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**Youth Participation Practice in North Ayrshire, Scotland from a  
Freirean Perspective**

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of  
Philosophy

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May 2018

## **Abstract**

There is a desire in policy, to encourage young people to take part in Youth Participation Practice (YPP). More insight is needed in approaches to YPP that enable meaningful and positive experiences for young people and communities. This qualitative study investigates youth participation practice in North Ayrshire Council in Scotland. Theories and principles from Paulo Freire (1996; 2000) form the framework for analysis. The study examines what young people and youth workers define the purpose of YPP to be; investigates the approaches that are used; and analyses what participants define as the benefits and outcomes of YPP for young people and communities. Through two focus groups with young people, 22 semi-structured interviews with young people, youth workers and Ruth Maguire, an elected member in North Ayrshire, themes were identified. These include the notion of young people feeling 'connected', being 'enabled' and feeling 'transformed' through their involvement in YPP. Freire's notion of armed love has been interpreted and redefined as the term 'alfirmo', which is the act of caring for, nourishing and supporting people, while asserting belief in their ability as agents of change. This study found that 'alfirmo' is embodied by youth workers and noticed by young people who have taken part in YPP in North Ayrshire Council. Through the embodiment of 'alfirmo', young people in this study feel connected to peers and youth workers and enabled to undertake many tasks such as presenting in front of peers and adults. Through their experiences in YPP, young people expressed that they have gone through a personal transformation, with a greater sense and feeling of confidence as a key example.

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## Acknowledgements

There are so many people to mention - please forgive me if I don't mention you specifically. My first thanks go to Barbara Read and Michele Schweisfurth, my final Supervision Team. Their kind and supportive approach embodied 'alfirmo' and I am so grateful for that. I would like to apologise to Barry, Isla, and Fraser for the endless days that I had to study. It is over now and we can have lots of sausage sizzles, walks and whatever we fancy doing together. I'd like to thank my family and friends for their support and encouragement over the years and for the caring acts that helped me through. I'd especially like to mention my mum and dad, who always encouraged my sisters Pauline, Michele and I to try our best - I certainly tried! Mum, Pauline and Michele, I can now be the kind of daughter/sister I've always wanted to be. The same goes for Joanna, Emma, Ryan, Ethan, Rebecca, Fyfe, Macleod and Frankie; I'm proud to be your Auntie and look forward to spending more time together. My mum, Janet and Hugh have helped to care for, and feed, my wee family and it is difficult to express how much I appreciate this. Helen Martin and Amanda McDonald - you made me believe that I could do it and you both rock! I am now on a roll and I will stop soon. Brian Findsen encouraged me to do my PhD and, again, he believed in me and I am grateful for that. I've chatted with so many colleagues in St Andrews Building in corridors over the years and your support was always appreciated.

As a final note, I'd like to dedicate my thesis to Josie Livingston MBE, my lovely Gran who is no longer with us. If I achieve half of what she achieved, I'll be a happy woman.

**Author's declaration**

“I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, that this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.”

Printed Name: \_Louise Sheridan\_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

## List of Abbreviations

<b>Abbreviation</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
BACD	BA Community Development
BACD	BA Community Education
CPP	Community Partners' Programme (Save the Children)
EM	Elected Member
MSYP	Member of Scottish Youth Parliament
PHH	Project Hip-hop
SYP	Scottish Youth Parliament
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
WYP	Wider Youth Population
YPP	Youth Participation Practice
YW	Youth Worker/s

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## Preface

I first encountered Freire's (2000) ideas as an undergraduate student undertaking a BA in Community Education (BACE). My memory has faded somewhat; it was over twenty years ago. However, I recall summarising his ideas from *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* into a five-step process: Step 1 - what is the problem? Step 2 - what information is needed in relation to the problem? Step 3 - what action needs to be taken? Step 4 - make it happen; and Step 5 - what should happen next? On completing the BACE, I began my career working with young people and was mainly involved in Youth Participation Practice (YPP). The constant theme was the aim to support young people to speak out and act in relation to issues that were important to them. It was often the case that I focused on the immediate situations of young people, without paying attention to wider factors that impacted upon their lives. Whilst studying a Masters in Adult and Continuing Education another brief encounter with Freirean theory reignited my interest and I began to understand that Freire's approach encompasses conceptualisations of love and politics. These experiences sparked my desire to investigate YPP through researching the experiences of those involved in YPP today, using Freire's theories as a lens to analyse the findings.

It's been a long journey... ..

## Chapter One A Qualitative Study of Youth Participation Practice

### 1.1 Study Background

The desire to undertake this research stemmed from my own experience as a youth worker, which began in 1997, facilitating youth participation practice (YPP). The United Nations (1989) Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) laid the foundation for my practice; it clearly states that young people under the age of 18 years should have a say about issues that affect their lives. For this research, the working definition of YPP is that it is a strand of youth work that seeks to enable young people to have a say in, and to act upon, issues that affect their lives. Chapter three describes differing approaches to YPP, that reflect different perspectives on young people.

In relation to general youth work, York Work Essentials (2017) notes that:

effective youth work takes place in a wide range of settings: youth clubs and youth centres, uniformed and voluntary youth organisations, youth counselling units, outreach and detached projects, youth cafes, youth arts groups, youth action and participation groups, drug and alcohol projects - wherever young people are at.

Reflecting the various forms and settings of youth work, youth workers take many guises. Youth workers, whether paid or volunteers, undertake many roles within the job of a youth worker. This includes planning, evaluating, administration, entertaining, dealing with conflict, amongst many other things (Youth Work Essentials, 2017). Youth workers are a diverse group of people, they range in age, background, religion, personality and outlook. The same can be said of the youth workers involved in YPP; the roles undertaken are many and the youth workers are also a diverse group.



The Scottish Government (2003) introduced a duty for local governments to involve local communities in community planning processes, which, in theory, includes young people. There was a clear political framework that underpinned YPP but I had limited opportunities to consider the longer-term impact of my work with the young people involved. The chance to gain meaningful insight into what the experience was like from young people's perspective was not available at that time. This was due to time constraints and the emphasis on working with young people as opposed to researching young people.

In 2012, the Scottish Government stated their commitment to encouraging youth participation. However, the experiences of those who participate in youth participation practice (YPP) are largely undocumented. This qualitative study contributes new findings in relation to YPP in North Ayrshire, Scotland. Additionally, this study provides new insights into the applicability of Paulo Freire's theories and principles to YPP in Scotland and beyond. For this study, participants include:

- young people aged between 12 and 26 years involved in some form of YPP
- youth workers who were employed by North Ayrshire Council's Youth Service
- An elected member who was involved in YPP structures in North Ayrshire Council

The United Nations (1989) defines young people as those under the age of 18 years. YouthLink Scotland (2011) defines a young person as someone aged between 12 and 25 years. Whilst North Ayrshire Council (2017) provides youth services to those aged between 12 and 25 years, young people are not arbitrarily excluded from YPP as soon as they reach 25 years old. The European Commission (2014) defines young people as those between the age of 15 and 30 years; therefore, the sample of young people in this study fall within the European Commission's definition of young people. All participants were aged between 16 and 26 years and actively engaged within YPP of some form within North Ayrshire Council.

## 1.2 Study Aim

The aim of the research was to critically examine the lived experiences of people who have taken part in youth participation projects in North Ayrshire, Scotland. The research questions were as follows:

1. What is the profile of young people who take part in youth participation practice?
2. What are participants' perceptions of the aim of youth participation practice?
3. What are participants' experiences of the approaches used within youth participation practice?
4. What is the young person/youth worker relationship like within youth participation practice?
5. How do participants define the 'ideal' youth worker for youth participation practice?
6. What are the implications of youth participation practice, as perceived by all research participants?

I describe myself as a critical theorist, influenced by theories and principles from Paulo Freire (1986; 1998b; 2000; etc.), and these formed the lens with which I engaged, analysed, and discussed my findings.

## 1.3 Thesis Outline

**Chapter two** includes a critical exploration of concepts such as oppression, power and empowerment. It demonstrates that critical theory provides a platform, upon which Freire developed his educational approach. A critical examination of conceptions of power and oppression provide a foundation upon which to analyse notions of empowerment and citizenship. Freire did not explicitly define oppression therefore his implied understanding of oppression will be examined. Freire's concept of armed love is also examined in chapter two, provided a theoretical grounding for what I intuitively felt as a youth worker in different contexts and as a lecturer within a university. **Chapter three** includes critical discussion of the seven political principles that Freire (1996) identified as the bridge between theory and practice; the approach that aims to turn hope into reality. Chapter three also demonstrates that Freire's theories and principles are influenced by critical theory. A critical

exploration of Freire's decodification approach is included, which was used as a basis for the focus groups and interviews conducted in this study. The second part of chapter three includes discussion and analysis of examples of practice that identify as taking a Freirean approach, which foregrounds the discussion on YPP in chapter four. Chapter four begins with a critical exploration of perspectives on young people within society, including the views that young people are 'trouble'; young people are citizens in the making; and young people are agents of change (James and McGillicuddy, 2001). The chapter shifts discussions from perspectives on young people in society to approaches to working with young people in YPP. The connection between perspectives held and approaches taken to YPP is made. The chapter also examines literature in relation to YPP, in policy and practice, and concludes by suggesting benefits, barriers and imperatives in relation to YPP. This includes discussion on the role and contribution that youth workers make within the process of YPP. Chapter five outlines the methodology and methods that were used to undertake this qualitative research project. The study focuses on an approach to YPP within one local authority in Scotland and examines whether there is a connection between YPP and the development of critical consciousness amongst youth participants. Chapter five also gives insight into the rationale for taking a qualitative approach to the research. Focus groups, interviews, and observations were selected as the methods of research and the findings were analysed using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The chapter provides more detailed discussions on my experience of undertaking the research.

The 'fruits' of my research are presented in the final three chapters of this thesis. These chapters combine the findings, analysis and discussion. During initial analysis, I identified categories that mirrored the research questions. It was important for me to shift from a rudimentary level of analysis to a complex level (Braun and Clarke, 2006). After much thought, paper 'shuffling' and mind-mapping, my analysis resulted in the thematic diagram as shown in figure 1. Chapter six, entitled 'The People Make the Project', considers findings associated with the people who are involved in YPP. This includes discussions on what the research participants perceive in relation to the profile of young people involved and the reasons they get involved. It also examines participants' perceptions of youth workers who are involved in YPP.

Chapter seven, 'The Project Makes the People', follows with a critical analysis and discussion of what the research participants believe are the core elements of YPP, including the approaches needed to ensure a positive experience for young people. Discussion also includes the perceived benefits, outcomes, and barriers that relate to YPP. Chapter eight provides a synthesis of ideas that culminates in my conception of praxis of Youth Participation Practice. It includes detailed discussion on the notion that the space in which YPP takes place is as important as practical tasks, methods and activities. This concluding chapter draws together ideas that reflect the three themes of: connecting; enabling; and transforming. When a transformational space has been created, young people are able to be connected, enabled and transformed. This can lead to some youth participants achieving their goal of making a positive difference in their communities.

## **Chapter Two    A Language of Possibility: A Critical View of Society**

### **2.1 Introduction**

Critical theory does not represent a homogeneous set of ideas but rather a way of thinking. This chapter sets out the theoretical framework for this study, which is that of critical theory. The first section gives some insight into that way of thinking, which is that life presents possibilities rather than problems to solve. Critical theorists, such as Adorno (1995) and Marcuse (2002), do not share all perspectives but agree about the oppressive nature of society. This chapter examines the nature of oppression existent, or experienced, by members of society. Any discussion on critical theory must include examinations of the nature of power and so, the chapter continues with some insights in the differing nature of power according to theorists such as Ellsworth (1989), Lukes (2005) and Gaventa (2006). What follows is a discussion on theories of empowerment, which form the basis for approaches to YPP that will be discussed in chapter four. At the outset of this study the concept of citizenship was not prominent in my mind. However, as I engaged with literature that relates to YPP and Empowerment, it became apparent that a solid understanding of concepts of citizenship is necessary. This chapter concludes by examining notions of ‘citizenship-as-achievement’, ‘citizenship-as-practice’ (Lawy and Biesta, 2006:37), and citizenship as political (Gouthro, 2007), which frame approaches to YPP that will be described in chapter four.

### **2.2 It’s not fair: A Critical Perspective of Society**

In describing the background to this study, I explained my worldview is influenced by critical theoretical perspectives from proponents of the Frankfurt School such as Horkheimer (1972) and Adorno (1995). Kincheloe and McLaren (2002:89) acknowledge the multifarious perspectives held under the banner of critical theory but identify a central theme, which is the ‘discourse of possibility’. Critical theory represents a way of thinking, in which there is language of possibility and this is the antithesis of the basic premise that ‘men and women are essentially unfree’ (McLaren, 2009:61). The suggestion that people are ‘unfree’ implies a lack of freedom as a fixed state. In critical theory, the subjective experience of feeling

'unfree' as well as an objective 'realities', such as being unemployed, are examined. This reflects Horkheimer's (1972:245) assertion that 'the world and subjectivity in all its forms have developed with the life processes of society', which suggests that there are multiple, subjective views of one experience or 'reality'. Berger and Luckmann (1966:15) refer to 'the social construction of reality' within the paradigm of interpretivism. Their emphasis is on the analysis of socially constructed ideas, that is, on understanding social phenomena. Mack (2010) avers interpretivists such as Berger and Luckmann (1966) do not consider politics and ideology in relation to phenomena, which means there is no effort to challenge or change situations. McLaren notes that the world is a system of contradictions and asymmetries of power and privilege' (2009:61); interpretivism considers people's lived experiences of asymmetrical power but does not consider paths to challenge inequalities. Critical theory encapsulates 'a process of critique' (Giroux, 2009:27) in which flaws and power imbalances within society are subjected to scrutiny. Most forms of critical theory are convergent with interpretivism on the issue of subjectivity but go further in exploring and challenging inequalities. The central tenet of critical theory is the imperative to challenge injustice and inequality within society.

Freire (1986; 1998b; 2000) and Frankfurt School theorists such as Horkheimer (1972) and Adorno (1995) believed that injustice prevails and there is a need to understand the nature of injustice to challenge injustice. The Frankfurt School of Critical Social Theory, or Institute for Social Research as it was originally known, was set up in 1923 with the purpose to research and study the nature and reach of a capitalist ideology. The school principally used a Marxist framework for the analysis of culture and the capitalist state, with a critique of political economy first and foremost. Some of the School's proponents, such as Adorno (1995), suggested that to take a purely economic focus produces a narrow perspective of society. Adorno, amongst others, suggested that a broader perspective was necessary. A wider assessment of society is crucial to challenge dominant ideas that are presented as normative. Marcuse (2002) suggests that a critical analysis of a range of societal elements such as business, media, the state and culture is fundamental to the process. Marcuse (2002:9) also asserts that the 'distinguishing feature of advanced industrial society

is its effective suffocation of those needs which demand liberation'. Further, he suggests that science and technology act as tools of domination in industrial societies. Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of society is not possible without consideration of the ways in which technology and media machinations, as examples, negatively affect the psyche of people. Carey (2009) supports the need to consider the role of technology. He cites the example of a 'state department searching for new technological means to maintain an American hegemony' (Carey, 2009:139), which would seem to be a palpable attempt to control the population. Another example is that some forms of media reinforce ideas around the inferiority of certain groups, such as asylum seekers. Forms of media, such as national newspapers, can perpetuate certain views and influence the mindset of those who digest 'truth' without question. For example, the portrayal by media of young people wearing 'hoodies' as sign of 'moral decline' (Hier et al. 2011).

The notion of 'truth' connects with ideological beliefs that are socially constructed, and shift and change through time (Berger and Luckmann, 1996). Nevertheless, ideologies are construed and conveyed as being truth and I have found it useful to utilise Gramsci's (1971) concept of hegemony to examine this idea. According to him, hegemony occurs when 'dominant groups in society, including fundamentally but not exclusively the ruling class, maintain their dominance by securing the 'spontaneous consent' of subordinate groups' (Strinati, 2004:153). Dominant groups assert their political, moral and cultural values as norms over less powerful masses (Joll, 1977) and the dominated group develops a false sense of 'truth', that is the ideas from the elite (Gramsci, 1971). Gramsci was influenced by 'Marx's assumptions that the psychological state of mind of members of society is dominated by ideology' (Marx, 1933 cited in Dale, 2003:57). Gramsci (1971) suggests, the masses of society are oblivious to the fact that their lives are being controlled, albeit in a subtle manner, by the powerful elite. According to Freire (1972) those experiencing some form of injustice should not be viewed as culpable for their own situation. Rather, they are overwhelmed by myths -including the myth of their own 'natural inferiority', which is symptomatic of being oppressed (Freire, 1972:30).

### 2.3 Oppression - Multiple 'Realities'

There are numerous definitions of oppression. However, for reasons of space, this section will consider just a few conceptions, including ideas from McLaren and Lankshear (1994), Young (2011), and Schugurensky (2011). Ironically, the author of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (2000), was criticised for not providing a clear definition of what he meant by the concept of oppression (Elias, 1976). It has been suggested that Freire referred only to the oppression of 'the poor', which is an overly simplistic analysis (Elias, 1976). The term 'poor' does not refer to a homogenous group and Taylor (1993:133) notes a lack of clarity as to whether Freire was referring to the working classes or to 'those who are non-literate' or 'socially deprived'. Freire referred to those who lack proper health care, nutrition and decent homes as the oppressed; they are unemployed, under-employed and/or on low wages, as defined by McLaren and Lankshear (1994), who are Freireans.

Freire referred to 'the oppressed' as those with no power and the elite as the oppressors (Freire, 2007a). Schugurensky (2011, p.137) suggests Freire's (2007a) description was 'an oversimplification that failed to address the multiple and contradictory dimensions of oppression at different societal levels'. Nevertheless, Schugurensky (2011) inferred that Freire believed oppression occurs based on gender, 'race', ability and age, amongst other aspects of social categorisation. Freire's (2000) understanding of oppression was implied in his reference throughout his works to those who experience violence, varying degrees of freedom and choice. Young (2011) refers to distinct forms of oppression: exploitation, marginalisation, cultural imperialism, violence and powerlessness. These forms of oppression are indiscriminate, that is, affect different abilities, gender, 'race', and age. In relation to the oppression of women by men, de Beauvoir (1971) identified an oppressive act as an attempt to render women as mere objects - objects to be controlled. An example that relates to the oppression of young women is captured in Hlavka's (2014) study, which involved almost 2000 young women in the United States of America. The study found that almost half of the young women had experienced sexual violence in some form. However, perhaps more relevant to the question of young people being oppressed, Hlavka (2014:344) cites a young woman who was interviewed as part of the study:



Patricia (age 13, white) told the interviewer: “They grab you, touch your butt and try to, like, touch you in the front, and run away, but it’s okay, I mean . . . I never think it’s a big thing because they do it to everyone.” Referring to boys at school, Patricia described unwelcome touching and grabbing as normal, commonplace behaviors.

Cudd (2006:21) refers to oppression as ‘an injustice caused by (at least in part) social institutions’. In this scenario, oppression takes place at a structural level in which there is no ‘obvious’ connection between the oppressed and the oppressors. It is through structural oppression that ‘groups of persons are systematically and unfairly or unjustly constrained, burdened, or reduced by any of several forces’ (2006:23).

Furlong and Carmel (2007) identify young people as an oppressed group and cite the precarious nature of employment as the primary cause of oppression. The Guardian (2017) reports a longitudinal study of 7,700 young people, ‘which found 25-year-olds on short-hours contracts more likely to report poor mental or physical health’. Young people’s experiences of poor mental health constitute an example of indirect structural oppression. Young people’s oppression is further compounded; Eisenstadt (2017:6) refers to findings from the Institute of Fiscal Studies (2016), which suggest ‘what is happening is a structural level change, where those people who are young today are experiencing exclusion from the labour market in a way that is new to the current generation’. Teenlink (2013) refer to the concept of ‘adulthood’ as part of a discussion about the oppression of young people. In this view, young people are viewed as less important than adults. Findings from this study lend weight to the argument that young people experience oppression and this can impact their lives in a negative manner. Belton (2017) suggests that young people experience discrimination in many aspects of the public domain and this is reinforced in law. Yet, young people do not necessarily associate with the label of oppression. There is often ‘a rejection of an identity which may be seen as ‘negative’, temporary or not applicable regardless of actual living situation’ (Ravensbergen and VanderPlaat, 2010:391). A person may reject the label of being oppressed, or being poor, because of socially negative connotations.

Ravensbergen and VanderPlaat suggest that someone may simply be unaware of the idea that he/she is oppressed through semi-intransitive consciousness (Freire, 2007). In semi-intransitive consciousness, people endure their situation without question, believing that they are not entitled to a better life. Those experiencing some form of oppression should not be seen as culpable for their own situation. Rather, they are overwhelmed by myths -including the myth of their own 'natural inferiority', which Freire (1972:30) described as being part of a 'culture of silence'. By this he meant that the oppressed are silenced by the hegemonic force of dominant ideas (Gramsci, 1971) and are unable even to dream about a better world. Freire elaborated on this by writing that the oppressed 'are inhibited from waging a struggle for freedom so long as they feel incapable of running the risks it requires' (Freire, 1996a, p.29). Freeman and Vasconcelos (2010:13) believe that a culture of silence 'should not be equated with ignorance or a deficiency in individuals'. Ravensbergen and VanderPlaat (2010) further point out that people may simply refuse to identify themselves as oppressed and avoid any kind of educational project that would categorise them as such.

According to Freire (1972, 1986, 2000) the aim of education is to uncover forces of domination and oppression and to consider how 'experience, knowledge and power are shaped' by dominant forces (Giroux, 2011a:5). The *telos* of Freire's educational approach is that the oppressed exert their collective power to challenge injustice and ensure that people are treated fairly (Freire, 2004). From a critical perspective, this represents the deployment of legitimate power, which can be channelled towards confronting facets of oppression (Van Dijk, 1993).

## **2.4 The Inextricable Link - Structure & Agency**

The theoretical framework for this thesis stems from critical theory, which asserts the need to examine structural components of society and encourage people as agents of change to act. Critical theory extends beyond the structure/agency dualism. Writing from a community development perspective, in which community development comprises of a grassroots radical approach, Connor (2011) addresses the dualistic view of structure and agency. He notes, 'if social structures are to

provide the starting point for analysis and practice, there may be little justification for recognizing the agency of individuals and communities' (2011: ii97). Connor suggests that community development as 'radical transformative social action' (2011: ii97) offers a means to encourage and support varying forms of agency, in multi-level contexts. It is possible to draw parallels between Connor's vision of community development and YPP that is based on an empowerment approach (which will be described in chapter four). Anderson et al. (2016:199) propose alternative frames of reference in relation to the power or powerlessness of young people and underline the importance of moving beyond the structure/agency dualism. They suggest that concepts of 'grit' and 'hope' should be part of the discourse. 'Grit' is embodied by persistent and sustained effort to achieve goals and 'hope' encapsulates the belief that it is possible to change things and that people have the power to bring about change. Grit and hope necessitate a dynamic engagement between individuals, groups and societal structures. Freire suggested that transformational education constitutes a bid to 'transform the objective reality' which renders people as 'beings for another' (2000, p.49) in which the objective reality represents structures within society.

#### **2.4.1 'There's Something Inside So Strong' - Agency Examined**

Van Audenhove and Vander Laenen (2017) describe agency as having the ability to direct oneself, accepting that one is responsible for life choices and having the strength of conviction to face adversities. Giroux (interviewed by Guilherm, 2010:174) connects agency of young people with citizenship but rather a critical approach to citizenship in which young people expand democracy. The notion of citizenship will be examined in some detail at a later point in this chapter. Many conceptions of agency recognise that individual or collective action occurs within structures of society. In some approaches to YPP, young people are intended to be agents of action and change, who shape societal structures. Sharp (2016:771) found that young people from areas of multiple deprivation in England recognise 'the need to address structural problems that affected young people 'like themselves'.' Musolf (2003:8) asserts that agency 'refers to the fact that we make culture, history, and policy' and, like Giddens (1997), note that this does not occur in a vacuum - the making of culture, history and policy takes place within the structures of society.

Musolf (2003) and Giddens (1997) do not pit structure against agency; they view them as having a reciprocal relationship. Musolf notes that agency ‘emerges through the ability of humans to ascribe meaning to objects and events, to define the situation based on those meanings and then to act’ (2003:8). In the empowerment approach to YPP that will be described in chapter four, young people are encouraged to act, using their individual and collective agency, to create new structures within society that value and include young people. Referring to the agency of young people, Diemer and Li (2011:1) refer to the importance of helping ‘marginalized youth overcome structural constraints on human agency’. This is based on the belief that young people are agents of change but may need support to enable them to act. Kohfeldt et al. (2011:42) highlight, ‘processes that target youth as change agents can be slow, yet they can also contribute to social change around higher order’. Young people can bring about change within ‘deep structures’, such as challenging institutional policies that discriminate against young people. Sharp (2014:359) suggests, ‘increasing common discourse on the subject of human agency itself might be an important part of enhancing young people’s perspectives of themselves as agents’ and, perhaps more importantly, would result in adults’ general acceptance of young people as social agents.

#### **2.4.2 ‘I’m Free to Be Whatever I Want’ - A brief examination of Freedom and Autonomy**

The ability of an individual to exercise power within herself relates to the realisation of the value of freedom, which is a key aspect of Freire’s (2000) axiological position. For Freire, ‘freedom is not an ideal located outside of man’<sup>1</sup> but more of a prerequisite in the ‘quest for human completion’ or to become fully human (Freire, 2000:47). Human completion, in this view, means being recognised as a member of society, with rights and the ability to act and change things. Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) influenced Freire in relation to this view (Collins, 1973). One difference is that Kant was a key figure in classical ‘liberal’ thought, and emphasised ‘the inner freedom’ of the individual as vital (cited in Kellner, 2001:9). In Kantian terms, ‘freedom means lacking barriers to our action that are in any way external to our

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<sup>1</sup> Freire was challenged for the use of the male referent in his earlier work (Weiler, 1973). He changed his approach to writing in his later work but some still suggest that he failed to fully acknowledge gender differences in his work (Taylor, 1993).

will' (Christman, 2009). Whereas, the more Marxian/critically-inspired Freire (2000) emphasised the exercise of freedom in unity with others and his approach to education involves exercising freedom through collective action. In Freirean terms, freedom involves acting with others to surmount oppressive structures. He believed that the transformation of society could only happen through 'fellowship and solidarity' (Freire, 2000:85). Immanuel Kant identified that autonomy is an important value for a person (Bronner, 2011) and referred to autonomy as self-government. In this perspective, disengagement with social structures is implied. Freire (1996) stated the importance of respecting a person's autonomy in his seventh principle for educational practice, which will be examined in chapter three. From extensive reading of Freirean texts, Freire's reference to the autonomy of a person is more aligned with that of agency, as the capacity to act.

According to James and McGillicuddy (2001) and Dayrell et al. (2009) the goal of youth participation is that young people come together to exercise their freedom to take collective action on matters that are important to them, which is young people as agents of change challenging issues. Critical theory encourages critique in relation to oppressive and unjust structures within society. It aims to provide alternatives, but mediated within the social contexts of people's existence.

#### **2.4.3 'Speak Out' - The Concept of Voice within Structure/Agency**

hooks (2010) recounted Freire's emphasis on the need for educators and students to enter dialogue as subjects; as active participants. She realises the importance of students having a voice in order 'to claim the subject position' and this is encouraged through a 'conversation-based model of learning' in the university in which she taught (2010:45). Caron et al. (2017:47) identify that 'many governments, policy-makers, educators, researchers and grassroots organizations have sought to foster and recognize 'youth voice''. They go on to question, 'how much might adults be mediating young people's voices in ways that dampen and co-opt them?' (2017:49). It seems relevant to also consider how to enable adults to reconcile between their own perspectives of young people and those of organisations and government. If an adult takes the view that young people are not competent to fully participate, as

described by Frank (2006), a significant shift is required to even undertake YPP at, what is identified as rung six of Hart's (1992) Ladder of Young People's Participation. At rung six YPP is adult-initiated with shared decision-making with young people (see chapter 4 for further explanation).

Giroux (2005: 197) refers to Bakhtin (1981) in relation to the notion of student voice within schools, who notes 'the pedagogical significance of critical dialogue as a form of authorship that gives meaning to the multiple voices that constitute the 'texts' that are constitutive of everyday life.' In this view, voice is not fixed, it is always fluid as it is mediated in the ever-changing existence of students. The notion of young people having a voice is often referred to within the context of youth work, which I confirm from my experience as a youth worker. It is perhaps more accurate to say, 'giving' young people a voice is a prevalent theme within the registers of YPP. Caron et al. (2017) refer to a negative association between youth voice and young people not being listened to, which reflects youth participants' feelings of being 'pushed aside' or feeling powerless.

## **2.4 The many 'faces' of power**

Gaventa (2006:24) notes that 'power is not a finite resource; it can be used, shared or created by actors and their networks in many multiple ways'. Power is not only infinite but is articulated in many ways. Gaventa (2006:24) refers to 'power over', which involves the powerful affecting the powerless; 'power to', which connects with the exercise of agency; 'power within' relates to individuals' realisation of confidence and self-awareness; and 'power with', which relates to solidarity and collective action. Ellsworth (1989) questions the notion of solidarity inferred in the second example. She feels that her position as a middle-class professor prevents her from building true solidarity with her students:

I could not unproblematically "help" a student of color to find her/his authentic voice as a student of color. I could not unproblematically "affiliate" with the social groups my students represent and interpret their experience to them. In fact, I brought

to the classroom privileges and interests that were put at risk in fundamental ways by the demands and defiances of student voices

Ellsworth (1989) suggests, processes that aim to be empowering within an educational setting can have the opposite effect. In a bid to challenge this within the university context in which she worked, she took an alternative approach. Her class would 'not debate whether or not racist structures and practices were operating at the university; rather, it would investigate how they operated, with what effects and contradictions—and where they were vulnerable to political opposition' (Ellsworth, 1989:299). Investigating the opportunities for opposition to racist structures and practices, enabled students to find the power within to challenge the system. As a caution, it is important to note that education can encourage students to find the power within but they may never feel empowered to act. Ellsworth (1997) also asserts the need to recognise well-defined differences between educators and students, such as the privileges educators have, and work within the parameters of those differences. At a basic level, Hoelzl (2004:4) asserts that 'solidarity is conceived as a reciprocal practice' and reciprocity necessitates active connections. These conceptions demonstrate the complexity of power. Lukes (2005:29) refers to elements associated with power and these are '(a) decision-making and control over political agenda (not necessarily through decisions) (b) issues and potential issues (c) observable (overt or covert), and latent conflict (d) subjective and real interests'. A consideration of these elements within YPP may give some interesting insight into the extent that young people have power, or not.

Ultimately, Lukes suggests that 'power refers to an ability or capacity of an agent or agents, which they may or may not exercise' (2005:63). The decision to exercise power is an act of power in its own right. Mann (1986) suggests, 'societies are constituted of multiple overlapping and interconnecting sociospatial sources of social power.' This implies the need to act at various levels in a range of settings to effect change, as Connor (2011) suggests. Freire recognised the importance of people uniting through a common cause, which results in relational power. Hocker and Wilmot (2011:116) describe relational power as a 'product of the communication relationship'. Power created, and exercised, through a communication relationship as an example of 'power with' others that Gaventa (2006:24) describes. It is usual

that the outcomes of relational power can be positive or negative, or shades in-between.

Arendt (1970:44) refers to power as ‘the human ability not just to act but to act in concert. Power is never the property of an individual; it belongs to a group and remains in existence only so long as the group keeps together.’ Arendt’s description could be said to describe the ideal situation. In my experience as youth worker and lecturer within academia, I have observed situations in which an individual ‘claims’ power. For example, a young person deciding on agenda items without consulting the group or a student taking the lead on a group project and failing to consult with others. The constant theme is that power is manifest in different forms. Freire (1985) believed that traditional forms of education reinforced the unequal distribution of power. Van Dijk (1993:255) described the abuse of power that results ‘in breaches of laws, rules and principles of democracy, equality and justice’. To counter this, Freire necessitated that a matrix of ideological, economic, political factors must be examined (Freire, 2004b), with manifestations of social power as the focus of the critical examination.

## **2.5 Empowerment**

The term empowerment became more common in literature derived from the fields of psychology, sociology and education in the 1970s (Fitzsimons, 2011), however, it was not a new concept. The idea of empowerment was referred to in the seventeenth century; with a particular focus on a legal framework. To empower meant to give a person authority in relation to a legal situation (Merriam-Webster, 2012). This early conception of giving power to someone is still one that resonates within contemporary examples (Fitzsimons, 2011). Tremblay and Gutberlet (2010) suggest the need to counter the approach in which people are seen to receive power rather than them creating power from within.



### 2.5.1 Community Empowerment

Wallerstein and Bernstein (1994:142) concur with this idea; they make the distinction that empowerment involves a location of power from within individuals or groups. They define community empowerment as

‘a social action process that promotes the participation of people, organisations, and communities in gaining control over their lives in their community and larger society. With this perspective, empowerment is not characterized as achieving power to dominate others, but rather power to act with others to effect change.’

Wallerstein and Bernstein emphasise that empowerment is about people using their own power to make changes as opposed to them being given power by someone else - as inferred in the earliest use of the term. Empowerment is an oft-used phrase within youth work that masks practice that is driven by adults in positions of authority (Toomey, 2011). Kohfeldt et al. (2011:42) note that ‘when actions come down from the top they rarely seem to be implemented as intended’.

### 2.5.2 Spiral of Empowerment

Lappe (2007:150) designed the ‘spiral of empowerment’, which is founded on the belief that people have the capacity to challenge injustice when they join with others to act. Lappe (2007) emphasises the importance of people working together in the process of conscientisation. Whilst not explicitly a Freirean, Lappe’s ideas resonate with Freire’s (2000) emphasis on collective action, that is, the importance of people working together to effect change in ways that meet collective needs. Underpinned by the content in the section on structure and agency, I would suggest that any attempt to encourage empowerment within young people necessitates an awareness of the interconnection between individuals and structures. Freire and Macedo (1987:98) refer to ‘cultural production’, which is the process of people developing a shared understanding of their lived experiences. In YPP, young people are supported to achieve a positive vision that can be developed through cultural production. Change seems more likely to occur through collective effort; but meaningful change, that is meaningful to young people and adults, could be

described as more likely when young people and adults are working together to drive the process forward. In this process, meaningful change reflects the needs and wishes of both young people and adults. This reflects rung eight of Hart's (1992) Ladder of Young People's Participation in which young people and adults make decisions together. Hart's Ladder of Participation will be explored in chapter four in relation to the meaning of participation. Lappe's upwards spiral is an alternative to the downwards spiral of powerlessness, in which society is lacking and there is not enough 'goodness' in the world to strive to make positive contributions in society (Lappe, 2007:131).

### **2.5.3 Critical Consciousness - Empowerment through Conscientisation**

Empowerment is often referred to as a 'value orientation, a set of processes and as specific outcomes' (Macphail, 2006). In the first referent of 'value orientation', there are connections to the notion of conscientisation. The process of conscientisation aims for the development of critical consciousness in individuals and collective consciousness in groups. At the heart of Freire's educational process is the 'deepening of the coming of consciousness' (Freire, 1993a:109) and is therefore an active process of people gaining a deep and meaningful awareness of the social, political and economic factors that condition them (Freire, 2000) - connected to structure/agency. The process of conscientisation is founded on a desire to uncover and overcome the obstacles to freedom and becoming fully human at a collective level (Freire, 1985).

In order that students can achieve this level of understanding they must go beyond viewing the issue at a micro-level; they must 'reverse their starting point: they would need to have a total vision of the context in order subsequently to separate and isolate its constituent elements and by means of this analysis achieve a clearer perception of the whole' (Freire, 1996a:85). Students are not always inclined, nor able, to undertake such a mammoth task. There are often barriers, both individual and institutional, that prevent someone even beginning to grapple with factors such as welfare change that impacts upon their daily lives (Rubenson and Desjardins, 2009). This is further confounded by Freire's intention that conscientisation always

involves action; he asserted that it should not simply be an intellectual project (Blackburn, 2000). Committed action, critical reflection and rigour help to uncover the way in which dominant ideological views influence society, which makes it possible to achieve a more just society. Schugurensky (2011:140) notes the criticism that conscientisation is viewed as 'a tool that can be easily subjected to manipulation, indoctrination, and brainwashing, albeit disguised as a coinvestigation'. This echoes the assertion from McLaren and Jaramillo (2009) that critical pedagogy can be subverted to reinforce dominant ideology rather than challenge it.

## **2.6 Concepts of Citizenship**

This study concludes that the notion of citizenship is fluid. Reichert (2017:91) identifies that there is an 'active/passive continuum' of citizenship and Westheimer and Kahne (2004:3) identify three types of citizen: 'personally-responsible citizen; the participatory citizen; and the justice oriented citizen'. It is possible to conclude that citizenship is a socially constructed idea. Moya (2003) asserts that citizenship is 'a historic category with an empirical content that is in constant transformation depending on the historic period' (cited in Tonon, 2012:13). In his analysis of fourteen definitions of youth participation, Farthing (2012) makes no explicit reference to the notion of helping others. Of all the definitions he analysed, he found two identified citizenship as a core element within youth participation. It is possible to conclude, from participants, that being a 'good citizen' is synonymous with helping others. The consideration of what constitutes good citizenship is problematic. It is evidence, from literature, that the idea of good citizenship is fluid, which means that it can have positive or negative connotations. Thorson (2012) conducted research with a group of young adults and found a range of conceptions of citizenship amongst the participants. There is a gap between dominant visions of good citizenship and those ideals held by young people. This disconnect can lead to the exclusion, or self-exclusion, of young people from mainstream forms of citizenship. Some youth work projects have clear remit to help young people to become good citizens (Miller et al. 2015) or, in other words, that aim to prevent young people from getting into trouble.

### **2.6.1 Citizenship-as-achievement**

Citizenship-as-achievement can be connected to the language of duty. Dominant thinking reflects 'citizenship-as-achievement' (Lawy and Biesta, 2006:37), in which citizenship is an outcome rather than an active and evolving process. In the context of the United States, Golombek (2006:13) asserts that being a 'good citizen' is associated with having civic duties, such as looking after the local environment, being a tax payer and abiding by laws. These actions may depict a 'dutiful' citizen but do not necessarily display critical capabilities. In this view of citizenship, young people are positioned as being deficient or as problems to be solved. Hart (2009:642) refers to a governmental drive 'to address the perceived threat of young people and engage them in the values and duties of responsible citizenship'. In relation to how young people were portrayed by the coalition between the UK's Conservative and Liberal Democratic parties, Brook (2013:324) identifies the ideal young person as a 'dutiful citizen'. The then coalition view of young people is underpinned by the need to maintain the order of society.

Young people are framed as somehow deficient in relation to the expected 'norms' of society. In this view young people feel marginalised, which is a form of oppression that was mentioned previously. This aligns with James and McGillicuddy's (2001) assertion that young people feel excluded or marginalised because of societal structures. Hart (2009:342) highlights that 'young people have been constructed within government and other popular political discourses as a potential threat to citizenship, in need of discipline and training before they may be accepted into the fold.', which necessitates a need to re-frame the citizenship agenda in relation to young people. Hart proposes that framing citizenship as a responsibility has a negative impact on young people, suggesting it 'is actually working against their sense of belonging, mutuality and agency in society, the very citizenship sentiments that New Labour has stated it wishes to foster' (2009:3).

### **2.6.2 Citizenship-as-practice**

Lawy and Biesta (2006:39) note, 'citizenship-as-practice not only encompasses problems and issues of culture and identity, but draws these different dynamic aspects together in a continuously shifting and changing world of difference'. Smith et al. (2005) suggest that young people should be perceived as citizens with needs

and wants relevant to their age, stage and situations, which are not fixed. In the worst conception of citizenship-as-practice, young people are viewed as workers of the future, ergo citizens of the future. There remains a gap in literature on youth citizenship. One example that attempts to fill the lacuna, is the empirical study that Lister et al. (2003:251) conducted with young people on their perspectives on citizenship. They report, 'young people found it much easier to talk about responsibilities than rights and when they did identify rights they were more likely to be civil than political or social rights.' The notion of youth citizenship as young people with responsibilities could imply that young people are 'in practice' to be responsible adults. One respondent in Lister et al.'s study, a 22-year-old female participant noted 'a citizen is where you're helping in the community ... You're helping people and you're trying to do your best. Trying to support where you are' (Lister et al. 2003:238). From this example, it is possible to suggest that this is an example of citizenship-in-practice but, equally, it could be described as a basic descriptor of young people as active citizens.

### **2.6.3 Citizenship-as-political**

Citizenship-as-political stems from Marshall's (1973:149) reference to citizens having a 'right to participate in the exercise of political power' in his book *Class, Citizenship, and Social Development*. Gouthro (2007:144) aligns 'the capacity to develop well-reasoned arguments, to critically assess evidence and to participate in dialogue with other citizens' with 'active and engaged citizenship'. Bessant (2007:42) asserts that the achievement of civil rights for youth 'rests on there being a social context in which young people can exercise their human agency.' The fundamental belief that young people are active citizens is at the heart of these discussions. Lister (2007:5) equates citizenship with 'people's ability to exercise some degree of control over their lives'; this connects to the value of self-determination or to human agency. Young people are seen here, as key members of society, with a role to play in bringing about positive change. Golombek (2006:11) notes that young people 'are not "citizens in the making" but instead social agents who already participate in building strong and democratic communities'. Notwithstanding, many young people contend with the label of being 'trouble-makers'; they face the accusation that they are part of the problem within society

yet are blamed when they take radical action to challenge dominant ideas. In both views, young people are deemed to be a troublesome group as referred to earlier (Bannister et al. 2013).

## **2.7 Conclusion**

This chapter demonstrates that it is impossible to consider possibilities to be gained through any exercise of power, without understanding the nature and experiences of oppression. Freire (1996; 2000) asserted the need to challenge oppression through transformational education and this chapter demonstrates that critical theory provides a theoretical framework upon which to base this approach to education, including YPP. Critical theory provides a language of possibility, in which structure and agency are no longer at odds. Rather, a critical approach to YPP enables young people to exercise their agency to challenge and change structures that are oppressive in some way. Reference is made to the notion of autonomy (Kant cited in Kellner, 2001), which is mentioned is Freire's (1996) seventh principle. This derives from his axiological position that asserts the need for people to become fully human. A process that aims for people to be 'fully human' could be nothing less than a dynamic and active process that enables the attainment of basic human rights as well as being self-determined, exercising personal agency and taking collective action; all of which reflect elements of autonomy. These represent core values within YPP that have a transformational focus. Therefore, the goal is that people exercise power for their own collective causes (Freire, 1996).

This chapter demonstrates that understanding the nature of power is also helpful in undertaking any approach to YPP. Freire (1996) developed a set of principles that underpin his approach to education and these will be examined in full in chapter four of the thesis. One of the principles asserts that educators should not enforce their own agenda within an educational project. Freire urged that educators should be mindful not to wield power over students in the educational process, which can also be said of youth workers working with young people in youth participation projects.

Freire's aim for education was about 'mastering the universal ethics of human beings' (Freire, 2004:117), which includes fighting for basic rights for those who are oppressed. This includes the ability to 'come and go...to eat...to be clothed...to study...to work' (Freire, 2004:117), which is pertinent to young people who are affected by living in areas where there are multiple levels of deprivation in Scotland. From this study, it is possible to conclude that any endeavour to help young people, and adults alike, realise their rights often requires support from a leader. Freire (2004) believed that adult educators play a crucial role; they are individuals who are motivated to rally, organise, and work with the oppressed to challenge injustices through progressive hegemony (Mayo, 1999). This idea is mirrored in some approaches to youth participation practice, that is, youth workers are central to a transformational experience for young people. For Freire (1998) the motivation to work with others, adults and young people alike, and to challenge injustice stems from the belief that everyone should be able to make choices and act, within the realms of social responsibility.

## Chapter Three Practice what you Preach: Translating Paulo Freire's Theories into Practice

### 3.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to undertake a critical exploration of the principles and methodological ideas that flow from Paulo Freire's theories on transformational education. The guiding principles will be illustrated, and analysed, in the context of youth participation practice. The seven principles are: 'the importance of pedagogical space; educators and learners are both subjects within the process but not necessarily equal; the importance of content or the object of cognition; education should aim for a dream; education should never be neutral; educators should never impose their agenda; and educators should respect the autonomy of the students and respect cultural identities' (Freire, 1996:129).

It has been suggested that Freire was eclectic in his work (Collins, 1973); Taylor (1993) went as far as suggesting that Freire's work lacked originality and that he directly 'borrowed' many ideas from others such as Buber (1937) and Kosik (1963)<sup>2</sup>. Freire was undeniably influenced by key ideas from other educational philosophers in developing his own theories but he designed 'political-pedagogical principles' that were distinctly his (Freire, 1996:129). These form a framework for practice and help to translate the rhetoric of concepts such as freedom and agency into guidelines for practice. His seven principles culminate to provide an understanding of the core elements of his approach. The principles should not be viewed as a step-by-step guide on how to apply Freire's ideas in practice but, instead, should be viewed as the bases for ethical, educational practice. The following discussions will facilitate a deeper understanding of how the principles translate into practice, including how they relate to YPP, and will incorporate some critical views on Freire's ideas. First, it is vital to establish what I have come to recognise as a fundamental part of any form of education, which is the presence of love.

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<sup>2</sup> Freire (1968) cited both Buber (1937) and Kosik (1963) in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*



### **3.2 You say, 'Armed Love', I say 'alfirmo': An interpretation of Freire's Concept of Armed Love**

The importance of showing love as part of an educational process is one of Freire's (1998) foundational beliefs. The belief that love can bring about change is a salient theme that can be observed in Freire's (2000; 2004b; and 2005) principles and theories. This is not a universal belief and this does not resonate with more traditional approaches to education (Darder, 2002). There may even be a level of discomfort in response to the suggestion of the importance of showing love in an educational setting, although not to all (Gidley, 2016). Freire (2000) and Guevara (1965 cited by Kahn, 2011) identified love for others as a core element of striving for positive change within society. However, Freire disagreed with Guevara's belief that violence is justified to achieve reform (McLaren, 2001). Freire referred to 'armed' love (1998:74) and promoted love as 'an emancipatory and revolutionary principle' (Darder, 2010) and he urged educators to bring this principle to life.

Embodying armed love involves caring for students. This does not involve sentimentality but, instead, it is about helping people to make a positive difference on their terms. Armed love is also embodied by noticing if someone is tired, or noticing if someone seems not to understand a concept and responding to this. It is also about provoking critical thought, questions and actions and helping people to break free from their restraints rather than teaching students to simply accept information without question. Barber (2007) noted that these are vital elements of youth participation practice that aims for the development of critical consciousness of young people, as described in the previous chapter. hooks (1989) concurs with Freire; love should be the catalyst for breaking down the barriers that exclude and discriminate against people, which includes discrimination against young people based on their age. Freire (1993b; 2004b) felt that love and warmth should be shown to those people who suffer through discrimination and rejection in society as part of an educational process, rather than as an act of sympathy.

Irwin (2012:38) supported this view by noting that it is important to distinguish between 'false charitable gestures' and solidarity, which is something that Ellsworth

(2005) admits can be difficult from a 'so-called' privileged position, as discussed in chapter two. Armed love is about relinquishing feelings of false pride for being benevolent; it is about putting energy into a process that can bring about positive change for those discriminated against.

My efforts within the classroom go beyond the simple act of teaching; it involves a commitment to students and a belief in them as active learners. People could be forgiven for thinking that this is not unusual, rather, it should be usual. However, from my experience of working within a university context and particularly my encounters with academics from a range of subjects, this is not always the case. When I studied for the Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice, I was initially surprised to hear some colleagues express complete disinterest in the students' experience. The emphasis on research and funding prevails for many academics. Reading Freire (2005) helped me to understand that I was not alone in my own experience as a teacher.

Freire believed that lovingness is an essential quality that teachers should have 'not only toward the student but also toward the very process of teaching' (p.74). This is also reflected in Hovied and Finne's (2014:248) reference to the notion 'you have to give of yourself' in an educational setting. The drive to connect with the students is 'to be human', as described by Freire (2005:3). For me, this is about showing students I want to try to do my best for them. It is about noticing if they are tired, stressed or do not appear to understand and responding to this in a subtle manner. From my experience, it is possible to suggest that educators and youth workers can create a positive learning experience by demonstrating this kind of care.

My understanding of Freire's (1993) theories reinforce the notion that showing care and affection does not necessarily undermine a critical pedagogical experience. One can be caring and still provoke critical thought, questions and actions in students. That said, the notion of armed love is unfamiliar to many students and the mention of 'love' is unexpected within the context of a classroom. It is important

nonetheless, particularly when I teach students who work with community groups, including youth groups. Freire (2005) believed that, unless we care deeply for students and the learning experience, we struggle to cope with the pitfalls of the teaching profession. Freire (1996a:70) wrote that ‘dialogue cannot exist, however, in the absence of a profound love for the world and for people’.

Nevertheless, I am uncomfortable with the term ‘armed love’ because of the violent connotations implied. Freire referred to ‘the fighting love of those convinced of the right and duty to fight’ (2004:74); ‘fighting love’ can also be associated with violence. For years, I have struggled to find an alternative phrase, one with which I feel comfortable. Freire (1996:71) described that ‘love cannot be sentimental’; that is, love should be shown with the intention of promoting freedom of thought and action. More than this, it should convey the sense of faith in people’s ability to learn, act and achieve, reflecting Freire’s (1998) suggestion that people who apply his theories and concepts should adapt them in a way that reflects the context in which they are applied.

My attempt to do this has led to the development of a new term, which is ‘alfirmo’. This portmanteau merges two Latin words: ‘alo’, meaning: nourish, cherish, support, sustain; and ‘firmo’, meaning: to make lasting, secure, affirm (Latin Meaning, 2017a; 2017b). My definition of ‘alfirmo’ is the act of caring for, nourishing and supporting people, while asserting belief in their ability as agents of change. A key motivation for this study was to ascertain if the embodiment of ‘alfirmo’ is perceived to be present in YPP. Freire (2004) asserted that love should be an intrinsic part of education. The term ‘alfirmo’, which I have coined to reflect my understanding of armed love is framed within the context of universal ethics.

### **3.3 You’ve got to have Ethics: Universal Ethics in an Educational Process**

Darder (2009:575) suggests that education can be ‘transformative and liberating’ if universal ethics are applied to ‘the political project of teaching’. Freire grounded

his educational approach in 'universal ethics', which he aligned to the 'ethics of human solidarity' (Freire, 1998:116). It can therefore be said that transformational education involves creating a sense of solidarity through connecting people (Hoelzl, 2004). In a very basic way, universal ethics entail showing consideration towards other people. Freire (2004:24) meant much more than this; it is about educational practice 'which values the exercise of will, of decision, of resistance, of choice'. With this logic, credit should be given to people's sense and embodiment of personal agency. Freire (2004) believed that people have the potential to make changes to their immediate circumstances, in that he argued that there is a possibility for people to act autonomously (as discussed earlier). He developed a model of critical pedagogy that provides the opportunities for people to exercise their own will and stems from educators believing in their potential and caring for them. The importance of ensuring ethics within all youth work practice is fully accepted within the field (Roberts, 2009). YouthLink Scotland (2011:4) assert the necessity to consider ethics in all aspects of youth work; it suggests that 'youth workers need to be able to view their practice through an ethical 'set of lenses'. This means that ethical considerations should always be front stage in relation to their thinking and decision-making processes. Ethics should underpin practice.' The following sections include discussions on Freire's (1996) seven principles for practice, which provided a useful set of ethical lenses.

### **3.4 Freire's Seven Principles for Practice**

#### **3.4.1 Principle 1 - The importance of pedagogical space**

Freire (1996) recognised that it is beneficial if an environment is conducive to learning. He captured this sentiment in his first principle, which is 'the importance of pedagogical space' (Freire, 1996:127). Freire's principle also reflects the importance of creating the right physical environment as well as creating an atmosphere that enables a positive learning experience (Rogers and Horrocks, 2010) to occur. For example, something as simple as arranging chairs in a circle rather than in straight rows can give rise to people feeling confident and comfortable to take part in a group discussion (Bahruth and Steiner, 2005). In Freire's vision of transformative education 'care for the space is necessary to connect with the frame

of mind needed for the exercise of curiosity' (Freire, 1996:123). The creation of a transformational space enables young people to build their confidence, not only for individual benefit, but to make a positive difference within their communities. Batsleer identifies 'the power of liminal space as a site of transformation' (2012: 347). A liminal space is described as sacred or special, which embodies principle one from Freire (1996). The opposite can be said of the following example: a dark and imposing classroom that gives the impression that students are not valued would hamper any learning experience.

A good learning space is one in which students are encouraged to think and act together and are helped in the process of gaining a critical consciousness about the world. Freire (1998:89) referred to the finer details of creating a good learning space, such as the need to 'understand the meaning of a moment of silence, of a smile, or even an instant in which someone needs to leave the room.' This could simply involve showing some appreciation when a student makes a thoughtful contribution, which helps to show students that it is possible for them to create new theories and possibilities (McDonough, 2014; hooks, 2010; Darder, 2002). These seemingly small acts can have a positive impact on the learning experience, which I have observed with my own students. It is always a pleasure to hear that students value the simplest demonstrations of care. An email from a BACD graduate encapsulates this,

*Thank you soooooo much for guiding, advising and supporting me on this journey. Thank you for being dependable, reliable, warm and caring. While pursuing this, it has helped to know that you are always willing to stand and walk with me every step of the way.*  
(Lumu, 2017)

The first principle recognises the complexities associated with exercising curiosity, that is, certain conditions must be in place to enable even the possibility of personal and collective transformation. Watters and Butterwick (2017) acknowledge that multiple subjectivities are encountered within a transformational educational setting, and educators play a key role in creating a space in which these differences are expressed in a safe way. The creation of transformational space that facilitates this experience in a positive way enables people to build their confidence. This not

only benefits individuals, but can make positive differences within their contexts and communities. Ellsworth (2005:32) notes that pedagogical spaces can ‘provide opportunities for us to both act in the world and upon the world’. The emphasis is on people connecting and continually creating new knowledge.

All of this combines to reflect what Barber (2007) describes as an engagement zone, in which young people and adults have authentic and honest conversations. Barber’s engagement will be discussed further, in chapter four, in the context of empowerment approaches to YPP. Showing respect, from my own experience, can be done by thanking a student for sharing their knowledge. As a teacher, this involves creating a space in which students can be critical thinkers but also being mindful of the power dynamics between student and teacher.

Hill et al.’s (2006:84) suggestion may be helpful to consider in efforts to develop meaningful opportunities for young people and adults to work together; and summarises the key ingredients of a positive pedagogical space:

*‘The use of ‘space’ connotes not just a physical space, but a social space (combining social practices and relationships), a cultural space (where values, rights and cultures are created and changed), and a discursive space (where there is room for dialogue, confrontation, deliberation and critical thinking).*

Cunningham and Tabur (2012) assert that a great deal of effort and thought is required to ensure a positive learning space. This is also applicable to youth participation practice; effort is needed to create a space in which young people can question and challenge ideas. In addition, it is important that YPP is fun and engaging, which motivates young people to continue to attend.

### **3.4.2 Principle 2 - Educators and learners are both subjects within the process but not necessarily equal**

Freire’s (1996) second principle encapsulates the notion of a horizontal relationship in which both students and educators learn within the process. Freire (1978:8) wrote

that 'all who are involved help each other mutually, growing together in the coming effort to understand the reality which they seek to transform'. A horizontal relationship is a complex one and Freire (2000) acknowledged that effort is required to navigate such a relationship. The complex nature requires any critical educator to be honest about her intentions in relation to building relationships with her students. There are some educators who may not be easily disposed to take this approach, to embark on a learning journey with students.

Some teachers help students in a paternalistic manner, viewing them as deficient in some way, rather than demonstrating at least a sense of solidarity with one's students (Margonis, 2007). Therefore a shift in attitude and approach may be needed for those accustomed to a traditional form of education, such as banking education. In the banking approach, students are viewed as empty vessels into which knowledge is deposited and students accept this knowledge without question (Freire, 2000). Coe et al. (2014) assert the need for teachers to value students' experience and knowledge as valuable resources within any learning project, which counters the view in a traditional approach to education, in which the educators' knowledge is the prevailing form. Freire (2000) suggested, creating an environment in which mutual respect is fostered can be transformational and supported as a two-way process in which educators and students work with each other for reciprocal benefit. Freire (2000) noted the difference between educators who display false generosity, who take a paternalistic approach and feel threatened if there is even a glimpse of them losing their power, and those critical educators who strive towards true solidarity; fighting with the students against 'an unjust social order' (Freire, 2000:44).

Mayo (1994) however questioned whether it was possible for an educators and students to achieve a horizontal relationship in contexts where differences in 'race', gender and sexual orientation are key factors. For instance, it is difficult to envisage that a person would be able to completely surrender the benefits and privileges that his or her gender warrants. Mayo (1999, p.118) also wrote that bourgeoisie

educators would find it difficult to abandon the very things that define them such as their 'values, norms, tastes for culture, ...possibly even one's acquired coherent and systematic view of the world'.

However, the rhetoric of dialogue, central to Freire's pedagogy, is associated with the notion of horizontal relationships. Freire (2000:91) suggested that students and educators embark on a critical journey through dialogue, which is what he described as a 'horizontal relationship'. Trust and respect are fostered on a mutual basis. On the surface, this could be viewed as being an equal partnership between students and teachers. Especially in relation to Freire's view, educators enter a learning journey just as much as students (2000). Dialogue is part of a dynamic and active process, which involves students and educators examining their thoughts and actions upon their reality. In a dynamic process such as this, there is a commitment by the educator to show solidarity with students and this can be described as embodying love in the educational process (McDonough, 2014).

Taking account of the connection between solidarity and reciprocity suggested by Hoelzl (2004), my own experience suggests that armed love and solidarity are distinct. In the context of education 'alfirmo' is one-way, from the educator to the students. This entails the educator having faith in students' ability to challenge and change their situations. Solidarity is two-way between educators and students, which involves the acknowledgement by educators and students of the existing power imbalances within society and a shared desire to challenge these imbalances. Educators must trust in their students, and instil the belief in them, that they 'can and should be agents of change' (Kane, 2002. p.39) and have the power to do so. Without faith in students, 'dialogue is a farce which inevitably degenerates into paternalistic manipulation' (Freire, 2000:91), which reflects the sentiment expressed by Walker.

In one sense, it is difficult to deny that there will always be a hierarchical element within any educational process. However, the goal of challenging the injustices that exist beyond the classroom can only be achieved where 'both are simultaneously



teachers and students' (2000:72). As part of this process students must feel comfortable enough to divulge the details of their lives, which could result in them feeling vulnerable. Educators should be honest with their students in a bid to create the right atmosphere for learning, which includes being open through dialogue about their own political views and intentions (Kane, 2001). In this situation, they are learning and teaching together rather than being on an equal footing in terms of power. Problems only arise if educators are too concerned with theories of empowerment as opposed to wrestling with the challenges of enabling a transformative experience to happen in practice through dialogue (Le Compte, 1995).

Despite these nuances there is a suggestion from some, Walker (1980) as one example, that Freire falsely conveyed the notion that both educators and learners are equal. Walker's critique of Freire suggests that there was actually an implicit hierarchy in Freire's education system, on the basis that teachers lead the process of dialogue and therefore hold a more powerful position. Further, Walker suggests that equality could never be realised between teachers and students. Schugurensky (2011) acknowledged that Freire's ideas on the teacher-student relationship were not fully developed in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Walker is right to assert that equality will never be achieved between teachers and students and Freire (1996) acknowledges this idea. Freire's (1985:76) assertion that 'whoever says that they are equal is being demagogic and false' leaves no doubt about his view on the matter. Teachers and students will always have distinct roles in the process, but that does not negate any attempts to ensure that both can teach and learn from each other.

Freire (2005) also recognised that teachers can find it a challenge not to reinforce a position of power - even the most ethical teacher would find it difficult to create an environment in which students believe that the teacher is on the absolute same level as the student. The important message from Freire (2000) is that, whilst teachers hold a power position, they should not be authoritarian and present their knowledge as the 'truth'. It is possible to strive to build a bond between students and teachers, as well as acknowledging the differences in terms of power and some knowledge. Freire noted that 'the teacher's accumulated knowledge' naturally places her in a

position of authority (2000:182) and he also recognised that a teacher has responsibilities that set her apart from students. Educators have a duty of care for students and this should never be diminished in the name of solidarity, which means that they have more responsibility and power in certain aspects of the process. Freire (1996; 2000) therefore recognised the responsibilities that an educator has, which sets her apart from the students.

Educators have responsibility in terms of ensuring students' physical and mental well-being. However, Freire suggested, educators should relinquish power in relation to the focus of the learning experience. Ryan (2011:94) echoes this sentiment stating that there is still an implicit need for educators to 'create the conditions that enable learners to actively engage in shaping their future, which also supports Freire's first principle about the importance of creating the right kind of space. Mulcahy (2011:78) captured the essence of Freire's ideas by noting that 'authentic education is mediated in a world which impresses and challenges both teachers and students and gives rise to views and opinions about it'. The emphasis here is that teachers and students work together to break free from the set of dominant rules that dictate the banking approach to education.

### **3.4.3 Principle 3 - The importance of content or the object of cognition**

In Freire's (1996) third principle the object of cognition in the educational process is students' 'present, existential, concrete situation' (Freire, 2000:95). One of the foundational ideas of Freire's approach to education is that the programme involves the process of students uncovering their subjective views of their objective world (Freire, 2000). He believed that 'it is possible for the learners to become productive subjects of the meaning or knowledge of the object' (Freire, 2004:160). In this process learners actively create new knowledge, enhancing their view of their world. The emphasis here is on creating new possibilities rather than having a static view of their objective realities, which is vital to transformational education according to Freire (1996, 2000). These ideas reflect the foundational idea that societal structures are not fixed and impenetrable; people as agents of change can influence how societal structures function.

Freire (2000:88) wrote that dialogue consists of ‘the encounter in which the united reflection and action’ takes place, which is what he referred to as praxis. It is often the case that people refer to the Freirean concept of dialogue but what they have described is a simple conversation. This is something that I have observed in my role as a lecturer. Rule (2004:323) noted that ‘dialogue is not merely an educational technique; it is something fundamental to the process of becoming a human being’ or fully human as Freire (2000) described it. It is more than simple conversation; dialogue in the form of meaningful and critical communication about people’s lived experiences, which leads to collective action to challenge discrimination and injustice. In Freire’s third principle, people’s lived experiences are the object of cognition. Freire was influenced by Buber (1970), who emphasised the importance of people engaging in dialogue as subjects of their shared realities, rather than as objects of reality. In Freire’s view, dialogue ‘presupposes a willingness to listen, to enter into an educational conversation not in a dogmatic or reactionary manner’ (Roberts, 2010:9).

Freirean dialogue is about fostering a deeper understanding of one’s self and the society in which one exists. Society is ever-changing therefore dialogue brings about individuals and groups’ recognition of themselves as ‘unfinished beings’ (Roberts, 2010:127), which means that people can continually change, both as the way define themselves and the way in which they engage with the world. That said, Freire (2000) emphasised that dialogue is not simply understanding that we are unfinished within the world, but trying to effect change in relation to the inequalities that exist within the world and this is made possible through ‘positive reflection’ (Freire, 1993:30). Rugat and Osman (2013:24) note that dialogue ‘can be seen as enhancing community and building social capital that leads to justice and human flourishing.’ Dialogue has the potential to lead to transformation but it should be framed as a long-term process that involves a critical view of the world in which people live.

Freire (2004b) stressed the need to recognise the importance of popular knowledge; but also urged that students should be encouraged to move beyond their local knowledge and consider a global perspective too. Giroux (2011a:155) notes that

Freire's vision of critical pedagogy involved 'soaring beyond the immediate confines of one's experiences, entering critical dialogue with history, and imagining a future that would not merely reproduce the present.' Freire (2004b) noted that, as part of this critical process, the educator would gain new insights into the world. In Freire's view, dialogue 'presupposes a willingness to listen, to enter into an educational conversation not in a dogmatic or reactionary manner' (Roberts, 2010:9). This research found that the wealth of experience and knowledge that students bring to the process can help to build a sense of bonding between teacher and students.

#### **3.4.4 Principle 4 - Education should aim for a dream**

Freire (1996b; 1998; 2000; 2004b) envisaged a more just society and his ideas for transformational education reflect the fourth principle, which is that education should aim for a dream. He stipulated that, to change the world, we must believe that it is possible for us to transform it (Freire, 1998). That said, it is important to establish if people have the desire and energy to challenge injustice. In *Pedagogy of Hope* he noted that pragmatism often prevails, in which the status quo is portrayed as the only option (Freire, 2004b). A defeatist outlook is not one that is supported by critical educators, who have hope as their emblem. In a world where there is still poverty, where people are still discriminated against on based the colour of their skin, their religion, their gender, amongst other things, there is little need to justify any bid to challenge the injustices of the world.

Zembylas (2007: xii) supports Freire's notion of hope, which 'entails a willingness to speak with the language of possibility in the struggle to initiate transformations in everyday life'. Zembylas recognises that education not only fulfils a functional purpose but also aims to encourage and fulfil hopes and desires. This reinforces Freire's belief that education should be based on a dream. Freire (2004b:77) wrote that 'dreaming is not only a necessary political act; it is an integral part of the historico-social manner of being a person'. Dreaming about a more just society should not have to be justified; it is a basic human right embodied in law (UK Human Rights Act, 1998). Benesch (2008) recognised that hope is an integral part of critical pedagogy and notes that the notion of limit-situations is a key concept from Freire

(2000) in relation to encouraging hope in the educational process. In Freirean terms, limit-situations are barriers that exist to contain, or limit, a person's options. Freire believed these should be viewed as opportunities to move forward rather than as barriers to progress. Benesch (2008) affirms this idea and notes that 'the dream is enacted when the limit-situation is confronted and transcended', which reinforces the language of possibilities.

Freire (1998) noted that all educational practice must exemplify a collective form of hope, referring to the kind of educational experience in which students become collectively 'conscious of themselves as unfinished beings' (Freire, 2004:100). Freire (2004) imagined an alternative future, one in which people are treated with justice and fairness, and he urged that students 'engage in the experience of assuming themselves as social, historical, thinking, communicating, transformative, creative persons (Freire, 1998:45). Roig and Crowther (2016) refer to empirical research they carried in Spain with learners who attend an alternative form of school for adults. Education within the school celebrates the knowledge that adults have and is influenced by Freire. Roig and Crowther refer to the notion that education should aim for a dream, a dream determined by the learners. Participants in their study refer to the idea that they have undergone a form of personal transformation through the educational process, with positive outcomes for their community such as their involvement in projects to improve amenities in their local area. Roig and Crowther note that transformation is not an intended outcome of the educational process. To include personal transformation as a requirement would align more with a utopian vision for education.

One of the charges levied against Freire was that his pedagogy is a form of utopian dreaming and is unrealistic (Weiler, 1993; Jackson, 2007). It is unethical to promote the idea that anything is possible through engagement with critical pedagogy. Freire's pedagogy has been described as 'unbridled subjectivism' that encourages 'an illusory basis for human action' (Hudson, cited by McLaren & Tadeu da Silva, 1993:68). McLaren & Tadeu da Silva (1993) defended Freire's ideas by stating that his utopia is not something that is fixed and rigid, and therefore unreal in this constantly changing world, but rather that it is transient and constantly calls for

alternative ways of thinking. The notion of utopia is complex, as described by Levitas (2010), who highlights the implicit fluidity of utopia. One person's dream is another person's nightmare. If one accepts that utopia is an 'impractical scheme for social improvement' (Merriam-Webster, 2012, Utopia), the notion should be rejected as unhelpful to those who are experiencing oppression. Levitas' definition of utopia as 'the expression of the desire for a better way of being' (2010:9) resonates with Freire (2007), who had a more fluid view of utopia. This seems more realistic in terms of an educational process.

Freire (1998) was no illusionist, he did not lead educators to believe that striving for radical democracy and a more just society is an easy task. He acknowledged that it is a challenge to constantly uphold an ethical stance and to work for the greater good. Freire wrote that one of the key responsibilities for a progressive educator is 'to unveil opportunities for hope, no matter what the obstacles may be' (Freire, 2004b:3). Barriers should not be viewed as being insurmountable and risks should be taken to try to change and improve society; that is the driving force of any kind of community development work. Freire's ideas should not be viewed as a panacea or indeed as a quick solution. Torres and Reyes (2008) also understand the longevity of Freire's project; they are aware that radical democracy cannot be achieved in an instant. Freire (2007) warned that results may not be achieved in our lifetime and Torres and Reyes (2008:122) reinforced this by noting that 'we must work hard for this dream, and as educators, pass the torch for future generations to continue'.

The alternative to Freire's (1998) vision would seem to be acceptance; the acceptance of the gross injustices and inequalities within society. O'Brien (2011) understood that this would not be an option for Freire (1998). She recognised his message to 'keep belief in transformative praxis despite the seeming impossibility of acting in a context of uncontrolled change and economic anxiety and loss' (O'Brien, 2011:20). The very notion of transformative praxis reinforces Freire's fifth principle.

### 3.4.5 Principle 5 - Education should never be neutral

Freire was explicit about the need to side with those who are oppressed because he felt that it was his ethical duty and he was very clear that critical education is very much grounded in 'a lucid perception of change' (Freire, 2004:6). This ideological basis for his pedagogy unequivocally places his vision for education within a political sphere. His fifth political-pedagogical principle was that education is never neutral (Freire, 1996) and his problem-posing education was far from this. He left no doubt about this when he wrote, 'education never was, is not, and never can be neutral or indifferent in regard to the reproduction of the dominant ideology or the interrogation of it' (Freire, 1998a:91). In fact, he was blatantly 'against the dominant fatalist ideology' (Freire, 2004:19) and so his intention was that education is directive by its very nature (Freire, 1993). There can be no doubt at all that there is a huge emphasis on politics within Freire's (1985; 2000; 2004; 2007) critical pedagogy. Freire (1998:3) asserted that transformative education must be based on 'a serious, correct political analysis' and Aronowitz and Giroux (1991) highlight that educational projects under the banner of a Freirean approach must undertake this level of analysis, and be bound by the universal ethics that Freire described (2000). Examining the day-to-day lives of many people, it is difficult not to make connections between societal inequalities and politics. Politicisation goes hand in hand with the idea that adult education must always commence with the 'day-to-day situations' experienced by the adult learners (Schugurensky, 2011:18).

The previous chapter demonstrates that Freire's theories on transformational education are entwined in concepts of power and democracy and this unequivocally places his pedagogy within a political sphere. In his talking book, *A Pedagogy for Liberation: Dialogues on Transforming Education*, with Ira Shor, Freire acknowledged that in the earlier years of his work he made no reference to the connection between politics and education. He described that stage as his 'most naïve moment' (Shor and Freire, 1987:61). Then, in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, he asserted that education 'had an *aspect of politics*', which was a '*less naïve moment*' (Shor and Freire, 1987:61). He later went onto say that 'all instances of education become political acts' (1985:188) regardless of the contexts in which they take place. In the final moment that he referred to, Freire said that 'education is

politics' (Shor and Freire, 1987:61). Freire did not draw parallels between moments and levels of consciousness that he described. However, it could be said that, when he realised 'education is politics', he reached his own moment of critical consciousness. With the eventual realisation that education and politics are inextricably linked, Freire stipulated that education must be a political venture that uncovers the intricacies of a dominant regime. Therefore, education either maintains the status quo within society or attempts to transform society. Be it transformational education or banking education, the agenda is not neutral. There are underlying purposes behind both approaches: freedom or constraint.

Freire (1996; 1998) called for educators to not only ask themselves where they stand in relation to this but also to state their ideological position openly. It seems only ethical for educators to be as open as possible with their students about their own philosophical and political stance - an idea supported by Kane (2001). This reflects Freire's intentions for educators to be open and honest with their students in a bid to create the right atmosphere for learning, as described earlier. In practical terms, a Freirean approach has the goal of enabling students to feel 'confident enough to interrogate their own realities...and act on their developing convictions to change their own social reality' (Peterson, 2009:306). This reinforces the idea that Freire's principles translate into practice and should not remain as rhetorical ideas.

#### **3.4.6 Principle 6 - Educators should never impose their agenda**

Freire recognised that educators hold a position of authority but that should not allow them to impose their agenda in the educational experience, which is the sixth practice principle from Freire (1985). Discussions on conscientization in the previous chapter suggest that people may need support in relation to being able to 'name the world' as Freire (2000:88) put it. It is important for educators to achieve a balance between directing when necessary and taking a step back to listen. This connects to Henderson and Thomas' (2002) notion of 'predisposition' in relation to the roles that educators take within educational contexts within local communities. They recognise that the educator must take cognisance of the stage of the group and choose the role accordingly. However, they also advocate against the educator influencing the direction of progress based on his or her own views. This reflects



Freire's (2004:19) belief that 'one of the foremost tasks for a radical and liberating pedagogy is to clarify the legitimacy of the ethical political dream of overcoming unjust reality'.

Esteva et al. (2008:18), write that Freire's 'blindness is his inability to perceive the disabling effect of his various activities of conscientization'. Freire (2000:35) was aware of this kind of critique and of suggestions that conscientization can lead people to a 'sensation of total collapse of their world'. In response to these critiques he suggested that the alternative was simply not an option; he believed it was better to question and challenge injustices within society. He believed that taking no action equated to siding with the oppressors and that was simply not an option for him. Freire (2000) was clear that educators have a necessary role to play in enabling a transformative process, but he did not envisage that they would manipulate the situation for their own cause.

There is a distinct difference between being manipulative, based on the educator's agenda, and being directive, based on using a critical pedagogical approach to education. All educators operating within the realms of critical pedagogy encourage students to undertake in-depth investigations and discussions in relation to how they perceive concrete realities. They are being directive in relation to the deepening of the inquiry rather than the content of the inquiry. Schugurensky (2011) asserts that it is important for the critical pedagogue not to be authoritarian, as does Freire (2000); opinions expressed by students should be listened to, discussed and challenged if necessary. He identified that this is part of an ethical approach to teaching. An ethical teacher must declare her own ideological position and therefore must explain the philosophical beliefs and political determinants that guide her actions (Kane, 2001). That means that she should be open about her intention to pave the way for the students to undertake critical discussions in relation to issues that affect their lives and the wider community.

Freire (2000:45) referred to 'the myths of the old order', such as the hierarchy of the education system, which can prevent a vision for action and change. In response

to this, educators must relinquish the power to dictate the agenda, trust in their students and instil in them the belief that they can effect change (Kane, 2001). However, it is difficult not to ignore the fact that, in Freire's pedagogy, teachers initiate the process. As critical pedagogues, the driving force is their view that society is unjust and that people are treated unfairly. Freire noted that a problem-posing approach is based on 'posing situations to learners - so that they can express themselves about the respect or disrespect for rights and duties, the denial of freedom, and the lack of ethics regarding public property', which is a core part of education for transformation (Freire, 1998:153).

Bushe (2013:1) recommends 'appreciative inquiry' as an alternative to a problem-solving approach to transformation. In Youth Participation Practice, an appreciative inquiry approach would seek to encourage young people to focus on the positives they would like to achieve rather than focusing on problems. Young people would be asked what their vision of the best community is and working from there, rather than starting by asking them what they do not like about the area in which they live. The key is that the situations posed are based on students' lived experiences; the teacher uses her expertise to design a codification that will enable the students to relate to the scenario and engage in critical discussions - further details on this process will be examined in the following chapter. The idea of a teacher posing situations to learners based on her own agenda, with no regard to the students' issues, is certainly not what Freire proposed. There is a strong emphasis on taking the starting position from the learners rather than having a pre-determined agenda, which is echoed in the work of the Highlander School in the United States (Horton et al, 1998). The final of Freire's seven principles for practice, which will be explored in the next section, is very much linked to the idea that educators should recognise the ability and potential that students have and not presume to know what is best for them.

### 3.4.7 Principle 7 - Educators should respect the autonomy of the students and respect cultural identities

Freire's reference to autonomy in this principle poses a contradiction. Giroux, a prominent Frierean, refers to human agency as a core part of Freire's approach to education; education

is always directive in its attempt to teach students to inhabit a particular mode of agency, enable them to understand the larger world and one's role in it in a specific way, define their relationship, if not responsibility, to diverse others, and experience in the classroom some sort of understanding of a more just, imaginative, and democratic life. (2010:718)

Freire's reference to human agency as part of transformational education necessitates consideration of a person's place within the world and reframing structures as democratic and inclusive. The notion of autonomy implies reframing structures based only on self-needs. As mentioned in chapter two, I conclude that Freire's reference to autonomy is better understood as human agency or self-determination (Lister, 2007).

Freire (2000; 1998; 2005) wrote that respect for students is an ethical requirement; not only to respect them as human beings but to respect their cultures. Freire (2005:76) asserted that people must be tolerant because 'it teaches us to learn from and respect the different'. He wrote that a core element of the educational process is about respecting what people know and that 'a fundamental starting point is respect for the learner's cultural identity...language, syntax, prosody, semantics, and informal knowledge' (Freire, 1996:127). Freire believed that the material existences of students should be the foundation on which to build transformational education. This echoes Gramsci's (1971:323) view that 'the starting point of critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is' (Gramsci, 1971, p323). Critical elaboration, which is part of Gramsci's approach to education, involves people recognising that they are the 'product of a historical process to date' (Gramsci, 1971, p323). Freire (1995) acknowledged the influence Gramsci's writing

had on him during his time in exile. Both Gramsci and Freire asserted people as experts in their own lives with educators simply working with them to explore these realities, which embodies the third principle for practice. Freire (2000; 1998; 2005) gave students what he believed to be their rightful place in the transformative educational experience, as both students and teachers. A crucial part of the process is that students are given the space and opportunity to identify the paths of action that they wish to take, which might not necessarily be those that the educator would choose.

Freire (2004b:72) urged that people consider their lived experiences within the larger 'horizon of cultural content'. I have found Freire's notion of 'expansion of horizons' (2005:151), which means examining issues that affect people's lives at both a micro and a macro level, helpful in relation to this. Of course, people do not exist in a vacuum; they are part of an ever-changing world. Freire (2000. p. 101) believed that the world is made up of epochs and he explained that 'an epoch is characterized by a complex of ideas, concepts, hopes, doubts, values, and challenges' in which history and the present are meshed together. Freire (2000) referred to historical reality in which humans are conditioned and their experiences, and cultural identities, are influenced by a fluid matrix of interacting ideological, economic, political issues and realities. Freire (2000) believed that by broadening their knowledge, by asking questions 'of authority, of freedom, of reading, of writing, of the virtues of the educator' (Freire, 2005:97), people would be equipped to challenge and overcome the injustices of the world and to take new directions (Freire, 1998).

Freire included young people in this kind of process; he noted that they are more than able to create new knowledge, but that they must be supported in the right way to do this (Freire, 1998). He described some parameters for working with children in transformative education. It is important to enable children and young people to have the level of freedom that promotes autonomous thinking, but also to set boundaries that give them a sense of protection and support. Freire (2004: 37) was clear that children have the same rights as adults and that includes 'children's right to learn how to decide, which can only be achieved by deciding'. That said,

he also maintained that part of this experience would entail teaching children that their decisions and actions must not impinge on the rights of others. Freire (2004) clearly thought that children and young people are as able as adults to engage in critical praxis. Freire's discussions about children and young people do, however, suggest that he saw them as a separate group in need of more protection than adults.

Steinberg (2011) pointed out that the notion of young people being a distinct group is relatively new. She asserted that the concept of childhood is a 'social and historical artefact' (Steinberg, 2011:3) and that, in the middle ages, children functioned as adults would. One could read this as an argument that children and young people do not need extra care and attention in critical pedagogy. In the reverse, it could be argued that many adults who have been oppressed in some way need similar protection to children. This is more in line with taking an ethical approach as Freire (1998; 2000; 2004) suggested. Noddings (2002) argued strongly that care should be shown during any educational process; regardless of whether it involves children or adults. An ethics of care towards students inherently means showing respect for students in relation to all aspects of the educational process - including respect for their cultural identities.

In a practical sense, the dialogue must start with discussions on the way that the participants perceive their concrete experiences rather than starting with discussions about the material facts of their lives. Concepts of power, powerlessness and hegemony were discussed in the previous chapter and mention that people experience hopelessness through hegemonic forces in society. Taking the issue of unemployment as an illustration, some examples of the 'thought-language' of people who are unemployed might be despair, exclusion, or isolation. The perceptions of the unemployed people would be the starting point. As Freire (2007:5) noted 'the ordinary person is crushed, diminished, converted into a spectator, manoeuvred by myths which powerful social forces have created.' This point reinforces the notion that many people are objects within their existence, with little control over their lives. A generative theme in this illustration could be exclusion. Freire (2007) suggests that learners are encouraged to take risks; and to view negative issues as the platform to build endless possibilities rather than seeing them as barriers that

cannot be overcome (Freire, 2000). This connects with the third principle that notes, education should aim for a dream.

### **3.5 Freire's Ideas in Action**

The principles noted above give insights into the principles that Freire's identified as the basis for transformational education. The final part of this chapter includes some discussions on examples from practice, of projects that identify as using a Freirean approach. Throughout this final part, reference will be made to associated principles.

#### **3.5.1 Freirean Ideas in Action? - An Examination of Freirean Projects in Action**

Efforts by Landless People's Movement (MST) in Brazil to challenge the '(mis)use and ownership of land' (Kane, 2001:91) is presented as an example of a successful project that applied Freire's ideas and methodology. It engaged many people in a political struggle and demonstrated that 'the vision of a radically better world continues to be a great motivator for change (Kane, 2001:108). The MST embodies more than one of Freire's principles; it reflects principles two (the importance of content and object of cognition) and principle five (education is never neutral). The challenge to structural oppression, in the form of the misuse of land, reflects a critical theoretical approach that embodies that language of possibility.

Whelan (2005) described his involvement in an environmental project in Brisbane that utilised a popular education approach. A campaign against a motorway being built by Brisbane City Council united and galvanised both experienced and non-experienced activists. Popular education provided the opportunity for the campaigners to share, develop and build their knowledge and skills in social action. Whilst the campaign itself was unsuccessful, a subsequent bid for long-term social change and action in relation to improving environmental conditions in the area emerged. This shows that popular education does not always guarantee that the original aim is achieved, but demonstrates that it can help to provide an invaluable experience for participants. In the Brisbane Anti-Motorway campaign, popular

education helped to lay a solid foundation for the campaigners' involvement in future social movements.

### **3.5.2 A critical review of Freirean Thought in Action**

It is important to acknowledge that Freire's ideas have not always been successfully implemented, or indeed understood fully. Vargas and Erba (2016) refer to an example of service-learning that identified as being based on a Freirean approach. However, praxis was the only Freirean concept referred to. This suggests that limited knowledge of Freire's overall approach undoubtedly brings challenges. The application of Freire's approach is not without its challenges. Kidd and Byram (1982) describe an example of their attempt to implement a Freirean-based project called Laedza Batanani (Community Awakening) in Botswana. As the organisers of the project, their aim was to get the local people involved in local issues. One of the assumptions by the community workers was that the people were apathetic and reluctant to get involved and therefore there was a need to mobilize them. The organisers decided to use socio-drama as a form of code to prompt discussion from the wider community. Contrary to Freire's (1996) idea that the people without power should identify the issues that are important to them, the issues that were portrayed in the socio-dramas were identified by people with power, such as government workers and local leaders. This could have led to one of the outcomes mentioned by Kidd and Byram (1982:1); that is to 'disseminat[e] dominant class ideas and induc[e] acceptance of the status quo'.

Fromm (cited by Graman, 1999) suggests that problems such as the acceptance of the status quo arise because people refuse to think for themselves and are therefore unable to operate at the level of critical consciousness. This notion would conform to the assertion that the people were to blame for their lack of participation (Kidd and Byram, 1982). Freire (1985) recognised that people do not automatically, or easily, attain a level of critical consciousness. That said, one of his core beliefs is that people have the ability and potential to reach this goal and to begin anew (Bustamante Jones, 2002). They may simply need the right support and guidance to achieve this, which connects to Freire's (1996) first principle as mentioned earlier.

McLaren (1993:111) notes that 'it is important to make it clear that Freire's work cannot be articulated outside the diverse and conflicting registers of indigenist cultural, intellectual, and ideological production of the Third World'. Freire was quite clear that his pedagogical approach could not simply be transported to another context. The provision he made was that efforts should be made to tailor his ideas and methods to fit the context, paying attention to the historical context (Freire and Shor, 1987). Macedo (1993) noted that many neo-liberal educators, with the purpose of creating future innovators and competitive individuals, embraced Freire's ideas as a substitute for a more domesticating type of education in a range of contexts. However, in this process, his theories were diminished to a simple method.

Many have noted a significant problem is that the political element is not addressed or is simply ignored (Roberts, 1996a cited by Finsen, 1999; Brady, 1993 and Burbules, 2000). Macedo (1993) also observed that Freire's dialogical method based has been misappropriated; group discussion and a process of sharing ideas has often been reduced to a form of group therapy - with little connection to the wider political issues that have led to the issues being discussed. Macedo highlighted that the problem with this is that this type of group experience does little more than validate people's feelings of being a victim and does not attempt to prompt collective action. These examples are the antithesis of Freire's intentions; failing to address the socio-political factors that lead to oppressive conditions evokes no social change.

Jenkins and Martin (1999) wrote that 'a slavish adherence to a Freirean ideology would be repugnant to Freire and would suggest limited imagination and creativity' (p.44). There is an absolute need to reinvent Freire's ideas and approaches, taking the context into account. This does not come without its challenges (Mayo, 2004) but any effort must recognise that dialogue and praxis must be at the heart of popular education (Darder et al, 2003). Torres (1993, cited by Thomas, 2001) remarked that 'there are good reasons why, in pedagogy today, we can stay with Freire or against Freire, but not without Freire' (p.140). Before describing themselves as 'Freirean', this research suggests that educators need to fully



immerse themselves in the ontological and epistemological ideas of Freire and then take these into account when applying his approach to popular education in practice.

### **3.6 Conclusions**

This chapter explores Freire's (1996) principles for practice that stem from his theoretical concepts of transformational education. It has been demonstrated that there are challenges associated with using his approach, such as the danger of educators enforcing their agenda within an educational experience. The exploration of examples of projects that identified as using a Freirean approach demonstrated that it is not always possible to fully implement Freire's principles in practice. It seems evident that a lack of understanding of the theoretical foundations of Freire's ideas can lead to a reduction of Freire's ideas. Macedo (1993) refers to an example of group therapy that was under the guise of a Freirean approach. There are clearly challenges associated with implementing a Freirean approach in its fullest sense but it is not impossible. Some of the challenges arise due to a lack of awareness of the range, and depth, of Freire's ideas. There are examples of Youth Participation Projects that have successfully implemented Freire's ideas in relation to dialogue, praxis and critical consciousness and the next chapter will illuminate these further.

## Chapter Four Young People Acting through Youth Participation Practice

### 4.1 Introduction

As noted in the previous chapter, the working definition of YPP is that it is youth work that seeks to enable young people to speak out and act upon issues that affect both their lives and the lives of people in communities. For this purpose of this thesis, enable means ‘make it possible’ (English Oxford Living Dictionaries, 2017). A fuller explanation will be given throughout the remainder of this thesis, with reference to YPP. This chapter begins with a critical examination of three existent perspectives on young people: the view of young people as deficient and somehow lacking in relation to societal expectations; the view that situates young people as citizens in training; and the perspective that young people are agents of change (Checkoway, 2011). This is followed by a discussion of levels of participation, with reference to Hart’s (1992) description of eight ‘rungs’ of participation. This research has found a clear relationship between perspectives on young people and approaches to YPP that are taken. Approaches to YPP under the banner of: prevention, youth development, and critical consciousness development will be examined and mapped onto citizenship approaches. The prevention approach to YPP maps to the notion of citizens as achievers; youth development approaches map to the view of young people as ‘apprentice’ citizens; and the critical consciousness development approach maps to the view of young people as active citizens. Ideas from Golombek (2006) and the Ginwright and James (2002) will be considered amongst others. For this research, the working definition of YPP is youth work that seeks to enable young people to have a say in, and to act upon, issues that affect their lives, which is located within the critical consciousness development perspective of YPP. This perspective falls under the banner of empowerment and young people and this will be examined further. Brief mention was made of international, national and local policies that underpin YPP in chapter one, such as the United Nations (1989) *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, Scottish Government (2003) policy and North Ayrshire Council’s (2015) youth participation strategy. Before continuing to consider the various forms of YPP, and the perspectives on young people. The next section will establish the policy context in which the North Ayrshire Council YPP is based.

## 4.2 YPP - The Policy Context

In 1989, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) declared the need for children to be protected and to be afforded human rights on a universal basis. Of relevance, article 12 asserts the right for children to have a say about things that affect them. The UNCRC is the platform upon which many children and youth initiatives and projects around the world are built (Nairn and Clarke, 2012). It also constitutes the basis for policies that have been developed locally and globally in relation to the participation of children and young people in civic life. The Scottish Government (2016a) explicitly identifies the UNCRC (1989) as the foundation for policy in relation to involving children and young people within matters that affect them. This has been a long-established position as demonstrated by the Scottish Community Education Council's (1996) introduction of Connect Youth, a national initiative that promoted the participation of young people in decision-making processes that affect them.

The Scottish Government (2014a) introduced a strategy entitled: *Our ambitions for improving the life chances of young people in Scotland National Youth Work Strategy 2014-2019*. The strategy places youth work at the heart of developing 'responsible citizens (2014a:12), noting, 'by working in partnership with young people we know we are creating a learning process which contributes to improving their life chances, through learning, personal development and active citizenship. Ultimately, we are building stronger, more resilient and inclusive communities.' The discourse here is that of maintaining the status quo. The word resilient implies that people should adapt and learn to deal with challenges, rather than transforming structures that create challenges for people in communities. Following the introduction of the Scottish Government's (2014b) Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, the Getting It Right for Every Child approach was established (Scottish Government, 2016b). This asserts the need for a child-led approach to working with children and young people, with the aim of ensuring their well-being. The discourse in this policy conveys the sense that young people need to be protected rather than seeing young people as agents of change. In the local context, the context in which this study is based, North Ayrshire Council (2015) enabled young people to develop their *Speak Out Youth Citizenship and Participation Strategy*, which succeeds the first youth participation that was developed four years prior.

The strategy denotes that, ‘citizenship is when you actively involve yourself in activities such as local politics, volunteering and participation in your community’ (North Ayrshire Council, 2015:2). Young people from the local authority wrote the latest version of the Youth Participation Strategy, including some of the participants in this research study. The language used within the strategy resonates with the view that young people are adults in training, an idea that will be explored in section 4.3.2 of this chapter.

As is the case across the globe, YPP in Scotland is not uniform. YPP varies from project to project, from area to area however, youth councils are prevalent across Scotland. In addition, the Scottish Youth Parliament has nationwide representation. These constitute what are described as formal structures in YPP. The following subsections are, in no way, attempts to provide a comprehensive account of all YPP that takes place in Scotland. They provide an insight into some examples of YPP both formal, that are facilitated by local government, and an example of a voluntary/third sector community-based YPP programme. The Scottish Government (2014b:3) developed a strategy for youth work, which aims to:

‘harness the value of youth work practice, build on what we know works and strengthen partnerships so that we can keep delivering vibrant, fun and effective youth work provision that helps young people become confident individuals who are ready to succeed.’

There are various forms of YPP that reflect the Scottish Government’s policy on YPP and formal examples will now be described.

#### **4.2.1 Formal Structures of YPP**

The Scottish Youth Parliament (SYP) was established in 1999 ‘to make sure that all young people in Scotland are represented by its democratically elected and diverse membership (Shephard, 2012:2). It is a youth-led organisation for young people aged between 14 and 25 years that strives for authentic involvement, as opposed to tokenistic involvement, of young people in decision-making processes. Shephard (2012) surveyed former members of SYP and found that most identify positive outcomes through their involvement. Significantly, research found that some young

people in Scotland had never heard of the Scottish Youth Parliament (48% of 11 to 16-year olds and 60% of 17 to 25-year olds, Tisdall et al., 2008). It is therefore not surprising that most young people were not able to comment on how effective the Scottish Youth Parliament is in terms of representing young people's views (Scottish Executive Education Department, 2005).

Shephard (2012) refers to successful campaigns conducted by the SYP, such as the campaign for equal marriage. More recently, SYP played a key role in developing the Scottish Government's (2016) mental health strategy for young people, which was in response to the wider population of young people expressing concerns about youth mental health problems. It is perhaps more relevant to question the effectiveness of SYP in communicating with the wider youth population rather than looking at the effectiveness of SYP. Formal YPP structures include youth councils and youth forums and YouthBank amongst other examples (see appendix 18 for fuller list), yet participation is low compared to many activities undertaken by young people, such as listening to music or going to friends' houses, and attendance by young people at school councils is even lower (Scottish Executive Education Department, 2005). Youth councils have had some successes; notably in the personal development of individuals involved and particularly those who envisage a future career in politics (McGinley and Grieve, 2010). However, the wider impact of youth councils in Scotland remains unclear.

Flanders Cushing and Van Vliet (2017) refer to the recent wave of youth councils in the U.S., with a focus on youth participation in city planning. They note an ideological shift that views young people 'as capable participants and partners in decision-making, rather than passive recipients of services' (2017:319) and indicate that youth councils provide young people with opportunities to develop a range of skills that enable them to improve the places in which they live. Change will only occur if young people have the chance to operate within the structures that have historically excluded them and discriminated against them. The following subsection will consider an example of youth participation in Scotland, which was my first encounter with YPP.

Matthews (2001) conducted research with young people who were part of youth councils in England. He explored themes in relation to the perceived strengths and weaknesses of youth councils, including young people's perceptions of the type of young person who gets involved in youth councils. Sixteen percent of the respondents suggested that members of the youth council are from the same background, that is, from more affluent backgrounds. That said, Matthews found that there was a wide representation within the membership. Patrikios and Shephard (2014) looked at the question of representation in relation to members of Scottish Youth Parliament and found that there have been instances where there was a higher representation from young people who were disadvantaged in some way. This is contrary to a general perception that mainly young people from more affluent backgrounds become MSYPs. In relation to the opportunities that are afforded to young people from diverse backgrounds to participate, McGinley and Grieve (2010: 258) suggest that participation serves as a 'validation of those already capable of being involved' rather than as an opportunity for those without a proven track record of attainment.

#### **4.2.2 Youth Participation in the muddy bend of the burn: Examining YPP in Camlachie, Glasgow**

Save the Children Community Partners' Programme is an example of a third-sector community-based YPP programme. Mathur and Morrison (c.2005:26) capture the successes of the Community Partners Programme (CPP), a community development programme that operated in four areas of multiple deprivation in Scotland. The CPP developed partnerships with local organisations 'with a valid role in contributing towards action geared to improving their communities' (Mathur and Morrison, c.2005:27). Successes were achieved through partnerships between young people and adults, such as the development of a project called Young EastEnd Speaking in the East End of Glasgow, which was founded on the commitment of local organisations to involve young people in decision-making processes.

I was a Community Development Worker with the CPP in the East End of Glasgow from 2001-2002; this was my first experience as a youth worker undertaking YPP. In one project, I gave disposable cameras to young people and asked them to take

photographs of things that were important to them. Once the photographs were developed, each young person made a collage and we worked together to identify common themes. I was, in effect, applying a Freirean approach, identifying generative themes (Freire, 2000). At the time, I was oblivious that I was implementing participatory photovoice (Wang, 2006). Road safety was a key issue identified by the young people; to reach the nearest supermarket, residents had to cross a very busy road. I worked with the young people to prepare for a meeting with an Elected Member and they expressed their concerns.

I moved on from the project before it concluded but I have driven through the area and recognise a lower speed limit and a pedestrian crossing as the outcome of the young people's efforts. Despite successes, one of the main challenges highlighted by Mather and Morrison (2005) was how to ensure young people's participation within formal structures, such as those structures within the local authority as a matter of routine. This reflects the point made earlier from James and McGillicuddy (2001) regarding the need to ensure that principles of youth participation permeate through institutions at all levels to enable young people to be agents of change.

### **4.3 Young People - A Range of Perspectives**

Young people are not a heterogeneous group, similarly, there is heterogeneity in terms of how young people are perceived. Morrow (2011) considers multiple perspectives of young people held within periods of history and within different contexts. For example, in the context of education, Morrow suggests that young people are positioned as apprentice adults and 'vast sums of money are invested in working out how to improve their qualifications and attainments to ensure they are well positioned to take their place in a competitive labour market/economy (2011:7). In terms of social welfare, young people are viewed as vulnerable and needing protection; 'which may lead to an overemphasis on 'rescuing' children, and a lack of emphasis on enabling them to 'participate'' (Morrow, 2011:7). Young people have often been labelled as selfish however, as Arnett (2007) suggests, this label is not always justified.

Ayman-Nolley and Taira conducted a study of 2034 research articles, published between 1985 and 1995, that focused on adolescence. They found significant negative bias towards adolescents conveyed in the articles. An article was identified as being 'biased if it pertained to parent-adolescent conflict, emotional disturbance, problem behaviours, trouble in developing identity or confusion of thought' (2000:38). Ayman-Nolley and Taira believe that these themes reinforce a negative portrayal of young people in society. Morrow (2011:7) refers to the way in which young people are presented in media; young people, especially young men, are often presented wearing 'hoodies', and are depicted as out-of-control and dangerous'. Ayman-Nolley and Taira refer to Havighurst (1972), a prominent figure in developmental psychology, and note the adolescent developmental tasks he identified did not include conflict or 'problem behaviours'. For Havighurst (1972), a totalising view of adolescents is not helpful and fails to recognise the root-cause of problem behaviour. Bessant (2016:925) suggests the need to stop perceiving young people as 'trouble and troubled'. Waters (2011:209) refers to a commonly held view that a child or young person 'who needs substantial attention from others is somehow deficient' instead of considering whether there is a problem that is having a worrying impact on the young person. Waters (2011:217) avers the need to reconcile that 'negative attention-seeking behaviour often reflects a resourceful response to an unmet basic need. It is imperative to look beyond behaviour and actions; to take a wider perspective of the context in which a young person exists.

#### **4.3.1 It's all their fault - The Prevention Perspective on Young People**

In the 'prevention perspective' (James and McGillicuddy, 2001), young people are viewed as being in deficit and unable to make decisions to bring about positive changes. In this view, young people are the root cause of their individual problems. Young people including those who are unemployed, or part of the criminal justice system, are identified as responsible for their own 'shortcomings', an idea that has been conveyed through media (Hertsmere Young Researchers, 2011; Čeplak, 2012). Unfortunately, some young people internalise this view, which manifests in self-blame for negative aspects of their lives including unemployment (Dayrell et al. 2009). Bannister et al. (2010: vii) conducted a study about youth gangs in Scotland and, not surprisingly, found a negative perception of young people in relation to



youth gangs; the same can be said of adults in gangs (Covey, 2010). Bannister et al. (2010) also suggest that the term ‘youth gang’ obfuscates a multitude of factors that influence young people’s lives, including social, economic and political factors. Reference is made to ‘troublesome youth groups’, who are identified as groups of young people involved in low-level crime or anti-social behaviour.

The term ‘troublesome’ aligns to a perspective that young people are ‘bad’ and wholly responsible for their behaviour. Miller et al. (2015) refer to findings from a small-scale study of young people’s views of youth work in two areas in Scotland. Participants in this small, but comprehensive, study convey an overwhelming sense of negative feeling towards young people, particularly from those in formal organisations such as the police force or leisure facilities, which connects with Bannister et al.’s (2010) reference to troublesome youth groups.

#### **4.3.2 Citizens in the Making - The Youth Development Perspective**

The second perspective is what James and McGillicuddy (2001:3) describe as the ‘youth development perspective’, in which young people face barriers to accessing the right kind of resources that they need to reach their full potential. Ginwright and Cammarota (2002:84) also refer to the youth development perspective and note that, in this view, ‘young people’s choices are bound up by complex relationships between peers, family, school, work, and the political and economic resources available to them’. The youth development perspective assumes that some young people do not have access to support and opportunities therefore youth work provides services and education to young people. Lerner et al. (2005:12) also suggest, ‘if young people have mutually beneficial relations with the people and institutions of their social world, they will be on the way to a hopeful future marked by positive contributions to self, family, community, and civil society. Young people will thrive.’ The importance in Lerner et al.’s suggestion is on mutual relationships between young people and the adults around them.

### 4.3.3 Young People as Agents of Change - The Empowerment Perspective

The third to be discussed is the ‘empowerment perspective’, which is founded on the belief that societal structures are the root cause for young people’s problems. James and McGillicuddy note that, in this third perspective, ‘the solution to creating opportunities for youth then becomes correcting those power imbalances through collective action that transforms community institutions and systems into more caring and supportive environments.’ (2001:3). Vromen et al. (2014:82) suggest ‘young people now see and engage with politics in a much more individualised (rather than collectivist) way and are involved in ad hoc issues-based campaigns (rather than long-term organisational commitment).’ Tsekouras (2016a:123) notes, it is time to see ‘young people as active social agents.’ The empowerment perspective directly connects with an approach to YPP that aims to enhance critical awareness in young people, which will be described later in the chapter. Children and young people should be protected first and foremost (Nairn and Clarke, 2012). From my own experience as a youth worker, I suggest that it is imperative to achieve a balance between protecting young people and enabling their participation. That said, I support the view that all humans should be protected from harm. Barber (2007) conceives of young people as agents of change, with the desire and ability to work with adults to achieve change.

The link between societal views of young people and government policy is evident. Barber suggests that the notion of young people as agents of change should be embraced within policy and resources with which to enable this. Brook notes that ‘coalition policy also shows clear continuity with previous administrations in its construction of young people as active consumers within educational markets’ (2013:322). The notion of young people as active consumers within education is a very positive one. However, a range of societal factors such as food poverty and caring responsibilities combine and subsequently have a negative impact on young people (Bannister et al. 2013), which can result in young people struggling to even contemplate being a part of educational markets. The Scottish Government (2014a) recognises this fact, in policy at least, by asserting the need to improve young people’s life chances.

#### 4.4 Theories of Participation

It would be remiss not to discuss what is understood by the concept of participation in relation to YPP, particularly when at least 36 models of participation have been developed since Arnstein (1969) developed the Ladder of Citizen Participation, as shown in Figure 1. Arnstein worked on the premise that, unless there is a genuine redistribution of power, meaningful participation is not possible.

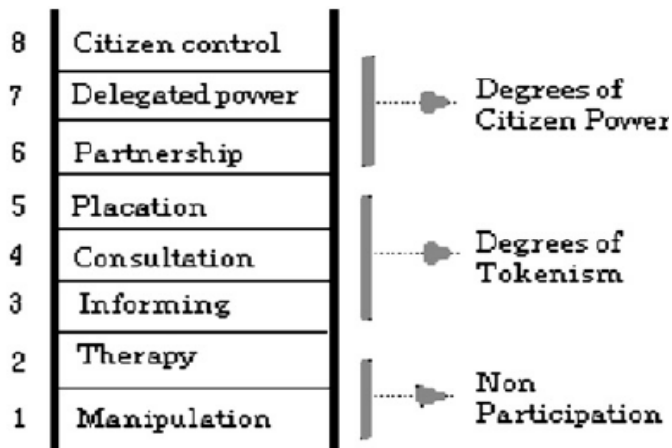


Figure 1 - Arnstein's (1969) Ladder of Participation

Arnstein's ladder depicts citizen control as the highest level of citizen participation. However, she cautioned that it was not necessarily the goal but rather, a demonstration of a theoretical possibility. Arnstein described participation as various degrees of citizen involvement in civic matters. Some years later, Hart (1992) developed the Ladder of Young People's Participation, shown in figure 2.

## Roger Hart's Ladder of Young People's Participation

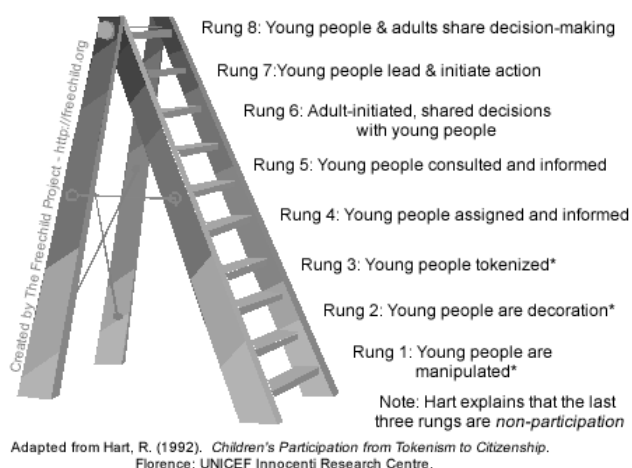


Figure 2 - Hart's (1992) Ladder of Young People's Participation

Hart developed his version of the ladder as a means of depicting various levels of youth participation/non-participation practice that he had observed in contexts across the globe. Like Arnstein (1969), Hart (2008) did not anticipate that it would be applied as step-by-step progression from the first rung, in which young people are manipulated, to the top rung in which young people and adults have joint responsibility for making decisions. Rather, it was intended as a prompt for organisations to consider the kind of participatory practices they employ or strive towards.

It is worthwhile noting that young people's participation is fluid and one approach will not be suitable for all young people. As noted above, the Scottish Government (2014b; 2016b) has made a political commitment to enabling young people in Scotland to be active citizens. However, it is not evident at which level young active citizens should operate. YPP that creates opportunities for young people to have a transformative role, and reflects Freire's (1996; 2000) theories and principles, align with rung eight of Hart's (1992) ladder of youth participation that was described in the previous chapter. The ways in which young people are perceived undoubtedly influences participation practice. Frank's (2006) romantic view of young people privileges young people's opinions over those of adults and aligns with the seventh rung from Hart (1992), in which young people lead and act independently. This may

be viewed as the goal but, given that young people co-exist with adults in the same communities, it is perhaps not realistic in all circumstances.

## **4.5 From Perspectives to Approaches - An exploration of Approaches to YPP and Citizenship**

There is a demonstrable link between perspectives on young people and the subsequent approaches to YPP and Citizenship. The following sections highlight the ways in which perspectives on young people influence the approaches to YPP that have been suggested by those such as Jennings et al. (2009), Ginwright and Cammarota (2002) and James and McGillicuddy (2001). As this research progressed, it was impossible not to consider the continuum of citizenship that also relates to views held on young people. That said, I favour the approach to YPP and citizenship in which young people are recognised as agents of change.

### **4.5.1 Youth Work as Prevention**

In the prevention perspective (James and McGillicuddy, 2001), young people such as those who are not in education, are viewed as problems to fix. In this perspective, the central concept of the UNCRC (United Nations, 1989) is not reflected. That is, young people are human beings not problems within society. Perspectives on young people influence the approaches to youth work that are taken. For example, Harris et al. (2010) note that school initiatives predominantly reinforce education to develop the citizenship of pupils, with an emphasis on embedding the notion of civic responsibility in students. The overall school citizenship agenda is compatible with the view of young people in the prevention perspective, in which young people fall short in terms of societal expectations and require intervention to steer them onto the correct path. From my experience within the field of youth work, and from this research, it is more accurate to identify that general youth work applies within this perspective. Youth work in the form of service-learning provides the means to equip young people with skills and knowledge needed to overcome their shortfalls and ensure their place as future citizen workers (Lister, 2003).

Citizenship-as-achievement connects with youth work as prevention. Smith et al. (2005:425) found that 'UK social policy assumes that young people lack citizenship' which translates that intervention is needed to develop young people's citizenship. Also referring to citizenship of young people in the United Kingdom, Lawy and Biesta (2006:39) note that 'education for citizenship has been viewed as an exercise in civics education and 'good' citizenship rather than as a way of developing and nurturing the social and critical capabilities of young people.' Citizenship-as-achievement is reinforced through a school agenda and is associated with preparing young people for undertaking their responsibilities as adult citizens. Tonon (2012:14/15) notes that 'in the case of young people, the exercise of real citizenship is a question related to the future (what they will be, not what they are) as they are not yet adults so they are not yet citizens.' I believe, in this approach, there is a failure to recognise young people as human beings with rights (United Nations, 1989) and to recognise the insightful contributions that young people can make within communities. The same limitations apply in the youth development approach, although not to the same extent.

#### **4.5.2 Youth Development Approach**

The youth development approach assumes that young people face barriers that prevent them from reaching their potential, and supportive adults help them to overcome these barriers. Golombek (2006) identifies that the development of marketable skills in young people is part of this approach. This raises the question of whether young people have the freedom to decide what their goals are or whether they are encouraged to undertake education and training that will help them to fill some of the 'skills gaps' that have been referred to by the Scottish Government (2007) as part of their Skills for Scotland strategy. It is not uncommon for young people to be signposted towards career and training opportunities to meet employers' needs rather than the needs of young people, which means that their choices are limited. The Government suggests that young people should 'effectively contribute to their society' (Scottish Government, 2014a:12). However, the notion of effective contribution is contentious. Effective contribution could either be seen to maintain or challenge the status quo. This connects to Reichert's (2017:91) continuum of citizenship referred to in the previous chapter.

In Smith, et al.'s (2005) view, emphasis should be given to enabling citizenship that meets young people's needs rather than simply preparing them for adult citizenship (Golombek, 2006). For example, formal recognition could be given to the role that social media plays in engaging young people with political processes or citizenship. Lawy and Biesta (2006) suggest that appropriate educational programmes would respect the claim to citizenship status of everyone in society, including children and young people. It would work together *with* young people rather than *on* young people, and recognise that it is the actual practices of citizenship, and the ways in which these practices transform over time that are educationally significant. In this view, YPP reflects rung eight of Hart's (1992) ladder of children's participation, which means that young people and adults make decisions together as citizens of the same communities. The Scottish Government (2014a) associates citizenship of young people with helping to improve their chances in life, enabling them to be successful adults. The Government identifies young people as citizens within society who need support to become active citizens. There can be no doubt that the Scottish Government (2016a) is committed to ensuring that young people have the chance to become active citizens within society. However, their definition of an active citizen remains unclear. From what has been written here, the Scottish Government's view of citizenship connects with the youth development approach to YPP. Whilst this is more positive than the youth prevention approach, there is limited recognition of the positive attributes that young people have as young people - as opposed to young people training to meet with expectations of adults.

#### **4.5.3 Critical Consciousness Development**

Then finally, a more radical approach, Foster-Fishman et al. (2010:31) describe Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) as an approach 'to promote the critical consciousness of their youth participants'. They developed a specific method, 'Research Actualizing Critical Thought', or ReACT, in which young people are involved in every stage of the process (Foster-Fishman et al. 2006). This method was developed in a way that encompasses the theoretical and practical ideas from Freire (2000; 2007) on critical consciousness and decodification. In the ReACT process young people are encouraged 'to demonstrate their capacities and concerns to the broader community and think deeply about the meaning of the data they gather, the

critical consciousness of the youth and the broader community is enhanced' (Foster-Fishman et al. 2006:82).

Biesta and Lawy (2006) propose that citizenship education should enable young people to become active and democratic members of society and this could be further supported by investing in community-based citizenship methods, such as ReACT. Kennelly (2011) refers to the concept of 'Citizen Youth', in which young people meet society's expectations of them being good citizens, as well as undertake activist activities such as getting involved in campaigns to tackle issues. It is difficult to make a distinction between youth activism and youth citizenship. However, dominant ideas relating to youth citizenship relate to moulding young people to conform to society's norms, whereas youth activism has an emphasis on striving for action and change. Activism has a clear purpose of tackling issues within society. Therefore, it is possible to deduce that youth activism and youth citizenship have the potential to overlap in terms of focus.

Kennelly (2011) suggests that operational boundaries should exist within activism, which reflects Freire's (1998) belief that violence has no place within an educational project. "Citizen Youth" should not stray into the realms of violence or militancy (Kennelly, 2011). Kennelly (2011:133) distinguishes between youth activism as a form of citizenship in terms of campaigning for rights and justice and being 'demonized as an irrational and irresponsible mode of 'troublemaking'. Kennelly (2011) and Furlong & Cartmel (2012) suggest that opportunities to contest dominant ideas from the state are diminishing, which counters the suggestion from the Scottish Government (2012a) that opportunities are increasing in the Scottish context. Furlong and Cartmel (2012:15) also noted that 'young people have become increasingly involved in direct action on single political issues', which could be described as either citizenship or activism. Dayrell et al. (2009:55) believe that 'effective citizenship' in young people can be achieved through YPP, in which they strive for youth democracy and justice that reflects the culture and society in which they exist. This is reflected in Norris' (2003:17) view 'that the political energies among the younger generation in post-industrial societies have diversified and flowed through cause-oriented activism'. It is this final approach to YPP that



reflects my position. I support the perspective that views young people as agents of change and therefore, I advocate an approach to YPP in which young people are supported to realise their potential, dreams and goals. Roig and Crowther (2016:79), noted earlier, suggest the ‘dialogical pedagogy of the school is put into practice to demonstrate its capacity for transformation and to corroborate how participants can become agents of change’. Roig and Crowther refer to an approach to adult education but their findings are applicable to YPP - adults and young people are all human after all. This leads on to a discussion of YPP that explicitly aims to facilitate an empowering process for young people.

## **4.6 YPP and Empowerment**

James and McGillicuddy (2001:3) define youth empowerment as ‘work that strives to promote the highest levels of youth leadership in organising collective action to transform institutions, systems and environments.’ Unfortunately, youth projects that focus on youth empowerment often have limited funding and cannot operate on a long-term basis. This hinders, or prevents, the achievement of long-term goals, which is the exercise of power ‘over’ young people or systemic oppression mentioned in chapter two.

### **4.6.1 Critical Youth Empowerment**

Ginwright and Cammarota (2002:82) developed a ‘Social Justice Model of Youth Development’ (SJYD), in response to the reality that many youth development approaches fail to consider the range of factors that affect young people’s lives. They believe that ‘extrinsic societal forces significantly influence the day-to-day lives of urban youth’ (Ginwright and Cammarota, 2002:83) therefore these forces must be a focal point to consider how oppression and injustices are manifest to strive towards changing the situation. This model reflects Freire’s (2000) belief that students’ experiences should be the basis of the educational experience, which connects with his second principle - the importance of content or object of cognition (1996). Kuttner (2016:530) identifies ‘youth cultural organizing’ (YCO) as an empowerment approach and cites Project Hip-Hop (PHH) as a practice example that uses artistic practice as a conduit for political action. PHH ‘takes a critical pedagogical stance, arguing that youth need to develop critical consciousness of how

systems of power and oppression function if they are to effectively challenge and transform them' (ibid:536/537). This reflects Freire's (1996) fifth principle described in chapter three; education is never neutral.

Barber (2007:85) developed the Top-Down/Bottom-Up Model of Youth Engagement, which is located within critical youth empowerment. Barber refers to the 'Engagement Zone' as part of this approach, which involves young people and adults engaged in meaningful and respectful dialogue, to work towards bringing about change as part of youth participation practice. It is not a static space; it must be flexible and 'dynamic', which reflects Freire's (1996) first principle on the importance of pedagogical space. It seems evident that, in the Engagement Zone, adults must relinquish the actual or supposed power that they have. This could lead to an element of conflict and Barber notes that some adults and young people opt out of the process because they feel that they are not being listened to. The 'approach is highly dependent on the level of control or personal agency young people feel they have in their interaction with adults, and indeed with each other' (Barber, 2007:81). The emphasis here is on the shift in attitudes from adults and organisations to bring about more opportunities for youth participation.

#### **4.6.2 YPP and Empowerment Theories - A Critique**

Toomey (2011:183) suggests YPP must be scrutinised using 'the lens of empowerment, as well as its opposite -that of disempowerment'. This reinforces need for a deeper understanding of the concepts of empowerment and disempowerment and their connection to YPP. Jennings et al. (2009) developed Critical Youth Empowerment (CYE) theory, 'which stresses the connection between critical reflection and meaningful action, and includes an element of social action directed at the root causes of problems'. This theory mirrors concepts suggested in Freire's (2000) approach to transformational education referred to in previous chapters. Martinez et al. (2016:7) refer to CYE under the banner of 'the transformative dimension' of youth empowerment. Aldana et al. (2016:344) suggest 'intergroup dialogue is a promising critical pedagogical approach for involving youth in public deliberation on social justice issues.' This approach reflects Freire's (1996)

seventh principle, to respect cultural identities, and enables young people to examine concepts of power, privilege, and diversity across groups.

Kope and Arellano (2017:399) note ‘academics, overall, have accentuated conscientization in empowerment development’. Youth empowerment development is synonymous with conscientisation and critical consciousness. Critical transitive consciousness, or critical consciousness, involves understanding the complex structures of society and acting to challenge social inequalities (Freire and Macedo, 1998). Freire provided an illustration of reaching this goal by noting that ‘a person who has achieved critical consciousness is capable of clearly perceiving hunger as more than just not eating, as the manifestations of a political, economic, and social reality of deep injustice’ (Freire, 1996:182/183). Coburn and Gormally (2015) equate youth empowerment with the development of consciousness in young people, which is achieved through effective relationships between youth workers and young people. In this view, the approach to YPP is based on providing support to overcome the hurdles that young people face.

Kohfeldt et al. (2011) refer to approaches to youth empowerment in which young people are supported to uncover the many factors that have a negative impact on the wider population of young people. Encouraging young people to recognise themselves as agents of change is a thread that weaves throughout this thesis. Some projects claim to empower young people yet actually disempower them, or simply provide support to help young people express their views (Shier, 2001). There is a vast difference between young people expressing their views and them being acted upon and them expressing their views as part of a tokenistic effort.

Adults often enforce limitations in relation to the expression of youth voice (Kohfeldt et al. 2011). Whether by design, or default, it can be challenging for some adults to relinquish power. Toomey (2011) suggests that a youth worker may be promoting empowerment yet be disempowering at the same time. For instance, a youth worker may create the right conditions for young people to express their views and identify changes they would like to implement but fail to support young people to pursue

this. Barber (2009:28) notes, ‘the so-called empowerment of young people may in some cases be ‘stage-managed’ by those who claim to have the best interests of young people at heart’. Foster-Fishman et al. (2010:31) note that YPAR projects are not uniform in their design and young people are often excluded from certain parts of the process. This means that promoting critical consciousness is sometimes far from the agenda. Kohfeldt et al. (2011) identify an example of YPAR within a school setting and highlight teachers’ attitudes as a barrier to positive outcomes. Young people often perceive teachers to be in a position of power and control and do not view the school context as the place to act against the state. Teachers may not feel comfortable or able to raise issues of deep injustice within the classroom. Diemer and Li’s (2011) study found that students expressed the view that teachers did not highlight issues such as racism within the classroom, although they were generally encouraged to express their own opinions on different issues. Diemer and Li also note that friends and family are more likely than teachers to enable the development of students’ critical consciousness. Their findings reinforce the need for more emphasis to be placed on developing meaningful opportunities for youth participation within the context of their communities.

Jennings et al. (2006:52) reinforce the need to distinguish between ‘empowerment as a process and an outcome’. Fitzsimons et al. (2011:5) suggest, ‘it is more useful to consider it as a process by which groups and individuals feel empowered to achieve, to participate and to overcome their lack of power and control.’ Similarly, my own interpretation is that empowerment refers to a process in which young people’s confidence builds, in which they are enabled to communicate and undertake new skills. Young people’s openness to try new things and to act enables them to empower themselves and the outcome is that they feel empowered - rather than the notion that young people have been empowered. Tremblay and Gutberlet (2010) suggest the need to focus on enabling young people to create power from within rather than bestowing them with power. Wallerstein and Bernstein (1994:142) concur with this idea; they define community empowerment as:

*‘a social action process that promotes the participation of people, organisations, and communities in gaining control over their lives in their community and larger society. With this perspective,*

*empowerment is not characterized as achieving power to dominate others, but rather power to act with others to effect change.'*

The assertion that youth work, in any form, empowers young people (McKee et al. 2010) is oft-used. There is an undeniable link between power, empowerment and YPP (Spencer and Doull, 2015) therefore it is important to examine these concepts. Contemporary views of empowerment have been influenced by ideas derived from the fields of psychology, sociology and education in the 1970s (Fitzsimons, 2011). In the seventeenth century reference was made to empowerment within a legal framework; to empower meant to give a person authority in relation to a legal situation (Merriam-Webster, 2012). This early conception of 'giving' power to someone is still one that resonates within contemporary examples (Fitzsimons, 2011) as indicated earlier. Anderson et al. (2016) refer to the notion of grit, mentioned in chapter two. In YPP, grit involves the creation of possibilities and opportunities for young people to be actors within society and not just recipients of services. In terms of power, YPP aims to enable young people to find the power within that enables them to exercise power with other young people. The notion of acting with others is a fundamental aspect of YPP, which reflects discussions in chapter two in relation to solidarity. I align myself with this perspective, in which young people are supported to work together to exercise power to bring about positive change for the wider youth population.

#### **4.7 YPP - Benefits and Barriers**

This section notes some benefits of YPP that have been identified from literature. There is no shortage of research in relation to the potential benefits of YPP however, it is prudent to note, most of what is written relates to a theoretical view rather than views expressed by young people. It is important to recognise that some forms and examples of participation may be detrimental to young people. For example, Barber (2009:27) suggests, 'not all forms of participation are democratic or egalitarian.' Earlier discussions highlight that some projects hide the fact that young people have no control in the process at all. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to include a discussion on the associated pitfalls of youth participation practice but some of the barriers that hinder young people's participation will be discussed.

The final sub-section discusses the necessary conditions to undertake meaningful YPP.

#### **4.7.1 The Benefits of YPP**

Literature suggests that the benefits to young people can be organised under the headings of: employability, citizenship and transformation. In relation to YPAR, Kirsher et al. (2011:141) highlight three areas of benefit to young people. These include 'increased skills and knowledge' such as technical skills that connect with the employment market; 'new roles that promoted identity development' with an emphasis on fulfilling civic duties; and 'identity transformation', which overturns the deficit-view of young people discussed in section 4.2.1. In a similar vein Diemer and Li (2011:1817) found that 'youth who develop "habits" of civic and extracurricular participation expect to be more politically engaged in the future'. They also note that studies have shown, young people involved in participation projects are 'more politically engaged as adults'. This echoes Golombek's (2006) point that youth participation practice is said to shape good citizens. O'Donoghue (2002:18/19) suggests, 'meaningful participation is said to foster democratic habits in youth, such as tolerance, healthy disagreement, self-expression, and cooperation'. Morsillo and Prilleltensky (2007:725) consider examples of youth participation both for citizenship and for transformation, which implies an either/or choice between citizenship and transformation. They suggest benefits for individuals such as 'enhanced sociopolitical awareness' (Morsillo and Prilleltensky, 2007: 731) and 'enhanced sense of control and social responsibility' (Morsillo and Prilleltensky, 2007: 732). However, in summary, they noted that 'psychological changes are easier to achieve than political transformations'. This is not surprising, any process to challenge injustices within the deep structures of society will be a long-term process.

It is certainly more difficult to effect change of this nature when funding for projects is usually for a limited period as mentioned previously (Kohfeldt et al. 2011). Nevertheless, Morsillo and Prilleltensky (2007:732) find, 'through empowering group processes, young people were able to reflect on their own oppression and take action.' Ginwright and Cammarota (2002:92), noted earlier, suggest that critical

consciousness leads to positive outcomes in relation to psychological well-being. They wrote, ‘through dialogue, young people develop a sense of optimism, emotional stability, intellectual stimulation, positive self-regard, and general resilience when facing personal, family, or community challenges.’ Connected with this point, Diemer and Blustein (2006:220) found that young people involved in critical consciousness development ‘had greater clarity regarding their vocational identity, were more committed to their future careers, and viewed work as a larger part of their future lives.’ Coates and Howe (2014:295) refer to findings from a small study of young people involved in YPP in Australia; young people identified the most important benefits are, ‘the opportunity to make like-minded friends, build social skills and networks in a safe way and learn to better support their peers.’ These examples highlight that some young people value feeling part of something and enjoy helping others. There was less emphasis on the importance of employability. Iwasaki et al. highlight the importance of ensuring that young people can access a range of opportunities through YPP. The opportunities they describe include: visiting new destinations and learning new skills, amongst other things and ‘these are chances in which they can grow and develop their potentials and improve themselves’ (2014:327).

Ginwright and Cammarota (2002:93) suggest, through critical consciousness and social action (praxis)...young people...explore the causes of community and social issues and act toward addressing social problems’. Factors that affect the lives of young people also affect other minority groups within society. Therefore, young people’s action within youth participation projects can effect change in relation to the improvement of the wider community. Examples of this include more ‘equitable institutional practices’ (Ginwright and Cammarota, 2006:94). Morsillo and Prilleltensky (2007:732) cite ‘enhanced youth involvement in local affairs’ with a specific example of a young person who became ‘a member of the Youth Advisory Council with the local government’. Outcomes are not always positive; success is often dependent on the adults involved in the process in the wider context. This will be explored further in the next section of this chapter. Despite some successes Morsillo and Prilleltensky (2007) also concede that it is easier for individual and group development to occur than development at the level of community. Counter to their

view, Hart (1997) argues that youth participation results in positive impacts for young people, such as an enhanced respect for the environment, which in turn leads to communities striving for a more sustainable society.

#### **4.7.2 YPP and Barriers for Young People**

This research stems from my understanding that, while young people may have a desire to get involved, many young people do not participate in YPP in Scotland. This section gives an overview of some of the barriers that prevent young people from taking part in YPP. In doing so, the section highlights that many barriers to participation are surmountable. Ginwright and James (2002:27) believe that many young people face significant barriers in terms of their involvement in YPP; they note that ‘young people face intense economic isolation, lack political power, and are subjected to pervasive social stigma’. Garabarino (1995:84) referred to these as ‘social toxins’, which undoubtedly affect all aspects of their lives. Checkoway (2011:342) lists an extensive array of factors that impact participation including ‘race, gender, age, income, education...family and community context...institutional barriers, school disparities’. For example, he noted that it is often young people from middle and upper-income families who participate, which has been shown to be the case in Scotland too (McGinley and Grieve, 2010). In the context of Australia, Bell et al. (2008:129/130) highlight barriers to youth participation in government and community decision-making processes; one of the most prevalent reasons is that young people felt ‘fear of being shamed or ridiculed by friends, family or the wider community for ‘speaking up’ or doing something differently.

There still appears to be a perception from the wider population of young people that YPP is for those young people who are high achievers in terms of education and those who come from more affluent areas (Bell et al., 2008). This perception was found to be true in the context of Scotland by McGinley and Grieve (2010:256), who also note that ‘significant numbers of young people continue to be socially excluded and disadvantaged through lack of participatory opportunities’. As means of countering some of these issues, Kennelly (2011:112) suggests the promotion of ‘relational agency’, which involves friends and family encouraging others to join



them in YPP. Kennelly notes, relational agency has the potential to lead to ‘actions that might otherwise be inconceivable’ (p. 117).

The European Commission’s (2015) report describes the benefits and outcomes of young people learning to work as part of a team and the ability to transfer the skills involved in team work to employment or study is just one example. The Scottish Government (2014c:4) set out their intentions in relation to youth employment; young people should be equipped to ‘enhance sustainable economic growth’ with skills needed by employers. They further note a desire to create ‘a culture of real partnership between employers and education, where employers view themselves as co-investors and co-designers rather than simply customers’, which reflects the government’s plans for education and training as employer-led. In addition to creating opportunities for young people to develop team-work skills, it is vital to enable young people to take the lead. McNeil et al. (2012:9) highlight the difficulty in measuring outcomes of youth services for young people. They note,

‘services for young people tend to articulate the value of their work through measuring the activities that are easiest to quantify. Often these are the tangible and concrete aspects of their work: ‘indicators’ such as number of accredited qualifications achieved, number of hours of services provided, or attendance, for example.’

They developed a framework, which provides a common language in terms of measuring ‘soft’, less tangible outcomes. Emphasis is placed on social and emotional capabilities, which they connect with positive, long-term outcomes for young people. A longitudinal study would be beneficial in terms of establishing the outcomes of YPP for participants in their adulthood.

#### **4.7.3 The Secret to YPP Success - Essential Elements of ‘Good’ YPP**

From this research, there are elements that contribute towards successful YPP. Mannion (2012:17) suggests overarching principles: ‘equal opportunities for inclusive, voluntary participation’; ‘respect for CYP’s rights and differences’;

‘transparency and accountability in decision making’; ‘intergenerational power sharing’; and ‘relevance of content, purpose and outcome’. I feel that it is important to acknowledge the impact of limited resources within youth projects, while striving to achieve successful YPP. In response to cuts in funding, project managers reluctantly cut contracted hours for youth workers, which results in limited time for youth workers to do necessary administration. Buchroth and Parkin (2010) acknowledge the day-to-day work pressures, such as paperwork, that prevent youth workers from creating an environment in which young people feel empowered.

Tisdall et al. (2008) note, there has been an increase in the development of tools to promote participation within the United Kingdom. However, they conclude that lessons could be learned from children and youth participation practice across the globe. Cultural forms, including music, dance, drama, and hip-hop have been shown to be attractive media for young people to reflect upon their experiences within society and envisage and work towards change (Butler and Princeswal, 2010). Wang’s (2006) participatory photovoice approach is a means of enabling young people and adults to engage in critical discussions about the others’ lives, about shared issues, cultures and perceptions of each other. Whilst lessons can be learned in a Scottish context, it should be noted that Butler and Princeswal (2010) feel work remains to be done in terms of researching the benefits and longer-term outcomes of using cultural forms of youth participation.

Creative and innovative ways of enabling young people to connect with the wider community, other organisations and statutory agencies can contribute to some success (Alparone and Rissotto, 2001). One of the key tenets is that young people have a right to have a voice in relation things that affect them. At the beginning of any process young people should have the chance to say how they want to participate. Tisdall et al. (2008:350) assert that ‘to avoid technical rational approaches to participation...we need to enable discursive spaces where children and adults work through what participation and inclusion mean in local contexts’. Freire (1996) reinforces the importance of creating discursive space in his first principle, which is examined in Chapter three.

Findings from literature confirm the knowledge I have gained from experience in relation to this. For example, in their study on young people's views on youth work in Scotland, Miller et al. (2015:478) found, 'connections created with youth workers encouraged [young people] to consider community engagement, which led in many cases to an accumulation of social capital for these young people'. This suggests that strong relationships with youth workers enable young people to pursue further opportunities, including volunteering. Nolas (2014:38) makes an interesting observation, '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 each other and the youth workers'. This concurs with findings from Coates and Howe (2014) mentioned earlier, that feeling part of a network in which they feel safe is more important to young people in a youth work context. Miller et al. (2015) found that, when young people feel connected, they feel more able to try out new opportunities.

Young people often need support in the process of engaging in new opportunities but seek support from their peers. Vromen et al. (2014:82), found that 'young people often choose to work horizontally with their peers, rather than with hierarchical authority, thus their social circles are an important source of information, as well as support'. Referring to the earlier point from Cammaerts et al. (2014), that some young people feel those in power do not care about them, it is possible to deduce that young people would rather work with peers as part of a 'heterarchy' (McCulloch, 1945 cited by Crumley, 1995:1). In social sciences 'heterarchy' refers to a group of people with the same amount of power and authority, who operate on a horizontal basis (Crumley, 1995).

With reference to the horizontal relationship between young people and youth workers, Bamber and Murphy (2010:230) suggest that 'unless young people feel trusted and respected, they are unlikely to meaningfully explore aspects of their personal and social lives with youth workers.' This reflects Freire's (2005) view that teachers, or youth workers, play a necessary role in enabling young people to achieve goals and act for change. This counters Walker's (1981) assertion that educators impose their will on students, or youth worker impose their will on young

people in this case. Hart (2016) suggests boundaries are important in all forms of youth work. Ensuring that boundaries are adhered to is not the same as enforcing a youth worker's will; boundaries help to create a safe space. Youth workers have a vital role to play; 'readiness, willingness and ability to improvise are central to the role of the youth worker' (Harris, 2014:654).

Youth workers must respond to young people's needs, which mean complete support that is gradually decreased. To illustrate this, Maletsky and Evans (2017:54) suggest 'youth voice is best promoted when the youth worker provides scaffolding to prepare youth to make decisions'. This approach reflects Freire's (1996) second principle in that young people and youth workers are both subjects in the process. Also, MacIntosh and Youniss' (2008) scaffolding approach, in which young people express the level of support they require, is evident. The notion of scaffolding positions youth workers at young people's side, working with them, until they are ready to take the reins. MacIntosh and Youniss (2008:32), aver the importance of scaffolding in YPP; the level and type of support or 'training' is dependent on the young person. Maletsky and Evans draw parallels between the process and the different rungs of the ladder of participation (Arnstein, 1969; Hart, 1992) discussed earlier in this chapter. There are circumstances in which youth workers 'pave the way' to enable young people to build connections beyond the youth project or YPP experience. Harris (2014:656) suggests that youth workers are also 'agents of social change' rather than reinforcing dominant expectations of young people, youth workers enable 'young people to gain an insight into their limited circumstances and challenge how they are marginalised within society too'. Harris (2014) answers De St Croix' (2016:73) question, 'is passionate youth work liberatory and subversive?'. Passionate youth workers help young people to resist rather than conform. The outcome for young people is that they feel able to undertake social action and youth workers support them in doing so.

Hartje et al. (2008) suggest an association between youth workers' input and outcomes for young people, which will be explored further in chapter seven in relation to findings from this study. Krauss et al. (2012:300) note 'claims that practitioner characteristics are critical to high-quality youth work' yet there is no

agreement on what the characteristics are, or guidance on how they can be acquired. As Public Health England (2014:23) notes, young people wanted ‘access to objective staff who were friendly, empathic, non-judgemental, honest and understanding’. The terms refer to the demeanour of youth workers. My research provides a unique contribution to literature on youth participant’s perspectives of youth workers. The findings also contribute to addressing another issue identified by Krauss et al. (2012:300), which is that ‘little research exists showing a connection between professionally trained youth work practitioners and positive youth outcomes’.

Batsleer poses the question: ‘what do youth and community workers do?’ Her answer is simple: ‘Listen and talk. Make relationships’ (Batsleer, 2008: 5). To build relationships, it is helpful for youth workers to show empathy to young people. Youth Work Practice (2017) define empathy as ‘the ability to perceive the motivations, thoughts and feelings of another person’. Emotional empathy helps to build meaningful relationships within youth work. Emotional empathy involves perceiving the feelings of young people but also involves showing compassion, which is a core part of ‘*alfirmo*’. This reflects the idea from Jeffs (2006), that youth work is a profession that stems from an expression of care for young people and De Croix (2016:75) who identifies relationships as the beating heart of youth work, rather than the ‘means to an end’. Relationships are the beginning and the end and everything else in-between.

The building blocks for successful YPP seem clear; a sense of belonging and a strong bond with youth workers that leads to young people feeling able to try new opportunities, build skills and knowledge that enables them to act. In doing so, they go through some form of transformation. Findings from this study suggest that a significant factor is that young people choose to take part. Coburn (2011) notes, young people participating in youth work on a voluntary basis signifies good practice. It follows that youth workers make efforts to ensure young people’s experience is relevant and worthwhile. As Hart (2016:870) describes, ‘a healthy relationship with a youth worker creates spaces for reflection, growth, increase in well-being, and flourishing’, which reflects Freire’s (1996) first principle that emphasises the

importance of the space. Gallagher, Starkman and Rhoades (2017) suggest the use of drama as an approach to enable young people to develop critical awareness, resilience and imagine positive alternatives. This reflects Crean and Lynch's (2011) suggestion that using creative methods in YPP transforms young people's consciousness. Regardless of the methods used, the important thing is that young people participate meaningfully in all aspects of their lives. That said, Williams et al. (2012) suggest there remains little research on the outcomes for young people from taking part in YPP. There appears to be growing interest in the field, resulting in the validation of practitioner knowledge. Again, findings from my research contribute in relation to the perceived outcomes of YPP from the research participants. From my own experience as a youth worker, it is possible to conclude that a significant level of care, effort, and support provided for young people increases the chance of positive outcomes for them. As noted in the introduction, I did not have the opportunity to assess the impact of my contribution on young people's lives therefore my conclusions are based on an accumulation of anecdotal evidence and personal observations.

#### **4.8 Conclusions**

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989) was established as a prominent policy in which young people are identified as having the right to have a say in matters that affect them. Literature has shown that projects to encourage and facilitate youth participation have increased, with varying success. Society encompasses a range of views of young people, for instance, young people are seen to need protection (Frank, 2006; Nairn and Clarke, 2012) or viewed as deficient in terms of the skills and knowledge to be able to contribute effectively to decision-making processes (James and McGillicuddy's, 2001). This is not a universal view; in the empowerment perspective (James and McGillicuddy's, 2001), young people are believed to have the potential and capability for making important decisions that affect them as well as being able to have critical discussions about a range of sociological, environmental and economic factors that impact their lives. The empowerment perspective forms the basis for approaches to youth participation, including Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) described by Foster-Fishman et al. (2010); Photovoice (Wang, 2003); Ginwright and Cammarota's (2002) Social

Justice Model of Youth Development (SJYD); Barber's (2007) Engagement Zone, which is part of the Top-Down/Bottom-Up Model of Youth Engagement; and Kuttner's (2016) youth cultural organising model. Praxis, dialogue and the development of critical consciousness form the basis of these models of youth participation, which reinforces the suggestion that understanding Freire's theories and practice principles are helpful in the application of these models.

Young people and adults should find meaningful ways of working together, Barber's (2007) engagement zone is one way to mediate the potentially difficult relationship between young people and adults. There have been, and continues to be, too many cases where young people are consulted with little or no action at all in response to their views. Frank (2006:353) infers that young people choose not to participate because 'they could become disenchanted with the process when their recommendations are not heeded', which is symptomatic when participation of young people is at rungs 1, 2 or 3 of Hart's (1992) ladder. Bell et al. (2000) found that many young people felt disappointed because of a tokenistic process that masked the overriding agenda of the adults involved.

As discussed in this chapter, the predominant form of youth participation in Scotland is the youth council system. Whilst youth councils have been shown to have some benefits, evidence relates mainly to the benefits for individuals who participate. Research to date suggests benefits such as increased confidence, development of skills and greater civic participation. Further research is needed to look at the impact that YPP has in terms of affecting change in relation to injustice and discrimination, as well as the long-term outcomes for individuals and communities (Barber, 2009; Checkoway and Gutierrez, 2006; Nygreen et al. 2006; Checkoway, 2011). This chapter highlights benefits associated with YPP both to individual young people and to wider society. Aspects that can potentially create positive experiences through YPP, including efforts to build trusting relationships between young people and youth workers, the use of creative and fun methods, and the creation and maintenance of boundaries, were also highlighted. This chapter highlights my position in relation to YPP, which is that young people are agents of change and that approaches to YPP should reflect this and enable young people to feel empowered

to act and make positive changes within their communities and beyond. Existent barriers that prevent young people taking part in YPP are not insurmountable. A shift in thinking and a willingness to work in alternative ways, by adults connected to YPP, would enable barriers to be overcome. A financial commitment from the Scottish Government that enables their policy to translate into practice would make a notable difference. The findings from my research, the design of which will now be discussed, contribute to the argument that a greater investment in YPP would reap benefits to young people and the community at large.

The building blocks for successful YPP seem clear; a sense of belonging and a strong bond with youth workers that leads to young people feeling able to try new opportunities, build skills and knowledge that enables them to act. In doing so, they go through some form of transformation. As Hart (2016:870) describes, 'a healthy relationship with a youth worker creates spaces for reflection, growth, increase in well-being, and flourishing', which reflects Freire's (1996) first principle that emphasises the importance of the space. Gallagher, Starkman and Rhoades (2017) suggest the use of drama as an approach to enable young people to develop critical awareness, resilience and imagine positive alternatives. This reflects Crean and Lynch's (2011) suggestion that using creative methods in YPP transforms young people's consciousness. Regardless of the methods used, the important thing is that young people participate meaningfully in all aspects of their lives.



## Chapter Five: A Project is Born - The Research Process

### 5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I explain how I designed and conducted the research project with young people, youth workers and an elected member, all of whom have taken part in youth participation projects. Section 5.2 indicates the research design that enabled me to gain insight into the lived experiences of those who take part in youth participation projects. Section 5.3 follows with a discussion of the ethical considerations taken for the research, including discussions on the importance of consent. Section 5.4 outlines the process for identifying youth participation projects, describes the final selection process and includes an explanation of how I gained access to research participants. Section 5.5 indicates how I carried out the research and includes an explanation of the ethical considerations that were given throughout the whole research process. Section 5.6 provides insight into the way in which data was collected and analysed and how issues of validity and dependability were accounted for within the process. This is followed by the closing section, 5.7, in which I provide some conclusions about the overall research process.

The aim of the research was 'to critically examine the lived experiences of people who have taken part in youth participation projects in Scotland'. There was an underlying focus on establishing whether there is a connection between youth participation practice and the development of critical consciousness in youth participants, as described in chapter four. The research questions were as follows:

1. What is the profile of young people who take part in youth participation practice?
2. What are participants' perceptions of the aim of youth participation practice?
3. What are participants' experiences of the approaches used within youth participation practice?
4. What is the young person/youth worker relationship like within youth participation practice?
5. How do participants define the 'ideal' youth worker for youth participation practice?

6. What are the implications of youth participation practice, as perceived by all research participants?

Whilst there is a growing body of literature asserting the need for youth participation in many aspects of civil society, there remains a gap in terms of research into the lived experiences of those young people who have already taken part in YPP in Scotland from a Freirean perspective. The research aim and questions provided the means to discover new knowledge on the potential benefits of youth participation practice for individuals and communities and more. The research design therefore had to provide the opportunity to gain insight into the views and experiences of those who have taken part in youth participation in Scotland.

## **5.2 Designing the Research**

### **5.2.1 It's their truth and nothing but their truth - A Qualitative Approach**

The purpose or aim of research dictates whether a quantitative and/or qualitative approach is taken. Instead of putting the 'methodological cart before the substantive (or content) horse' (Punch, 2005:4), or selecting the research methods first, the research questions were the driver for my research design. It was important to select an appropriate design that would enable the research questions to be answered; this involved considering ontological and epistemological dimensions (Cresswell, 1998). My ontological view is that there is not one 'single truth' (Wahyuni, 2012:71); reality is variable in that it depends on the views and actions of individuals (Wahyuni, 2012). A qualitative approach to ascertaining how participants construct their experience of youth participation practice was appropriate for my research. My approach was based on key ideas from interpretivism, in which reality is socially constructed (Guba and Lincoln, 2005; Wahyuni, 2012). From this perspective, the 'conception of social reality' (Cohen et al., 2011:8) is based on a subjective view therefore individuals' subjective accounts constitute meaningful data. The focus for my research was on ascertaining how to perceive the processes and outcomes of youth participation practice. The methods selected were qualitative in nature as the participants' subjective views of their reality were the main foci of the research, which reflects my epistemological

position. My decisions were also based on my belief that there are no 'permanent standards by which truth can be universally known' (Guba and Lincoln, 2005:204). As a researcher, my approach is embedded in a critical-interpretivist paradigm. In this worldview, it is vital 'to consciously adopt a critical and reflective stance' (Monson, 2015:22). In relation to this study, this entails critical reflection on the role that YPP may play in 'maintaining social orders and power relations in organizations' (ibid. 2015:23) or, indeed, in challenging the status quo. The following section explains the additional factors that motivated my final decision to take this approach.

### **5.2.2 How to Find Out Their Truth - Selecting the Research Methods**

As a qualitative study, it was crucial to consider the need to encompass an active connection between myself and the participants. This is a key element of the critical-interpretivist approach. To gather data, such as the lived experiences of young people, it is vital for the researcher to interact with the research participants (Yin, 2012). An approach that affords the opportunity for deeper discussions influenced the methods that were selected. It was important that the methods enabled me to engage in dialogue with the participants rather than them being constrained by a limited set of choices presented in a questionnaire for example. Multiple realities and perspectives add depth to a study and triangulation is an accepted means of clarifying meaning in qualitative research. In 'social research the term 'triangulation' is used to refer to the observation of the research issue from (at least) two different points' (Flick, 2004:178). I elected to conduct focus groups, interviews, and observations of youth participation meetings, which entailed both methodological and participant triangulation.

## **5.3 Ethical Considerations**

Being mindful of the fact that the project involved working with young people, it was vital to ensure that the research was ethically-grounded. Research and ethics must be considered in tandem and it was vital to reach some equilibrium between what was asked of the participants in the research and their rights and values to be protected. Hill (1998) suggested three areas of consideration when children or

young people are involved in research. The first is the necessity for them to give consent and freely choose to participate in the research.

### **5.3.1 The Importance of Consent**

O’Kane (2008) recognises that, whilst young people can make informed decisions about taking part in the research, it is still ethically sound for the parents and carers of young people to give their consent for their child’s participation. It was important to ensure that young people, and their parents and carers, understood what was being asked of them and time was taken to explain the project. Youth workers gave a verbal account of the study to young people, explaining the content of the Information Sheet. They furnished each young person with an Information Sheet (Appendix 6) and consent form (Appendix 7), as well as providing an Information Sheet for their parents and carers (Appendix 8). In cases where young people were under the age of 16 years, their parents/carers were also provided with a consent form to complete (Appendix 9). This was in keeping with the guidelines on the legal capacity of children and young people as described by Greig et al., (2013). Adhering to the guidelines, if a parent or carer did not give consent, then the young person was not asked to participate. Youth workers were provided with an information Sheet (Appendix 10) and consent form (Appendix 11) in relation to their own participation in the research, which enabled them to make an informed choice to participate in the research. Both youth participants and youth workers identified the elected member, who had significant involvement in youth participation practice within the area. I made direct contact to explain the nature of the research and gave an invitation to take part in an interview, which was accepted. I also provided an Information Sheet (Appendix 12) and asked that a consent form was signed (Appendix 13).

### **5.3.2 Protection from Harm**

The second ethical consideration from Hill (1998) is whether, or not, participating in the research would cause harm or distress to the participants. Greig et al. (2013) assert that children now live in a society in which great emphasis is placed on meeting their needs and reinforce the need to protect children within the process

of research. Whilst it was not anticipated that participation in the research process would harm the young people, the youth workers or the elected members, it was still important to be mindful of their right to be protected throughout the process. Kendrick et al., (2008:91) noted that the 'negotiation of children's time and space must be approached carefully, with due consideration of their rights and wishes'. In addition to designing the research to enable young people to discuss the things that they want to discuss, it was also essential to think about processes to protect them. It was vital to become familiar with the project's child protection policies and procedures and, should any child protection issue have arisen, these procedures would have been followed immediately. This also involved being familiar with the range of support and advisory services for children and young people, should any matters have arisen, which were out with child protection issues.

As it happens, no issues were raised and I had no concerns at all about the well-being of any of the participants. Part of the research process involved building relationships with the participants but this also involved being open and honest about boundaries, limitations of the researcher's involvement and the responsibilities of the researcher to protect all participants. Finally, Hill (1998) suggests that thought must be given to how privacy and confidentiality will be ensured. Strategies were put in place to ensure privacy and confidentiality. Participants have been referred to by pseudonyms within this thesis and the same will happen in any publications that arise from the research. Throughout the period of data collection, participants were reminded that they could withdraw at any point and that they were in control of the information they shared. Data is anonymous and the original identities of participants are locked in one cabinet with corresponding pseudonyms being lock in a different cabinet. All physical data is stored within a locked office in the University of Glasgow. Electronic data was stored on a hard-drive, which was accessed by the researcher using a password, and all data will be destroyed on completion of the research project.

### **5.3.3 Ethical Approval**

The University of Glasgow's School of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee granted ethical approval for this research in order that it could proceed. Following recommendations in Greig et al. (2013), I took account of the guidelines for good practice in research with young people. This included producing clear and concise information statements for all participants; showing respect and building a rapport with the participants; and, being mindful of issues of privacy and confidentiality.

## **5.4 Serendipity Calls - The Selection Process**

### **5.4.1 Identifying Youth Participation Projects**

Youth Participation Projects were identified through two avenues; the first being through the Youth Scotland (2016) website. Youth Scotland is a network of youth organisations and groups across Scotland. The second route was to identify youth participation projects through the BA Community Development (BACD), network of contacts across Scotland. This is an undergraduate programme within the University of Glasgow, for which I was the Programme Leader, in which students undertake ongoing work practice in the field of community development, including youth work. For this research, I was interested in YPP that aimed to encourage the collective action of young people. Contact was initially made with managers of youth projects that had identified themselves, or were identified, as being involved in youth participation practice. The gatekeeper of a project plays a crucial role in the success of any research project (Bailey, 2007). It is important to establish a good working relationship with gatekeepers from the outset and efforts were made to quickly build a rapport by showing an interest in the project and demonstrating passion for developing positive experiences for young people. Once the gatekeepers gave their approval, the initial contact phase involved seeking permission to contact the Youth Workers involved in the project. The purpose of the initial contact with Youth Workers was to ascertain if the project was involved in youth work that had a participatory nature. That is, that it aimed to involve young people in projects, which had the purpose of giving young people a voice in decision-making processes. This was consistent with intentions set out by the Scottish Government (2003) to involve more young people in making decisions about things that affect them. The

contact also involved ascertaining for how long the youth participation project had been established. The final purpose was to explain the aim of the study and what would be involved should young people and youth workers agreed to participate. Details were compiled recording the length of time the project had been running, the demographics of the youth participants, and a brief overview of the kinds of activities that the project had undertaken. The notes assisted the process of selecting the projects that participated in the research.

#### **5.4.2 Whittling it Down: Refining the list of Youth Participation Projects**

I identified key criteria to facilitate the selection process. This first criterion was that the youth participation practice had been in operation for two years or more. Previous research conducted by Barber (2007) found that the age profile of young people who take part in youth participation projects in the United Kingdom is generally between 12 and 18 years old. The initial decision to focus on young people within that range was influenced by the UNCRC's (1989) definition that young people are those aged 18 years and younger. The lower age was identified as 12 years to strengthen the validity of consent, as young people aged 12 years and over are usually deemed able to give consent (Grieg et al. 2013). Therefore, only projects that were working with young people aged 12 and over were eligible to participate. It transpired that some of the young people taking part in youth participation practice were older than 18 years. Rather than excluding young people arbitrarily based on previous research, I included young people who were still taking part in youth participation practice. This included three young people who were 19 years, 20 years and 26 years old respectively.

I felt that it was important to gain insight into youth participation projects with established foundations for practice; therefore, projects that had been running for at least two years or more were eligible. The rationale was that in projects that had been in operation for two years or more, there was a greater chance that the approaches and methods that were being used had been tried and tested more than once. It is important to clarify that there was no expectation that young people had been involved for two years or more. The selection process was assisted by

information provided on the 'Dialogue Youth' website, which provided information on projects that had been 'identified' as examples of good practice. Dialogue Youth is a national organisation that is funded by the Scottish Government, which aims to ensure that services and government best meet the needs and wishes of young people in Scotland. It could be suggested that this skewed my decision to select a 'good' youth participation project. I identified 12 possible youth projects that self-identified as providing YPP opportunities. These included two church-based projects, a dedicated youth complex, and 9 other projects located in areas of multiple deprivation.

From my own experience, it is often adults who 'identify' projects as exemplifying good practice rather than youth participants. A serendipitous telephone call played a part in the final selection decision. I received a telephone call from the Head of Youth Services in a North Ayrshire Council, in which many young people are affected by multiple levels of deprivation (Scottish Government, 2016a). The call was regarding a matter that was connected to BACD undergraduate programme. During the conversation, it transpired that the youth service within the local authority met the selection criteria. Additionally, the youth service also provided support for Members of the Scottish Youth Parliament (MSYP). This would give the research an additional dimension as MSYPs are often cited as prime examples of young people who participate in projects within their communities (McGinley and Grieve, 2010). This ultimately meant that the final decision was based on a convenience sample (Research Methods, 2017) that met the selection criteria. The Head of Youth Services provided contact details of two Community Workers, who are responsible for YPP in areas within the local authority. Both community workers directed me to both youth workers and young people who are involved in YPP, who then self-selected to take part in a focus group, interview or both. Not all young people who were interviewed took part in a focus group and the same can be said in reverse.

## **5.5 Making it Happen: Undertaking the Research Process**

This section provides insights into how the research was carried out and includes discussions on the strengths, limitations and challenges that were encountered in using each research method. As already stated, the methods that were used in the



study were: focus groups, interviews, and participant observation and appendix 18 provides a detailed list of dates, etc.

### **5.5.1 Focus Groups**

As the research topic was connected to YPP, I felt that it would be relevant to gather more data from young people who take part in YPP. For this reason, youth participants were asked to participate in a focus group. Focus groups also enabled multiple perspectives from young people to be gathered in relation to YPP (Research Methodology, 2017). Another reason for choosing to do a focus group is that other participants act as a stimulus for some individuals (Fontana and Frey, 2005). The format for the focus groups followed an adapted version of Freire's process of decodification (Kirkwood and Kirkwood, 2011). Two focus groups were conducted, with five young people in each focus group. Greig et al. (2013) suggest that five or six young people is the optimal number taking part in a focus group to enable all participants to contribute.

### **5.5.2 Decodification**

The starting point for any programme of education or political action must be the lived experiences of the participants (Freire, 2000), which connects with Freire's (1996) third principle that was described earlier. In the third principle, the object of cognition is the lived experiences of participants and therefore dialogue must be based on these experiences. His process begins by looking at the 'thematic universe' of the people (Freire, 2000:96), that is their subjective view of their lived realities and the context in which they exist. Freire asserted that people are historical beings; their concrete experiences shape their consciousness and, in turn, their consciousness influences the way that they see the world (Lankshear, 1993). This means that a person, or group's, thematic universe is not static and therefore the generative themes that form the thematic universe will continually change. Collins (1973) noted that people are conditioned by society and, for that reason, the object of the investigation should not be the people themselves 'but rather the thought-language with which men and women refer to reality' (Freire, 2000:97). The material facts are used as a platform to base investigations on but the dialogue that

ensues centres around the students' perceptions of their concrete experiences. The thought language also feeds into the development of 'generative themes' (Freire, 2000:102), a concept that will be examined in the following chapter, and absolutely incorporates a level of subjectivity.

Kirkwood and Kirkwood (2011) identified that a problem-posing approach is used as part of the process of decodification from Freire. This begins with the participants simply describing what is happening in the codification. From there the participants are encouraged to delve much deeper into the issue or issues being portrayed, which involves thinking about whether the issue happens in real life. From there the group are prompted to think about how the issue connects with society at a wider level, thinking about the range of factors that have led to the situation. Questions such as 'What do you mean by that?' 'Why is that important?' are used to shift the participants into the realms of praxis and dialogue. Kirkwood and Kirkwood (2011:43) note that 'the process of description shading into reflection, of dialogue with elements of analysis and synthesis, of abstraction and return to the concrete, is called decoding.' This is the start of the awakening of critical consciousness. The codifications must conform to a set of criteria; they must:

'Represent familiar and easily recognizable situations; they must not be too explicit or too enigmatic - neither making propaganda nor seeming like a puzzle; they should offer various decoding possibilities; they should be arranged in a thematic fan or sequence, with one theme opening onto another; all the codifications in a sequence should make up a totality, and contain what he calls the inclusive contradictions, by which he means those key contradictions of the area which recur in various aspects of life' (Kirkwood and Kirkwood, 2011:42)

The description of codifications provided by Kirkwood and Kirkwood reaffirms that Freire asserted the important of enabling participants to come up with their own range of possibilities, derived from decoding, rather than conveying a sense that there are easy solutions to every problem, which there are clearly not. I was the

animator, or the facilitator of the process, and the groups of youth participants took part in discussions. The initial stage involved the development of a code, which was a picture that was produced by an artist (Appendix 1) in this case. The picture portrayed a group of young people working with a youth worker in an informal setting, which enabled the research participants to identify themselves within the picture. The development of the code was carried out before the actual Focus Groups took place and was based on a culmination of my knowledge and experiences as a youth worker. The code conveyed a situation that participants of the focus groups would be familiar with i.e. a picture that could have represented a youth participation project meeting. It also aimed to show different, perhaps opposing, elements of youth participation practice. An example of a possible opposing element was that one young person could have perceived that the youth worker was leading the young people in discussion whereas another young person could have perceived that the youth worker was part of the discussion along with the young people. The code had to strike the balance between not being too vague or too explicit; it had to be clear enough to enable the participants to relate to the scenario and therefore feel that they could contribute to the discussion.

Whilst the individual young people did not identify themselves with a specific character in the picture, they drew parallels between the scenario and their own experience of group meetings. The code acted as a stimulus for discussion based on a set of prompt questions that were asked. This was a structured process (Appendix 2), which prompted the following actions from the participants: describing what they saw in the picture; undertaking basic level of analysis of why they thought that it was happening; identifying key themes in relation to youth participation practice; making connections with real life situations; undertaking a deeper level of analysis of what was happening and why it was happening; and finally identifying the possible outcomes from what was happening. The code is like a vignette, which Finch (1987) describes as a short story or scenario that has no ending and relates to a specific context. As with the research code, a vignette is used as a prompt for discussion about possible actions and outcomes, which relate to the context that is depicted in the scenario. Hughes (1998) suggested that vignettes are a useful way of gaining insight into people's views and perceptions on a subject. This was applicable to the

use of a code in the focus groups as it enabled the young people's views and perceptions of youth participation practice to be uncovered.

The adapted process of decodification in this research project also encouraged participants to have more control of the content, setting the direction for discussions (Nadeua, 1996). Renold (2002:3) note that an approach such as this enables participants to 'define the situation in their own terms', which gave them a sense of ownership of the process. This was invaluable in helping to build the confidence of participants. A significant strength in using this approach was that it allowed the participants to discuss their views of youth participation openly without having to give a detailed account of their own experiences, which some preferred not to do. Engaging in discussions about the code facilitated a 'distancing factor' (Nadeau, 1996:35), in which the participants discussed the research theme but from a more hypothetical position. This was exemplified when the participants referred to the code when discussing youth participation practice. Enabling someone to detach from her own experience can also be a limitation of the approach. Finch (1987:113) suggested 'asking what a third party 'ought' to do in a situation is not the same thing as asking respondents what they themselves think they ought to do'. In a group setting, some participants may be inclined to discuss more of what they think that they ought to do in their practice rather than focusing on what they do within youth participation projects. There is also a danger that participants are drawn into 'groupthink', which may not always reflect their individual perspective on a theme (Fontana and Frey, 2005). There was consensus amongst the participants in both focus groups, particularly when a contentious issue was raised. To counter the effects of groupthink, the focus group was not a stand-alone method within the research process. Individual interviews with young people, youth workers and an elected member facilitated the opportunity to investigate their experiences and views of youth participation projects.

### **5.5.3 Interviews**

Interviewing is a common approach that is used within qualitative research, and (Yin, 2003; Simons, 2009; and Scott and Garner, 2013). That said not all participants

choose to display their feelings in a group setting, which was the rationale for including interviews as a relevant method for gaining individual perspectives on the youth participatory approaches and methods. There has long been a range of approaches to interviewing, including the continuum of structured to unstructured interviews (Patton, 1980). In this research, I conducted semi-structured interviews. Core questions were developed following the literature review and additional questions were added following the Focus Groups. As a means of gaining deeper insight into the culture in which the youth participation projects exist, the interviews also involved asking 'how' and 'why' questions of the participants. This is what Geertz (1973:3) refers to as 'thick description', which was about gaining insight into the participants' subjective views. Geertz likened 'thick description' to ethnography, which is about gaining insight into the cultural norms of a particular setting. For him 'culture is not a power, something to which social events, behaviors, institutions, or processes can be causally attributed; it is a context, something within which they can be intelligibly- that is, thickly-described' (Geertz, 1973, p.153). In addition to gleaning the material facts about the participants' experiences it was important to gain insight into how young people perceived their culture (Packer, 2007).

Fontana and Prokos (2007:93) describe 'empathetic interviewing', which involves the interviewer taking a stance rather than a neutral position as well as being active in the process. Empathetic interviewing is 'a method of morality, because it attempts to restore the sacredness of humans, before addressing any theoretical or methodological concerns' (Fontana and Prokos, 2007:93). This basically means that the people are more important than the research process. Gubrium and Holstein (2002) regard the interview as a story negotiated between the researcher and the researched; the researcher is not in complete control. This reflects, Bellah et al.,'s (1985:305) notion of the 'active interview', in which the researcher's perceptions form a part of the conversation. It was important to acknowledge the fact that I did not have a neutral position within the process; I made it explicit to the participants that the research was borne from my belief that young people have the right to participate fully within society and should be supported to do so. It was also important to recognise that an interviewer has power over the interview. As Smith

(2005:137) suggested, the interviewer has the 'ability to impose preconceptions dictated by academic interests on the interview process.' It was vital that I was clear about the preconceptions that I hold yet not let them dictate the direction of the interview. Semi-structured interviews helped to combat this; they enabled me to explore and discuss themes of interest to me but also gave the participants the opportunity to discuss issues that are important to them in relation to the overall research theme.

The aim of the interviews with the young people was to develop an in-depth understanding of their lived experiences of youth participation projects following the group discussions that took place within the focus groups. The aim of the interviews with youth workers was to gain an in-depth understanding of the approaches, and guiding principles, that they use. Following the first focus group, the research design was altered to include an interview with an Elected Member within the local authority. Semi-structured interviews (Appendixes 3, 4, and 5) were conducted with young people, youth workers, and an elected member who are involved in youth participation projects. Each interview lasted between 20 and 60 minutes and took place at a time and place that was convenient for the interviewee. Most of the interviews took place within a youth facility. However, a small number took place in either a further education college, a local church or a constituency office. Again, the location for the interviews were selected on the basis that it was most accessible for the interviewee. The code that was used in the focus groups was used as a stimulus for discussion within the interviews. It was anticipated that most of the participants would have taken part in the focus groups however this was not exclusively the case. Two young people from the first focus group opted not to be interviewed, the reason for which was not asked. One young person from the second focus group opted not to be interviewed as she had only recently joined the Youth Executive Council and she felt that she was not able give strong insights into her personal experience so far. Documentary findings, and themes from the first focus group, helped to provide a frame for the interviews but, again, the semi-structured nature enabled some flexibility in the discussion. Twenty-two interviews were conducted during the period of data collection and all were recorded and fully transcribed. Interviews were conducted with 12 youth participants, 9 youth workers and one elected member.

The overall strength of the interviews was that they enabled a significant amount of data to be gathered in relation to the overall theme of youth participation practice. The data gathered through interviews is 'richer' than data gathered through other research tools, such as a survey (Yin, 2012:12). Interviews provided the opportunity to gain 'insightful explanations' (Yin, 2012:5) from the participants that helped to facilitate a deeper comprehension of their understanding of the cultures in which they live. However, it was also important for me to consider if the Hawthorne Effect (The Economist, 2008) was at play. That is, research participants saying things they believe the researcher wants to hear. To counter this effect, a range of methods of data collection, including the observation of YPP sessions permitted triangulation and deepened understanding.

#### **5.5.4 Observation of Youth Participation Project Sessions**

Observations were selected to get some sense of youth participation practice in action, as opposed to taking an overall ethnographic approach. Simon (2009) asserts that observation should always begin from the point that the field is entered to the point of exit (Simons, 2009). As mentioned previously in relation to the limitations of taking an ethnographic approach, it was not possible to dedicate enough time to observe all planning meetings. Three unstructured observations were undertaken within the data collection period. The observations were arranged to fit with young people and youth workers' timetable of events. They included the observation of two planning meetings that included a youth worker and a group of young people working together to prepare for a Joint Cabinet meeting and a youth consultation event that was led by the youth participants and supported by youth workers. One aim of the observations was to gain further insight into the relationships between the youth workers and young people, examining how they interacted with each other both verbally and non-verbally. Another aim was to contribute to the development of a comprehensive view of youth participation practice. Brief notes were taken throughout each observation and were supplemented with reflective comments being noted immediately after each observation. Notes were made in relation to prominent behaviours, themes and 'salient features' (Cohen et al., 2011:298). A significant strength of using observations was that it provided a means of gaining insight into the experiences of those who felt less confident about contributing to discussions in a group context. It also provided a valuable method

to gather data on non-verbal behaviour. Finally, observations provided an instrument for clarifying or cross-checking data gathered during focus groups or interviews, which strengthened the validity of the study and contributed to the triangulation of the data collection process. Whilst it was only possible to conduct three observations, I was still able to witness interactions that reflected the experiences noted by both youth participants in both focus groups and interviews.

It is important to acknowledge that the simple act of observation can have an impact on what is being observed. It was noted that one of the limitations of the Focus Groups, or conducting research in groups generally, is that participants control what they say. In Angrostino's (2005) notion of 'naturalistic observation', in which an observation setting is never completely natural due to the presence of the researcher, the intention is that the researcher will not affect the usual flow of the activity. As in the focus groups, there was the potential that participants being observed may have adjusted their behaviour in some way from what would be their 'norm' (Angrosino, 2005). In participant-observation, there is the potential for the researcher's presence to influence the outcome of the observation (Yin, 2003). This is less likely, but still possible, to occur in non-participant observations, where the researcher observes from a distance. It is impossible to confirm but it appeared that my presence did not affect the proceedings of the meetings or event with any notable significance. Having discussed the methods that were used with the participants, the next section will give some details about how the youth project was selected.

## **5.6 'Handling' Data**

### **5.6.1 Data Collection and Management**

The data set was extensive therefore it was important to have a systematic process for the management of data items, to allow for ease of analysis. Transcriptions provided a rich source of data, which were then used to clarify understanding. The interviews were all transcribed verbatim, which allowed for direct quotes to be identified, which helped to provide supportive evidence for the presentation of



findings. Separate electronic folders were created for focus groups, interviews and observations. Data items were saved with the corresponding prefixes:

YP - young person

YW - youth worker

EM - Elected Member of the Council

FG - Focus Group

OB - Observation of Youth Participation Practice

The data collected from the focus groups, interviews, and observations required a systematic process of identifying themes. Braun and Clarke (2006:4) noted that thematic analysis provides a 'foundational method for qualitative analysis.' Holloway and Todres (2003:347) identified that "thematizing meanings" is one of the few, shared, features of qualitative analysis. This commenced with a systematic process for coding the data collected, which was done manually. This necessitated ongoing engagement with the data and was based on an active approach in identifying themes that were prominent and reoccurring. This involved lots of post-it notes, mind maps, and lists. Themes that depicted key ideas in relation to the research questions were noted (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This was as opposed to the idea that themes simply emerge, based on the notion that themes are inherent in the data (Taylor and Usher, 2001). The ongoing engagement with the data enabled connections to be made between the codes identified from the range of data items that were collected. The findings were then grouped together and additional, reoccurring, themes were also noted and factored into the final analysis.

### **5.6.2 Data Analysis**

I used thematic analysis as a framework throughout the data collection, coding and analysis phases (Guest, 2011). The phases of thematic analysis (Appendix 16), as summarised by Braun and Clarke (2006:35), were used as the overall approach to the analysis. The phases are: 'familiarising yourself with your data'; 'generating initial codes'; 'searching for themes'; 'reviewing themes'; 'defining and naming themes'; and 'producing the report'. It is important to note that analysis of the data corpus was not seen as a distinct stage; it was an ongoing process from the first

data item that was collected. An idiographic approach was taken in generating initial codes, which involved analysis of each data item (Smith, 2004:41) before searching for and defining themes. An excerpt of a coded transcript can be found in appendix 14. In the final phase of the analysis I returned to the research questions and considered theoretical ideas that relate to YPP that I had encountered in my literature review, as well as Freire's theories (2000) and principles (1996). In doing so, I used a theoretical thematic approach to identify latent themes (Braun and Clarke (2006). It was important to adopt a constant process of reflexivity in relation the rhetoric of youth participation practice and the lived experiences of those who have taken part in youth participation whilst analysing and interpreting data items. Braun and Clarke suggest that a thematic map is developed, which can be refined in the final stage of defining and naming themes. The final map that I developed is shown in figure 1. The main challenge that I faced in using a theoretical thematic analysis approach was that it took some time to identify themes that demonstrated a critical analysis of the data corpus.

### **5.6.3 Dependability and Validity**

The comprehensive research design of this study means that it is possible for the research process to be replicated. That said, the 'uniqueness and idiosyncrasy of situations' (Cohen et al.:202), which are strengths in qualitative studies, mean that it would be unlikely for the same conclusions to be drawn. The notion of 'dependability' (Lincoln and Guba, 1985 cited in Cohen et al., 2011:201) is viewed as relevant in qualitative studies. This means ensuring that there is consistency and transferability of the research undertaken. To ensure dependability, as with ensuring reliability, the procedures that were followed have been documented clearly. Throughout this research each step of the process was clearly recorded and documented and reflected how fairness and 'respecting participants' perspectives' (Simons, 2009:128) were factored into the process. To contribute towards the transferability of the research, notes were made of each step taken within the methods. Notes have been kept electronically, with a separate file for each method. Records were made of each document that was viewed; notes of the process of Focus Groups were also taken, including details such as room layout. Observations were documented with details including the context and participants. Finally, notes

of the interview process were taken, including the location and duration of each interview.

Ensuring validity is an essential element; making sure that the research can be defended, and is reasoned, is a vital task (Simons, 2009). One of the main tactics used to ensure validity was that of '*triangulation*' (Simons, 2009:129), which was mentioned earlier. This, in turn, helps to bolster the argument in relation to making claims from the evidence. Another strategy to ensure validity is that of 'respondent validation' (Simons, 2009:129), which entailed the verification of 'accuracy, adequacy and fairness of observations, representations and interpretations of experience' (Simons, 2009:131).

A key component of ensuring validity from an interpretivist epistemological perspective is the self-reflexivity of the researcher. This process of critically reflecting on the 'human as instrument' (Guba and Lincoln, 2005:210) is vital throughout the research process, which entails looking at how the researcher engages with, and influences, the research process. It has been suggested that a researcher brings three different selves into the research process 'research-based selves, brought selves (the selves that historically, socially, and personally create our standpoints), and situationally created selves' (Reinharz, 1997, quoted in Guba and Lincoln, 2005:210). Reflexivity involves critically thinking about these different selves and how these interact, or conflict, to shape research decisions, data collected and data analysis and interpretation. It was inevitable that my subjective position influenced my engagement with the data set however, I took reflective approach to analysis to manage this by a continual process of praxis, which was assisted by revisiting themes on numerous occasions. I continued to engage with literature which meant that I revised my thinking at times.

## **5.7 Conclusions**

The purpose of this chapter was to provide insight into the research design, the rationale for selecting methods and the implementation of the research. It was clearly demonstrated that selecting appropriate methods to answer the research

questions was of utmost importance, as opposed to starting with research methods and defining the questions from there. The chapter illustrates the steps that were taken to achieve the overall research goal, which was to gain critical insight into the lived experiences of young people and youth workers who have taken part in youth participation practice in Scotland. Young people, an elected member and youth workers were research participants, which provided the means to triangulate the data sources. This helped to gain different perspectives of the same events. I undertook documentary analysis, focus groups, semi-structured interviews and some observations. These methods helped to create a picture of what shapes the lived experiences of those who have taken part in youth participation practice. Using a range of methods helped to establish credibility and dependability of the findings and a clear description of these enables the replication of this study. The next chapter provides a critical analysis and discussion of the findings that were gained through these qualitative methods with the youth participants.

## Chapter Six - The People Make the Project

### 6.0 Introduction

This chapter argues, for YPP to be effective, youth participants must work with youth workers to shape the overall project. I will be arguing that this notion is evident from both youth participants and youth workers' views. Rather than providing statistics in relation to the profile and demographics of young people, this chapter conveys the ways in which youth participants perceive their peers in YPP and the ways in which they view the youth workers. To begin, a critical discussion of how participants in this study perceive societal views on young people included. As a useful comparison to dominant views that cast young people as deficient, there follows a critical discussion on how youth participants view themselves. Their desire to convey a counter-narrative is clear; youth participants want society to know that they have potential and can make a difference. Youth participants cite varying reasons for their involvement in YPP but the main driver is their desire to make a difference and help others. The vital role youth workers play is evident from this research. As a reminder, the research questions were as follows:

1. What is the profile of young people who take part in youth participation practice?
2. What are participants' perceptions of the aim of youth participation practice?
3. What are participants' experiences of the approaches used within youth participation practice?
4. What is the young person/youth worker relationship like within youth participation practice?
5. How do participants define the 'ideal' youth worker for youth participation practice?
6. What are the implications of youth participation practice, as perceived by all research participants?

This chapter considers all research questions with more of an emphasis on the people involved within YPP: the young people and the youth workers. Questions 1, 4 and 5 are therefore the main focus. The final part of the chapter will be organised under the themes of: Connect, Enable and Transform. It is important to note that

reference to these themes refer to the perspectives of the research participants. That is, they feel connected, enabled and transformed.

## **6.1 Social Constructions of Young People**

A range of perspectives on how young people are viewed within society were considered in pages 69-71, and the range and scope of these views reinforces the notion that reality is socially constructed (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). Chapter four refers to a range of perspectives conveyed in literature and the connection was made between ideological views on young people and the development of policy in relation to young people.

### **6.1.1 The Faces of Young People in Policy**

The rhetoric from the Scottish Government (2014a) was explained in chapter four, that is, the importance of young people engaging with adults to improve their skills and knowledge. YPP is one medium that aims to achieve this. I argue that, for success, youth workers must understand and to apply the values and principles of transformational education. The Scottish Government has shown a will to enable this to happen but more needs to be done to achieve this across Scotland. Willie (YW) identified that all youth workers need the skills and knowledge to enable a transformational approach to YPP however, more needs to be done 'at youth worker level to target that because if it's not done at youth worker level it won't follow down' (P7:229-232). This suggests not all youth workers have the skills and understanding to enable young people to develop their critical awareness. Willie (YW) suggests there is a 'culture of silence amongst some youth workers' (P6:224-225), a concept mentioned in chapter two, which means that people are unable to envisage that change is possible. Faced with pressures caused by cuts in funding and a decrease in contracted hours, it is not surprising that youth workers feel helpless and overwhelmed at the prospect of challenging things. The Scottish Government (2014a:6) acknowledge 'the need for support and development of the entire workforce', which has resources implications. However, it seems an ideological shift is needed as a precursor for resources to be allocated to ensure that youth workers have relevant training.

Chapter four highlights a range of views in relation to young people in society and I argue that a shift from viewing young people as problems within society, or as being in deficit (Dayrell et al. 2009; Mackie and Tett, 2013), to viewing young people as having agency to bring about positive change in society is needed (Macleod, 2009; Iwasaki et al. 2014). YouthLink Scotland (2011a:4), which is a national organisation that is funded by the Scottish Government to build links between youth organisations in Scotland, declared the need for ‘all political parties to recognise the value of youth work, to support the sector and to share our vision for Scotland’s young people.’ As this research shows, the possible outcomes of YPP are numerous. This study has found that YPP not only can have a positive impact on individual young people; it has the potential to bring about positive changes within communities. Young people want the chance to be involved; Harris et al. (2010) suggest the need to debate the view that young people are apathetic. The Interim Planning Group consulted young people in Scotland in advance of *2018 Year of Young People*. It was found that young people want to know how to get involved in local activities; the findings suggest the need to ‘provide a platform for young people to have their views heard and acted upon’ (2016:7). Harris et al. (2010) acknowledge that young people are often misunderstood and misrepresented. The following sub-section discusses this further.

### **6.1.2 The Myths of Young People**

Young people are not a homogenous group and a range of perceptions of young people exist too. Contrasting perspectives were examined in chapter four, including views that young people are deficient; young people have personal agency; or young people need protection. Youth participants in this study believe that adults tend to view young people in a negative light.

Well, sometimes if you’re talking to someone, especially adults and that, about what you do a lot of them just go, “Oh that’s great” and don’t listen to you and don’t respect it. (Ruby P6:225-228)

there's many people that think young people are negative and they really don't do much (Chloe P5: 125-126)

Ruby's comment reinforces the sentiment that young people are not viewed as having a valuable contribution to make within society. Michael conveys his sense that young people are viewed as a homogeneous group:

I mean there's people that would say oh there's these youths hanging around the streets, so why are they hanging around the streets? Don't label them. Some people do that too quickly, they label young people and go 'Oh they're a nuisance. (P8: 217-222)

Sebastian refers to a negative label that is used for young people when they express their frustration or anger:

a lot of people would just disregard it as being a stroppy teenager  
(P2: 40-41)

This reflects the discussion on the media's negative portrayal of young people (Ayman-Nolley and Taira, 2000) mentioned in chapter four. With reference to young people's mental health, and the notion of attention seeking, Sebastian makes a salient point:

Well, as he said with the attention seeking, I've always thought if someone's seeking attention they need attention. So, look beyond the attention seeking and try and find out what's going on in their head because, who knows, it could be something a lot deeper and more problematic than they're making it seem. (P3:120-127)

Sebastian refers to his own experience in relation to this and describes a positive response from youth workers:

I've been here for six years now and there's been a couple of times where I've not been myself, and they've noticed. But instead of getting angry and stuff they'll talk to you and try and understand what's going on. I think that's great (P2: 93-100)



Rather than labelling young people, participants infer a need for society to ensure that young people achieve their potential, which could have positive outcomes for the communities in which they live. Michael suggests the need for a community response to address the problem:

‘why not help them and I think that’s for all of us, I think that’s something that’s what we do too much, we label but we don’t actually work on it and progress it’ (P8:13-16).

In response to a question about the purpose of YPP, Maisi suggests that YPP can help to counter the view that some adults have of young people. The efforts that young people make to improve communities through YPP helps young people to feel that communities have a positive view of young people. This helps to challenge attitudes such as: ‘oh, you’re just a young person; you don’t matter’ type thing’, as Maisi describes (P1:22-23). When asked if she feels that the community views young people in a different light because of their involvement in YPP, Ruby expresses there is a shift in attitudes towards young people, certainly amongst adults in her local community:

I think it is a lot, not 50/50, more adults when you start talking are going to go, “Oh that’s great”, but some of them are still like... because of the media and all that their perception of young people, “Oh you’re just doing it for your CV; you don’t do anything else” sort of thing. But a lot of people are starting to respect when you say. Actually, most young people aren’t like that. You get some that maybe don’t know about things like this and that’s why they kind of loiter about and all that. But it has changed the perception of young people I think doing stuff like this. (P9:355-366)

From a critical perspective, it is positive that Ruby perceives a shift in attitudes towards young people but participants suggest a need for structural and political

change in relation to how young people are perceived. This must filter through to societal attitudes, behaviours and expected norms and Brad concurs:

I know young people will still be getting a bad name for hanging about the street corners and drinking and taking drugs and stuff like that, but it's not everybody; it is a small minority of people and it's not fair that everybody's getting accused of it. And it's something that needs to change and it needs to change now because I'm fed up with it and so are a lot of people. (P5: 147-151)

This reflects Waters' (2011) point, noted in chapter four, that it is common for young people to be labelled as deficient, regardless of their context. In the context of YPP, a young person who is acting in a challenging manner may represent someone who is struggling with personal issues, as Sebastian suggests. Rothi and Leavey (2006) suggest, as mental health problems get worse, young people are less likely to seek help. One of the striking things that youth participants said in this study is the sense that youth workers genuinely care about them and notice if they seem to be under-the-weather. Rather than deeming young people to be 'attention-seekers', youth participants often believe that youth workers look beyond unusual, or 'problem' behaviour.

## 6.2 Who do you think *you* are?

The previous section demonstrates that the participants perceive there to be a prevailing negative view of young people, which the youth participants wish to challenge. As appropriate in a qualitative study, I consider participants' perceptions of young people who take part in YPP. Albeit that Matthews' (2001) research, referred to in chapter four, was small-scale, the findings demonstrate that YPP appears to involve a range of young people from a range of backgrounds, as explained by various youth participants:

there's such a different range of people with different personalities, different characters, different looks, different everything, you know. We're all different in our own ways. Jacob (P3:115-118)

Michael refers to characteristics of those involved:

I never really thought of myself as somebody that would be within youth work as such. But there's a whole array of people. There's just loads of people. There's not like a certain type or anything like that because within [local authority] youth executive we've got shy people, we've got loud people, we've got loads of different people. (P6:195-201)

This dispels what Checkoway (2011) and McGinley and Grieve (2010) found in their separate pieces of research, that young people from middle-class backgrounds are more likely to take part in YPP. He also refers to young people's backgrounds:

Because there are loads of people that come here: there are people that live in [area that falls within top 15% most multiply deprived]; people that live along the road; some people don't live with their mum and dad; some people living alone. Anybody can come here; anybody is welcome to the youth forum, they're welcome to any group. Michael (P7:330-341)

Paula confirms this to be the case:

I think that so many young people have so many different lives, that's the thing. Like I'm in the Youth Exec and I'm coming from like steering myself at 17 and there's people round that table who's never ever imagined of- and I'm sitting there like 'What am I going to make for my dinner tonight?' (P13:465-470)

These quotes demonstrate that a range of young people from differing backgrounds come together as part of YPP, which counters 'normative' views that only young people from affluent backgrounds join YPP. Fiona (YW) challenges a perception that young people who are from more affluent backgrounds do not have difficulties:

I think it's good when you've got kids that have experience in different walks of life coming in and sharing what they've kind of learned or what they're going through and what they want to see change. I think a lot of people as well think 'Oh yeah if it's full of kids that are all well off...' Like you could have a group that are full of kids that are all well off but just because they're well off doesn't mean that they don't have struggles (P10:344-353)

This is confirmed by Peter (YW):

So, there are totally difficult backgrounds. There's ones who are wealthy and others who live with their gran and stuff. But they still do the same stuff; they've still got the same mindset to go and change things. (P7:238-242)

Peter refers to one of the themes here, which is making a positive difference for young people. This topic requires further research but this study indicates that youth participants of YPP are perceived to be diverse, according to the research participants themselves, and YPP provides a space in which they can connect with each other.

### **6.3 Why did you do it?**

The findings from this research suggest that young people get involved in YPP for many reasons, including the desire to make a difference as mentioned in the previous section. There remains the need for more focussed research on the reasons that young people get involved in YPP. Some research has considered the incidence of young people's participation in politics or youth political participation rather than specifically considering the reasons why young people get involved. One study considered the reasons that young people, who were eligible to vote for the first time, exercised their vote. Seventy five percent of those interviewed cited 'duty' as the main reason (Cammaerts et al. 2014:651).

### 6.3.1 We want to make a difference

Rather than conveying a sense of duty, the findings from this study suggest that young people have the desire to influence the processes and outcomes of social change or, reflecting youth participants' words, young people want to make a difference. Ruby suggests that YPP involves 'young people trying to change communities in a way'. This resonates with the words of Chloe, who suggests that one of the purposes of YPP is about giving young people a voice in our council, to show that young people, what we have to say is valid and that we can make a difference (P2:92-94). The perceived purpose of YPP will be discussed in the next chapter. For most of the youth participants, the hope of making a positive difference seemed to be borne from a position of selflessness rather than self-gain. That said, it is impossible to know whether participants felt compelled to say what they thought I wanted to hear. When asked about her thoughts on whether it is right to become involved in YPP to include it on a CV, Heidi makes her position clear: 'definitely not. That is obviously a bonus factor' (P4:171). Heidi seems genuine in expressing that individual gain is an added benefit. Further, she sees her involvement in YPP as her:

just trying to make a difference to the young people in this area, and this area in general. I really do want to try and make a difference to them because this is quite a deprived area so I do want to try and make changes in it and make the young people more active within the youth work and things like that. (P6:214-220)

The notion of helping others will be discussed further in chapter seven, as youth participants identified this as a key purpose of YPP. They identify that it is not only a purpose but the reason that they got involved in the first place. Maisi describes the reason she got involved in a pupil council, 'I like being able to help other people get their voices heard; I like being able to help things. I like helping make a change in things (P1: 29-30). Jacob wants to have a career that centres on helping others and describes his reason for getting involved in YPP: I want to help young people so much, something I want to do, it's a good footstool for me (P4:124-125). Chloe expresses a similar view: I want to help young people and hopefully I get a job that I can do that, and I can benefit young people (P6:140-142). It could be suggested

that youth participants got involved because they view YPP as means to make a difference for the wider community, and not just for young people.

### **6.3.2 What's the matter? Young People's Involvement Matters that are important to them.**

The United Nations (1989) *Convention on the Rights of the Child* was identified as the bedrock for YPP in chapter four. Article 12 asserts young people's rights to have a say in decisions that affect them. It was evident that youth participants got involved in YPP to have a say in things that are relevant in their lives. Heidi began by saying that YPP is about 'young people getting involved with what matters to them.' (P1:15-16) As I argue throughout this thesis, it should be customary to incorporate young people's knowledge and experience in the design of YPP. That is, topics to be tackled within YPP are identified by young people themselves ergo they are topics that matter to them. There are examples of youth participation projects that are 'initiated by community bodies such as the police or health authority with the intent of engaging young people in agendas which are organizationally led' (Matthews, 2001:305). In these instances, there is every chance that some young people will choose not to participate as the agenda has been imposed on them. The efforts of organisations that attempt to involve young people in some way should not be negated; it is a positive step in the right direction. Freire's (1996) third principle is relevant here. He stressed the importance of the content of any learning experience and by this he meant that the content must reflect people's concrete experiences. In the case of YPP, it should be young people's subjective view of the material situation in which they find themselves and the one that they identify as the most relevant at that time. This is an example of translating Freire's (1986) third principle, the importance of the content of cognition, into practice.

### **6.3.3 It's all about politics**

Some of the youth participants noted that they got involved in YPP because they are interested in politics, which counters the suggestion that young people are not interested in political issues. During one of the focus groups, Brad expressed a strong interest in politics, which was borne from his involvement in YPP:

I mean, I'm not from a political family, my parents really don't care, but it...but I didn't know anything about, it opened this kind of door to politics, and I thought, I couldn't do that, how could I do that...and then I got offered the opportunity, my teacher picked me because of the community work I'd done to apply to go to London and I got to go down to the Parliament and spend the day there and, I wanted to teach and now I want to become a representative, I want to do something within politics. (FG2)

There is little research in relation to the connection between young people's involvement in YPP and their continued interest and participation in politics or civic engagement. Keating and Janmaat (2015:409) argue 'that school activities can have a lasting and independent impact on youth political engagement and provides support for the continuation of education through citizenship, as well as about citizenship.' Roig and Crowther (2016) write that a critical approach to education in La Verneda-Sant Marti School for adults in Spain has led to the action and political involvement of many adult learners. It is possible to make the case that young people's voluntary involvement in YPP beyond school could have the same effect.

Henn and Foard (2014:374) refer to another perspective, that there is a continued decline of youth political participation; young people 'remain relatively disengaged from the political process and from democratic institutions and players.' This was certainly not the case for the, then, recently enfranchised 16 and 17-year-olds in Scotland, of whom 75% cast their vote in the 2014 Independence Referendum. This is contrary to the oft suggested notion that young people are immobilised in a state of apathy. Young people in Scotland associated the referendum with causes, such as 'the continuing austerity cuts of the UK Government' (Hopkins, 2015:92). The significant turnout of 16 and 17-year-olds is evidence that young people care about the world in which they live (Norris, 2003).

McDowell et al. (2014) found that there is an increased of numbers of young people taking part in alternative forms of politics through social media. Reference was made to the importance of social media in supporting and enabling YPP in this

research. For example, Jacob noted that he ‘liked their Facebook page and I’d seen it a few days before they came into speak and I looked at it and I thought that looks really interesting, I could go for that’ (P5:189-192). There is an increasing assumption that social media is the first port of call for young people to find out about what is happening in the world (Vromen et al. 2014). It is worth noting that issues around digital exclusion persist, which reinforces inequalities in many aspects of young people’s lives. Livingstone and Helsper (2007:6) suggest that it is necessary to think about ‘inequalities in the nature and quality of access’ rather than focusing on lack of access. If there is recognition that participation in youth politics, and YPP, takes many forms, consideration must be given to enabling quality access for young people.

Bessant (2016) suggests the need to reconceptualise what is meant by youth political participation, which is compelling as the complexity of youth political participation is evident. Aligned to the suggestion from Bessant, it is vital to conceive of a new way of thinking about young people. Positive outcomes could be achieved if young people are seen to have the ability and potential to achieve goals that benefit them and the wider community. This research found that youth participants make the connection between YPP and young people working collectively to bring about positive social change, which reflects Tsekouras’ (2016a) assertion that young people are agents of change, or, as Heidi (P1:21-22) puts it ‘it really does make a difference within the community’. Cammaerts et al. (2014) found that young people are not apathetic about politics but, rather, have no faith in political processes nor in those who are supposed to represent them. From a 7,021-strong sample of young voters across Europe, Cammaerts et al. that most of the participants ‘often believe that those who “do” politics are neither representing them nor care about them’ (2014:650). Further, they found that the young people from the United Kingdom expressed a desire to find out more about the ways in which they could get involved to bring about change in their communities. It could be concluded that many young people want to bring about positive social change but are simply unaware of how they can come together to do so.



It seems evident that many young people perceive an absence of platforms for collective action, which could be said to result in 'political' engagement through social media. In both focus groups, it was evident that the youth participants had been involved for significant periods of time, which demonstrates their long-term commitment. For example, the youth participants in the second focus group counted that, between them, they had almost 30 years of experience of YPP. Youth participants in this research identify working as a team as an important aspect of YPP, which counters one of Vromen et al.'s findings, that young people choose to engage individually. Chapter four identifies experience of working in a team is helpful in terms of future employment. Whilst this was in no way the most important reason that youth participants identify as their reason for joining, they acknowledge it is something positive to include on a CV.

#### **6.3.4 It looks good on your CV.**

Most of the youth participants referred to the fact that their experience of YPP was something that they could include on their curriculum vitae (CV). However, this did not appear to be a significant reason for them to join in the first place. There seemed to be an unspoken acceptance that their experience of YPP would be listed on their CV but this was secondary to the experience and skills that are gained. As Chloe noted:

‘There's just so many opportunities that they don't see, that there's so much and you get so much from it, it's not just your CV; your confidence, your communication skills, you meet so many amazing people and you're going on to be able to talk to the people when you're older.’ (P.6:145-148)

Most of the youth participants refer to skills, experience and personal development that will undoubtedly be useful to them as adults. It is evident that taking part in YPP enables young people to gain skills and experience that are viewed in a positive light by people who recruit onto college and university courses, as well as those who offer employment opportunities. Through the process of applying for a place at university, Chloe began to acknowledge what she had achieved:

“I thought I was actually making a positive difference and then the honour of making a positive difference that made me... I never thought about how much it made a difference to me, I just then wanted to make a difference for other people but even filling in my personal statement for uni, I was like, did I do all that? I was like, I’m, I think I got into uni with my personal statement cos I don’t have great grades’ (FG2:23:575-580).

It achieves so much in my opinion. As I said before it gives you a whole bundle of opportunities, so it does, you can put it in your CV, your university applications, college applications and you know it can be a deciding factor for other people that look at these so it can be compared to someone that hasn't had the opportunity, that hasn't participated Jacob P2:75-81

Cnaan et al. (2010) synthesised findings from studies into the reasons that young people chose to volunteer in communities and found that the most important ones cited were the desire to help others, followed by others that connect with enhancing future employment and studies. It is not surprising that young people refer to the need to develop skills that will help them to compete and succeed. Pressure for young people to do well comes from both schools and parents (Leonard et al. 2015). It is perceived by participants in this study that this can lead to people getting involved in volunteering for the ‘wrong’ reasons, that is, through self-interest. As Paula and Maisi, respectively, note:

‘I think that is quite a big pressure though, that some people think I need ((taps table)) this for my CV. Like some people are thinking 'I don't particularly want to help young people, I want to help myself and that's ((moves both hands in a forward motion)) why it took me a lot longer than other people to get in but I just didn't - I couldn't work with people like that. I just feel like, ((shrugs shoulders)) I just couldn't. Like people were pretending that they want change or 'my

CV, my CV' and I'm like I've not even wrote one yet ((laughs)).' Paula (P.11: 406-415)

I know there are a few young people that are MSYPs that are kind of....but yeah you could see within a day, sittings were two days, so you could see within the first day who was there for CVs, who was there because they genuinely cared. Maisi (P.5: 181-186)

The response to this scenario is not straightforward as there are no prerequisites in terms of the young people who choose to get involved in YPP. From my own experience as a youth worker, I would encourage all young people to get involved regardless of their reasons for doing so. The potential benefits and outcomes of taking part are many but, for the young people who initially join for self-development, there may be unintended outcomes such as 'the growing recognition of one's impact on one's surroundings and responsibility to others, as well as the ability and opportunity to work collaboratively with others for a common goal' (Pittman et al. 2003:10). Parental pressure could be viewed as a mitigating factor if a young person joins in response to pressure to secure a university place secured. Fiona (YW) describes the impact when a young person is there for the 'wrong' reason:

So obviously if they're coming to the group because they want to make change and then they're applying for a job then I would say put it on your CV, use it because you've done something, why not kind of show it off but I wouldn't promote a group by going ((said in a persuasive manner)) 'Oh come to this group, use it for your CV' because you're going to get young people ((shakes head)) that don't really want to be there and I've seen that happen. I've seen people come into a group because they think 'Ah I can use this for my CV' and then when you get down to it, not that they don't have the skills they don't want to be part of it so then they distract everyone else in the group (P:9 332-341)

It is unfortunate if young people continue their involvement despite their lack of commitment to the aims of YPP. It is unsurprising that it happens; Winterton and Irwin (2012) found that, in addition to parents, teachers were cited as the main source of pressure on young people to do what is needed to secure a place at college or university. This is not necessarily a negative thing; rather than seeing it as pressure, some young people feel encouraged by teachers to reach their potential. There are a range of factors that contribute to the lack of parental involvement in their child's education, including parents' own negative experiences of school (Jafarov, 2015). Teachers can therefore be the only source of encouragement for a young person and this can also be said of youth workers, which links to the next section. Youth participants describe how they got involved and many of them describe that youth workers really 'sell' YPP.

## **6.4 Route to involvement**

Following discussions on why youth participants got involved in YPP, this section will give some insight into how they got involved. An understanding of the processes used to encourage young people to take part is helpful in terms of future developments in YPP.

### **6.4.1 Reaching Out to Young People**

Youth workers in the area that the research is focused on visit youth projects and do a presentation on what is involved in YPP. Youth workers' enthusiasm was mentioned repeatedly in relation to many aspects of YPP but it was also seen as a motivational factor that prompted young people to get involved in the first place. As Jacob noted:

'I probably would not have done it if I hadn't the two youth workers from the council come and talk about it so enthusiastically and give us more detail.' (P5:211-213)

The presentations provide young people with the chance to meet the youth workers with whom they would be working should they choose to become involved in YPP. There are times that young people join on the basis that youth workers seem friendly

and approachable whilst doing a presentation, rather than them being interested in YPP. Ruby notes:

‘The people that weren’t interested in it went along and they found out that it was really fun and the workers were all really nice as well. Sometimes the workers sell it a bit because obviously if there is a really nice worker doing it you might go, ‘I’m going to go along and see’ whoever it is.’ (P2: 49-57)

If YPP is presented as solely a fun thing to, without the need for effort on the young people’s part, that would be misleading. However, it appears that the youth workers are very clear about all aspects of YPP, as Ruby describes:

‘They just kind of told us what it was basically. They didn’t try to sugar coat it and say, “It’s great” and just told us the benefits of it, if that makes sense. They just told us the basics of what it was.’ (P2:47-57)

An honest account of what is involved helps to establish a good foundation to build upon (Public Health England, 2014). Another approach that enables young people to appraise YPP in action, and make an informed decision, is by inviting school pupils to attend a workshop that has been organised by young people who already involved in YPP. Pupils from different schools take part in a fun and participatory activities that explore what it is like to be a young person living in the area. Some pupils see the workshop as a means of ‘getting out of school’ but then decide that it is something in which they want to get involved. Youth workers support the process, as Maisi explains:

So, the youth exec had done a workshop or something and then they were like, “Okay, we’re going to put a sheet here. If you want to join write your name and address” type thing. So, I did that and then

one of the community workers got in contact with me and said, “We’re having a meeting on this day, come along”. (P3: 53-59)

In addition to promoting the benefits of taking part in YPP, specific youth workers have a remit to promote the Scottish Youth Parliament. They visit schools and youth clubs and explain the tasks that young people need to undertake if they are interested in becoming a member of Scottish Youth Parliament (MSYP). The support that youth workers give is viewed as invaluable, as Paula demonstrates:

the youth services have gone beyond for us. Like they've helped us do our DVD, so every single person who's standing has got a DVD and the youth services have sent it into every single school. Youth services are making sure that we're campaigning, they don't need to do that! It's, in a way, your campaign ((puts hand over heart)) but they are giving us like all this model stuff and helping us, guiding us and I probably wouldn't be able to stand without them as well. A lot of people wouldn't, because of the guidance given to us and how to promote. Like the week of the election, how you're going to tell people to- like how are people going to know what to do? How can they vote for you? Like different stuff like that. They were telling us stuff like you know make a separate Twitter account, small things like that that people don't think about. Set up a separate Twitter account so you're not acting as un-neutral or make a like page on Facebook, stuff like that which has been amazing (P9/10: 333-351)

Social media increasingly is a platform to convey messages about many things, as McDowell et al. (2014) note, such as inviting young people to run to be elected as a MSYP. However, it is heartening to know that word of mouth still has a part to play.

#### **6.4.1 Friendship and Relational Agency**

Chapter four (p.89) refers to the need to build on relational agency (Kennelly, 2011), which involves current participants in a project inviting their friends to take part. A few of the youth participants explained that they initially got involved in

YPP because a friend was already involved. Once involved, the youth participants enjoyed the experience and continued to attend. For example, when Brad's friend stopped going along, he felt there was too much to lose: 'I was saying to myself, 'why should I give up because xxx given up? I like coming here' (P3:141-143). It is heartening that peer pressure appears not to have prevailed in this case. Without knowing the details of what occurred, it is impossible to draw firm conclusions. It may be worth noting Steinberg and Monahan's (2007) suggestion that, between the age of 14 and 18 years, it has been found that there is an increasing level of resistance to peer pressure. Bell et al. (2003), mentioned in chapter four, found that one of the reasons young people do not join YPP is the fear of ridicule from friends, which does not reflect Steinberg and Monahan's (2007) findings, as more than half of the respondents in Bell et al.'s research was aged between 15 and 17 years old. In the one of the focus groups, there was a discussion on the cumulative length of time that the youth participants have been involved, and it was approximated to be 33 years. Chapter seven discusses the outcomes from being involved in YPP, from the perspective of youth participants. I argue these include that young people feel connected, enabled and transformed, which means that they feel they can make a difference in communities. All youth participants in my study attribute this to the support of youth workers and the role they play, which will now be discussed.

### **6.5 What Are They Like? (Perceptions of Youth Workers)**

The global theme for this chapter is that the people make the project, which connects with questions three and four that aim to examine the young person/youth worker relationships within youth participation practice and gain insight into ideas about the 'ideal' youth worker for YPP. It is evident that youth workers play a pivotal role in creating a transformational space, not only through the things that they do but also in the way that they conduct themselves in the space. De St Croix (2016:5) suggests, youth workers are 'the most vital resource for good youth work'. The aim of this research project was to look at young people's perspectives on their experience of YPP and it became increasingly clear that the youth participants view youth workers as crucial within the process. This section focuses on youth participants' perceptions of the contributions youth workers make, as well as how they describe youth workers' characteristics. There is a scarcity of research in

relation to the role that youth workers play within YPP so it is necessary to draw on research in other fields. Janssen and Davis (2009:21) looked at the role youth workers play in the sexual education of young people and one of the key findings is the importance of building ‘trusting relationships’ as part of any transformational process with young people. Youth participants identified that they trust their youth workers implicitly and have much to say about the positive attributes of their youth workers. The youth participants contribute to a significant list of youth workers’ characteristics and contributions but it is not possible to address the complete list within this chapter. I refer to characteristics and contributions that I associate with three of the overall themes: connect; enable; and transform. The full list identified by youth participants is found in appendix 15.

All youth workers who took part in the research, bar one, are professionally trained. My analysis and discussion of the findings contribute to building theoretical foundations in relation to youth workers’ characteristics and contributions necessary to ensure high quality youth work. The following sections include explorations of youth participants’ perceptions of the youth workers they work with on a regular basis and a critical discussion of these in relation to Freire’s theory, principles for practice and other literature. To begin, I consider views on youth workers’ attributes and inputs, to which this research associates with the possibility of young people feeling connected.

### **6.5.2 Youth Workers Connect**

Without exception, youth participants described their youth workers as friendly, which I identify as one of the foremost attributes for a great youth worker. The following excerpts from Faith, Chloe and Michael are just a few examples that encapsulate the friendliness that they experience from the youth workers:

She’s very open and very friendly. (Faith, P3:83)

Friendly, like outgoing (Chloe, P3:108)

Other descriptions of youth workers include: fun, funny, up for a laugh, and chatty, all of which help to build connections and trust. Jacob perceives this to be the case:



*Well they act as if they're a young person themselves, which is quite good ((smiling)). So, they come and interact with you, which is good fun' (P3: 39-40).*

Peter (YW) describes himself as a youth worker:

Fun. I'm easy to talk to as well. A lot of young people come and talk to me because I'm quite easy going and I'm easy to talk to as well and they can trust me. And I'm not strict; I don't shout. I'm just like a normal person to them as well. (P4:115-125)

These descriptions can be situated under that heading of youth workers' demeanour. Hart (2014), cited earlier, suggests that young people value relationships with youth workers more than opportunities that are on offer. Youth work of any kind, including YPP, is built on relationships (Sercombe, 2010) hence it is vitally important that young people feel that they can connect with youth workers. This appears to be the case, as described in the following comments:

I've got workers that are there that are really approachable for myself and I would say stuff to them more than what I would to my family because they're so open, so approachable'. (Michael, P4:26-29)

She's just got one of those faces that you know if you've got a bad day you can go and tell her about it and she just listens. She never mocks or laughs at you. She laughs with you rather than at you. She's really friendly and stuff like that, she's amazing'. (Faith, P3/4:84-90)

'outgoing, like they're professional but they're kind of they're relaxed so that you can just chat to them and they're approachable' (Chloe, P3:109-112)

Youth participants in this study view their youth workers as approachable and believe that the youth workers are always there for them, which enables them to talk about difficult issues. This reflects the earlier point (p.93) from Krauss et al. (2012) who suggest youth worker characteristics influence young people's

experiences of YPP. The notion that the youth workers are there for young people is an indicator of what Freire (1998a) described as armed love, or 'alfirmo'. Maisi describes the sense that youth workers care; there is a benefit of having:

workers that you know are going to support you, you know are going to be there for you P8: 254-255)

Ruby also conveys her feeling that youth workers care about her:

you know they're always there for you because they've got your best interests at heart. (P2: 49-50)

Faith refers to Lucy, who is the youth worker that she is most in contact with:

she's there for us in our personal life as well as in our youth work. It's amazing to have such good support from someone else other than family and friends. (P2: 51-53)

There is a common view that youth workers are caring and compassionate, which participants infer helps to create a safe space. This reflects Freire's (1996) emphasis on the importance of the space, which is captured in his first principle. It also reflects the sense that an oasis (Kuttner, 2016) has been created, the concept of is discussed in chapter four. Sebastian answers a question about what the 'ideal' youth worker should be and he suggests:

Seb. .... compassionate.

I And youth workers are?

Seb. Definitely. Although we can sometimes annoy them

I And probably vice versa?

Seb. Of course. ((Laughter)) (P2: 51-55)

Youth participants demonstrate their sense that youth workers care for them, as exemplified in the following quote:

It's weird because you can walk into a meeting and straightaway they'll kind of clock you. I don't know if it's because you're working with them over a period of time, but they do click when a young person's not themselves straightaway and they will make sure you're all right and ask if you want to talk or whatever. It's kind of weird. It's good to know that someone... because sometimes that is all you need: you need someone to say, "Are you all right?" (Maisi, P8: 279-287)

Sylvia (YW) describes this as '*noticing changes in character*' (P8:273). Jacob describes the youth workers as:

'always chatting, trying to keep my conversation going, always concerned if there's something wrong, like you know being there supporting them through whatever, wherever' (P2: 68-71).

Faith confirms this to be her experience:

'they get to know us on a personal basis, so they know by our body language or the way we're speaking or what we're not saying that there's something up that way. They're quite good that way.' (P12: 319-324)

Sylvia (YW) and Faith convey what I refer to as '*alfirmo*' (p.44), that is, the demonstration care for young people, which enables young people to feel valued. This was also confirmed in the following extract from one of the focus groups:

'Michael - I think the role that Sylvia and Lucy, and the whole of the community learning and development team play, is they realise, they know every single one of us very well.

Ruby - Nods

Michael - Be it through executive meetings or through other groups we do. So they know personalities, they know body language, they know when we've had a bad day or something like that

Pippa - Nods in agreement

Michael - and they're very good at picking that up and very quick at it. And if there is, if there is a discussion that we're having, eh they're very on the ball and they're very good at watching us to make sure that everyone's got their part to say.' (P8: 266-284)

These quotes support Freire's (2005) suggestion that a demonstration of kindness and care to students is an invaluable part of a transformative educational experience. Blackburn (2000), referred to in chapter four (p.36), asserts the need for a loving approach in YPP. Embodying 'alfirmo', which is my translation and development of the notion of armed love, not only involves youth workers conveying their positive belief in young people's ability and potential, but also creates the sense that laughing and joking are a core part of the experience. It is important to achieve the right balance, as was referred to earlier (Sercombe, 2007). This connects with the importance of establishing boundaries, which will be discussed in the next sub-section, in relation to the role that youth workers play in enabling young people.

### **6.5.3 Youth Workers Enable**

Youth workers referred to in this study are perceived to have characteristics that are conducive to enabling youth participants to try new things, to learn new skills, to act to challenge injustice etc. Beth describes her ideal youth worker, which is a combination of characteristics from a team of youth workers: 'I'd have her for the strictness' (P3: 84). It may be surprising that a young person would choose a youth worker who is strict but, as mentioned earlier, many young people are comfortable with having boundaries in place (Hart, 2016 cited on page 92 of this thesis). Youth participants acknowledge that youth workers will be strict if necessary, as Brad exemplifies: 'obviously if you don't follow those rules, you've got a couple of warnings and you'd be asked to leave. But I don't think that's ever happened to

anybody' (P1: 29-30), which demonstrates that boundaries are perceived to exist but are not explicitly enforced. It would be remiss to convey the sense that there is harmony all the time. Maisi describes a challenging experience within a previous group of young people but refers to the role that youth workers played in enabling young people to think things through before acting:

I think there have been a few times where there have maybe been disagreements between the group and things, "I've had enough of whatever the disagreement was; I'm not going back" and then you talk to the youth workers and they're like, "Why...? Not why are you letting it get to you in a nasty sense, but, "You're better than that. You know you're better than that; don't stoop to that level". And it makes you think about all the things you've enjoyed over the years: that's why I'm doing it. (P4: 120-129)

The scenario that Maisi describes emphasises the difference between a YPP setting and school. Brad distinguishes between his experience in YPP and his experience in school, 'the rules are fairly straightforward: come along, have fun, be nice' (P1: 28). This suggestion from Michael, 'I mean some of them are like kids' (P4:26-29), may raise concerns that there is a lack of boundaries, which are essential in any form of youth work. It remains the case that further research is needed on the subject and experience of boundaries in youth work (Sercombe, 2010). That said, there appears to be no dispute from young people or youth workers that boundaries are necessary. From this study, it is evident there is a clear sense from youth participants and youth workers that boundaries are in place.

You've got boundaries you've no need to be their best friend. Hopefully a friendship develops, it's a professional friendship, but you still need to be ruthless in terms of what's acceptable and what's not acceptable". And that's where a little bit of respect comes in. Duncan (YW) P:9 329-334

they always make sure if there's a change happening the young people are consulted. They just make sure that everyone's happy, and if they see someone that's not happy they try to see if they can

fix it; maybe not stand them up in front of the room, “What’s wrong?” but they make sure over time something happens. Ruby (P2: 41-44)

Ruby exemplifies a demonstration of professional care from the youth workers, which is something that Sebastian implies:

I think the longer you're with them the more you actually get to know them as well and they're open with us and because they're showing that they're open with us in talking about things that to me goes I can trust that worker actually, I can tell them this because I know they've actually got like my welfare and they really care about me but I know they're doing it in a professional manner Michael (P5:24-31 & P6:1-2)

Freire (1998) asserted the need to achieve balance between young people’s freedom and protection within the process. Chloe’s description of the youth workers demonstrates this balance has been achieved:

like outgoing, like they're professional but they're kind of they're relaxed so that you can just chat to them and they're approachable' Chloe (P3:108-112)

there needs to be some sort of professional relationship between them or else nothing is going to work. Rachel (P5: 138-139)

Chloe and Ruby’s comments suggest that professionalism and approachability combine to convey that boundaries are in place. Ruby’s comment ‘or else nothing is going to work’ reflects the sense that young people appreciate that boundaries in place, which confirms Hart’s (2016) suggestion that boundaries give young people the sense that they are being cared for (page 90). Without further research, it is not possible to conclude that there is a relationship between boundaries and a feeling of safety. However, findings from youth participants imply this could be the

case. Rachel notes: 'I definitely know that the workers here are definitely passionate about young people' (P4:118)'. Sebastian agrees that his youth workers are passionate and adds, 'you'll get nowhere in life without passion and commitment. That's what most educators fail to understand' (P4: 111). It seems that the passion is demonstrated in varying ways:

The support we get is amazing. They're at our side all the time in everything we do. It's amazing. (Faith, P2: 40-43)

The workers are really good at actually pushing me - not pushing me but more encouraging me, "You can do this". (Rachel P5:155-156)

And having the workers that are going to support you and motivate you and help you and the group achieve the best you can for whatever the situation is. (Maisi)

"Oh that's well done! I'm really proud of you!" because I like folk saying that to you. (Beth, P6: 202-204)

Faith, Rachel, Maisi and Beth reflect the notion that youth workers are there to scaffold young people in the process of YPP (MacIntosh and Youniss, 2008 cited on page 92 of this thesis). Chapter seven describes outcomes for youth participants and Beth's ability to do a presentation at Hampden Stadium is one example. This was something that Beth was extremely nervous about but, with the support and encouragement from Duncan and other youth workers, Beth succeeded. Faith attributes the support that youth workers give her with her ability to get involved in lots of opportunities:

'the confidence it gave me was unreal. I started off quite quiet and never really got involved; and then I got involved in everything I could possibly get involved in, I enjoyed it so much. It's really good.

I - It sounds like the youth workers probably had a bit to do with that.

Faith - yeah, [they have] a lot to do with that. They encouraged it all, definitely.' (P4: 92-98)

Youth participants clearly feel supported but not only that, what the youth workers do and say seems to provide a platform upon which young people push themselves forward, which then arguably results in personal transformation.

#### 6.5.4 Youth Workers Transform

From literature on YPP, and other forms of youth work, raising young people's confidence is a prime goal. It is also a common feature within the Scottish policy context (YouthLink, 2011; Scottish Government, 2014a). Findings from this study confirm that youth participants feel more confident through their involvement in YPP. Youth participants did not explicitly say that youth workers made them confident but this was inferred. Through enabling youth participants in varying ways, as described in the previous sub-section, youth workers contribute to helping young people to build their confidence. During the first focus group, increased confidence was mentioned on nine occasions. The following quotes are just a few examples of this:

Ruby - And it's just like, it's built all of our confidence. We're all a lot more confident than we were a while ago (looking around the group)

Pippa and Michael - nod in agreement (P11: 526-529)

Pippa mentions confidence again, noting:

you can't put enough emphasis on confidence because confidence can bring so many different things to different people (P17: 875-876).

Ruby restates this in her interview:

'It's made me confident anyway so I'm a bit more positive towards the future. Whereas before I was like, 'oh I can't do this and I won't be able to do that'. (P7: 279 -281)



Sebastian notes that his youth worker, Duncan, ‘has allowed [him] to think in a more sort of perspicacious manner, just so [he] can see all different sides and bits to life’. This exemplifies what should happen in an engagement zone that Barber envisages is part of YPP. Youth participants describe their youth workers as trustworthy, non-judgemental, proud, and willing to take risks, which all contribute to enabling the transformation of young people. Youth workers show that they trust the young people and this is evident through youth participants’ reference to youth workers taking a step back and letting young people lead. In doing this, youth workers are embodying ‘*alfirmo*’, which shows young people that they have faith in their abilities. This connects with Kane (2002:39), mentioned in chapter three, who asserts that youth workers must convey their belief in young people’s as ‘*agents of change*’. Youth workers help to develop youth participants’ tolerance and understanding of difference, which demonstrates their commitment to youth work ethics (YouthLink, 2011) and universal ethics (Freire, 1998) described earlier in the thesis. To illustrate this, Heidi notes:

‘it’s made me, I don’t know, it’s just made me so different. I feel as if I’m more confident and I feel like I’m more understanding of other people’ (P1: 36-38). Faith notes:

there’s so many different types of people and personalities and things, and it’s really strange how we all get on so well. ‘Cos if you were to put us all in a class at school, we’d probably all hate each other and not...just never speak. (P12: 618-620)

This reflects Tsekoura’s (2016b) findings from a study of young people involved in YPP in England. They reported that they were mixing with people that they ordinarily would not have mixed with. Tsekoura also found that the youth project provided a ‘safe haven’ (2016b:335) that prompted discussion and collective action. Heidi’s assertion that ‘[YPP] really makes a difference within the community’ (P1: 16-18) reinforces Miller et al.’s (2015:478) suggestion that YPP can lead to a sense of ‘collective worth’.

## 6.6 Influence on Youth Workers

The focus of this research is youth participants' experiences and perceptions of YPP. Notwithstanding, youth workers play a vital role in the overall process therefore this section includes some discussion on what youth workers identified as influencing factors in how they approach their work. In terms of choosing youth work as a career path, Willie (YW) was encouraged by the youth worker who runs the church youth group that he attended as a young person. The youth worker continues to support Willie:

the youth pastor is just absolutely amazing, like he's totally dedicated and he's supported us the whole way through, because there's so many challenges when you're stepping into youth work.  
(P15:540-544)

Willie's experience mirrors that of the youth participants in this research. That is that his positive experience of youth work as a young person prompted his desire to help other young people. When asked what has influenced the way he approaches YPP, Willie (YW) identifies:

theory, I think, in particular, the actual purpose behind it because at the end of the day if you didn't understand the purpose behind what you're doing you would just see it as a service but if you didn't understand the whole approach, that it's about people kind of getting that kind of - well, to use a fancy word - that whole conscientisation, for them, to actually understand and have a kind of awakening to the fact that it's their role, their responsibility (P6:196-206)

Willie (YW) refers to conscientisation, a key concept from Freire (2000), with explicit reference to the approach that should be taken within YPP. Fiona (YW) also refers to her experience at university as an influencing factor on her practice: 'university definitely taught me to think ((wide open hands)) more about the work that you're doing' (P11:393-414). Similar to Willie, Fiona also attributes her own experience of youth work as a young person as the reason for becoming a youth worker:

I think if you go to youth groups when you're younger, for me it influences the way that I work now. I went to a lot of church youth groups and the opportunities that were provided to me were unreal. Like there's so many things that I'd done that I think I wouldn't have had the opportunity to do if I didn't go to a youth group. I don't think I'd have had the opportunity if someone didn't actually spend time with me. (P10:361-370)

Sylvia (YW) also refers to her experience as a young person, attending youth clubs, as an influencing factor on her becoming a youth worker. She also attributes the support and guidance that a community worker gave to her in the early stage of her youth work career:

When I was younger, I was involved in youth work. I went to a youth club and I was quite impressed with the way it was run. It was very youth orientated, it was fun, it was flexible, things like that. But, in terms of the job role I'm in just now, things that would influence me would be the community worker that I worked with, [XXX], she's fantastic and just showed me, like, cos, youth participation, the structure for that is different from your average youth group that I was used to working in. So it's adapting the whole, the change and moving over to that and trying different things, which she kind of helped me with. (P3:84-92)

As a final note in this section, Fiona (YW) embodies Freire's (1996) fourth principle, which is that education should aim for a dream. Fiona reflected on her own experience of being supported and encouraged and conveys that to the young people with whom she works:

For me like spending time with young people and providing support, providing opportunity but working with them so that they recognise everything else out there that ((rolls hands)) they can actually

achieve that. I think the society that we're living in now is very negative so you've got young people that are sitting in my group saying 'I'd love to be a doctor', 'Why don't you?' 'Phew! I can't go to university, nobody in my family's gone to university blah-blah-blah' and because they've been told time and time again ((open handed gestures)) that 'Oh you're not smart enough to do that' or 'Do you know where you're from? You'll never do that' so for me I think I'm more motivated to get young people to actually dream a lot bigger than they've ever before because that's the way I was kind of taught. (P10/11:370-387)

This is an area that warrants further attention, which would have the potential to identify the ways in which young people make the transition from young person to youth worker.

## **6.7 Conclusion**

Under the broad heading of 'The People Make the Project', this chapter considers themes that are associated with the people who are involved in YPP. To begin, discussions looked at the ways in which society perceives young people, which ranges from young people as trouble/troubled to young people as agents of social change. The findings from this research suggest that youth participants are aware of the negative perceptions of young people but view YPP as a conduit to challenge these perceptions. It is evident from this research, a range of young people from different economic and social backgrounds take part in YPP, which challenges the myth that only young people from more affluent backgrounds take part. It was interesting to note, making a positive difference is the main reason for youth participants to become involved although there is an acknowledgement that the experience is something positive to include on a CV. The experience is also recognised as a positive factor in terms of applying to college or university, with one youth participant citing her experience as the contributing factor to securing a place at university. Youth participants were asked to identify the characteristics and contributions of the youth workers and the findings are organised under three key themes: connect; enable; and transform. Findings from youth participants reinforce the importance of building solidarity and a sense of belonging in young people to the

development of horizontal relationships (Freire, 2000) between youth participants and youth workers. It seems evident that youth workers in this study embody youth work ethics and universal ethics in what they do. As described in chapter one, Freire's reference to the importance of armed love in an educational experience has resonated with me for more than ten years. Although, as noted, I feel uncomfortable about using the term, both in the context of higher education, and with reference to youth participation or any youth work setting. 'alfirmo', the term that I have coined to represent my understanding of what is meant by armed love, is shown to be a thread that weaves through this chapter, and the next one.

## Chapter Seven - The Project Makes the People

### 7.0 Introduction

Chapter six looked at the themes of ‘connecting’; ‘enabling’; and ‘transforming’ under the global theme of ‘the people makes the project’. This chapter considers that same themes under the heading of ‘the project makes the people’ and serves to answer questions one and two:

Question 2 - What are participants’ perceptions of the aim of youth participation practice?

Question 3 - What are participants’ experiences of the approaches used within youth participation practice?

The chapter includes discussions on the perceived purpose of YPP, which is identified as having the aim of making a positive difference in communities and helping others. This will be followed by a discussion on the perceived benefits and challenges of YPP, according to participants, which are organised under the themes of: connecting, enabling, and transforming young people. Unlike findings from much of the literature, a significant benefit expressed by the participants is the ability to make friends and meet like-minded people. The final part of this chapter outlines some of the outcomes for those involved and these will be discussed in relation to literature on YPP and Freire’s (2000; 1996) theories and principles. Chapter four refers to descriptions of YPP conveyed in literature; the following section encapsulates the participants’ views of the aim of YPP.

### 7.1 It’s About Making a Positive Difference

As established in chapter four, there is a range of views in relation to the aim of youth participation. The Carnegie UK Trust (2008:8), which has funded many youth projects to undertake YPP, defines youth participation as ‘the involvement of young people aged 10-25 in public decision-making’, which gives a general sense of YPP from the literature. There are examples of YPP that are well-intentioned and well-executed; young people’s involvement is meaningful and reaps positive outcomes (Tsekouras, 2016a). However, there are other examples such as those noted in

chapter four in which YPP serves only to reinforce dominant structures (McCulloch, 2007). YPP is never neutral, which reflects Freire's (1996) principle five as described in chapter three, regardless of the underlying intention. The next section reflects views from youth participants and youth workers, who assert that YPP is fundamentally about making a positive difference, which stems from a desire to improve and change things.

#### 7.1.1 It's about helping folk - The Perceived Aim of YPP

During most encounters with youth participants, in both focus groups and interviews, the consistent view is that the aim of YPP is to help others. This reflects a more caring element than the definition cited from Carnegie (2008), which focuses on public decision-making. This human element was reflected during the interview with Chloe; she referred to helping others on eight separate occasions. Simply put, YPP aims 'just to help the community' (Chloe P3:60). Farthing (2012) and Thorson (2012) referred to in chapter four, note the concept of citizenship within the field of YPP is complex.

Sebastian reflects Miller et al.'s (2015) suggestion that youth projects provide diversionary opportunities therefore keeping young people out of trouble. He stated that the aim of YPP is 'to keep folk off the streets' (P1:24). Sebastian later elaborates by noting:

every time you come to a youth centre, take part in a group, it's just bit by bit increasing your confidence and self-awareness and keeping you off the streets; in a way preventing negative things from happening (P4 344-350)

In the final part of this quote, Sebastian gives a sense that young people need protection at times or it is possible that he has internalised a dominant view that young people are 'trouble' (Hier et al.2011). There is an overlap in relation to the aim of YPP from youth participants' perspectives and why they decided to take part in the first place. The desire to help others also serves to maintain young people's

involvement in YPP. As Maisi explains ‘I want to be able to help young people that way. I want to be able to see them strive in their communities and things’ (P12:414-416). In relation to the aim of YPP, Faith sums this up by stating that YPP should try ‘to make younger people’s lives better as well as improving ours at the same time’ (P1:18-19).

Regardless of the purpose of YPP, whether a project aims to develop ‘good citizens’ or not, young people join for their own reasons. In this study, the participants consistently identified their reason to join as an intrinsic desire to help others. The local authority in which the youth participation practice takes place has a policy on the citizenship and participation of young people. The strategy draws parallels between citizenship ‘and participation in your community’ (Anon. 2015:2). Fiona (YW) confirmed that young people she/he works with have the desire to be part of their communities and to make positive changes:

‘I think a Youth action group is brilliant because you’re actually working with young people that are willing to talk and they’ll tell you why they’re there, they’re there to change their community’ (P3/4:114-118).

Duncan (YW) gave a succinct, but clear, description of the aim of YPP; *it’s always about encouraging young people to get involved in their community and make a difference* (P1:15-17).

### **7.1.2 YPP - It’s About Making Sure That Voices Are Heard**

YPP and citizenship is often associated with young people having a voice. When asked about the purpose of YPP, Willie (YW) replied ‘*the purpose, I would say, would be to get all young people in a specific area to have their voices heard*’ P1:29-30 expand on this. Chapter four suggests that youth voice is more important than adult voice in some circumstances (Frank,2006), perhaps when the aim of a project is that it is truly youth-led as represented in rung seven of Hart’s (1992) ladder of participation. That said, there was a suggestion that adults impose limits on youth



voice in other circumstances. For example, in chapter four there is reference to Kohfeldt et al. (2011), who suggest limitations occur due to structural constraints as well as the lack of adult will. This is an experience that I encountered as a youth worker; local authorities were committed, in principle, to making changes to systems and processes that reflected the voices of young people. In practice, however, attempts to bring about change were often blocked by bureaucracy. In one example, the local authority that was funding a young carers' project was focused more on tangible outcomes for young people. Expectations were set in relation to increasing school attendance of the young carers, whereas, young carers wanted an emphasis on leisure time away from their caring responsibilities.

Caron et al. (2017) value the importance of enabling youth voice. However, they question the legitimacy of supporting young people to speak out within an adult structure. They suggest this leads to young people being primed to fit in with adult norms and expectations in relation to participation rather than having the freedom to participate in youth-led structures. Regardless of the question of the legitimacy of enabling youth voice in adult participation structures, youth participants in this study equate YPP with young people having a voice. The following responses were in answer to the question of what is the purpose of YPP:

...giving young people a voice in our council, to show that young people, what we have to say is valid and that we can make a difference Chloe P1:47-48

...is building young people up to have an active voice, to feel like they can be heard, to feel like they should be responsible for the actions that they take. Kasia (YW) P1:23-27

...probably just try and get your opinions heard. It's trying to make sure that young people's voices aren't just pushed aside Maisi P1:9-

11

Maisi conveys a sense that young people are not always valued, which was also implied by the elected member who took part in the study:

I think that young people out of all the interest groups can be quite marginalised really. I think young people get a hard time; it's quite difficult for them to make their voices heard Ruth Maguire, MSP (EM P1:27-29)

Both Maisi and Ruth Maguire, MSP (EM) perceive that there has been an improvement over the past two years.

I think we treated young people with respect and listened to them. We didn't always agree or always do exactly what was asked; but were able to say, "If something is raised that is important to you here's what we're going to do about it" or, "Here's what we can't do about it if you're asking for something". And just a kind of honest dialogue and listening, but really listening. EM P4: 97-101

Maisi conveys the need to ensure that young people know that the council and elected members want to listen to and involve young people more:

So, I think it's just trying to get young people to realise that now they are in a position where they will start trying to listen to what you're saying and will try to improve the things that you're bringing up (Maisi P1:14-15)

The youth participants' views suggest that youth voice is not always listened to nor acted upon as a matter of course. This reflects the discussion on Kohfeldt et al. (2011) in chapter two, who suggest that limits are enforced in relation to what young people say. This is also synonymous with Freire's (2000) notion of being dehumanised. As chapter four demonstrated, YPP has been identified as a conduit for young people to access the opportunities that enable them to be fully human, which includes being able to make a positive difference in the communities in which they live.

### 7.1.3 YPP - It's About Providing Opportunities

The findings from youth workers and youth participants in this study mirror Iwasaki et al.'s (2014) point, noted on page 77, that YPP should provide new opportunities for young people.

I think youth work's providing a service for young people, youth participation is providing opportunities for young people as opposed to just a service for them Willie (YW) P4:125-128

Willie (YW) identifies the opportunities YPP provides as the thing that distinguishes it from general youth work. It is possible to align the two perspectives from Willie (YW), that is youth work and YPP, to those suggested described in chapter three (James and McGillicuddy, 2001). That is, general youth work aligns with the youth development perspective and YPP aligns with the empowerment perspective. The empowerment perspective identifies 'society's power imbalances as the reason youth are denied access to opportunities' (2001:3) therefore YPP provides young people with opportunities thus enabling young people to do things for themselves. This notion is reinforced by Marie (YW), who noted:

...the opportunities it gives them as well in terms of we're giving them extra qualifications - well, we're not giving them, but they're working for that, and we give them the opportunity to do that - so it's going to help them in terms of their later life as well and going for jobs. Marie (YW) P7 250-254

[YPP] gets you involved in a lot of opportunities that you wouldn't get just normally. Brad P1:5

...so you know the opportunities from it have been amazing and it's all happened through this Scottish Youth Parliament process Jacob P6: 256-258

YPP provides young people with the chance to do things that they would not ordinarily be able to do, which enables them to gain skills and experience that may not have been provided through family or school contexts. The opportunities

contribute to enabling young people to go through transformation. Agans et al. (2014) conclude that successful projects provide opportunities to enable young people to build skills and test out leadership roles, which are two key aspects that enable the positive development of young people (Kielty, 2017; Learner et al. 2005). From a youth worker's perspective, these are core parts of YPP; '[it's] about personal development and social development (Dani (YW) P2:44-45); and 'it's a crucial part I think of society development. It's for young people to actually take a lead and do something' (Dani (YW) P2:52-53). James and McGillicuddy (2001) note, models of YPP that focus on youth empowerment, are associated with enabling young people to become strong leaders. Youth participants' view in relation to this will be explored at a later point in this chapter in relation to their perception of the outcomes of YPP. Throughout the research process, it was evident that YPP has many forms that provide young people with opportunities to go through some form of transformation and the next section will illustrate just some examples of YPP.

## 7.2 The many faces of YPP

The discussion thus far has focused on YPP in a general sense, without referring to specific forms of youth participation. Through the course of the research, it was evident that young people within the study are involved in a range of activities that fall under the banner of youth participation including pupil councils and youth forums. Appendix 18 provides a fuller list of different forms of youth participation practice. There seems to be no dispute that youth participation is heterogeneous (Cammaerts et al. 2016). Rather than standing as evidence of this fact, the following quotes aim to show how participants of YPP feel about some of the forms that they are involved in.

When I first got involved in youth work it gave me opportunities I would never, ever have thought I would have had. And along the years I became an MSYP; I was chairperson in the local youth forum; I represent the LGBT community in the National Youth Council - I would never have had that if I wasn't involved in youth participation. Rachel P1:12-15

The MSYP is a really powerful thing because they go up to Holyrood; they go to the parliament as well and get to speak to the House of Chambers and actually speak at the question time and stuff like that. It's a big thing. If they really want something changed in the community and they go to the right people, come to us and ask for support and stuff, they can make a lot of change in the community as well. Peter (YW) P5:174-182

We hold joint cabinets with [local authority] and us, so that happens in one of the schools and then pupils from that school can really try and influence [local authority council] to do whatever they want to do. So, I feel as if that's quite political because you're involved with [local authority council] and things like that. Heidi P3/4: 97-100

The above quotes from youth participants and youth workers give a sense that young people's involvement in different forms of YPP can be viewed as a positive thing. Further, they demonstrate that young people taking part in YPP contribute to bringing about positive change in wider contexts. It appears that YPP in this study is connecting, enabling, transforming young people and making a positive difference.

However, this is not always the case; it was noted earlier that Cammaerts et al. (2014) suggest young people are not getting the chance to take part in the forms of YPP that are suited to them. Forms of YPP that are constructed by adults may prevent young people's participation rather than enabling participation - this is not something that young people raised. It should not be assumed that it is impossible to change adult structures. Freire's (1996) fourth principle is that education should be based on dreams and desires. Rather than impossible dreams, goals should be challenging but attainable. The following section discusses the potential benefits of YPP from participants' perspectives, which includes the benefit of providing young people with access and support to change participatory and decision-making structures.

### 7.3 YPP - What's so good about that?

Chapter four refers to benefits that are associated with enhancing young people's employment opportunities; developing them as good citizens; or the transformation of young people (Kirsher et al., 2014; Diemer and Li, 2011; Morsillo and Prilleltensky, 2007; Ginwright and Cammarota, 2006). One of the significant benefits to communities and wider society is a shift in relation to the social justice agenda, which is about fairness for all, and more 'equitable institutional practices' (Ginwright and Cammarota, 2006:94). Morsillo and Prilleltensky (2007:732) cite 'enhanced youth involvement in local affairs' with a specific example of a young person who became 'a member of the Youth Advisory Council with the local government'. The benefits identified from literature often fall under the banners of: employability, citizenship and transformation as noted by Kirsher et al. (2011). Youth participants, and adult participants, identified a range of benefits associated with taking part in YPP. These will be considered under the themes of: connecting, enabling, and transforming young people. The theme of transformation is represented in literature on the benefits of YPP however, young people feeling connected and enabled are not generally represented in the literature.

#### 7.3.1 YPP Connects People

Freire's (2000) approach to education focuses on enabling people to come together: to learn, to reflect and challenge collectively. He asserted that the act of knowing is a synthesis of individuals' knowledge and experience. Therefore, a positive learning experience should enable people to connect with others. YPP provides the opportunity for young people to connect with others, or as Jacob describes it, you get other friends out of it (P5:60). This is the first step in building connections, as reflected in the following quotes:

Somebody to, somebody else to speak to (Sylvia (YW) P6:172)

There's a major confidence boost from it. Just you're meeting new people, you're in different environments, you get so much experience; there's millions ((laughs slightly)). All your basic skills that you learn when you're younger they're really improved. (Chloe P4 195-201)

Because if you're surrounded by people from all different walks of life and workers who all come from different walks of life, I know it sounds really silly, but it is making things better for everyone that's taking part, not just the young people. (Sebastian P7:344-355)

Sebastian refers to the positive benefit of being surrounded by people, which exemplifies Miller et al.'s (2015) referred to earlier (page 92). Coates and Howe (2014) found that meeting friends is a positive aspect for many young people. This resonates with Fiona's (YW) experience:

I think the benefits would be that you get a group of young people coming together to make change. I don't think change is a bad thing. Also, you've got community councils that are there, other wee groups within the community so I think it gives scope for them to join up. (Fiona (YW) P12:424-429)

Chapter four discusses the benefits of YPP identified in literature. For example, Morsillo and Prilleltensky (2007) identify that YPP increases young people's political awareness. There is little reference to the benefit of building friendships and connections; Coates and Howe (2014) are one of the exceptions. Based on my own experience as a youth worker, I would argue that emotional factors are equally as important as more rational factors, such as employability. Ruby highlights that YPP can enable young people to feel that they belong, 'So, it just means you're always involved in your community and it also means that you feel part of something bigger, if that makes sense' (P4: 151-153). It follows that, if a young person feels part of YPP, she is more likely to remain involved and benefit from the range of opportunities on offer.

Positive relationships with youth workers also create the possibility for positive outcomes for young people; Hartje et al. (2008:28) aver, 'a critical link has been found to exist between youth outcomes and positive relationships with skilled staff.' To sum up this sub-section, participants suggest that when young people have a

sense of connectedness, they are better placed to engage with the opportunities to expand their skills, knowledge and experience. This connects with the aims of the youth development approach to YPP (Golombek, 2006) that were discussed in chapter four, which are to build young people's skills to enable them to become citizens in training.

Chapter four refers to findings from Coates and Howe (2014) in relation to what young people in Australia identify as the benefits of YPP. They found that a sense of belonging was one of the most important benefits for young people in the Australian study, which was ranked higher than learning skills that are helpful to gain employment. Youth participants in this study identify that they feel part of something, or that they belong, through their involvement in YPP. Paula's comments exemplify this: 'I just like, I feel part of something' (P6: 220). Paula has had the opposite experience, 'I know obviously how it feels like not to be part of something' (P6: 221). Research has shown that young people who feel disconnected and alone are more likely to experience anxiety and depression.

Cavanaugh and Buehler (2016) refer to peer, family, and school support to bolster young people's mental health difficulties but do not mention youth workers as a possible support. Future research into loneliness in adolescents would benefit from including community-based sources, such as youth projects, as part of a young person's support network. Paula clearly identifies her involvement in YPP as something powerful:

I just like, I feel part of something and I want other young people to feel part of something because I know obviously how it feels like not to be part of something so for me like being in like Youth Exec gives me that awareness, the confidence but also gives me a purpose. A purpose to live here, a purpose to like helping other people so that's is for me why I like these type of things. (Paula P6:218-228)



This quote from Paula reflects a very positive outcome that can be described as her feeling fully human (Freire, 2000). Paula's reference to knowing what it feels like 'not to be part of something' can be ascribed to feeling dehumanised. Paula's response reflects Freire's dialectical approach that was described in chapter two. Freire (1985) believed that dehumanisation is embodied by someone feeling alienated or isolated. In a state of semi-intransitive consciousness, a person feels helpless and unable to change things. Nolas (2014:31) found that young people 'attend the youth club to get away from the everyday social divisions and tensions they experienced to achieve a sense of belonging.' This shows that young people believe in the possibility of a different future. It is possible to conclude that YPP should reflect Freire's (1996) fourth principle, which is that education should aim for a dream. Paula acknowledges that there are areas in need of help and YPP is a vehicle to enable her to do so, 'I've seen a lot of areas which has made me want to stand because I've seen a lot of areas that I want to work with to help change or to help forwards' (P9: 256-259). The fact remains that young people who take part in YPP face challenges and need support themselves, as noted by Marie (YW)

Maybe distract them as well from their own issues. It gives them that kind of distraction and someone to talk to (P7:256-258)

Young people who experience loneliness and do not have access to support are more vulnerable to experiencing mental health difficulties. In addition to support that is provided by youth workers, youth participants describe making strong friendships as a positive outcome. Rachel describes her experience of this:

Put it this way: maybe seven or eight years ago I wouldn't be able to sit here and do this. Going through that journey, like growing up in schools I didn't have any real friends to talk to just because all focus on my family background and everything and some people weren't accepting to it. That's fine; everyone has their own beliefs and everything else. But coming to the youth groups allowed me to make friends and just having my friends built up my confidence straightaway (Rachel P7/8 348-360)

Lucy (YW) refers to another young person who built friendships through her involvement with YPP:

There was one young person who she didn't have friends at all; just was only focused on studying and youth politics. But then she's managed to be able to turn it into youth politics and see that young people can be involved in this, and after one term of being involved in youth services her confidence has grown. She had friends; she was actually having a bit of a social life (P8: 290-297)

It is beyond the scope of this study to examine the relationship between friendships and the development of confidence. It is possible to conclude that if young people have developed a bond with others, they feel more comfortable about speaking out. This was described by Rachel in one of the focus groups:

I started to get, I started to get to know everybody. I didn't actually know anybody. I knew, I'd heard of Amy and I remember doing like youth councils and stuff. I didn't actually know them, I just knew their name. And then, when I came along to the meeting, I recognised their faces and then, the more I went on the more I got to know everyone and I got to know the workers as well. Some people I didn't know at first, I didn't know them before. The more I got to know them, the more I felt comfortable with them. I just started speaking up. (P19: 451-457)

During one of the focus groups, Michael conveys the same feeling:

But now the group's well established, everyone knows everyone and we get on fantastically well and ourselves, we know everyone's personalities, what they're like so we pick it up as well. (P6: 288-290)

There is strong a sense from the youth participants that they have built positive relationships with youth workers and are on the same level:

So, kind of getting to the next stage where you do get to know them a wee bit and you build up that trust and you're like, they really do want the best for me. Rachel P5: 139-141

The experience is amazing, you know you just get to know all the youth workers on a more personal level, which is great. same experience as you Jacob (P5:58-60)

Heidi and Maisi reinforce the sentiment in Freire's (1996) second principle described in chapter three, that youth participants and youth workers are on the same level, but not necessarily equal:

But obviously, you've got that level of respect for them because they are older than you, and obviously if you're doing something wrong you're going to get into trouble. But you really do get that same level with them. Heidi P2: 56-58

It's almost like someone that, you know you have friends, family friends that you call aunty and things, it's almost like because you're working with them over this long amount of time you do kind of feel like that with them. But obviously, you still keep things professional Maisi P6: 168-170

But with youth workers they don't see themselves as higher up than you, because at the end of the day without the young people they wouldn't have a job. So, I think they just want it to be an experience where you run side by side. Sebastian (P1:21-23)

As mentioned in chapter four, power differentials will always exist in any educational process, whether between youth worker and young people or within the group of young people. Freire (2007) emphasised the importance of developing relationships, or connections, between adults and young people in which both work for a common goal. Youth participants may feel they are on the same level as youth workers but they still recognise there is a difference. This is reflected in young people's sense of the youth workers' professionalism, which will be discussed in

relation to youth workers' ability to enable young people to achieve different skills and experience.

### 7.3.2 YPP Enables Young People

Iwasaki et al. (2014), referred to earlier, suggest that YPP must provide young people with new opportunities and research participants identify this as a key purpose of YPP. Harris et al. (2010), mentioned in chapter four, refer to school-based YPP opportunities and note the emphasis on enabling young people to become 'dutiful' citizens. There is an assumption that school provides opportunities for all children and young people to prepare for life however, as Michael suggests, school does not meet the needs of all young people:

people may hate me saying this but for some people school's not the best place for them and sometimes it's outside the school where they actually achieve more and they gain more. (Michael P6:102-104)

Community-based YPP is an alternative conduit to enable young people to learn new skills and gain qualifications.

there's formal qualifications and everything like that and people don't really see that a lot with youth work, especially like Duke of Edinburgh' (Michael P2:25-29)

I suppose confidence and for some that'll be a big achievement in themselves, like even being part of the group, it would be a big achievement because they don't go to school, they don't work (Dani (YW) P6:195-199)

Dani (YW) confirms that youth services support young people who do not attend school and highlights the significant contribution that YPP can make in their development. It appears that YPP can enable young people to build their confidence and learn to function as part of a group. Chapter six refers to the fact that a range

of young people take part in YPP in this study, from those who do not function well at school to those who aspire to go into higher education. Jacob describes that YPP places young people in a strong position in terms of applying to university:

It achieves so much in my opinion. As I said before it gives you a whole bundle of opportunities, so it does, you can put it in your CV, your University applications, college applications and you know it can be a deciding factor for other people that look at these so it can be compared to someone that hasn't had the opportunity, that hasn't participated (P2:75-81)

Chloe highlights that YPP enables young people to build confidence and develop life skills further, which connects with the development of skills and knowledge that enable young people to compete in the labour market (Kirsher et al. 2011):

Just you're meeting new people, you're in different environments, you get so much experience; there's millions ((laughs slightly)). All your basic skills that you learn when you're younger they're really improved. (Chloe P4 196-201)

It cannot be disputed that opportunities for young people to further develop basic skills and to learn new skills enable them to feel more confident and able to deal with expectations and challenges that they face. Kirsher et al. (2011) suggest that learning new skills, and being exposed to new opportunities, enables positive identity development (page 87). This can particularly be the case when a young person is experiencing difficulties in their personal or family life. Further research is needed to confirm common-sense knowledge that young people's involvement in YPP has the benefit of diverting their attention from personal issues. Youth workers in this study assert this to be the case:

Maybe distract them as well from their own issues. It gives them that kind of distraction and someone to talk to. (Marie (YW) P7:256-258)

it's an outlet kind of thing (Sylvia (YW) P6:170)

Ruby implies this in her comment: *it gives you something to do as well because maybe people have a bad background or whatever it means you've got something to look forward to.* (P3: 86-88). Rachel confirms this to have been the case for her. Rachel has experienced difficulties in her life and through the support that she has had through her involvement in YPP, she envisages this for other young people:

It was good because I always felt safe and that I could just be myself and nobody was there to judge me. And that's what I'm wanting for other young people that went through similar situations as me. (P2: 64-66)

Rachel describes that her involvement in YPP has enabled her to be herself, without having to hide behind a façade. Rachel did not elaborate and I did not pursue what she meant by being herself. Research has shown that many young people feel unable to show their 'true' self and it is well-documented that sexual and gender minority (SGM) youth have this experience (Wagaman, 2016), which may be the case for Rachel. Pacey et al. (2017) observe that SGM youth experience more bullying than their peers, which includes bullying from peers, teachers and community members. It is unsurprising that SGM youth find it difficult to publicly identify their sexual or gender identity. There is an increase in the number of LGBTQ groups involved in YPP and LGBT Youth Scotland (2017) provides a national campaign forum to tackle prevalent issues. Involvement in form of YPP enables young people to access support from youth workers but also provides a forum for young people to share their life experiences, particularly negative experiences and to envisage positive alternatives.

Freire (1998a) proposed that change is possible through praxis and dialogue. He suggested a dialectical movement between the negative experience of feeling unsafe in this case, and the desired positive experience, which is that young people feel safe. YPP enables, or should enable, young people to identify the ways in which this can be achieved. YPP provides opportunities to learn new skills, to build confidence and to be supported by youth workers and young people are enabled to work towards their goals. A potential benefit is that young people are transformed in some way.

Much has been written in literature about the skills, knowledge and experience that young people gain through YPP (Golombek, 2006 for example) and chapter four refers to the notion that YPP enables young people to learn new skills and sample new experiences. This in turn enables them to become part of employment and training markets situate this in the language of possibility rather than the market. Rather than the notion of someone else empowering young people to gain skills and experience, my emphasis is on enabling young people to empower themselves. The concept of young people empowering themselves will be discussed further in chapter eight. The following quotes from youth participants and adult participants demonstrate that YPP enables young people to do a range of things that they have never done before. Youth participants do not refer to the concept of empowerment however, the descriptions they give, along with those given by adult participants align with theoretical ideas of empowerment. Adult participants refer to examples of youth participants communicating, including talking to people, speaking out in front of people and asking questions:

They are a lot more vocal, they are confident to go up to question the leader of the council, as if to say, why is this not happening, why are you doing this but not doing that? Things like that. More confident and capable of going up and speaking to them and also, most of them are actually standing to be a Member of the Scottish Youth Parliament, which is a massive achievement (smiling broadly) for them. Just to...as a worker, I feel quite proud of them (Sylvia (YW) P4/5:120-130)

they started to engage with each other and they done the presentation. To see two boys that can't look someone in the eye when they're speaking. To actually stand up and actually talking. I was almost sitting crying, I was like ((said emotionally)) 'Oh my goodness!' (Fiona (YW) P8:279-284)

The quotes from Sylvia and Fiona also convey a sense of passion and care for young people. They demonstrate an emotional connection to young people that reflects what Jeffs (2006) and De Croix (2016) refer to as passionate youth work, which was discussed on page 93. This is further demonstrated by Duncan (YW) who notes,

A few of them had never been to Glasgow; never been to Hamden. The whole experience was a bit overwhelming, but in terms of them going through that process to finally see it through and do a presentation in terms of 100 odd people was incredible. It was one of those ones that you hope it goes well, and nine out of ten times it does, but you hope it makes a difference to young people. (Duncan (YW) P1/2:36-43)

Ruth Maguire, elected member, refers to young people's ability to communicate through their experience in YPP:

I think there's a sort of practical things in terms of practice, just speaking out and being heard and forming arguments and learning to negotiate and to be around different people in different situations. (Ruth Maguire, MSP EM P6: 161-163)

These accounts from the adult participants are positive examples of young people demonstrating the ability to communicate and this is confirmed by youth participants' accounts:

I've had to speak at a couple of youth councils. If I hadn't have been to those groups, even just say, "Okay guys, go over there" I wouldn't have been able to do that. But through all this stuff it's built my confidence up, and it's enough that I can kind of say to people, be in front of them and say, "Right, this is what we're going to do". I wouldn't have been able to do that before. (Ruby P4: 63-74)

...you end up talking to big groups Chloe (P3: 84)

I can speak in front of people, like big crowds. Like before I used to do it through [local project] but I would take my hat along with me, because my hat was my comfort zone. And then as we came here we go to different events, you tend to leave that wee hat behind. I've still got my hat but it stays in the house now. (Beth P7: 252-257)



I can now stand up in front of the class and stuff like in school without getting embarrassed or shy or anything like that, and I talk to a lot more people now. (Chloe P1: 16-17)

Chloe connects her ability to speak in public with her growing confidence, thus making the point that she continues to develop through the process. This connects to Diemer and Li (2011), referred to on page 87, who suggest that YPP can enhance young people's skills as well as encourage more participation in civic activities.

I What's been the best thing about you getting involved? I mean, you can talk about a specific thing or in general

R In general, the amount of confidence that I've got from it, public speaking and everything like that.

I So you've done public speaking now?

R Yeah. I had before but I was kind of not sure and everything. Even now after a year and a half I'm still building confidence and I'm still getting new skills and it's like I've been on trips, I've been places. I might not have ever been able to do that before and I went from past from working here to doing things with Young Scot. It leads on!

It could be described that Chloe's continuous growth relates to the notion of feeling empowered (Ellsworth, 1989 - page 35), which rests on the assumption that no-one is pre-determined. MacIntosh and Youniss' (2008) concept of scaffolding, referred to earlier, must account for the reality that young people will change and develop through time. Rachel refers to the fact that, before she got involved in YPP, she could not have spoken out in front of people that she did not know. The difference is marked, from feeling extremely shy to facilitating meetings with senior managers:

The workers are really good at actually pushing me - not pushing me but more encouraging me, "You can do this". I wouldn't be able to stand up in a room of ten people and speak. But now I'm delivering sessions to senior management teams and everything. It's absolutely

crazy. And when I think back to eight years ago what I was like, I was like I don't even know how I would be like that: I was so shy; I wouldn't talk; the first thing I'd say is my name, and that would be it, I wouldn't give my age or anything away. (Rachel P4 139-143)

Rachel attributes her development to the youth workers that she's worked with. The support and encouragement they give, and continue to give is powerful:

I think it's just been a really good positive decision that I made in my life, and I don't think I would ever have managed to get it if it wasn't for the support of the workers in here. (Rachel P12: 594-597)

Chapter four refers to Walker's (1981) suggestion that there is an implicit hierarchy in Freire's approach to education. In the case of YPP, there appears to be a clear need for support and intervention from youth workers. It could be inferred that a hierarchy exists, in as far as the youth workers enforce boundaries when necessary. However, the lived experiences of youth participants reflect that young people feel they operate on the same level as youth workers as demonstrated by Chloe's reference to 'just us'. Youth participants confirm that their experience of YPP has enabled them in many ways, including the ability to facilitate as Chloe reflects: 'you can take groups and lead groups' (P3:85). Maisi captures the essence of enabling young people, that I relate to, when she identifies that: 'the workers are kind of, like, they facilitate but they let us lead' (P2: 67). This, again, reflects the notion of scaffolding that was described in chapter three. Youth workers enable young people to practice the skills of leading and they are on-hand to provide support if needed. This was also confirmed by Michael:

It is run by the young people and it's for the young people and they do everything; they chair the meeting, they take the minutes, they decide all the funding totally themselves. The workers are certainly involved with the young people but they're not sitting there saying 'So what, so what, so what...' because the chair's actually sitting

there firing them sort of questions in and the worker just takes a step back (P3/4: 85-93)

Youth participants convey that they undertake other tasks that some adults would not feel comfortable, or able to do, such as speaking out and representing other people's views in public forums. There are two examples from youth participants:

I represent the LGBT community in the National Youth Council  
Rachel (P1: 17).

...as chair of the youth forum [I'm] representing the whole of the  
neighbourhood Brad (P2: 55-56)

Duncan (YW) refers to youth participants' achievement of doing a presentation to a large audience. During the life of the project, seven young people were involved. However, when it came to do the presentation, only two young people took part:

The whole experience was a bit overwhelming, but in terms of them going through that process to finally see it through and do a presentation in terms of 100 odd people was incredible. (P1:27-29)

### **7.3.3 Through YPP, Young People Feel Transformed**

Research participants identify potential benefits of YPP that mirror what has been suggested in YPP literature. YPP enables young people to develop skills, meet new people, and have new experiences, all of which enable the transformation of young people. Feeling confident is core to young people's success. This research found that through connecting and enabling young people to try new things and learn new skills, they can become confident individuals, which is the aim identified by the Scottish Government (2014b). The transformation may take time, as described by Michael: 'Over a period of time it will make you become more confident but you won't actually realise it as well I'd say.' (Michael P7:122-123)

It can really build up your confidence a lot because you end up talking to big groups or you can take groups and lead groups.

Obviously, it looks good on your CV if you do stuff; but it does make you more confident, it makes you happy. Ruby (P3: 84-86)

There's a major confidence boost from it. Just you're meeting new people, you're in different environments, you get so much experience; there's millions ((laughs slightly)). All your basic skills that you learn when you're younger they're really improved. (Chloe P4 195-201)

But every group, every time you come to a youth centre, take part in a group, it's just bit by bit increasing your confidence and self-awareness (Sebastian P4:144-155)

The transformation that Duncan observed is palpable. Beth was one of the two young people to present, which she managed to do without her 'nervous hat'. These examples demonstrate that young people also have the sense that they have gone through some kind of transformation. Chapter four conveys that YPP aims to transform the lives of young people in some shape or form and this study has found this to be the case for youth participants. The theme of 'transformation' is divided into the following sub-themes: confidence; self-worth; and positive outlook. The most consistent word referred to throughout the data corpus is confidence. Youth participants clearly identify that they are more confident individuals through their experience of YPP and adult participants concur:

I remember my first meeting I sat behind Chloe and didn't talk to anyone. Now I'm probably the most vocal. So, my confidence has improved massively. Before when I started the youth exec I could not stand up in front of a crowd and talk. I've now presented in front of, I was part of Young Scot and I went to Hamden and I stood up in front of all these big business people and partners of the Games. (Maisi P5:136-140)

I think you just build up and build up and build up but I think with your confidence, you become more confident, you'll say more than what you would have and I think that can help you just develop as a person. Over a period of time it will make you become more

confident but you won't actually realise it as well I'd say. You might do things that you thought I'd have never of done that. Michael (P7:21-28)

Maisi and Michael express their sense of increased confidence. More than simply feeling confident, they describe the things that they have done through feeling more confident, which connects to Gaventa's (2006) notion of 'power to' do things through increased confidence as described on page 34. Sylvia (YW) notes that many young people are on a personal journey through their involvement in YPP:

I've recently been speaking about this with my boss...The young people, when they first started, were very shy, not confident in speaking up...they wouldn't get involved in simple things like discussions or playing a game or things like that but recently I've noticed a big change in a lot of the members that come along each week. (Sylvia (YW) P4:120-124)

The findings in this research suggest an association between young people feeling that they belong within a group and their confidence increasing. This connects with Batsleer's (2012) description of a liminal space and Freire's (1996) first principle that emphasises the importance of transformational space, both referred to on page 47 of this thesis. The emphasis Batsleer and Freire make is that a positive space enables positive transformation in the form of increased confidence as one example.

So obviously confidence and just ((sighs)), I don't know, I just- ((shrugs shoulders slightly)) I don't know what it is for me, I just like, I feel part of something and I want other young people to feel part of something because I know obviously how it feels like not to be part of something so for me like being in like Youth Exec gives me that awareness, the confidence but also gives me a purpose. A

purpose to live here, a purpose to like helping other people so that is for me why I like these type of things. (Paula P6:218-228)

It's made me a lot more confident. I can now stand up in front of the class and stuff like in school without getting embarrassed or shy or anything like that, and I talk to a lot more people now. Whereas if I went into, say for example into a place where a lot of people were, I'd sort of take a stand back and sort of go in the corner and not many people would notice me or whatever. But now I'm more forthcoming and I'm actively looking for new people to be friends with and things. And that really makes a difference to me. (Heidi P1: 26-38)

Duncan (YW) refers to Sebastian, with whom he has worked for a significant period in Sebastian's life:

he's been working with us for about four years now. In terms of the biggest outcome for him it's probably his confidence. It's probably the same for most of the young people: it's the confidence that people get from getting involved in our projects; it still has an impact on their personal life in terms of relationships with their family (P4 111-117)

This reinforces the point from Nolas (2014), referred to on page 91, that young people value the relationships they have with youth workers. Sebastian confirms the profound affect that YPP and youth workers have had on him:

It's just great for me. Because when I started here when I was younger I had no confidence at all; an anxiety ridden little ball of angst. But now I've metaphorically blossomed and now I can speak for myself, speak for other young people when the time is needed and just listen. I thank the youth workers for that. (P10: 478-485)

Sebastian observes that his involvement with YPP, with encouragement from Duncan and other youth workers, has enabled him to develop his critical thinking skills. This

connects with Freire's hope for education that people will have an enhanced level of critical consciousness. Sebastian feels able to think about life from many perspectives, taking account of many factors, which demonstrates that he has reached a level of critical consciousness. This conclusion can be made because Sebastian has the desire to change things for the better and has participated and acted within YPP campaigns. The presentation made at Hampden about the 'No Knives, Better Lives' campaign is one example. A desire to change things for the better stems from a positive outlook, which is captured by Sebastian:

I realised only in the past year that I want to commit my life to making others happy and hopefully make a change for things. And it's by realising that that it's allowed me to break out of this so-called box and do things for the good of others, not just for selfishness. (P7: 299-304)

Involvement in YPP has enabled Sebastian to dream of a positive future for himself, and for others, which connects with Freire's (1996) fourth principle that education should aim for a dream.

The following quote conveys that Beth has a greater sense of self-worth through her involvement in YPP, 'well, I think they've really saved my life because if I hadn't got his number I wouldn't be in the situation that I'm under now (P6: 208-210). There is a sense that youth participants feel that they owe so much to youth workers and the opportunities that YPP has given them. Pippa makes a poignant remark: I wouldn't be where I am, I sometimes wonder if I'd still be here, 'cos, like Michael, I've had some tough times (with emphasis) (FG1 P17:870-872). Pippa's remark implies that she now views life as worth living; she is worthy and valued.

Some of it's going to make them value themselves a bit more and gives them that wee bit of a self-worth, especially if they don't always get it, and self-esteem and confidence. Since I started just over a year ago I've seen a massive change in some of them, massive change' (Marie (YW) P7: 244-250)

Marie's comment implies that youth participants' experience of YPP may be the only place in which they are valued. If a young person does not experience a positive sense of self at home then it seems natural for them to seek this elsewhere and becoming involved in YPP can compensate for what is lacking at home. If young people have a sense of self-worth then it follows that they can learn to value others. This reflects the essence of O'Donoghue's (2002) suggestion, noted on page 87, that a positive experience of YPP can foster tolerance of others. Freire (2005) referred to the importance of encouraging tolerance within transformational education, which implicitly relies on learning to understand that which is different. Rachel connects her experience of YPP with the following:

I feel like I'm more understanding of other people. Rachel (P3: 121-123)

This connects with Freire's (2000) assertion that people must enter dialogue with an open and understanding frame of mind, which also reflects what Roberts (2010:95) describes as 'youth workers' commitment to contribute towards the promotion of social justice'. Albeit difficult at times, it is essential that youth workers promote anti-discrimination in all interactions with young people. Valuing other people and accepting difference is a demonstration that universal ethics and tolerance (Freire, 1998) are important for everyone involved. Faith describes an outcome of her experience in YPP:

Well, it taught not everyone has the same opinion, but we all think of things within school. Like it's not just me who thinks, 'oh that needs change', a lot think it as well. We come up with different ideas of how it needs change. And it taught me that everybody has their own opinion and no opinion is wrong, no matter what. (Faith P5 129-137)



YPP provides the opportunity for young people from a range of backgrounds, religions, beliefs etc. to come together and Lucy (YW) demonstrates a positive outcome from this:

I know that in some of our other youth groups, like the youth council executive committee, some of the young people that came along to that maybe don't mix with a lot of young people in school because they feel they have a different outlook in what they want to do. They're 12, 13 and they're really interested in politics and they're quite focused, so I think they come along to the groups thinking, 'right, this is for me, but nobody else is like me'. So, whenever they meet other young people then they start to make friends and start to grow in their self-esteem as well and know that they can be different from other young people but you're still you, you're still good for being, no matter what it is you're interested in. (Lucy P7:270-284)

Lucy (YW) reflects Freire's (1996) seventh principle, which is the importance of respecting difference. This not only applies to youth workers but also to young people who take part in YPP. Youth workers should create environments in which mutual respect and a willingness to listen to other young people is cultivated. Pittman et al (2003) identifies an awareness and celebration of differences as crucial with YPP and Rachel confirms this to be her experience, 'so, going to those kinds of groups gave me that kind of safe space where I was able to just be myself and not be judged around people' (P1: 35/36).

Rachel's experience demonstrates that a positive space has been created. Her reference to a '*safe space*' implies that there are places in which she does not feel safe and she feels judged. Tsekoura (2016b:335) refers to young people's experiences of YPP and 'participants presented their projects as 'safe havens' within which they could safely explore their identity, establish pleasurable communication with like-minded people and embark upon a collective attempt to challenge societal stereotypes.' The importance of a safe space for young people is clear and it is clear,

through YPP, young people are enabled to interact with other people who are different from them but who share the same visions. Miller et al. (2015:478) describe YPP as means of developing '*a sense of collective worth, leading to shared beliefs that results can be achieved when people work together*'. Tsekoura (2016b) found, through YPP, young people have the chance to mix with people that they would not ordinarily mix with in school. Heidi relays her experience of this:

through heeding what other people have gone through that's not necessarily within my friendship group has really made me more helpful to other people, if that makes sense. I feel as if I've helped a few people through some challenges and stuff like that, (P1: 23-25)

Through YPP, youth participants value other people, learn from other people's experience and want to help others. Heidi conveys a personal outcome, 'I feel as if that's made me a better individual' (P1: 26). Youth participants not only have positive view of themselves but they perceive they are valued and respected by others:

It's really good because we have other young people watching so they get to ask questions, so it's good to know that they respect us for being their age and doing what we're doing as well as the adults are respecting us and wanting us to talk and wanting us to help them. Chloe (P4/5: 106-109)

It makes people a bit more, not positive towards you, but they kind of respect you a bit more (Ruby P6: 202-203)

Maisi's comment, 'young people's voices within the council have been taken a lot more seriously' (P1: 17-18) reinforces the implicit political nature of YPP: This connects with Freire's (1972) belief that education is political. It was evident that youth participants had a greater sense of their personal and collective agency.

So, I feel as if that's quite political because you're involved with North Ayrshire Council and things like that. So, yeah, I think what

we do does change; it really does make people more aware that we are sort of political, we're not just for fun, we do try and make changes. Heidi (P3/4: 99-104)

I think people are more awake of the kind of possibility of changing the community and they're more politically aware. Especially the young people in my group because obviously with the referendum and things like that they were old enough to vote so that even caused discussion in our group and made them more passionate. (Fiona (YW) P13:471-478)

I think they actually see that they have got a voice and they can do something positive. (Dani (YW) P5:171-172)

Youth participants' involvement in YPP appears to have enabled them to recognise and exercise their personal agency, both for themselves and for others, which exemplifies the youth empowerment approach to YPP that was described on page 67. The following two quotes from Rachel demonstrate the difference that YPP can make:

I feel it's giving me a lot more positive attitude towards my future, because back then I didn't think I actually did have any. So, without being involved in it I don't really know where I would be or what I'd be doing. It's made me, I don't know, it's just made me so different. (P2: 51-53)

It's not just raised my confidence; it's raised my confidence, it's motivated me and it's encouraged me, it's allowed me to realise that I do have a brighter future ahead of me, no matter what I've been through, the background I came from, that shouldn't define me as a person. It's just enabled me to realise I've got a career now, I've got a path that I'm going on; and before that I didn't actually feel I was going anywhere, I was totally lost. (P4: 143-149)

Rachel expresses that, through her involvement in YPP, she has a positive outlook on her future. More than this, it appears that she has dreams and aspirations, which reflects Freire's (1996) fourth principle as noted on page 54, and Roig and Crowther's (2016) assertion (noted on page 55), that education should enable people to dream of alternative futures. It should be noted that the terms benefits and outcomes of YPP are used interchangeably.

#### **7.4 YPP Makes a Positive Difference**

Chapter six notes that youth participants attribute much of the success of YPP to youth workers' positive characteristics and the support that they provide. The following section describes perceived outcomes from youth participants and youth workers working together in YPP. During my time as a youth worker, I encountered difficulties in terms of measuring certain outcomes for young people. This was often due to limited time and resources. The implication is that youth projects focus on easily measurable indicators that can be demonstrated to funders and do not have the capacity to track less tangible indicators such as increased confidence and self-esteem. This reflects the point that McNeil et al. (2012) make regarding the challenge of measuring outcomes for young people as noted on page 77.

Youth participants feel transformed through their experience of YPP, which has enabled them to work together to make a positive difference for young people in North Ayrshire. Most of the youth participants note that they are involved in more than one aspect of YPP and identify YPP as a natural pathway to volunteering, which is clearly a benefit to society. Youth participants demonstrate this in the following quotes:

[YPP] inspired me to do a lot of voluntary work (P13:337-338)

I'm now part of the [Authority] Youth Executive Council and the [Authority] Youth Bank, I'm also just going to start the Youth Forum for young people in [local area] and I'm also part of the Cash Back for Communities Project. Jacob P6: 250-253

I ran for Member of the Scottish Youth Parliament, and then from there I got asked to join North Ayrshire youth executive, and then

from thereon I joined the youth bank. So, that was the sort of starter; running for an MSYP was a sort of starter. Heidi (P3:109-113)

There appears to be a 'ripple effect', that is, one experience of volunteering or YPP leads to another. Thoits and Hewitt (2001) observe that people who have a strong sense of well-being are more likely to become volunteers but also that volunteering can promote well-being. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to explore this notion further but it could be concluded, these young people who joined YPP with low self-esteem and sense of well-being feel transformed through the experience. Further, it could be said that with a new-found positive sense of self, young people opt to become involved in further volunteering or YPP opportunities. Ruby makes an interesting point in relation to the 'ripple effect':

It seemed to like, whenever you get open this one door, to another thing, it's like, I mean, for me it was like a secret world. Like I never knew anything about, I went from one thing to another thing, to working nationally with young scot going to London (P24: 595-598)

Perhaps the most significant point is the notion of YPP being 'a secret world'. This is reinforced by Chloe:

'I'd just publicise it more because it's great but I didn't know anything about it until my friend had mentioned it and I wished that young people knew more about it, knew what they could get from it' (P7:313-317).

It seems that young people are missing out on the opportunities that YPP can provide, which is unfortunate. Flicker (2008) suggests that involving young people in participatory projects helps to contribute to the development of young people as future leaders within communities, which is a positive outcome that reaches beyond individuals. Therefore, if more young people are involved then YPP can have a greater impact within society. Flicker found that the involvement of young people within a health promotion agenda led to youth issues being discussed at a national

level. In this research, youth participants referred to their involvement in both local and national YPP, which was viewed as a positive thing. As Michael (P8:23-27) notes 'we do national work as well and it's not just the difference that you make to you and your group, it's the difference you make to your community.'

As young people move towards adulthood, they must go through the process of self-development to attain the skills for independent life. Where some young people take the chance to exercise their freedom for individual benefit, others opt for a more altruistic route. This research demonstrates that there are young people who take satisfaction from helping others, as well as helping themselves. Chapter four refers to ideas in relation to young people's human agency and Diemer and Li's (2011) assertion that young people can challenge injustice and effect change but need support, at times, to do this. Brad associates authority with the ability to make changes: 'it makes me feel like I've got a sense of authority because in the youth forum and with the youth parliament you can make a change' (P4: 146-147). Involvement in YPP has led to a transformation in Brad; through the support that he's been given and the opportunities that he has embraced, he clearly believes that YPP can make a difference:

It's just like ((smiling)) a knock-on effect that keeps growing and growing and the community gets bigger, better and stronger.  
(P3:101-104)

The above quote demonstrates a general sense from all research participants that they are making a positive difference to communities. All participants identified tangible examples of making a positive difference. Through the efforts of youth participants, youth workers and elected members, youth participants communicate and negotiate with elected members who are responsible to communities. The new structure enables more young people to be involved and enables them to better represent the views and issues of the wider population of young people. In the past, youth representatives would attend meetings in the local authority headquarters. The format entailed a one-way communication process that saw young people providing an update to elected members of the council. This represents an adult

structure, as referred to earlier. The process did not allow for meaningful conversations between young people and adults, rather ‘a couple of prefects would come and give a report ((Laughs))’ (Ruth Maguire, MSP (EM) P1: 22-23). The problem was further compounded because the teachers who were tasked to identify representatives would ‘often select folk who are going to be the least bother; not for necessarily any bad reasons’ (Ruth Maguire, MSP (EM) P2: 43-44). The overall structure has changed, in which elected members go to schools to meet with young people and youth participants and elected members facilitate a conversation café with the wider population of young people. The changes enabled more meaningful YPP, as Maisi suggests, ‘since I’ve been involved with the exec and things, young people’s voices within the council have been taken a lot more seriously’ (P1: 12-13).

The process continues to evolve and, in a move that enabled greater accountability, elected members asked for a change in format that enabled young people to put them on the spot and ask direct questions. This is viewed as a positive step: ‘there’s an open question and answer time, so we’ve involved them more’ (Faith P3: 78-79). This example shows that structures can be altered, when there is a will to do so. It is important to be mindful that those who are elected to represent the public must be accountable, which includes being accountable to young people.

As with many processes, it takes time to ensure that everyone subscribes to the necessary changes. Fiona (YW) refers to YPP in general, ‘change takes a long time and ((points to herself)) I’ve realised that’. (P16:462-464) It is important to ensure that young people are aware that change takes time and youth workers and other adults involved, such as elected members, must be open about that. Peter (YW) suggests, ‘you just need to be honest with young people. Don’t lie to them; don’t say to them, “We’re going to do this” and then it’s not achievable’ (P3:103-105). Kohfeldt et al. (2011) note that significant changes can be made through the action and participation of young people. Sheridan and Martin (2012) emphasise, those involved must commit to values, and universal ethics, such as embracing diversity and being open to challenge. The elected member made a pertinent point in relation to this:

I think for some people, and I suppose for me sometimes as well, you have to be confident enough in yourself to engage and to open up to that and to be comfortable being challenged and pushed and actually recognise that it's good for you to do that and you don't just sit behind your board table (Ruth Maguire, MSP (EM) P9: 239-243)

It is worth noting, like any community development process, changes made through YPP impact future generations. Youth participants demonstrate that they are motivated to help others rather than themselves and the following quotes demonstrate examples of achievements that relate to issues raised by the wider youth population in the area:

Right now, I'm in the middle of creating my very own mental health toolkit to go out to every secondary school in [Local Authority]. I'm sure going to be working with the Alcohol and Drugs Partnership with [Local Authority] to create a resource for young people that are growing up in families with alcohol and addiction problems - which is quite a big thing because there's no support out there at all. Rachel P2 45-49

they've just recently developed their own strategy, which is going out to all the schools, to make sure that young people will have the chance to participate in the pupil council, to get things set up within schools to make sure that there's, for example, different committees, you know like, eco committees, and things like that, which tie in to youth services and the youth council. Sylvia (YW) P4:98-103

We had a young person who was in our executive who then worked up to become an MSYP who had young people coming to them and said that they weren't happy with the school toilets. So, it was something as simple as that, which is probably the biggest complaint you'll get in every single school: they weren't happy about them. So, they came up with this campaign and the first name for it was



the Bog Crawl ((laughter)), which went down well as you can imagine with leaders of councils etc. And they get the leader of the council and councillors to go on bog crawls round schools, do impromptu checks in different schools to see the standard in school toilets. So, that alone was amazing. Young people were complaining about toilets being locked and why are the toilets locked when they need to use them and whatever else. So, a full document got drafted and guidance went to every school saying, 'your toilets shouldn't be locked and this is the minimum standard' and whatever else; so that got changed. That on a local level was massive for young people (Kasia (YW) P6:211-220)

These examples show that efforts made through YPP have had a positive impact on young people's day-to-day lives and their well-being. However, little has been written about the outcomes of YPP on the adults involved. Sebastian reflects Freire's (1996) second principle, that young people and youth workers are subjects of the YPP process:

Because if you're surrounded by people from all different walks of life and workers who all come from different walks of life, I know it sounds really silly, but it is making things better for everyone that's taking part, not just the young people. (P7/8 350-359)

It is therefore possible to suggest that a diverse group of people take part in YPP contributes to a meaningful learning experience. The following also demonstrates the intrinsic outcomes for the adults involved in YPP:

I suppose true satisfaction because there's nothing better than when you're working with young people and they're running with it themselves and they're happy being involved in it. Willie (YW) P9:312-315

Marie (YW) describes the powerful effect that YPP has had on her:

...if you're in youth work for the money you're in it for the wrong reasons to be honest. This doesn't feel like a job to me. It's more than a job. I don't wake up on a Monday morning and think, 'oh, got to go to work'. It's, 'right, let's see what we've got'. I love it. It's something I would love to make a career out of. I think it's totally shaped me as a person, and that's even though I've only been in a year it's matured me a lot, it's opened my eyes to a lot and it's made me sit back and think wow. It's totally turned my life around, and that's as a worker and not as a young person. (P12/13:407-420)

Duncan demonstrates the satisfaction gained from being a youth worker, which reflects De Croix (2016) and Jeffs (2006) point that people become youth workers because they care about young people and want to make a difference:

Years ago, a young person jokingly said, "If you won the lottery would you stop doing what you're doing?" I went, "No. I'd give up the job but I'd do it voluntary". Because the impact you can positively make on a young person's life is incredible. (P8/9: 302-305)

Being part of YPP has had an impact on Ruth Maguire, MSP, the elected member. Ruth Maguire, MSP refers to a time during which she observed a young man give a report to the audience at naming ceremony:

we involve young folk in the naming of the leisure centre, and one man particularly chairs the youth forum, and he was so proud at being involved in that and did quite a formal report, but it was just quite magnificent. You could see them all sitting and you thought, 'that's a wee bit of their community that's going to be there for ages and they've named it' and I could have teared up with pride. (P7:166-171)

## 7.5 Conclusion

Participants in this study perceive that they have made a positive difference in people's lives through YPP. Findings show that the research participants perceive that YPP aims to help others, to enable young people's voices to be heard and to be acted upon, and to give young people access to a range of opportunities. YPP takes many forms within the study, including youth forums, youth councils, and the youth executive council, all of which have associated opportunities that young people can access. There are many potential benefits from taking part in YPP and those identified by the research participants concur with those identified in literature. The benefit of making friends was one that was identified by most of the research participants, who identify that building friendships has the benefit of building confidence. The most significant outcome of participating in YPP is that youth participants feel more confident in themselves, which enables them to do things that they would not ordinarily feel able to do. This includes young people feeling able to communicate with people at all levels, to undertake a leadership role and to represent the views of others in public forums. The findings were organised into four themes: connecting, enabling, transforming and making a positive difference. The findings have led to me concluding that YPP reflects Freirean theories (2000) such as the importance of praxis and dialogue in a process that aims to make a difference to people's lives and the dialectical nature of YPP as described by youth participants. Youth participants who have experienced difficulties in their lives are striving to ensure a positive future for other young people, which reflects Freire's (1996) fourth principle and Freire's (2000) emphasis, the lived experiences of people should be the starting point of transformational education. Freire's (1996) second principle can also be observed, that young people and youth workers are on the same level but not necessarily equal. This is on the basis that youth participants fully expect youth workers to enforce rules, if necessary.

## Chapter 8 - A Praxis of Youth Participation: A Scottish Experience

### 8.0 Introduction

This chapter is a synthesis of my thoughts and findings in relation to theory that underpins YPP and the lived experiences of YPP in a study in Scotland. The aim of the research was to critically examine the lived experiences of people who have taken part in youth participation projects in North Ayrshire, Scotland. The research questions were as follows:

1. What is the profile of young people who take part in youth participation practice?
2. What are participants' perceptions of the aim of youth participation practice?
3. What are participants' experiences of the approaches used within youth participation practice?
4. What is the young person/youth worker relationship like within youth participation practice?
5. How do participants define the 'ideal' youth worker for youth participation practice?
6. What are the implications of youth participation practice, as perceived by all research participants?

In a true Freirean (2000) approach, it is a praxis of youth participation. Stacey (2001) emphasises the need to consider the theoretical foundation of any practice that involves interaction between people. From the outset, I was keen to consider the relationship between Freire's (2000; 1996) theories and principles and youth participation practice in Scotland. I therefore combined theories from Freire (2000; 2005) that I feel are significant in a transformational approach to education, such as armed love, with his principles for practice (Freire, 1996) as a lens for analysis. The contents of this chapter convey the results of my praxis; the merging of Freire's theories, theories that relate to YPP, and participants' perceptions of their experience of YPP. Chapter six includes findings and discussions under the overarching theme of 'the people make the project' and chapter seven follows with findings and discussions relating to the notion that 'the project makes the people'. From participants' perspectives in this study, it is possible to identify some

imperatives for successful YPP, in which the people and the project unite. To enable success through YPP, this study found certain features must be present such as trusting relationships, boundaries and a youth-led approach. Using thematic analysis, I identified a global theme: making a positive difference and three main themes: connect; enable; and transform. This chapter is organised around these themes to illustrate findings that suggest that, when young people feel connected, enabled and transformed through support from youth workers, they can make a positive difference. What follows is a critical discussion of key elements that appear to create a positive experience for all participants involved. As a precursor to further discussions, the next section discusses the effect that ‘space’ has on the experience of YPP. As a precursor to final discussions, Figure 3 depicts the Final Thematic Map that I developed. This provides a ‘skeleton’ for the themes that are discussed in this final chapter.

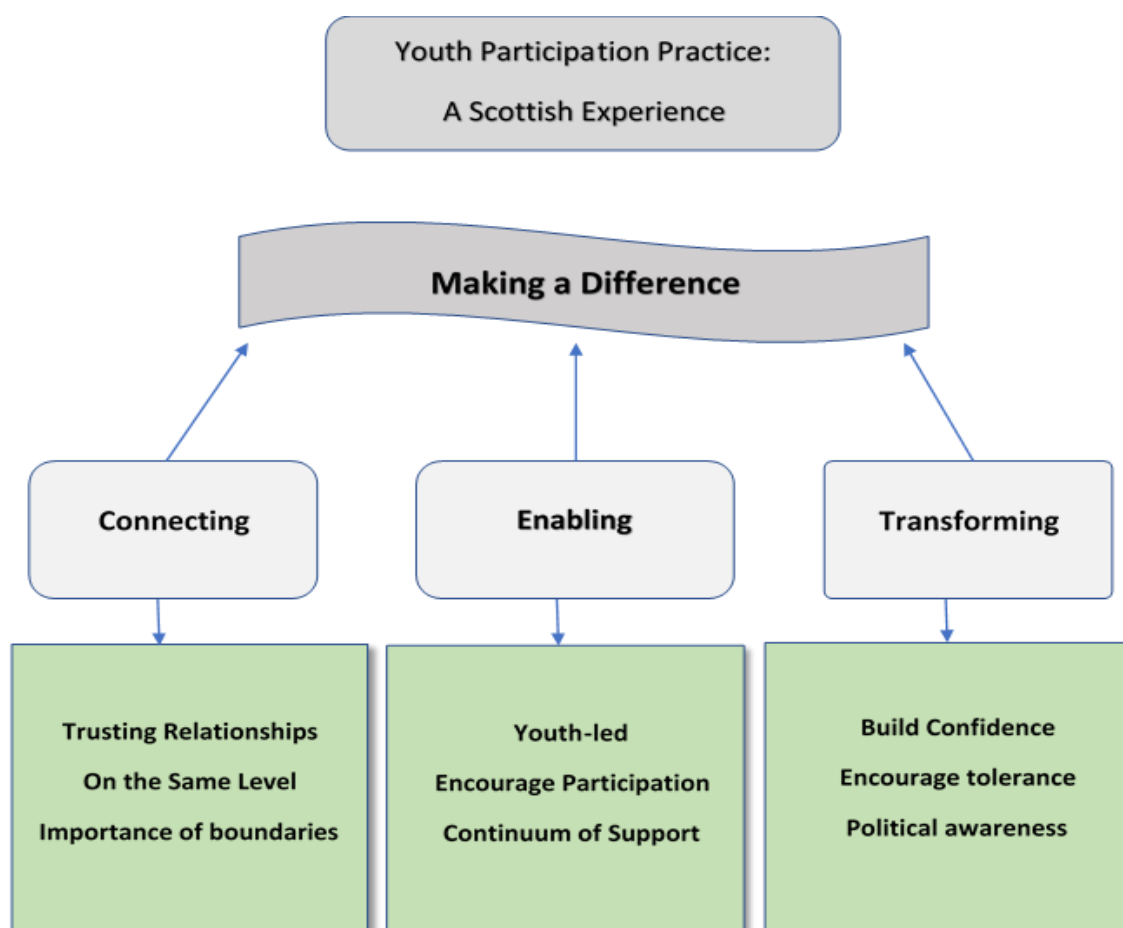


Figure 3 - Final Thematic Map

## 8.1 The Importance of Transformational Space

Findings across the data corpus associate the creation of a positive space with positive outcomes for young people. Freire's (1998) emphasis on caring for people and believing that they have the potential to exercise agency and act is a core part of creating transformational space. The approach to creating a space can be simple, as reflected by Faith:

They don't ever tell us any of our questions are silly. If they think that we've got an idea they drag it out of us. They make sure that everybody in the group has a say in absolutely everything we do. They're not forceful. They don't do anything for us; we've got to do everything ourselves. But the support we get is amazing. They're at our side all the time in everything we do. It's amazing. Faith P2/3:53-64

Faith's reference to youth workers 'dragging ideas out of young people' sounds harsh but, as I understood it, this stems from Youth Worker believing in young people's ability. This represents that I understand 'alfirmo' to mean. Youth workers and youth participants reflect what Freire (1998) meant by armed love within an educational setting:

it's noticing changes in character... things like that Sylvia (YW) P7:206

always concerned if there's something wrong, like you know being there supporting them through whatever, wherever Jacob P2:47-48

It's weird because you can walk into a meeting and straightaway they'll kind of clock you...It's good to know that someone...because sometimes that is all you need: you need someone to say, "Are you all right?" because you want to talk Maisi P8:282-291

if they're having a bad day, that's totally fine, like, explain to them that we all have bad days and things like that. I think it's just the communication between me and the young people, I try to keep them informed of things, I don't hide things from them, ...and I think

they appreciate that. Like, being involved at all stages of the process. Sylvia (YW) P5:143-148

These simple acts, or demonstrations of care, represent the type of pedagogical space that Freire envisaged as part of his transformational approach to education. They also embody what I understand ‘alfirmo’ to mean. Respect for young people is implied in the above examples, which embodies universal ethics that Freire (2004) suggested should be the linchpin of education. Findings from this research highlight examples of practice that are clearly underpinned by ethics. Thus, it is possible to conclude that an ethics of care must frame any type of educational experience, including YPP (YouthLink Scotland, 2011; Noddings, 2002). Youth participants reinforce this notion in the following quotes:

I think every youth worker should be passionate about young people. They have to be; it’s their job. And if they’re not then there’s no point and it’s going to show, it’s going to show through the local authority and it’s going to show through everything that you’re going to be doing. Rachel P6:265-272

Just someone who is very compassionate and understanding and is able to guide you in the right direction but doesn’t tell you what the right answer is; they let you find it out for yourself. Sebastian P2: 76-80

These comments from youth participants reinforce that demonstrations of ‘alfirmo’ are noticed by young people and are as important as the methods that are used within YPP.

## 8.2 YPP Builds Connections

To build connections, it is imperative that YPP enables the development of trusting relationships. Youth participants refer to the positive impact from youth workers treating them as adults, or being on the same level as them. The notion of young

people and youth workers operating on the same level may be contentious; supporters of the treatment model of youth work in which young people are viewed as deviant would reject this notion (Cooper, 2012). It is reassuring that the importance of boundaries is confirmed by youth participants and youth workers.

### 8.2.1 Trusting Relationships

Most participants convey a trusting relationship between young people and youth workers and young people perceive that youth workers are there to support them come what may. Findings from this study suggest that building trust between young people and youth workers is a vital element of YPP, as underlined by Sercombe (2010) who was mentioned earlier. On the topic of youth workers' role, Willie (YW) noted:

it's such an important role that it's just kind of overlooked in so many ways because there are things that we discuss in it are the things that nobody else wants to discuss. Like there's not a place in the school curriculum or there's not a place sometimes in peoples' homes to discuss certain things, so I think that we kind of fill in that gap.

Willie (YW) P8:279-285

A trusting relationship between youth participants and youth workers helps to provide a safety net. Young people may be facing a significant problem but, as Willie (YW) suggests, feel unable to mention this within the family home. This was confirmed by Michael who said:

'I would say stuff to them more than what I would to my family because they're so open, so approachable (P4:27-29), who also noted 'If you're worried about something they'll talk to you about it and stuff like that' (P:2 38-39).

Openness is a vital element within any trusting relationship and in YPP this requires youth workers to be clear about child protection policies. If a youth participant raised a matter which prompted a youth worker to be concerned about someone's safety, the youth worker must always tell the youth participant what will happen



next. Youth participants may raise issues that challenge youth workers' moral compass but it is essential to be non-judgemental. Findings from youth workers demonstrate the importance of accepting and respecting young people, as well as the effort required to earn young people's respect, as illustrated in this quote from Duncan (YW):

when young people come here it's the simple things like first names; when they go up to the workshop when you see them they feel as if they're adults. As we know, sometimes when working with young people you need their respect, but sometimes you need to earn that respect. That was one of the things I did learn when I started working with young people; whereas I automatically thought when you're working with any person within the community there should be a natural respect immediately at the start. But for young people that's not the case; you earn that. Duncan (YW) P6/7:225-237

The people that they meet in that centre they're like their own kind of family sometimes. It's people that they can form that bond with and doing things that they share an interest in as well, in a safe place. Marie (YW) P2: 67-71

Youth participants identify essential characteristics in youth workers that facilitate the development of positive relationships within YPP:

Friendly, like outgoing, like they're professional but they're kind of they're relaxed so that you can just chat to them and they're approachable do you know what I mean? (Chloe P3: 108-112)

Well they act as if they're a young person themselves, which is quite good ((smiling)). So, they come and interact with you, which is good fun (Jacob P2:57-59)

Fun, ((smiling)) always up for a good laugh, doesn't take everything too seriously. Always chatting, trying to keep my conversation going, always concerned if there's something wrong, like you know being

there supporting them through whatever, wherever (Jacob P2:68-72)

It is therefore possible to assert that a positive demeanour in youth workers is essential in ensuring successful YPP, which reflects the point made by Agans et al. (2014) that was noted earlier. Agans et al. (2014:920) also identify that enabling 'positive and sustained youth-adult relationships' is a crucial element of successful YPP, as chapter four confers. A positive and sustained relationship is signifier of rapport, which is something that Sylvia (YW) refers to:

Especially if it's a group I've got a rapport with and I've maybe do that on a weekly basis, whenever I meet them, just to try and have individual wee catch ups with them just to see what's, what's changed from the previous time Sylvia (YW) P7:202-204

This is evidence that young people feel connected to youth workers, which reflects Freire's (2000:85) emphasis on 'solidarity' and demonstrates the fundamentals of building horizontal relationships. This is also supported by Roberts (2009), referred to in chapter two aligns the development of strong bonds with positive outcomes in YPP.

### **8.2.2 Youth Worker and Young People's Relationships: On the Same Level**

Youth participants in this study all stated that they perceive themselves to be on the same level as youth workers Throughout the research process, there was a clear sense that youth workers and youth participants perceive YPP to involve them working side-by-side. This embodies Freire's (1996) second principle in which young people and youth workers are subjects of the learning process. Anna refers to this idea, in part, when she notes the following:

'Well our meetings are just us, we're truly relaxed because none of the community's there so we're all just sitting around a table, we're all talking amongst ourselves until we start and then we're just truly

relaxed so that everyone knows that they can contribute.’ (P3:146-152)

When asked, what is meant by ‘just us’, Anna replies ‘it means it’s just us, like the youth and the youth workers’, which demonstrates that she views young people and youth workers as operating on the same level. This reflects the concept of horizontal relationships that Freire (2000) described, which was mentioned in chapter three. Regardless of whether youth workers and young people operate at the same level, there should be reciprocity of trust and respect between them. This does not happen automatically; effort must be made on both sides. Jacob describes how youth workers should approach this:

Well it’s about speaking to [young people] more often, like just small talk to start off with, make sure they’re comfortable around you until you build up a trust with them that they’re able to come and talk to you on their own if they’ve got any problems. (P4: 166-170)

This indicates rapport between youth participants and youth workers in this study, as further demonstrated by Michael:

I think the longer you’re with them the more you actually get to know them as well and they’re open with us and because they’re showing that they’re open with us in talking about things that to me goes I can trust that worker actually, I can tell them this because I know they’ve actually got like my welfare and they really care about me but I know they’re doing it in a professional manner and that to me is what I really like about youth workers Michael P5:87-91.

Youth participants note they feel on the same level as youth workers in one sense but they recognise the difference and this is reflected in young people’s sense of professionalism from the youth workers.

why I like being on a first name basis with youth workers, because teachers call us sod or tease us and it’s almost degrading to the

young people; so, youth workers are better in my opinion. Sebastian P2: 58-62

they're very welcoming and they'll make sure that everybody knows each other's names. The young people kind of take it on themselves as well, so they know if someone new comes in, the young people are very welcoming to young people as well. And the workers are very good at making sure everybody keeps in contact and they're getting on with things and they're supporting us the right way. Rachel P6:287-297

It's not as if they're adults and you're children; they all treat you equally as adults, which I really appreciate because I feel as if I'm not a child, I'm 16. So, I feel as if they really do treat as you adults type of thing. But obviously you've got that level of respect for them because they are older than you, and obviously if you're doing something wrong you're going to get into trouble. But you really do get that same level with them. Chloe P2: 53-58

Simple acts, such as chatting informally and being on first name terms, enable youth workers to develop rapport with young people and this signifies that a positive, pedagogical space has been created, which represents Freire's first principle. Being on the same level could imply that young people and youth workers are equal but findings from this study confirm the complex nature of YPP. Evidence from the study shows that horizontal relationships can exist within the process of YPP, however, this does not implicitly mean that young people and youth workers are equal in terms of power. This reflects Freire's (1996) second principle (2000) and youth participants and youth workers' understanding of this is implied in their reference to the importance of boundaries.

### **8.2.3 The Importance of Boundaries - A Core Element of YPP**

All participants expressed the need for clear boundaries within YPP as concurred by Hart (2016) mentioned earlier on page 90. It is possible to deduce from this study,

that youth participants connect professionalism with enforcing boundaries, as reflected in the following quotes:

like they're professional but they're kind of they're relaxed so that you can just chat to them and they're approachable do you know what I mean? Anna P3: 108-112

There needs to be some sort of professional relationship between them or else nothing is going to work. Rachel (P5: 138-139)

Marie (YW) refers to suggested good practice in youth work, which is the negotiation of a group agreement with young people:

But I know if I'm starting off a new group we will set out a group agreement and group rules. There is that thing where yeah, maybe at the beginning you've got to do those couple of warnings, don't do that kind of thing, and we sort it and we deal with it. Marie (YW) P10:346-351

Youth workers and young people working together to develop a group agreement is a foundational element of building relationships, which is key to the creation of transformative space (Youth Work Essentials, 2017). Marie (YW) refers to practice that can be transferred to different settings. In my early experience as a lecturer, I established a group agreement with students but failed to refer to this consistently, which led to unnecessary escalation of issues before I challenged them. Marie (YW) infers the agreement should be enforced from the outset to create a positive space for all involved. This entails being firm but not too authoritarian:

So, it's like stand my ground; there's a line, don't cross that line. But at the same time this isn't school. Marie (YW) P6:191-193

You've got boundaries you've no need to be their best friend. Hopefully a friendship develops, it's a professional friendship, but you still need to be ruthless in terms of what's acceptable and

what's not acceptable". And that's where a little bit of respect comes in. Duncan (YW) P:9 329-334

Duncan's reference to enforcing boundaries in relation to what is acceptable and what is not acceptable connects to Batsleer's (2012) suggestion that all participants must engage within the process of setting and maintaining boundaries. It has been noted that YPP represents a safe space, in which young people can be themselves. This means that young people can talk about issues around sexuality and gender, for example, and feel protected in the space. Duncan (YW) endorses this:

Within youth work we accept the young people for who they are. The young people have got that confidence in you that you're just going to treat them with respect, and work with them to achieve something that will make a difference to them and the local community' (P7:256-261).

The importance of ensuring young people are aware of the rules is clear, as Brad echoes:

'the rules are fairly straightforward: come along, have fun, be nice. The golden rule is 'be nice, don't be horrible'

. Obviously if you don't follow those rules, you've got a couple of warnings and you'd be asked to leave. But I don't think that's ever happened to anybody. The rules are just straightforward; follow the rules and everything's fine.' (P2:71-79)

Marie (YW) notes that working with young people to develop a group agreement is a positive way of ensuring that people are aware of what is acceptable and not acceptable. This also enables young people to have ownership of their experience and helps to create an environment in which young people can try out new opportunities. Therefore, it can be concluded that all youth work practice should adopt the

practice of young people and youth workers working together to set and maintain boundaries.

### **8.3 YPP Enables**

The creation of transformative space, in which young people feel connected to peers and youth workers, creates possibilities to make a difference in the world. As a small example, Willie (YW) notes an example of building connections with other communities, ‘we’re also connecting our heritage group to other heritage projects so we can network [with] each other’ (P11:451-455). This enables the groups to learn from and support the other groups. Building networks is a way of enabling change to occur on a wider level. Findings from this research suggest that it is imperative within YPP is that young people feel able to learn new skills, test out ideas, and embrace new opportunities. The importance of taking a youth-led approach in achieving this is also clear.

#### **8.3.1 Youth-led is Best**

The importance of YPP being youth-led is a resounding theme throughout this thesis (Caron et al. 2017). Chapter three notes Freire’s suggestion that the concrete lived experiences of participants is the starting point of any educational experience (Freire, 2000) and captures Freire’s (1996) third principle, which is about the importance of the focus and content of the educational experience. For instance, Freire (1996) suggested lived experiences are the starting point of a decodification process. Findings from this study suggest that it is vital that young people are fully involved in determining what action should be taken in relation to issues, if action is needed at all. This study has also shown that an important part of the process is to establish whether young people want to be involved taking action. Returning to the quote from Duncan (YW), who conveyed a sense of frustration that young people opted out of presenting to a large audience at Hampden Football Stadium, it is important to respect the wishes and choices that young people make - presenting to a large audience at a football stadium would be daunting for most people. Participants in this research concur with Freire’s (1986, 1996a, 1996b, and 2000) belief that educators should not enforce their agenda and should not impose solutions. Findings from this study reinforce the importance of creating an

environment in which young people decide what they want to do or whether they want to do something at all. Kasia (YW) emphasises the importance of avoiding tokenism (Hart, 1992) at all costs. Referring to a scenario in which youth workers are tasked with ‘consulting’ young people about something, Kasia (YW) questions the effectiveness of this approach: ‘we’ve designed this document, do you like it?’ If they don’t like it are they really going to change it? I don’t know’ (P3:103-105). This top-down approach is not meaningful for young people. Sylvia (YW) refers to the importance of communicating with young people at every stage: ‘I try to keep them informed of things, I don’t hide things from them, and I think they appreciate that. Like, being involved at all stages of the process’ (P4: 122-124). Michael emphasises the importance from a youth participant’s perspective:

I’d say it shouldn’t be a worker that’s standing up and giving out instructions or saying something and if it’s going to come from anyone and for it to have more affect I’d say it’s best to come from a young person.’

In addition to ensuring that practical tasks and actions are youth-led; the approach to communication with young people should be youth-led too. This is demonstrated by Lucy (YW):

when I’m working, I try and bounce off the young people that I’m working with. So, if I know they’re up for fun and they want activities to be engaging then I’ll try and make them fun. Or if I’m working with young people who are quite serious and like to get to the point I’ll try and not be as... try and be serious and try and be focused with them. So, I think I always try and find out the group of young people that I’m working with first; try and get an idea of what their aim of the session is and then work it that way. Lucy (YW)  
P5:168-178

In this situation, the session may involve the youth worker giving young people practical support to enable them to undertake necessary tasks. There is a continuum of support given; it depends on the young people and the tasks. It seems clear, the



important thing is that young people have the sense that youth workers are there for them, as demonstrated by Faith who notes ‘the support we get is amazing. They’re at our side all the time in everything we do. It’s amazing’ (P2:41-43). From my own experience, I have learned that it is important to take a step back and let young people do things on their own, even if the task takes much longer. This study shows that it is important for youth workers to be mindful of what young people want to achieve, and support as much or as little as young people require (MacIntosh and Youniss,2008), as exemplified in the following quote:

it’s just giving them the confidence and the tools and the way to do what it is they want to do. And if they get to that stage where they are able to, some young people might want to change a massive policy; some young person might just want to be able to attend the group - so if we’re able to work with them for their confidence and self-esteem then that young person has empowered themselves.  
(Lucy, YW)

Lucy’s (YW) makes a distinguishing point, YPP should enable young people to empower themselves; YPP does not empower young people. The latter view reflects Fitzsimons’ [2011) observation, noted earlier, that the notion of adults empowering or giving power to young people prevails. This research highlights the importance of helping young people to build their confidence, which enables them to empower themselves. Youth participants did not refer to the idea that they were empowered, or felt empowered, through the process but describe the help given by youth workers to enable them to undertake key tasks on their own. For example, Michael describes a gradual withdrawal of practical support:

Youth workers help within the Youth Bank to make sure that everyone understands how to do the finance side, how to chair a meeting, how to take minutes and if they help along those stages then over that period of time those young people will go actually I feel confident in doing that and that’s what a Youth Bank is, it’s run by young people for young people (P3:46-50)

This study has found that it is important for youth workers to embody the sense that projects are youth-led - Caron et al. (2017). This is intrinsic to enabling participation, and to creating a positive space that enables young people to achieve the things that they identify. Both youth workers and youth participants conveyed this. From her experience as a youth worker Kasia suggests:

someone that works within the participation structure needs to know that they are in the background, and the young people are using their voice and you should never be pushing your opinions or your beliefs or what you think should happen. Kasia (YW) P7/8: 261-267

Findings also suggest that it is imperative to enable young people to test out ideas, to make mistakes and to encourage them to reflect upon the experience, which is an example of praxis (Freire, 2000). These findings suggest that those who choose to become Youth Workers are fully aware of the importance of taking a youth-led approach within YPP. In YPP, the benefit of creating a transformative learning space, which reflects Freire's (1996) second principle, is that young people feel comfortable about expressing their views. This reflects the experience described by Kutter (2011), even if they disagree with youth workers.

### **8.3.2 YPP is Based on Voluntary Participation of Young People**

MacIntosh and Youniss (2008:32), cited in chapter three, refer to the notion of scaffolding within civic engagement, which comprises of 'training, access to a real political system, and support while participating in that system'. It may be worthwhile adding another component that enables youth people to test these out in a safe space prior to participating in the system. A youth-led approach to YPP means that different approaches will be employed to enable all young people to participate. It must be acknowledged that young people drift away from their involvement; the reason for which may never be known. A pedagogical space must enable a person to take part but must also enable a person to leave without pressure. Given that participation is voluntary it is usual for young people leave and new members to join and the ethics of care must be present throughout.

The distinction was made that YPP is voluntary and therefore different from school, which allows youth workers to create an informal space. Young people can attend a YPP meeting but choose not to participate in an activity or meeting, which is another distinction between school and YPP as reflected by Sylvia:

Well, obviously, there are certain rules to follow, but it's not like school. You come here, if you don't want to do something you say you don't want to do it and it's fine. You won't be forced to do anything you don't want to do. Sylvia (YW) P2:64-69

Sylvia implies that young people have limited choices in a school setting, which is different from YPP. The following quote from Brad conveys a young person's perspective on this:

but it's not like school. You come here, if you don't want to do something you say you don't want to do it and it's fine. You won't be forced to do anything you don't want to do. (P1:29-30)

This was evident from literature; chapter three notes that any form of youth work in which young people choose to participate, exemplifies an aspect of good practice (Coburn, 2011). Sylvia (YW) concurs:

I believe youth work, and what I do, is totally different from schools. I don't want it to be regimental like, youth groups to me is young people, it's voluntary. So, it has to be something worthwhile and something interesting to them to keep them captivated and getting them coming along each week or whenever the meetings are, and, raising their confidence as well, to give them the ability to speak up and make sure that things are going their way (nodding with emphasis) Sylvia (YW) P3:66-72

As noted in the literature review, Cunningham and Tabur (2012) emphasise the need to ensure the experience is fun and engaging. The element of fun is captured in

responses from both young people and youth workers in the study. Jacob, a youth participant, refers to his youth workers:

Well they act as if they're a young person themselves, which is quite good ((smiling)), so they come and interact with you, which is good fun (Jacob P2:57-59)

Youth workers describe their efforts to ensure that activities within YPP are fun and engaging:

so we'll try and make something fun out of it, so they're still learning but because they're learning in a fun way they'll take it in more and then they'll want to do it again. Peter (YW) P4:137-140

Like if we have a consultation we'll look at the questions and think, 'right, how can we turn this into a game? Or how can we turn that into an activity?' One of the games that we use for a consultation that's got so many questions is Hungry Hippos...So, we've got all the balls and we put a number on the ball, on all the different balls it's got loads of numbers, and the young people are in two teams so we throw them out on a skate board and pull them back in, and when they pick up the ball they'll say, "Number two" and we'll say, "This question is, 'how can young people engage in their community?'" And then they'll answer the question. So, we're still getting the consultation completed, we're just making it a bit more fun than sitting them down with a pen and a bit of paper. Lucy (YW) P2:53-70

This study illustrates the link between fun and learning and it is possible to conclude that transformational is more likely to take place when young people feel fully engaged, which relates to the earlier point that a positive learning space can lead to transformation of some kind (Darder (2009)). There are times when young people are asked to take part in consultations that have been prompted by an external agency, such as a Health agency. The above quote from Lucy (YW) shows that when

the focus of the consultation is pre-determined by others, which counters the principle that young people should set the agenda, youth workers make the exercise more engaging and fun. This is a positive example of an approach that helps to encourage greater youth participation.

### 8.3.3 Encourage Participation

Youthlink Scotland (2011) identifies participation as a key value within youth work. In this context, the value of participation is embodied by enabling young people to take part in activities through breaking down barriers. It can take the form of a simple act, such as posing a question to someone who is quieter than others.

Well, sometimes what will happen is the youth worker and they're all having their point, they make sure, obviously people put their hand up to get their point, but to the quiet one say, "Have you got any thoughts on it?" and if they say, "No" they don't badger them or whatever. But sometimes you do find that maybe people sit and go, "Actually this is what I think". So, they just make sure that everyone gets a point, even if they don't have a point, if that makes sense, just to make sure they've talked to the group. Ruby P4:135-144

It could also be a practical decision in relation to the timing or venue for YPP.

A lot of young people don't want to come out on a Friday night to a youth group so we changed it to a Thursday night and we changed it back to a room where they could sit and have discussions because we were in a computer room last time and really hemmed in and you just weren't getting any work done. Fiona (YW) P4/5:148-154

The practical decision described above reflects Freire's (1996) first principle and exemplifies the importance that space should be conducive for all participants to learn and work together. It also connects with Barber's (2007:85) assertion that effort must be made to achieve an 'engagement zone', which involves young people testing out ideas:

So, I always try and work with young people to go, “Know your end goal and see how you want to get there”. Sometimes they’re quite stubborn; sometimes they’re really stubborn and they want to go ahead with it. So, then you just need to let the young person go, because they’re going to do what they want to do so you just need to support them either way. So, if they go ahead and do it their way and maybe they’ll get burned and then it’s just supporting them back down and saying, “Right, how could you do this differently?” So, it’s just asking them how they could see it working a different way without pushing anything on them; just letting them figure it out themselves but being there to support them. L change name Lucy YW P7: 253-264

Michael describes the benefits when the right space has been created:

if you're in that team setting you just thrive off each other. I think you just build up and build up and build up but I think with your confidence, you become more confident, you'll say more than what you would have and I think that can help you just develop as a person. (P7: 20-25)

During one of the focus groups, Faith refers to the need to recognise that all youth participants are as important as each other.

‘I think you need to work as part of a team. That’s kind of good. I don’t think you need to make yourself... it’s one of those groups where it’s, no one’s more important than the other. We all have our own voice, we all have our opinions, right now, I think that we have a good way of working (pointing to the people around her) compared to the past, maybe 2 years ago. I think it was quite, it wasn’t quite as good’ (FG2 P: 21/22 531-536)

This reflects Barber’s (2009) engagement zone, which was described earlier, in which it is hoped that people work together in a meaningful way. Maisi also

identifies with the notion of working horizontally, which she sees as the ideal scenario. Young people work horizontally for the most part but there have been situations where MSYPs 'were almost too driven by what they thought, and not what the young people wanted' (Maisi, P6:192-194). In these situations, it was perceived that the MSYPs asserted themselves as having more power as they had easier access to Members of the Scottish Parliament. It may be helpful to note that Maisi did not take part in a focus group but that the issue that s/he referred to in relation to past MSYPs reflected the comments made by other youth participants. There is no evidence in relation to this issue; further research is needed on the workings, or 'machinations' of the Scottish Youth Parliament (Patrikios and Shephard, 2014). Maisi noted that this had not happened in recent times and this was also inferred in focus group two.

In a Freirean approach, the importance of praxis in this situation is important. It is important to learn from lived experiences. Maisi describes the youth workers' role in dealing with conflict:

I think there have been a few times where there have maybe been disagreements between the group and things, "I've had enough of whatever the disagreement was; I'm not going back" and then you talk to the youth workers and they're like, "Why...? Not why are you letting it get to you in a nasty sense, but, "You're better than that. You know you're better than that; don't stoop to that level". And it makes you think about all the things you've enjoyed over the years: that's why I'm doing it. (P4: 120-129)

The scenario that Maisi describes is one that is likely to re-occur. The importance within YPP is that youth workers can support young people through the situation. Tuckman and Jensen (1977) describe this as 'storming', which they believe is a natural part of the group process. The scenario that Maisi refers to, above, suggests the importance of mediation within YPP, which is a core part of youth work (Youth Work Essentials, 2017). This is a role that youth workers should take, which may require training but is invaluable in terms of enabling young people to maintain their

involvement. Regardless of the possible conflicts of interests, or differences in opinions, the youth participants recognised the benefits of working as part of a team. This is explicit in Dani's (YW) comment:

It's for young people to actually take a lead and do something, and that I feel really strongly about. P2: 52-53

Chapter one describes my interpretation of armed love (Freire, 2005) and refers to the concept of 'alfirmo', which is the act of caring for, nourishing and supporting young people while asserting belief in their ability as agents of change. Dani's comment above conveys her sense that young people have the power and ability to lead and to act, which reflects 'alfirmo'. This also include the provision of practical support, which enables young people to achieve tasks and demonstrates that youth workers care about them. This is exemplified in the following quotes:

[Lucy] organises picking us up and stuff; she picks us up in her own car if we're long enough. She involves us. She texts us, like silly things like university interviews, she'll text us good luck and then ask us how we've got on and things like that. So, she's there for us in our personal life as well as in our youth work. It's amazing to have such good support from someone else other than family and friends. (Faith P3:70-80)

Our youth workers support us through everything that we do: if it's doctor's appointments, if you're needing someone to come with you if you don't feel comfortable, if you've got an anxiety they'll come with you and they'll make sure that you're going to be all right. It's all about that process Rachel P5: 238-246

genuinely nice people that they'd do anything for you: they pick you up from places; they take you places, if you ever need to go to anything or whatever. They're just all really, really helpful and they're all genuinely nice people. Chloe P2: 51-53



Faith, Rachel and Chloe's comments are evidence of what Nolas (2014) and Miller et al. (2015) refer to in relation to the relationships between young people and youth workers. As noted on page 91, these are indicators of a positive relationship within YPP.

#### **8.3.4 Continuum of Support**

From the findings, it is evident that a continuum of support is provided to young people involved in YPP (Rogers and Horrocks, 2010). Youth participants conveyed a sense that there is a gradual withdrawal of support from youth workers, until the stage that youth workers are simply on hand to give support if needed. This suggests the importance of a process that provides scaffolding (MacIntosh and Youniss, 2008) for young people to learn new skills and eventually apply those skills independently. It appears that there is an accumulative effect. Through the creation of transformational space, young people build connections with their peers and feel connected to youth workers. In turn, this provides the platform upon which young people are enabled to gain experience, build knowledge, and implement new skills. All of which lead to the transformation of young people in some form.

### **8.4 YPP Can Transform**

It is worth clarifying that any reference to the transformation of young people relates to young people's subjective feeling that they are transformed. Transformation takes many forms from Beth feeling able to speak publicly without her 'nervous' hat, to Sebastian's enhanced critical consciousness that drives him to challenge injustice. The most common transformation that youth participants describe is that they feel more confident; youth workers confirm that they have observed this in young people.

#### **8.4.1 Build Young People's Confidence**

I believe that all youth workers should find ways in which to enable young people's confidence can grow. Lucy (YW) makes a direct connection between young people feeling confident and young people feeling empowered. Youth workers cannot

empower young people, as described in chapter three; young people must empower themselves. A process of scaffolding (MacIntosh and Youniss, 2008) may contribute towards young people feeling increasingly empowered as time passes.

I think whenever we talk about empowering young people it's just giving them the confidence and the tools and the way to do what it is they want to do. And if they get to that stage where they are able to, some young people might want to change a massive policy; some young person might just want to be able to attend the group - so if we're able to work with them for their confidence and self-esteem then that young person is empowered themselves. (P14:517-525)

Kasia (YW) describes this as the goal of YPP:

I think the purpose and the point of it is building young people up to have an active voice, to feel like they can be heard, to feel like they should be responsible for the actions that they take. I think it's just about building confidence. (P1:22-27)

It is vital that youth workers make the effort to engage young people, which enables the process of 'building young people up' (Kasia) or enabling confidence to grow. Hart (2016: 670) suggests, 'healthy relationships with a youth worker creates spaces for reflection, growth, increase in well-being', which are core in the process of conscientisation. Sylvia (YW) reinforces the need to encourage young people to come back each week, which enables them to be in a space in which their confidence grows:

So, it has to be something worthwhile and something interesting to them to keep them captivated and getting them coming along each week or whenever the meetings are, and, raising their confidence as well, to give them the ability to speak up and make sure that things are going their way (P2:56-59)

This connects with research participants' view that YPP should be fun, creative and engaging.

#### **8.4.2 Encourage Tolerance**

A transformative space has been created when tolerance has developed through dialogue. Freire (2001:24) described this as the capacity to respect others and the 'ability to relate to others' without letting prejudice affect the outcome. This is shown in the following quote from Maisi:

It's got to be completely non-discriminatory; not saying, "Your hair's too long" or something. I don't know; stupid example. But just accepting young people for who they are: all walks of life; all backgrounds; races, genders and abilities. You need to be completely non-discriminatory (P11: 405-410)

Non-discrimination is identified as a key value within all youth work (YouthLink Scotland, 2011), including YPP. YPP should be based on universal ethics, which celebrates diversity. Faith and Rachel describe that YPP has enabled the transformation of how they see others. They are more accepting, understanding and tolerant, which are the products of praxis and dialogue.

#### **8.4.3 Develop a Sense of Agency**

Kasia refers to a crucial requirement for youth workers involved in YPP, 'you've got to actually believe in young people having a voice' (P7: 256-257). This relates to the essence of 'alfirmo' that was described in chapter xx. Youth workers influence young people and, if they have a negative view in relation to making a positive difference, this will filter through to young people. This is exemplified, in a way, in Ruby's point, 'they have to be friendly and basically happy, because if it's someone moping about it's going to make the mood of the group go down' (P2:65-66). Youth workers are also change agents (Harris (2014), cited in chapter four) and should be optimistic about the future. This reflects Freire's (1996) fourth principle, which is that YPP should aim for a dream. In *Defence of Youth Work* (2014) stresses youth workers' role in 'the nurturing of a self-conscious democratic practice, tipping balances of

power in young people's favour'. Lucy (YW) makes an interesting point in relation to this:

When we go to joint cabinet meetings young people are really aware of who holds the power. I quite like when working with young people they don't think that's any better than them. They understand it; but they understand how important they are as well. Lucy (YW)  
P11:387-392

Youth workers must foster young people's sense of personal agency and support them to act as part of an empowerment approach to YPP described on page 78 (Ginwright and Cammarota, 2002). Youth workers must resist imposing their view on young people. An example of this is a youth worker starting a project by asking young people what they do not like about their area or what their problems or issues are. I have observed inexperienced youth workers taking this approach. Rather than challenging the view that young people are lacking, this approach reinforces the view. Freire (1996) emphasised that educators should not impose their agenda.

As chapter four demonstrates, some models of YPP are influenced by critical theory. These models undeniably have an agenda, which is to challenge injustices that youth people face. YPP reflects Freire's (1996) fifth principle, which is that education is not neutral. This study has shown that YPP can enable young people to challenge injustices that affect young people and their communities. Freire's (1998) assertion, to change the world, we must believe that it is possible for us to transform it should also be reflected.

Freire's (1996) third principle relates to the importance of the object of cognition, which is the lived experiences of youth participants and the wider youth population in the area. Youth participants express that they want to make a difference in communities and help other people, as described in chapter seven. It is evident that youth participants in this study have experienced difficulties in their lives and are driven to help others in similar circumstances. Therefore, a transformational

approach to YPP takes young people's experiences as the starting point and enables young people to set the agenda for action. This is echoed by Sylvia (YW): 'I don't impose my agenda on them and I don't try and set things up the way I want them' (P3:78-79). This applies to identifying the focus for discussion and action, as well as identifying the solutions. This signifies Freire's (1996) third principle, which is the importance that the object of cognition is identified by young people. The dialectical nature of Freire's approach should be considered, which involves the process of understanding the negative experience and imagining a positive alternative. Harris (2014:656) suggests 'workers need to be able to rapidly recognise aspects of young people's everyday life within their immediate environment (events, images, conversations, etc.) as potential stimuli for educative dialogue'. The youth worker and youth participants act collectively to take steps to achieve the positive outcome. Regardless of whether young people identify negative aspects of their lives, or not, the job of the youth worker is to encourage young people to pose the kind of questions that were described in chapter three, such as why something is important. Harris (2014:667) identifies 'an improvisatory disposition should sit equally with other personal qualities we seek to develop within youth work students as part of their effectiveness, such as initiative, persistence, creativity, leadership, critical thinking, emotional intelligence and so forth.' The qualities that Harris describes relate to youth workers and good youth workers strive to enable young people to develop these qualities too. Brad describes his response to reading newspapers, or watching news programmes:

'Why is this happening? Is there something you can do to fix it?'  
because I want to make a change. I know young people will still be getting a bad name for hanging about the street corners and drinking and taking drugs and stuff like that, but it's not everybody; it is a small minority of people and it's not fair that everybody's getting accused of it. (P5: 146-149)

Brad attributes a more critical approach in his thinking to YPP:

if I'd seen that on the news without coming here I'd probably go,  
'oh no, let them get on with it (P5: 144-145).

Sebastian made a powerful statement in relation to youth worker input:

Well, I wouldn't say they help them to think; I would see more they try to unlock the gates in their brains. (Sebastian P4:183-184)

Chapter three refers to Freire's hope that people feel able to be 'bold' (1998:38) in their thoughts and actions. Findings from this study suggest that young people should be encouraged to be bold and not to accept the status quo. This can be enabled through 'alfirmo'; youth workers should begin the process by assuming young people are social actors with personal agency. Youth workers must embody this throughout the process, enabling young people to transform the way that they see the world.

#### **8.4.4 Enhance Critical and Political Awareness**

The need to dispel the myth that young people are apathetic was noted in chapter four (Harris et al. 2010). Norris (2003) also refutes the view that young people are apathetic. Fiona (YW) concurs by noting, 'there are lot of young people who would like to join a group, they just don't know it's going on' (P13:479-481). Heidi notes: '[she] wouldn't have found like that passion for politics without being involved in youth services' (P7: 263-265). Participants' suggest there is a need to ensure that more young people have the chance to become involved in YPP. Youth participants believe it is a positive way of showing communities their passion for politics and for making a positive difference.

It follows that additional resources are needed to enable this to happen, particularly when the Scottish Government's (2014b) *Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014* asserts this in law. Young people want to be involved in civic affairs as this study has shown. Findings and literature review point to the need to highlights to re-think the ways in which takes place. This study demonstrates that young people want the opportunity to participate in structures that enable meaningful participation and engagement with elected members. The structures that have been developed in the example of YPP studies in this research appear to have enabled

constructive and sustained dialogue and praxis between young people and adults. Maisi refers to the positive change:

Like even from when I started you can see that the council are taking us more seriously. And I think being part of that change has been quite cool; even just the change in young people and their interest in politics as well. It's incredible. (P7: 218-220)

The opportunity to engage with elected members on a meaningful level enables positive relationships to grow - make more of this and connect back to literature. Ruby describes an outcome from the change in structure:

[Elected members] invite us along to things as well; if they're having meetings and stuff they'll be like, "do you want to come over?" So, you know you're appreciated because you get invited along to a lot of things that a lot of people might not be able to. (P6:237-241)

Ruth Maguire, MSP (EM) suggests the need for more elected members to embrace the contributions made by young people. There should be more opportunities for young people to engage with elected members and other figures of authority. The notion of transformational space should apply in these contexts, which would involve the ceding of power by adults but also openness from young people. Elected members can also contribute to the development of critical consciousness in young people. However, as noted in chapter four, findings from this study should not always have to conform to adult structures. It is possible that greater achievements can be made through alternative spaces and structures. McDowell et al. (2014), cited in chapter six, suggest that more young people are politically active through social media and Bessant (2016) confirms that social media improves the experience and outcomes of youth participation. Further research is needed on this subject but youth participants in this study cite social media as a tool to communicate with youth workers and peers. This should be considered as a communication tool within YPP, whilst being mindful that not all youth participants will have easy access to social media. As a former youth and community worker, my experience suggests that social media is not a substitute for the experience of coming together with a group

of like-minded, albeit ‘different’, group of people. YPP provides the opportunity for young people to come together to make a difference and it’s been shown that dialogue and praxis should form a substantial part of YPP that aims to enhance young people’s critical consciousness. YPP should encourage reflexivity in all participants, young people and youth workers alike. In *Pedagogy of the Heart*, one of Freire’s (1998b:30) final pieces of work, he referred to the importance of ‘positive reflection’. He stated, change is only possible through critical reflection and only if you believe it to be possible.

## 8.6 Conclusions

As a reminder, Freire’s seven principles are:

1. the importance of pedagogical space;
2. educators and learners are both subjects within the process but not necessarily equal;
3. the importance of content or the object of cognition;
4. education should aim for a dream;
5. education should never be neutral;
6. educators should never impose their agenda; and
7. educators should respect the autonomy of the students and respect cultural identities (Freire, 1996:129).

This chapter considers the experiences and perceptions from participants who have taken part in YPP in a Scottish context, referring to Freire’s theories and principles and literature on YPP in general. I will now briefly answer each research question as a means of summarising:

1. What is the profile of young people who participate in youth participation practice?

There is no simple answer to this question. All participants, young people and youth workers, noted that a range of young people become involved in YPP. Young people come from a range of economic and family backgrounds, have a range of educational



experiences, young people who have different goals in life, who represent LGBTi groups, have different learning needs to name some examples. Previous research found that young people who take part in YPP are perceived to be from more affluent backgrounds or are high achievers in school. Participants in this study counter this notion.

## 2. What are participants' perceptions of the aim of youth participation practice?

The purpose of youth participation practice according to participants, and supported by literature, is to bring young people together in a safe, supportive environment to make a positive difference in the lives of young people and those in wider communities. Participants convey a sense that they want to see a more positive and fairer future, which connects with Freire's (1996) fourth principle - education should aim for a dream and his fifth principle - education should never be neutral.

## 3. What are participants' experiences of the approaches used within youth participation practice?

Participants in this study describe approaches that enable young people to make new friends, learn new skills, to make decisions, to speak out in public and to act in the interests of others. The importance of creating a positive space in which YPP takes place has been found to be crucial to the success of any approaches to YPP, which connects to Freire's (1996) first principle - the importance of pedagogical space. An additional aspect, which I suggest is key to success, is that a youth-led approach is taken. This relates to the agenda that is set, and the activities that are undertaken and young people should decide. This connects with Freire's third principle - the importance of content or the object of cognition; and his sixth principle - educators should never impose their agenda.

4. What is the young person/youth worker relationship like within youth participation practice?

The key description that encapsulates the young person/youth worker relationship is that they are on the same level. This relates to the shared goal that they all want to bring about positive outcomes for young people. The relationship was described as a professional friendship but one in which boundaries are important. This captures the spirit of Freire's second principle - educators and learners are both subjects within the process but not necessarily equal. All research participants describe that trust is a vital part of YPP, and this is two-way between young people and youth workers.

5. How do participants define the 'ideal' youth worker for youth participation practice?

The suggestions given for the 'ideal' youth worker overlapped with descriptions of actual youth workers. Descriptions from both young people and youth workers included friendly, honest, fun, helpful, trustworthy, care about young people, do anything for young people, professional, kind, and thoughtful. They refer to a positive demeanour, which results in a positive experience for young people. The descriptions given are the characteristics needed to embody 'alfirmo' within YPP, which also connects with Freire's first principle.

6. What are the implications of youth participation practice, as perceived by all research participants?

A range of implications, or outcomes, of youth participation practice were given. These included that young people's involvement in YPP leads onto involvement in other 'civic' opportunities, such as becoming involved in a Neighbourhood Forum. Young people describe their participation in other activities within the local

authority that can be described as political activity. Engaging with elected members to raise youth issues and find solutions is one example. This connects with Freire's fifth principle - education is never neutral. A desire to improve things for local communities was noted by the participants and a recognition of many individual benefits were noted too. These included increased confidence, improved sense of well-being, a positive outlook for the future.

In addition to answering the research questions, I identify the creation of transformative space is a core element of YPP, which reflects Freire's (1996) first principle. The creation of space is more than attending to the physical aspects of the space. The space is created through youth workers meaningfully getting to know young people and noticing changes of character and behaviour and attending to these in a subtle way. In demonstrating care, attention and understanding, youth workers create a safe place in which young people can feel free to be themselves. The space must convey 'alfirmo', which is the act of caring, nourishing and supporting young people while asserting positive belief in their ability as agents of change. In creating a transformational space, youth workers build connections. The development of trusting relationships is important and requires effort. This builds on the creation of space and develops the possibility for horizontal relationships to grow, in which youth workers and youth participants are subjects in the process of YPP. The importance, and acceptance, of boundaries is what distinguishes between them in terms of power. This reflects Freire's (1996) second principle. Youth participants fully embrace the notion of boundaries but they must be involved in the development of group agreements. Through building connections with and among youth participants, youth workers play a key role in enabling young people to develop skills and knowledge and to test these out. This takes place within a horizontal relationship (Freire, 2000), in which youth workers and youth participants work side-by-side. It can be concluded that it is beneficial to young people when youth workers take a scaffolding approach within YPP (MacIntosh and Youniss, 2008). YPP is voluntary and youth workers should encourage the participation of all youth participants. This can be done through creative and fun methods, in which youth participants opt to take part, or not. Strong connections and young people's ability to demonstrate and test out new skills and knowledge, leads to young people feeling

transformed in some way. The most significant transformation possible is enhanced confidence in youth participants and efforts should be made to enable this transformation. With a greater sense of confidence, comes the feeling that youth participants can achieve things on their own or collectively. This reflects Freire's (1996) seventh principle, to respect the autonomy of young people. Freire (2000) identified dialogue and praxis as crucial elements of a transformational approach to education. These elements must be core parts of YPP, which leads to the development of tolerance, a sense of agency and enhanced critical and political awareness. Making a positive difference is the global theme I identified through the thematic analysis and this is only possible when these elements are present, which is reflected in figure 5 below. Freire (1998) asserted that change is only possible if one believes that change is possible. This belief must be conveyed in the process of YPP and young people must believe in their ability to make a difference.

Freire (2004) believed that young people should be encouraged to care for others and to dream of endless possibilities. This research has demonstrated, youth participants who are part of YPP in this study clearly care for others and want to make a difference. The hope is that more young people have the same opportunity and are recognised as strong, committed and caring young people who can benefit communities and make positive changes.

## Epilogue

The aim of the research was to critically examine the lived experiences of people who have taken part in youth participation projects in North Ayrshire, Scotland. The findings from this study contribute to the body of literature that relates to youth participation practice, particularly in relation to the application of Freirean principles in YPP. Aldridge and Cross (2008) highlight the need for a significant shift in the way that young people are represented in media. They propose that a rights-based approach to children and young people should be enshrined within law. As it stands, children's right set out in the UNCRC (1989) cannot be enforced through the judicial system in Britain. The Joint Committee on Human Rights (2015) also propose the need for law reform in this respect.

Substantial changes are needed and it is only through structural and political change that children and young people will be perceived as having rights; including the right to protection and the right to participate. Only then will young people be represented in a positive light in media. Freire (1998a:56-57) wrote that we live in a 'world where there are so many possibilities yet so many chances for these to be denied, despised or refused'. A change in law would enable young people to embrace these possibilities. Further, structural and political change would translate to cultural practices and beliefs. The youth participants are aware that people believe young people cause trouble.

It is important for me to acknowledge that the findings cannot be generalised. The thematic map depicted in figure 4 below captures some of the key elements that I suggest, from my experience and from the findings in this study, should be present within YPP to ensure positive outcomes for all.

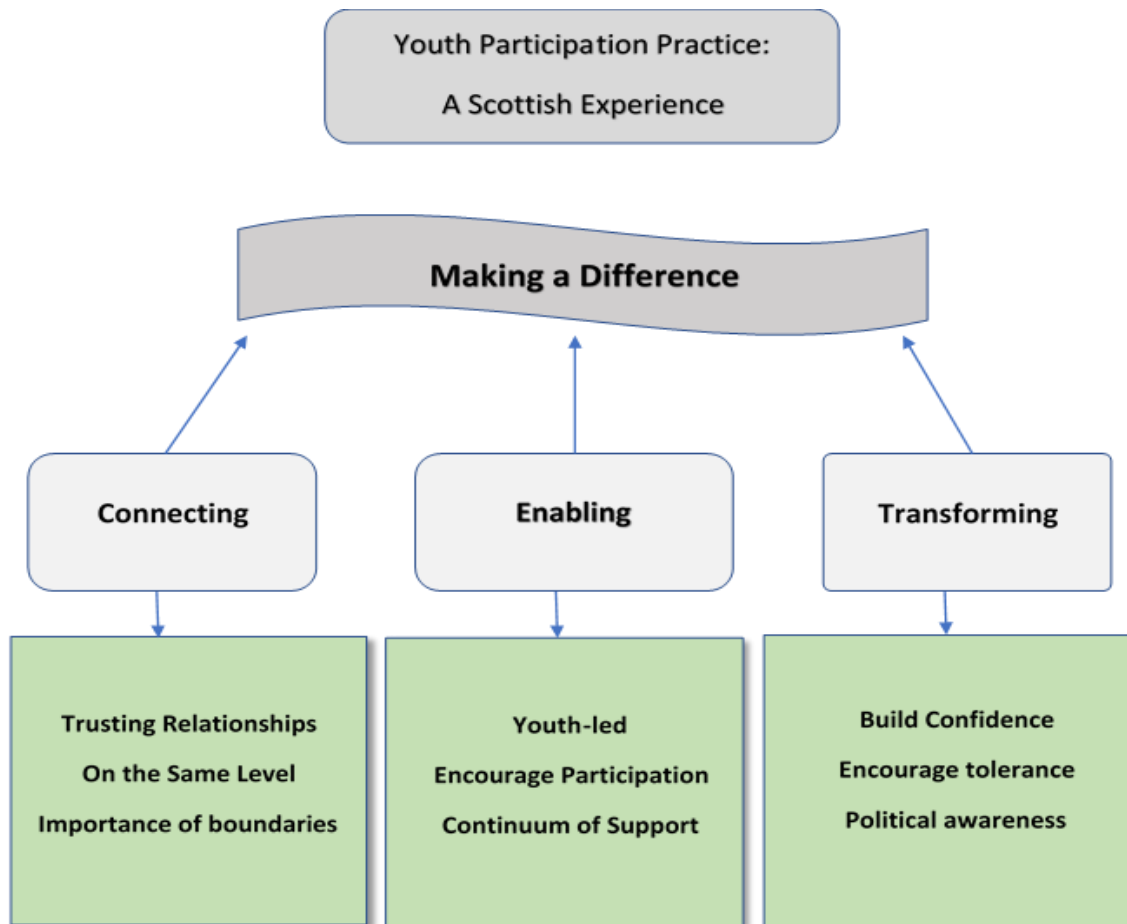


Figure 3 - Final Thematic Map

It has been, and will always be, important to acknowledge my positionality, which has influenced my research experience every step of the way. I am mindful of trying not to impose my own agenda (Freire, 1996b) but also of not going to the extreme of trying to be too objective or wear 'gloves and masks' (Freire, 1998a, p. xii). The thread that weaves through this research, and shapes my experience as a teacher, is 'alfirmo'. This research project has provided the opportunity to learn from others and to further develop my praxis of transformational education. There are numerous factors that contribute to the success of YPP but the message that I would share is, by embodying 'alfirmo' and paying attention to creating a positive space in which to learn, young people blossom and emerge as agents of change.

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## Appendix 1 - Codification for Focus Groups and Interviews



## Appendix 2 - Process for Focus Groups with Young People

I will begin the focus group with a discussion about the importance of confidentiality in research. I will remind the group that a code name will be used for each person so that they cannot be identified when the report is written. I will also explain that, if anything is disclosed during the discussions, which raises a concern for someone's safety, I will have to tell the Project Manager. I will finally ask if they agree to a verbal confidentiality agreement, which means that they keep the content of the discussions within the room.

To begin the discussion, I will show them a picture that depicts a youth worker in discussion with a group of young people.

I will then use the following prompt questions and make notes on a flipchart that I can refer to during the process:

### **What do you see happening?**

- What do you think they are doing?
- What do you think they are feeling?

### **Why was it happening?**

- Why are they doing the things that they are doing?

*At this point, there is a shift from observation to thinking*

### **Does this happen in real life?**

*At this point the focus shifts from the picture*

### **Focus on the main themes identified by participants**

*Use prompt questions to explore themes in more depth*

- Why? How? What happens when?
- 

Conversations may remain at the level of general views youth participation practice; the participants will determine this. If participants are willing to talk about their own experiences then they will be prompted to elaborate on the points that they make, again by being asked 'Why?' 'How?' and 'What happens when?'

### **Summarise discussions**

- Clarify that the points that have been noted represent views accurately

**Thanks for participation and invite people to take part in individual interviews.**

## Appendix 3 - Interview Themes and Process for Interviews with Young People

The themes for the interviews are as follows:

- 1 Youth participants' perceptions of the purpose of youth participation practice
- 2 The approaches and methods that are used within youth participation projects
- 3 Youth participants' perceptions of the outcomes of their involvement in youth participation practice

I will begin each interview by explaining that the aim of the interview is to give them the chance to add a bit more detail to the discussions that they had in the focus group or to provide additional information that was not covered in the focus group.

A picture that depicts a youth worker in discussion with a group of young people will be used as a stimulus to prompt initial discussions. If a young person struggles to think of anything to say in relation to the picture I will continue the interview by saying 'Tell me about your experience of the youth participation project'. If following themes have not been covered, then the subsequent questions will be asked. These will be core questions within each interview with young people:

- |            |   |
|------------|---|
| Question 1 | What is the purpose of youth participation practice?                                |
| Question 2 | What methods and approaches are used with the youth participation project?          |
| Question 3 | What do you think about these methods and approaches?                               |
| Question 4 | What has changed as a result of you taking part in the youth participation project? |

I may add one or two additional questions based on prominent themes that a Ruth Maguire, MSP during the focus groups.

I will thank the participant and explain that I will do a short presentation of my findings on completion of my study.

## Appendix 4 - Interview Themes and Process for interviews with Youth Workers

- 1 Youth workers' perceptions of the purpose of youth participation practice
- 2 The approaches and methods that are used within youth participation projects
- 3 Youth workers' perceptions of the outcomes of youth participation practice for young people

I will begin each interview by explaining that the aim of the interview is to give them the chance to give their view on youth participation practice.

A picture that depicts a youth worker in discussion with a group of young people will be used as a stimulus to prompt initial discussions. If a youth worker struggles to think of anything to say in relation to the picture I will continue the interview by saying 'Tell me about your experience of the youth participation project'. If the above themes have not been covered, the following questions will be asked. These will be core questions within each interview with youth workers:

- |            |   |
|------------|---|
| Question 1 | What is the purpose of youth participation practice?                            |
| Question 2 | What methods and approaches ensure successful youth participation projects?     |
| Question 3 | What has influenced the way that you undertake the youth participation project? |
| Question 3 | What do think that youth participation projects achieve?                        |

I may add one or two additional questions based on prominent themes that a Ruth Maguire, MSP during the focus groups.

I will thank the participant and explain that I will do a short presentation of my findings on completion of my study.

## Appendix 5 - Interview Themes and Process for interviews with Elected Members within Local Authority

- 1 Elected members' perceptions of the purpose of involving young people in decision-making processes
- 2 The approaches and methods that are used within decision-making processes involving young people
- 3 Elected members' perceptions of the outcomes of involving young people in decision-making processes

I will begin each interview by explaining that the aim of the interview is to give them the chance to give their view on youth participation practice.

A picture that depicts a meeting with young people and elected members will be shown as a stimulus for initial discussion. If an Elected Member struggles to think of anything to say in relation to the picture I will continue the interview by saying 'Tell me about your experience of working with young people who are involved in youth participation projects. If the above themes have not been covered, the following questions will be asked. These will be core questions within each interview with youth workers:

- |            |   |
|------------|---|
| Question 1 | What is the purpose of involving young people in decision-making processes?       |
| Question 2 | What methods and approaches ensure successful decision-making processes?          |
| Question 3 | What has influenced the way that you engage in dialogue with young people?        |
| Question 3 | What do think is achieved by involving young people in decision-making processes? |

I may add one or two additional questions based on prominent themes that a Ruth Maguire, MSP during the focus groups.

I will thank the participant and explain that I will do a short presentation of my findings on completion of my study.

## Appendix 6 - Information Sheet



### 1. Study title and Researcher Details

University - University of Glasgow

College - College of Social Sciences

Title - Youth Participation Practice in Scotland: The Lived Experiences of Youth Participants

Researcher - Louise Sheridan, 0141 330 1818, [louise.Sheridan@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:louise.Sheridan@glasgow.ac.uk)

Supervisor - Dr Barbara Read, [Barbara.read@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:Barbara.read@glasgow.ac.uk)

Degree - PhD Research

### 2. Invitation paragraph

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether, or not, you wish to take part.

Thank you for reading this.

### 3. What is the purpose of the study?

This study was prompted by the researcher's previous experience of, and interest in, youth participation practice. The aim of the study is to find out what it's like for young people who take part in youth participation projects. The purpose is to share, and build on, examples of good youth participation practice in Scotland.

### 4. Why have I been chosen?

You've been picked because you've been involved in a youth project that's tried to give young people a voice.

### 5. Do I have to take part?



You don't have to take part in the study; it's completely up to you. If you decided to take part and then changed your mind, that's no problem at all. You don't even have to give a reason.

#### **6. What will happen to me if I take part?**

Your involvement would be approximately two hours. At the start of the first contact, I will discuss the importance of confidentiality amongst the group and would then involve you discussing your experiences of the youth project with a group of other young people. The second hour, which would probably be on a different day, would involve an individual interview. This would still be about your experiences of the youth project. Both the focus group and the individual discussion will be video-recorded but these will be destroyed once the study is finished. I'll also spend some time watching what goes on within the youth participation project to help me get a better understanding of the process; I will make notes but, again, these will be destroyed once the study is finished.

#### **7. Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?**

The information that I gather will be kept strictly confidential. When I'm writing about any of the discussions, from either the focus group or the individual interviews, I'll use a code name for you. This means that, when people read my report, no one will be able to identify you.

#### **8. What will happen to the results of the research study?**

I will include the results within my PhD Thesis, which is a large written report that I'll submit and once it's completed, I will do a short presentation of my findings to the participants.

#### **10. Who has reviewed the study?**

The College of Social Science's Ethics Committee, which is part of the University of Glasgow, have reviewed the study.

#### **11. Contact for Further Information**

If you have any concerns about the conduct of the research project then you can contact the College of Social Sciences Ethics Officer, who is Dr Valentina Bold, at [Valentina.Bold@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:Valentina.Bold@glasgow.ac.uk)

Thanks for taking the time to read this.

Louise Sheridan

## **Appendix 7 - Consent Form for Young People**

**Title of Project:** Youth Participation Practice in Scotland: The Lived Experiences of Youth Participants

**Name of Researcher:** Louise Sheridan

1. I confirm that I have read / listened to and understand the Information Sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.
3. I know that if I take part in a focus group and interview, these will be video recorded. The recordings will be destroyed when the research has been completed.
4. I understand that I will be observed during the process of the youth participation project and notes will be made, which will be destroyed when the research has been completed.
5. I understand that I will be given a code name in the research so I cannot be identified by anyone.
6. I agree / do not agree (delete as applicable) to take part in the above study.

\_\_\_\_\_

Name of Participant      Date      Signature

\_\_\_\_\_

Name of Researcher      Date      Signature

## Appendix 8 - Information Sheet for Parents and Carers



### 1. Study title and Researcher Details

University - University of Glasgow

College - College of Social Sciences

Title - Youth Participation Practice in Scotland: The Lived Experiences of Youth Participants

Researcher - Louise Sheridan, 0141 330 1818, [louise.Sheridan@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:louise.Sheridan@glasgow.ac.uk)

Supervisor - Dr Barbara Read, [Barbara.read@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:Barbara.read@glasgow.ac.uk)

Degree PhD Research

### 2. Invitation paragraph

Your child is being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide if he/she can take part it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether, or not, you wish your child to take part.

Thank you for reading this.

### 3. What is the purpose of the study?

This study was prompted by the researcher's previous experience of, and interest in, youth participation practice. The aim of the study is to find out what it's like for young people who take part in youth participation projects. The purpose is to share, and build on, examples of good youth participation practice in Scotland.

### 4. Why have I been chosen?

Your child has been picked because he/she has been involved in a youth project that's tried to give young people a voice.

### 5. Do he/she have to take part?

He/she doesn't have to take part in the study; it's completely up to you. If you gave permission for him/her to take part and then changed your mind, that's no problem at all. You don't even have to give a reason.

#### **6. What will happen to him/her if he/she takes part?**

The involvement would be approximately two hours. The first hour will begin with a discussion about the importance of confidentiality amongst the group and would then involve a discussion about their experiences of the youth project. The second hour, which would probably be on a different day, would involve an individual interview. This would still be about the experiences of the youth project. Both the focus group and the individual discussion will be video-recorded but these will be destroyed once the study is finished. I'll also spend some time watching what goes on within the youth participation project to help me get a better understanding of the process; I'll make notes of this but, again, these will be destroyed once the study is finished.

#### **7. Will my child's participation in this study be kept confidential?**

The information that I gather will be kept strictly confidential. When I'm writing about any of the discussions, from either the focus group or the individual interviews, I'll use a code name for your child. This means that, when people read my report, no one will be able to identify him/her.

#### **8. What will happen to the results of the research study?**

I will include the results within my PhD Thesis, which is a large written report that I'll submit and once it's completed, I will do a short presentation of my findings to the participants.

#### **10. Who has reviewed the study?**

The College of Social Science's Ethics Committee, which is part of the University of Glasgow, have reviewed the study.

#### **11. Contact for Further Information**

If you have any concerns about the conduct of the research project then you can contact the College of Social Sciences Ethics Officer, who is Dr Valentina Bold, at [Valentina.Bold@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:Valentina.Bold@glasgow.ac.uk)

Thanks for taking the time to read this.

Louise Sheridan

## Appendix 9 - Consent Form for Parents and Carers



**Title of Project:** Youth Participation Practice in Scotland: The Lived Experiences of Youth Participants

**Name of Researcher:** Louise Sheridan

1. I confirm that I have read / listened to and understand the Information Sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
2. I understand that my child's participation is voluntary and that we are free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.
3. I give consent for my child to take part in a focus group and individual interview and understand that these will be video-recorded. The recordings will then be destroyed when the research has been completed.
4. I give consent for my child to be observed during youth participation meetings with other young people and youth workers and notes will be taken but will be destroyed when the research has been completed.
5. I understand that my child will be given a code name in the research so he/she cannot be identified by anyone.
6. I agree / do not agree (delete as applicable) to my child taking part in the above study.

\_\_\_\_\_

Name of Parent/Carer      Date      Signature

\_\_\_\_\_

Name of Researcher

Date

Signature

## Appendix 10 - Information Sheet for Youth Workers



### 1. Study title and Researcher Details

University - University of Glasgow

College - College of Social Sciences

Title - Youth Participation Practice in Scotland: The Lived Experiences of Youth Participants

Researcher - Louise Sheridan, 0141 330 1818, [louise.Sheridan@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:louise.Sheridan@glasgow.ac.uk)

Supervisor - Dr Barbara Read, [Barbara.read@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:Barbara.read@glasgow.ac.uk)

Degree - PhD Research

### 2. Invitation paragraph

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether, or not, you wish to take part.

Thank you for reading this.

### 3. What is the purpose of the study?

This study was prompted by the researcher's previous experience of, and interest in, youth participation practice. The aim of the study is to find out what it's like for young people who take part in youth participation projects. Youth Workers have a key role to play in youth participation practice therefore the study includes gaining insight into the approaches that are used within current practice. The purpose is to share, and build on, examples of good youth participation practice in Scotland.

### 4. Why have I been chosen?

The Project Manager has identified that you have a key role in a youth participation project, or within the overall youth facility, which includes working with young people to give them a voice and help them to act on issues that are important to them. You have views and experiences on youth participation practice, which could make an important contribution to further development in this field of work.

### 5. Do I have to take part?

You don't have to take part in the study; it's completely up to you. If you decide to take part and then change your mind, that's no problem at all. You don't even have to give a reason.

#### **6. What will happen to me if I take part?**

Your involvement would be approximately one hour. This would take the form of an individual interview about your views and experiences of youth participation practice and the approaches that are used. The interview would be audio-recorded but this will be destroyed once the study is finished. I'd also spend some time observing planning meetings for the youth participation project; notes will be made of this and, again, will be destroyed once the study is finished.

#### **7. Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?**

The information that I gather will be kept strictly confidential. When I'm writing about any of the discussions from the individual interview, I'll use a code name for you. This means that, when people read my report, no one will be able to identify you.

#### **8. What will happen to the results of the research study?**

I will include the results within my PhD Thesis, which is a large written report that I'll submit and once it's completed, I will do a short presentation of my findings to the participants.

#### **10. Who has reviewed the study?**

The College of Social Science's Ethics Committee, which is part of the University of Glasgow, have reviewed the study.

#### **11. Contact for Further Information**

If you have any concerns about the conduct of the research project then you can contact the College of Social Sciences Ethics Officer, who is Dr Valentina Bold, at [Valentina.Bold@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:Valentina.Bold@glasgow.ac.uk)

Thanks for taking the time to read this.

Louise Sheridan

## **Appendix 11 - Consent Form for Youth Workers**







## Appendix 12 - Information Sheet for Elected Member



### 1. Study title and Researcher Details

University - University of Glasgow

College - College of Social Sciences

Title - Youth Participation Practice in Scotland: The Lived Experiences of Youth Participants

Researcher - Louise Sheridan, 0141 330 1818, [louise.Sheridan@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:louise.Sheridan@glasgow.ac.uk)

Supervisor - Dr Barbara Read, [Barbara.read@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:Barbara.read@glasgow.ac.uk)

Degree - PhD Research

### 2. Invitation paragraph

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether, or not, you wish to take part.

Thank you for reading this.

### 3. What is the purpose of the study?

This study was prompted by the researcher's previous experience of, and interest in, youth participation practice. The aim of the study is to find out what it's like for young people who take part in youth participation projects. Youth Workers have a key role to play in youth participation practice therefore the study includes gaining insight into the approaches that are used within current practice. The purpose is to share, and build on, examples of good youth participation practice in Scotland.

### 4. Why have I been chosen?

The youth participants identified that you have a key role in a youth participation project, which includes working with young people to give them a voice and help them to act on issues that are important to them. You have views and experiences on youth participation practice, which could make an important contribution to further development in this field of work.

### 5. Do I have to take part?

You don't have to take part in the study; it's completely up to you. If you decide to take part and then change your mind, that's no problem at all. You don't even have to give a reason.

#### **6. What will happen to me if I take part?**

Your involvement would be approximately one hour. This would take the form of an individual interview about your views and experiences of youth participation practice and the approaches that are used. The interview would be audio-recorded but this will be destroyed once the study is finished. I'd also spend some time observing planning meetings for the youth participation project; notes will be made of this and, again, will be destroyed once the study is finished.

#### **7. Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?**

The information that I gather will be kept strictly confidential. When I'm writing about any of the discussions from the individual interview, I'll use a code name for you. This means that, when people read my report, no one will be able to identify you.

#### **8. What will happen to the results of the research study?**

I will include the results within my PhD Thesis, which is a large written report that I'll submit and once it's completed, I will do a short presentation of my findings to the participants.

#### **10. Who has reviewed the study?**

The College of Social Science's Ethics Committee, which is part of the University of Glasgow, have reviewed the study.

#### **11. Contact for Further Information**

If you have any concerns about the conduct of the research project then you can contact the College of Social Sciences Ethics Officer, who is Dr Valentina Bold, at [Valentina.Bold@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:Valentina.Bold@glasgow.ac.uk)

Thanks for taking the time to read this.

Louise Sheridan



## Appendix 14 - Sample Transcript

	1	I You've just said that you've done youth work	
	2	but you've more recently been involved in youth	
	3	participation stuff.	
Purpose of YP	4	R Yes.	
	5	I It would be good to hear what you describe	
	6	youth participation to be all about. What's the	
	7	purpose of it?	
Experience of yp	8	R Youth participation the way I see it is not the	Talking to ypeeps about
	9	same as some general youth work things. I'd see it	their rights and getting
	10	more as working with young people to talk to them	them involved in things
	11	about their rights and how they can be involved in	that happen in their
	12	things that happen within the community.	community
YW Input	13	Sometimes when you speak to young people they	Some ypeeps don't feel
	14	don't feel attached to anything that's happening; so	part of anything in comm.
	15	more the kind of youth participation stuff I would see	Helping ypeeps to
	16	as working with young people to help them	understand that they
	17	understand that this is something that I should be	should be involved
	18	involved in and can be involved in, and help them	YW then help ypeeps to
	19	find their way through that in however they want to	express ideas and support
	20	articulate what they want to say then just support	them to achieve change
	21	them in doing so.	Youth council meetings are
Forms of YP	22	We use our youth council meetings to ask young	a means of consulting with
	23	people about things that are happening within the	ypeeps about things that
	24	council. So, if there are surveys or consultations out	are happening within the
	25	then if young people want to have their voices heard	council
Core elements of yp	26	in that then we'll turn the consultations into a fun	Consultations are made
	27	workshop so that they're still able to get their voices	fun
	28	heard. It's just not how a young person will probably	
	29	see a consultation, quite boring. So, we'll use our	
	30	youth council to do that, and we use our executive	
	31	youth council committee. They'll look at things that	
	32	are happening within the communities and think,	
	33	'no, that would maybe be a good thing to bring	
	34	across to other young people'. So, they're looking at	
	35	that kind of representative group of young people	
	36	from North Ayrshire, so they'll see what happens and	
	37	then see what they can give into the youth council.	

## Appendix 15 - Sample list of Basic Themes

Ypeeps' Perceptions of YW	Ypeeps' Perceptions of YW
YW put ypeeps first	Encouraging
YW let ypeeps have the limelight in relation to achievements	Very compassionate
YW are always there for ypeeps *7	Understanding
Approachable *6	Non-judgemental
Happy	Open *2
Fair	Genuine
Relaxed	Helpful
Outgoing	Determined
Friendly *4	Enthusiastic
Chatty	Committed
Listens *3	A bit confident
Patient	Not afraid of change
Caring *3 (YW care about ypeeps in a professional manner)	Up for things'
Supportive	Does not take things too seriously
<b>Professional</b>	Like a kid but still a worker
Can be strict	Respects ypeeps
Motivated	2-way respect
Passionate	Proud of ypeeps
Fun/funny/up for a laugh *4	Like' a friend
Sweet and kind	Play a key role in the success of YP
Nice *2	YW saved the ypeep's life
Amazing	Ypeeps wouldn't manage without YW
If YW is not passionate about working with ypeeps then they should not do it - it is obvious if they do not care about ypeeps	YW help ypeeps to 'unlock the gates to their brains'

## Appendix 16 - Phases of Thematic Analysis

Phase	Description of the process
1. Familiarising yourself with your data:	Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and rereading the data, noting down initial ideas.
2. Generating initial codes:	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
3. Searching for themes:	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4. Reviewing themes:	Checking in the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis.
5. Defining and naming themes:	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells; generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6. Producing the report:	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

(Braun and Clarke, 2006:35)

## Appendix 17 - List of Research Participants

Add this in time for final submission



## Appendix 18 Forms of Youth Participation Practice

### Forms of Youth Participation Practice

Youth Forums

Pupil Councils

North Ayrshire Youth Council

Youth Groups

Eco Committees

Sports Leadership

Peer Education

Scottish Youth Parliament

British Youth Council

LGBT National Youth Council

Neighbourhood Forums

North Ayrshire Joint Cabinet

North Ayrshire Youth Executive Council

YouthBank