Developing Practice in Relational Spaces: A Hermeneutic Phenomenological

Study of the Lived Experience of Youth Workers

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Statement of Originality

This is to certify that to the best of my knowledge, the content of this thesis is my own work. This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or other purposes.

I certify that the intellectual content of this thesis is the product of my own work and that all sources have been acknowledged.

Lisa J. Windon

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For Ruby & Luke ~

If you're always trying to be normal

you will never know how amazing you can be

~ Maya Angelou

The one thing that you have

that nobody else has is you. Your voice,

your mind, your story, your vision

~ Neil Gaiman

ABSTRACT

The social and community services sector provides hundreds of programs and services throughout Australia that find youth workers engaging with young people in a variety of settings. As an emerging profession the youth work sector has grown considerably over the last few decades and whilst research relating to young people and their concerns abounds, the literature provides little in the way of acknowledging or understanding the practice and professional development of youth workers. The purpose of this study is to reveal the experiences of youth workers as they learn their craft and develop their practice.

This hermeneutic phenomenological study, informed by the works of Heidegger, Gadamer and van Manen, presents the findings from in-depth interviews with eight youth workers practicing in Australia. The investigation explored the lived experiences of youth work practitioners who came to the field from a variety of backgrounds. As they described their journey into youth work, and their experiences in the field, practitioners revealed the strategies that they employed as they learned and developed their practice.

The study reveals the challenges that youth workers experience as they transition into the role and adapt to the reality of practice. As they come to an understanding of the role, and the work, youth workers learn and develop their practice in situ. As they centre young people at the core of their practice practitioners learn through experience and upon reflection in, and on, practice whilst accessing the knowledge and support of colleagues. Mentorship plays a vital role as practitioners move from novice towards expert - crafting their own unique practice as they navigate the uncertain terrain of youth work.

Youth workers highlight the need for practitioners to clearly understand the nature and purpose of youth work, and the requirement to develop professional practices that provide clear and positive structures and frameworks for the young people with whom they work. In order to ensure their longevity in the field practitioners recognise the need for self-care, and the importance of access to resources that support and provide for continuous learning and development to sustain their personal and professional selves.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AYAC	Australian Youth Affairs Coalition
ACWA	Association of Children's Welfare Agencies
CCWT	Centre for Community Welfare Training
DOCS	Department of Community Services
PYD	Positive Youth Development
RPL	Recognised Prior Learning
TAFE	College of Technical and Further Education
VET	Vocational Education and Training
YACWA	Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia
YACSA	Youth Affairs Council of South Australia
YACVIC	Youth Affairs Council of Victoria
YANQ	Youth Affairs Network Queensland
YAPA	Youth Action and Policy Association NSW Inc.
YMCA	Young Men's Christian Association
YNOT	Youth Network of Tasmania
YWCA	Young Women's Christian Association

VIGNETTE

It's a quarter-to-five, Friday afternoon. You intend getting out of the office right on five o'clock. After all it is Friday, and it's been a hectic week. A young person shows up at the door of your Youth Service. They've just come in on a train from country NSW this afternoon and say they have nowhere to stay; no other clothes - not even a bag; and they do not know ANYONE in Sydney. They say they rang their DoCS worker from up home when they got off at Central to ask for some money. She gave them the phone number and address of your Youth Service and then said that she was leaving the office for the day. Adam has just turned 15 and has never been to Sydney before. He says he reckons he can manage to find somewhere 'rough' to sleep until Monday if he has to - he's done that before - but he really needs money for food, and some other clothes would be good.

<div align="center">What do you do?</div>

If you present this scenario to 10 youth workers you will probably hear of 10 different descriptions as to how to assess, address and respond to this situation. The outcomes, too, will be potentially varied. What is the 'correct' response? What outcome is ideal? What indicates that 'best practice' has been applied? What do you do first? How do you know what to do here? How do you learn that?

<div align="center">***</div>

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

This hermeneutic phenomenological study explores the lived experiences of youth work practitioners as they learned to become youth workers. The background to the research, the purpose of the research and the research questions are presented in this chapter, followed by some observations of the significance of the study for the field.

Phenomenon of interest

The social and community services sector delivers thousands of services in Australia where youth workers can be found working with young people in a variety of settings (Stuart, 2004; Wojecki, 2007; Bessant, 2012). These include homelessness support programs, residential accommodation services, employment, education and training support programs, street and outreach programs, youth drop-in community programs as well as specialist services and programs that include sexual health, mental health, drug and alcohol, and juvenile justice programs.

There is no single pathway into youth work. Not yet a regulated profession, the youth work sector recruits qualified and unqualified workers who may come with one of up to 50 related or unrelated qualifications ranging from certificate to postgraduate degree qualifications in line with the Australian Qualifications Framework (Corney, Broadbent & Darmanin, 2009; Bessant, 2012).

My own entry was 'accidental' and unplanned. Previously engaged in unrelated industries, and parenting an adolescent of my own, an opportunity arose to work at a youth refuge as a residential support worker. With a history of volunteer work, and a particular interest in working with young people, I came to the field with no youth work specific qualifications. Over the next 12 years I worked with young people in residential and accommodation services, youth outreach services, leaving care and after care services, and a number of years with 'at-risk' students in public, private and independent school settings – all very different contexts with very different workplace

environments. During this time I acquired basic certificate youth work qualifications via RPL through a pilot program whilst on the job, and attended as much sector training as possible whilst in my various roles.

I was fortunate to arrive at youth work at the time that Howard Sercombe was conducting his series of workshops around the country as a national consultation with a view to developing a Code of Ethics for youth work. Attending his Sydney gathering was a catalyst for my deeper learning in relation to youth work. Whilst there was not a great deal of literature about youth work at that time I accessed whatever material was available, and attended inter-agency meetings and conferences whenever possible to meet like-minds and connect with youth workers outside of my local program or agency. Eventually, it was whilst I was pursuing postgraduate studies some five years into my own youth work journey that a seemingly insignificant event led to my desire to engage in research about youth work, and youth work practice.

I was faced with a conundrum in the course of my daily work that required time for consideration. Having given some thought to the situation and having reached a determination, I stood to move from the office to go to speak to the group of young people in response to the matter and I had an unexpected epiphany. I stood stock still − taken by quiet surprise. I realised that I had 'arrived'. By that I mean that whilst normally with a complex scenario I may have second-guessed myself, tossed to and fro about my decision, my reasoning and perhaps sought a colleague's second opinion. This time I had simply come to a conclusion with little effort or anxiety. And I was quite sure of my response. On that day I realised that I had 'become'. It dawned upon me that I had now worked in the field for some time; had experience across a number of different types of services; had acted consciously as often as I could; and now trusted my own judgment as I drew upon the knowledge acquired and the practice experiences that preceded this moment. And it was this − this sensation of having 'arrived' - that made me wonder if, or when, others also experienced this moment. What had it been like for other youth workers? How had they experienced their youth work journeys? Was it like this for everyone, or was it because I had come in with so much to learn that there had been, indeed, a portal for me step through? But there were no stories, no accounts that I could find.

Hence, I decided to incorporate a research project into my Masters study program. This research project, conducted in 2007, explored youth work as the practice of informal education (Windon, 2011). I felt that I first needed to conduct a study that spoke to, and revealed, what youth work was – how it was defined, and the practice described, by those engaged in the delivery of youth work services and programs. I felt that it was important to turn to the voices of youth workers themselves, as they were not particularly evident within the literature. And so, in following, the intended progression finds me now asking my original question – how do (other) youth workers learn to do what it is that they do? How do they experience their practice journeys? How do they learn and develop their practice?

Purpose of the research

Current youth work literature in Australia continues to debate the professionalisation of youth work and examines the education and training of youth workers in Australia (Maunders & Broadbent, 1995; Wilson, 1995; Bessant 2003; 2004; 2007; 2009a; 2009b; 2011; Sercombe, 1997; 1998; 2000; 2004; 2010; Bessant & Webber, 1999; Maunders, 1999; Corney, 2004; Corney & Broadbent, 2007; Wojecki, 2007; Corney, Broadbent & Darmanin, 2009; Emslie, 2012; Cooper, 2013; Bessant & Emslie, 2014; Cooper, Bessant, Broadbent, Couch, Edwards, Jarvis & Ferguson, 2014). Investigating the lived experiences of youth workers by acquiring first-hand accounts of how youth workers learn and develop their practice will contribute to these discussions. Whilst there exists a great deal of literature regarding young people, their needs, their activities and their concerns; little attention has been given to the practices and experiences of youth workers who deliver the services accessed by young people. Discussions about youth work education and training, and what constitutes professional learning and development, will be enriched by the examination of the lived experiences and professional practices of those youth workers already in the field. The purpose of this study is to contribute to the knowledge base for youth work studies and youth work practice in Australia.

Research questions

The central research question for the study was: How do youth workers learn to become youth workers and develop their professional practice?

The supplementary questions guiding the research were:

- What is it that is being learned?

- How is it being learned?

- What factors support, or hinder, the development of youth work practice?

Significance of the study

As an emerging profession youth work in Australia, whilst dedicated in service to young people, struggles with its own identity and is predominantly reliant upon the contributions of academics to generate discussion and conduct research in order to grow the body of knowledge for the field.

This study provides a platform for the voices of youth work practitioners. Whilst each treads the path of a unique journey, there are elements of their experiences that are shared that are likely to resonate with fellow practitioners. Gaining insight into the daily practices of youth workers, and making explicit the learning experiences of youth workers will lead to a greater understanding of the ways in which youth workers learn and develop their practice. This knowledge will be important for educators and trainers to inform future learning strategies for youth work practitioners, and equally – if not more - important for those who employ and professionally support youth workers in their practice worlds.

Summary

This chapter has presented my personal account of my entry into youth work and the practice experience that was that catalyst for this hermeneutic phenomenological research. The chapter included the background to the research, the purpose of the

research and the research questions. Giving voice to youth work practitioners is central to the significance of the study.

Chapter 2 provides a review of the youth work literature as it relates to youth work in Australia. Also presented is a short review of learning theories that focus upon the social construction of knowledge, along with a brief discussion of workplace learning.

Chapter 3 presents the methodology for the study and explains the hermeneutic phenomenological research design. I describe the procedures, methods and tools applied and utilised for the investigation, detailing the recruitment of participants, data collection and the data analysis.

The findings of this study are presented in four parts in Chapters 4, 5. 6 and 7 and discuss the accounts of the youth worker participants.

Chapter 4 introduces the participants as the backstory of each youth worker and the pathway that brought them to youth work is described with each revealing a pre-disposition for the work. As they transition to the field they tell of their experiences as they come to understand the role and the realities of youth work practice.

Chapter 5 delves deeper into the lived experiences of youth workers as they gain experience. Describing the ways in which youth workers learn and develop their practice, we find practitioners constructing practice knowledge as a result of their experiences; learning new and different ways of doing and being, supported by colleagues and mentors as they find meaning in their work.

Chapter 6 turns to the challenges that practitioner's encounter as a result of engaging in practice, not only as newcomers, but also as a result of change, the unexpected, and the distressing. Youth workers faced an array of challenges of varying degrees of intensity, requiring them to reflect on their practice and determine a response.

Chapter 7 turns to the supports and resources that practitioners relied upon throughout their practice journeys. Access to organisational resources and supports provided youth workers with the means to learn, develop and sustain their practice. As they gained experience they learned to identify and understand the benefits in accessing support and to more readily utilise the resources available to them. Practitioners also

learned the importance of maintaining an awareness of self and state of mind; acknowledging the value in sustaining self in order to sustain their practice.

The interpretation is presented in three parts in Chapters 8, 9 and 10 which provides a deeper level of analysis of the accounts of the youth worker participants.

Chapter 8 considers the lived experiences of youth workers as corporeal beings coming to, and navigating, place. Anticipation, expectations and perceptions find newcomers arriving to the field in different states of preparedness. As they step into their roles, within unpredictable contexts, they seek to make sense of the environment that is 'this place'.

Chapter 9 introduces concepts of space, exploring the spaces within which youth workers engage with others and learn - in relationship. Space is differentiated by spaces of engagement with young people, colleagues and mentors, and the world outside of the immediate place of practice. The knowledge co-constructed within each of these environments informs the primary practice of youth workers with young people.

Chapter 10 draws together the many ways of being, knowing and doing in the becoming of professional practitioners. Coming to the field with intent, the socialisation of many of the youth workers in this study begins upon arrival to place. Practitioners each come to the work with a range of skills and abilities, and a unique body of knowledge. In becoming, through learning and developing their practice and engaging in the co-construction of new knowledge, practitioners craft a personal practice as they acquire expertise and move towards mastery.

In closing I briefly turn to reflections within the literature that correlate with the findings from this study; outline the implications of the research for youth work practice; and present recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER TWO: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

This chapter explores the main themes within the literature pertaining to youth work practice in Australia, theories of learning, and the literature on workplace learning that is relevant to the research. Whilst there has been a recent explosion of literature regarding youth work practice emerging from the United States during the last fifteen years, the practice of youth work, or positive youth development (PYD) as it is known in the US, operates within a substantially different framework to that in Australia and caters to a much broader demographic profile (Brooker, 2014). The youth work tradition in Australia stems from its British heritage (Bowie, 2005), and maintains close parallels with youth work in the United Kingdom in its practice approaches and a philosophy of working with young people who choose to access services and participate in programs on a voluntary basis. There is an extensive body of work that explores youth work and youth work professional practice in the United Kingdom, however, the predominant focus upon the Australian literature here is intentional and specifically highlights the need for more research to be conducted in the youth studies field in Australia.

A history of youth work in Australia and its evolution is presented, along with an overview of definitions and descriptions relating to youth work and youth work practice including a discussion on practice frameworks. The professionalisation of youth work as a continuing debate within the youth work sector in Australia is reviewed through a closer look at the development of codes of ethics around the country, and the various viewpoints on the education and training of youth workers, and the various pathways into youth work. This is followed by an outline of a number of learning theories pertinent to adult learning, and a brief look at the literature on workplace learning.

Youth work

> Currently, youth work in Australia is at a crossroads, with education and training in decline, youth worker roles being subsumed into broader occupations and professions, occupational shortages (especially in rural and remote areas) and a lack of coherent pathways for youth workers. There is also the absence of a shared identity for youth workers, and no agreed national definition of youth work that recognises and articulates the unique and essential service that youth work contributes to the lives of young Australians (Australian Youth Affairs Coalition, 2013, p. 1).

Background

Youth work in Australia has "a tradition that is committed to social justice and social change" (Stuart, 2002, p. 7). Emerging first as a volunteer movement through the "child saving and diversion interventions" (Bowie, 2005, p. 280) of the 1800's, followed by an era of fitness and recreational programs for youth that focused on social and physical wellbeing until the early 1970's (Maunders, 1984; White, 1990; Bessant, 1997), modern youth work of today "operating across often radically different institutional sites, times and communities" (Bessant, 2009, p. 431) "still draws to a large extent from its British heritage and has a strong tradition of government as a key provider of youth services" (Bowie, 2004, p. 279).

Early efforts during the mid-nineteenth century to "protect society from the larrikin scourge" sought to "reform those within its clutches" (Maunders, 1984, p. 43) borne of the fear that if young working-class people were "left unsupervised and without direction" they would "pose an increasing threat" to the "property, security, values and lifestyle" of the ruling middle and upper classes of society (Bowie, 2005, p. 208).

The establishment of "reform schools and other institutions for the care and protection of children and young people" (Bowie, 2005, p. 280); the introduction of denominational education in state schools and the creation of Sunday schools; and the provision of training for boys all sought to "contribute to the technical education of working class youth" (Maunders, 1984, p. 43). Bowie (2005) describes this care and concern for the lives of young people as "a thinly disguised desire to 'save' the eternal souls of the less fortunate children and youth (p. 280). Such rescue and diversionary interventions aimed to control the occupation and activity of working-class youth

whilst also teaching them to be good moral and responsible citizens (Maunders, 1984:
Irving, Maunders & Sherrington, 1995; 1990; Bessant, 1997; Bowie, 2005) instilling
them with "middle-class values and conservative life-styles" (Bowie, 2005, p. 280).

By the 1920's and '30's a number of youth organisations – the Young Communist
League (known later as the Eureka Youth League), the YMCA and YWCA along
with Girl Guides, Boy Scouts and Boys Brigades – offered membership to young
people and provided social and community education and training by using recreation
and leisure activities as a way of occupying and entertaining young people. Still very
much a means of control and influence, youth clubs provided young people with
social experiences and connections with other young people, with the aim of 'keeping
them off the streets' and to role model 'good' citizenship, (Maunders, 1984; Mason,
1987; Bowie, 2005; Bessant, 2012). National Fitness Councils were established prior
to World War II to address and improve the health and fitness of young people,
shifting the focus of youth work (Mason, 1987; Bessant, 1997) and leading to the
introduction of training for volunteer youth leaders who were "providing programs to
meet the needs of the young people attending their clubs" (Mason, 1987, p. 28).

The beginnings of modern day youth work emerged through the 1970's and '80's as
the development of youth policy saw greater levels of government funding for
emergency and long-term residential accommodation for youth (Bowie, 2005), a
community-based system of welfare services for young people, and the Community
Youth Support Scheme to engage and assist young people who were not employed
(Bessant, Sercombe & Watts, 1998). Whilst previously those working with young
people in recreational and leisure activities had predominantly been volunteers, the
establishment of formally funded services across many communities led to a paid
workforce of 'professional' youth workers.

The last few decades have seen "a redefinition of youth work in accordance with the
practice of contemporary social welfare systems" (White, Omelczuk & Underwood,
1991, p. 46) moving beyond a volunteer movement (Sercombe, 2004) with traditional
recreational and leisure activities (Mason, 1987; White et al, 1991; Maunders, 1999;
Brooker, 2014) to a model of service delivery of community welfare support primarily
funded to address issues leading to youth homelessness, disengagement and
unemployment. Youth work in Australia "is a small but significant component of …
the social and community services industry" (Bessant & Webber, 1999, p. 47) that

does not sit neatly within social work, psychology, education or health, but borrows instead from a range of fields. Hence, the last twenty to thirty years have seen youth work in Australia seek to define its identity, articulate its purpose, and to confirm its standing as a distinct (Daughtry, 2011) and unique practice. The national statement on youth work was agreed upon by the states by the close of 2013

> Youth work is a practice that places young people and their interest first. Youth work is a relational practice, where the youth worker operates alongside the young person in their context. Youth work is an empowering practice that advocates for and facilitates a young person's independence, participation in society, connectedness and realisation of their rights. (Australian Youth Affairs Coalition, 2013)

drawing upon earlier definitions of youth work with particular reference to the rights of young people and clearly articulating "the core attributes of youth work and differentiates youth work from other disciplines that work with young people" (AYAC, 2013, p. 1).

Youth Work – Practice

Youth work in Australia focuses on the provision of services for young people (12 – 25 years of age) and aims to address a range of issues that may result in youth disengagement, unemployment and/or homelessness, occupationally existing within the community welfare field (White et al, 1991).   Youth workers engage with young people across a variety of contexts and deliver services and support via local, state and federal government programs, and increasingly, through not-for-profit agencies and organisations.

There is no typical youth work setting as program provision may be delivered via targeted or universal service models, however more often than not youth work aims to

> consider the multiple needs of the young person … even where a particular service may be organised around a specific function … since the notion of service provision usually extends beyond the immediate purpose of a particular agency (White et al, 1991, p. 47).

Programs for young people provide services that are delivered in accordance with the terms of government funding received – most commonly relating to youth accommodation/housing; education, training and employment; juvenile justice

support; drugs and alcohol, mental health, sexual health, school and community engagement /participation (this list being by no means exhaustive). Programs and services are delivered across a range of practice settings (Stuart, 2004; Wojecki, 2007; Bessant, 2012).

Regardless of context, "youth workers have shared a general intent to seek the development of young people as human beings" (Bessant, 2009, p. 431), working with young people in their personal and vocational development. Internationally, "there is widespread consensus that youth work's core purpose is the personal and social development of young people" (Merton et al, 2004, p. 5) and whilst "we cannot point to a narrowly conceived form of youth work possessing commonly agreed characteristics and a single skill set or singular identity" (Bessant, 2009, p. 431) "it is helpful to think of there being competing and different forms of youth work rather than a single youth work with commonly agreed characteristics" (Smith, 1988, p.51).

Youth work "is driven by a multitude of different theories and concepts" (European Youth Work Convention, 2015, p. 18) and consists of a range of practice approaches that Emslie (2016) argues have not yet been adequately examined in the youth work literature (p. 6). With the overarching goal of youth work being "to enhance the ability of young people to identify and develop their capacities, to understand and exercise their rights and responsibilities, and evaluate the context in which they live" (Merton, 2004, p. 41) there still remains no agreement within the literature, nationally or internationally, as to what it is that youth workers actually do (Smith 1988; Davies 2005; Bessant, 2012; Brooker, 2014). Barwick (2006) in her review of issues for youth work in the United Kingdom, New Zealand and Australia concluded that: "youth work in all three countries needs to better define what it is, and what youth workers do (p. 23). Merton (2004) describes the role and function of the youth worker as being to provide young people with opportunities to develop – "to plan activities and interventions with learning in mind and to encourage reflection so that the learning and achievement can be recognised and recorded" (p. 41).

Flowers (1998) identifies this engagement as a form of informal education and stresses that this is not "learning by chance" but a "process where the act of helping people is planned and intentional" (p. 5) facilitating and involving young people in an informal, or non-formal, educative process (Smith, 1988; Jeffs & Smith, 1990, 1996; Banks, 1999; Merton, 2004; Spence, Devanney & Noonan, 2006; Batsleer, 2008;

Sercombe, 2010; Gormally & Colburn, 2014) that is transformative and empowering (Rodd & Stewart, 2009).

An extensive study undertaken in the United Kingdom, Youth Work: Voices of Practice (Spence, Devanney & Noonan, 2006) reached similar conclusions about the nature of youth work to those found throughout the Australian literature:

> There is an underlying unanimity and conceptual clarity across different locations and types of agency that youth work should be characterized as informal, educational and developmental. In practice this demands an holistic approach to young people, which involves building relationships on a voluntary basis (p. 41).

The defining characteristic that echoes consistently throughout descriptions of youth work is the universal approach and holistic way of working with young people. White's (2009) review of two decades of the Australian youth work literature found that regardless of context "what became clear very quickly was that good youth work demands a holistic approach to the total person" (p.2).

Youth Work – A professional relationship

White, Omelczuk & Underwood (1991) defined youth work in terms of the

- target group (young people);

- specific ways of working with young people (content of practice); and

- self-identity of practitioners (consciousness of a specific field of practice) (p. 47)

highlighting that what sets youth work apart from other adults' work with young people is that "youth work attempts to consider the multiple needs of the young person rather than concentrating on any one aspect of their experience" (p. 47).

Sercombe (1997) takes this further and defines youth work as the practice of engaging with young people in a professional relationship in which:

- the young person(s) are the primary constituency, and the mandate given by them has priority;

- the young person(s) are understood as social beings whose lives are shaped in negotiation with their social context; and

- the young person is dealt with holistically (p. 18).

He describes youth work as "a practice in which the youth worker engages the young person as the primary constituent … and works with the whole person in their social context" (p. 18), and where others acknowledge the holistic nature of youth work as well as its diversity, they emphasise that youth work is "responsive to the needs and development of individual clients rather than focused on a specific issue" (Geldens & Bourke, 2006, p. 33).

Youth work is "constituted by a particular kind of relationship between a professional and young people" whereby "youth work practice is distinguished by the priority it gives to the young person as client" (Sercombe, 1997, p. 21). The particular point of difference for youth workers, as compared to other professionals working with young people, is that "youth workers work with the whole person in their social context" (p. 19), embracing an holistic, universal approach rather than addressing only a singular, targeted aspect or circumstance of the young person.

"A fundamental characteristic of youth work is the professional relationship between young people and the worker in which young people's issues are addressed within their social contexts" (Geldens and Bourke, 2006 p. 33) "as members of groups and communities" (Merton, 2004, p. 41). Attention is given to the relationship being mutually determined (Sercombe, 1997) rather than youth workers "doing things to young people to increase their commitment to work and learning" (Smith 2001, p.10).

Good youth work relies on positive and respectful engagement forged over time (Evans & Bourke, 2000; Stuart, 2004; Rodd & Stewart, 2009) that involves

> Building relationships of trust and respect; giving young people the recognition that is often missing in their lives … thus building their confidence and motivation to engage" (Merton, 2004, p.42).

It is widely accepted that it is the relationship that is forged with young people that establishes the foundation upon which all other activity with young people depends. Bond's (2010) extensive review of the literature concludes that

> possibly the most critical aspect of youth centres is the people and the relationships they foster … relationships with youth workers that are positive, respectful and trusting; with peers including young people from different socioeconomic backgrounds, faiths and cultures; with older generations; and the broader community (p. 28).

Youth Work - Practice frameworks

A practice framework, or practice model, is defined as "a conceptual map that brings together, in an accessible design" (Connolly, 2007, p. 825) the philosophical and theoretical factors that outline the service or agency approach to practice. Practice undertakings that underlie service provision, along with the identification of key elements – values, principles, knowledge and techniques – serve as a general 'scaffold', or foundation for practice that can be applied across a range of settings. Underpinned by strong ethical values and informed by quality, evidence-based research, as "a tool for practitioners, a practice framework provides a theoretically informed intervention logic and a set of triggers to support best practice" (Connolly, 2007, p. 825) that is "intended to be continuously developed and improved over time" (Guardian Youth Care, 2013, para. 2).

Cooper & White (1994) present four theoretical models of youth work intervention:

- Treatment Model

- Reform Model

- Advocacy Models (Radical and non-Radical)

- Empowerment Models (Radical and non-Radical) (p. 31-35).

Acknowledging the "conflicting expectations, diverse values, (and) variety of individuals from many social backgrounds" (p. 34), and, at times, the contradictory nature of the models above, Cooper & White (1994) recognise that the "challenge for each youth worker is to develop and continually reassess the theoretical basis for their work" in order to clarify the aims and impact of their practice. They argue

> the specific methods used in youth work ultimately reflect the principles
> and politics of the practitioner, the service agency and the social milieu in
> which the youth work is done (p. 34).

Practice frameworks and resources have been developed by numerous agencies and services, for example: Youth Health Better Practice Framework (NSW Centre for the Advancement of Adolescent Health, 2011) and No Vacancy - Melbourne City Mission's Best Practice Framework for Youth Refuge (Barrett & Cataldo, (2012). Each is customised for working with young people in their particular context. Bond's review of Victoria's youth services and programs acknowledges that whilst there are

many effective services "there is no coherent framework incorporating clear principles and measures [resulting] in inconsistency of service delivery" (Bond, 2010, p. 19). Unlike the United Kingdom and United States, "where major programs are supported by legislation to deliver more integrated services for young people" (Bond. 2010, p. v) resulting in the application of "a more integrated and holistic approach to service for young people" (Bond, 2010, p. 8), Bond rues the lack of "a substantive and well-resourced national youth policy and supportive legislation" (Bond, 2010. p. v) and calls for a Youth Framework "guided by a universal approach", and "the consolidation of the currently fragmented array of referral and assistance programs across portfolios into a single youth support structure" (Bond, 2010. p. 14).

A practice framework incorporates the philosophical and theoretical approaches that guide practice. In addition to codes of ethics, service providers outline their core values within a Mission Statement, or a philosophical statement that articulates a combination of beliefs, values and hopes that reflect the guiding principles underpinning the practice, and outlines the anticipated outcomes of the service delivery of programs to young people.

Theoretical frameworks for youth work draw upon a range of fields of practice which explains the difficulty in constructing and making explicit a 'good fit' theoretical framework to address all contexts within which youth work occurs. As an example, a Framework for Practice developed by a residential service for young people in NSW (Guardian Youthcare, 2013) first outlines a set of foundations derived from

> service, research and evidence-based approaches, while also reflecting the specific and unique characteristics that also distinctively shape, and perhaps help define, the nature, philosophy and spirit of the [organization] (para. 4)

which are "used to shape and guide our thinking and plans for practice". Following, they have identified seventeen fields from which they draw upon to develop the therapeutic theoretical framework that informs their practice. The range of fields shown in Table 2.1 below reveals the complexity of the work, hence, demonstrating the difficulty of clearly articulating 'what it is' that youth workers do, suggesting the varied nature of the work across numerous contexts and providing a view to the barriers that may present in formulating a universal framework for youth work practice.

	Theory / Framework
1	Child Protection
2	Attachment
3	Neurological Impact of Trauma
4	Core Strengths Theory
5	Positive Behaviour Support
6	Child Development
7	Lifespan Development
8	Aboriginal Wellbeing
9	Learning Theories
10	Attachment, Regulation, Competency Framework (ARC)
11	Cultural Competency
12	Risk Management and Offending Behaviour
13	Disability
14	Trauma Informed Practice
15	Motivational Interviewing
16	Mental Health
17	Dialectical Behaviour Therapy

Table 2.1: Core theories, framework and knowledge base (Guardian Youth Care, 2013)

Youth work - The professionalisation debate

The emergence of a definition of youth work in Australia (White et al, 1991; Sercombe, 1997) evolved from early descriptions about youth work and its aims (White et al, 1991; Knight, 1991). Reflections upon the state of youth work, and the educational requirements, options and pathways for youth workers (Irving, Maunders

& Sherrington, 1995; Maunders & Broadbent, 1995; Bessant & Webber, 1999) have generated persistent discussion about the professionalisation of youth work.

Discussion concerning the professionalisation of the sector has led to the development of codes of ethics in most states within Australia. The debate continues still, persistently generating calls for the need to professionalise the youth work industry (Maunders & Broadbent, 1995; Sercombe, 1997; 1998; 2004; Bessant, Sercombe & Watts, 1998; Maunders, 1999; Bessant, 2004; 2005; 2011; Barwick, 2006; Corney & Hoiles, 2006; Corney, Broadbent & Darmanin, 2009; Emslie, 2012) with the "attendant disciplines of a code of ethics, mandatory training, and professional registration" (Sercombe, 2004, p.20).

Youth work - A code of ethics

> Good youth work will include a reflexive element in empowerment. In the process of making young people aware of the accountable relationships in which they are involved, youth workers, teachers and others should also make their own relationship with young people, as an accountable relationship, transparent (Sercombe, 1998, p. 21).

Following years of debate and extensive consultation with youth workers across Australia, a Code of Ethics for Youth Work was developed by Dr Howard Sercombe from 1997-2000 and presented in 2000 in Western Australia at the State Youth Affairs Conference. Following further development and consultation the Code was re-presented in 2002, named The Fairbridge Code, and adopted by the Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia (YACWA) the following year in 2003. Modified versions of The Fairbridge Code were adopted by the Youth Coalition of the ACT in 2003, and endorsed by the NSW Youth Action and Policy Association (YAPA) in 2004; with the Youth Network of Tasmania's (YNOT) Fairbridge informed Youth Ethics Framework produced in 2012. The Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (YACVIC) developed and finalised their own independent code of ethics in 2007 (Corney & Hoiles, 2006; YACVIC, 2007) which differs substantially in its philosophical and ideological considerations.

Whilst publishing a guide for Ethical Youth Work (2009) following debate and discussion in 2007 and 2008, and creating a forum for further discussion at the state

Youth Worker's Conference in 2011, the Youth Affairs Council of South Australia (YACSA) does not appear as yet to have finalised a code of ethics. The Australian Youth Affairs Coalition (AYAC) (2014) reports that the Northern Territory has no peak body and that the Youth Affairs network does not have the capacity "to progress this discussion" (p. 4). The Youth Affairs Network of Queensland (YANQ) reiterated their opposition to the adoption of a code of ethics (Quixley & Doostkhah, 2007) again in 2011 (Network Noise, Youth Affairs Network Queensland Inc., 2011, p.11) and as such, whilst encouraging youth workers in the state to consider and participate in the debate, has made no moves towards developing a code of ethics for the state.

The principles underpinning the YACWA Code of Ethics, detailed below in Table 2.2, provide a well-articulated overview of the aims of youth work and the framework for professional practice with young people. The Code provides a frame of reference with which to develop ethical and safe practice and is informed by the central position that

> the core of youth work practice lies in the relationship with the young person as the primary client, expressed through a commitment to advocacy and healing in their work with the young person and the wider society (Sercombe, 2002).

Principles	Description
Primary Client	Youth workers are clear that the interests of the young people they work with always come first. Where conflict exists between obligations to more than one young person, the youth worker should always try to find solutions that minimise harm, and continue to support the young people involved.
Context	Youth workers work alongside young people in their social context. A wide range of contexts impact on young people's lives, including culture, family, peer group, community and society. Youth work is not limited to facilitating change within the individual young person, but extends to the context in which the young person lives.
Promotes equality	Youth workers' practice promotes equality for all young people, regardless of factors such as age, gender, ethnicity, religion, sexuality, disability, location or socio-economic status.
Empowerment	Youth workers presume that young people are competent in assessing and acting on their interests. The youth worker advocates for and empowers young people by making power relations open and clear; by holding accountable those in a position of power over the young person; by avoiding dependency; and by supporting the young person in the pursuit of their legitimate goals, interests and rights.

Duty of care	The youth worker avoids exposing young people to the likelihood of further harm or injury, and is aware of the safety of others.
Preventing corruption	Youth workers and youth work agencies will not advance themselves and their interests at the expense of young people, and will act to prevent corruption.
A transparent relationship	The role and expectations established between the youth worker and the young person, and the resulting relationship, will be respectful, open and truthful. The interests of other stakeholders will not be hidden from the young person.
Confidentiality	Information provided by young people will not be used against them, nor will it be shared with others without their permission. Young people should be made aware of the limits to confidentiality, and their permission sought for disclosure. Until this happens, the presumption of confidentiality must apply.
Cooperation	Youth workers will seek to cooperate with others in order to secure the best possible outcomes with and for young people. Youth workers will respect the strengths and diversity of roles other than youth work.
Knowledge	Youth workers have a responsibility to keep up to date with the information, resources, knowledges and practices needed to meet their obligations to young people.
Self-awareness	Youth workers are conscious of their own values and interests, and approach difference in those with whom they work with humility and respect.
Boundaries	The youth work relationship is a professional relationship, intentionally limited to protect the young person. Youth workers will maintain the integrity of the limitations of their role in the young person's life.
Self-care	Ethical youth work practice is consistent with preserving the Health and well being of youth workers.
Integrity	Youth workers are loyal to the practice of youth work, not bringing it into disrepute.

Table 2.2: Adapted from Code of Ethics for Youth Workers in W.A. (YACWA, 2003)

The peak body for young people and youth workers, the Australian Youth Affairs Coalition (AYAC), hosted an online national debate in 2011 to progress the conversation about the role of values and ethics in youth work towards "a unified, national understanding" (AYAC, 2014, p.1). Generating further discussion through conferences and conducting a national survey in 2013 – the AYAC National Snapshot of Youth Work - that invited further commentary in regard to ethical conduct and

practice, a Discussion Paper was released by AYAC in 2014 seeking to encourage the sector to re-engage with the national debate. In the same year the Australian government ceased funding for AYAC reducing the capacity of the peak body to continue to drive the debate for consideration of a national code of ethics for youth work. It seems unlikely that such a resolution will be reached – for now.

Youth Work - Education and training

In reviewing the arguments for and against professionalisation of youth work Bessant (2004a) laments the "dearth of research" (p. 19) in youth work and youth studies as a discipline, which is vital if youth work seeks to secure recognition as a unique profession with its own "discrete body of knowledge, skills and expertise" (Bessant, 2004b, p. 28). She suggests that a professionalisation of the industry may lead to "quality education" for youth workers with education providers "required to meet the educational specifications of the professional body" in order to assist in the regulation of youth work practice and the ongoing development of the sector. (p. 19).

A survey of over 100 youth workers in Western Australia 25 years ago (White, Omelczuk & Underwood, 1991b) found that almost half of the respondents had no formal tertiary qualifications, whilst one quarter had completed a youth work course at a tertiary institution (TAFE or University). The remaining youth workers held qualifications in associated studies such as social work, "community welfare studies, child care studies, psychology, residential and community care, and general liberal arts and social science courses" (White et al, 1991, p. 48). A breakdown between metropolitan and rural youth workers demonstrated that almost twice as many metropolitan youth workers had a tertiary qualification and it was suggested that there was difficulty in attracting qualified workers to rural areas, in addition to a lack of available education and training opportunities. The authors found that there were "a significant number of youth workers without qualifications employed in the youth emergency accommodation services" (White et al, 1991, p. 8) but stated that it wasn't clear why, and that "proportionately, the emergency accommodation services and the drop-in centres, employ significantly fewer workers with qualifications in youth work or social work than the other services" (White et al, 1991, p. 8).

The findings of this study reflect the state of youth worker education, training and the general level of qualifications held by youth workers in Australia at that time. The sector had difficulty attracting degree-qualified workers with rates of remuneration substantially below average ordinary wages (Emslie, 2009) – particularly those rates for entry-level frontline roles. Support roles in accommodation services and youth refuges, which often included overnight shifts that were not fully paid, and after-school drop-in centres that often offered only part-time hours or casual positions – both of which may have been viewed as 'baby-sitting' roles - were filled instead by those willing or able to work with young people but lacking the qualifications, skills and experience required for second-tier roles such as case managers and program coordinators. As these support roles usually needed to be filled with some urgency there often was not the luxury of time to await a more qualified candidate, hence, these entry-level roles were often the foot in the door for many unqualified youth workers at that time.

Experience then became currency - the content-filler for a qualification-free resume, a way to get a foot in the door - to gain experience with the possibility of progression. Some choosing to continue within the field used this opportunity to undertake study and gain qualifications related to youth work in order to move into second-tier roles and beyond such as general case management, program coordination and management roles, or associated policy and research roles.

Without a professional body anchoring required qualifications for licensing the practice of youth work in Australia, various routes to participating and engaging in youth work training and professional development have emerged (Wojecki, 2007, p. 222). By the mid-1990's, three states in Australia offered formal education and training specifically designed for youth work (Maunders & Broadbent, 1995) via one to two year Certificate or Diploma study programs provided by the technical and further education (TAFE) sector, or via a three-year Degree program at University. By the mid-2000's youth work degree courses were offered at five universities in Australia (Bowie, 2004). Universities in Western Australia and Victoria continue to offer Youth Work specific degrees, whilst others offer youth studies within degrees such as Community Services, Community Welfare or Human Services degrees. Certificate and Diploma studies in Youth Work continue to be offered through TAFE colleges throughout Australia, as well as through the Commonwealth Youth

Programme (Bowie, 2004) and numerous accredited private colleges and vocational education and training (VET) providers.

The debate that has emerged in terms of preparation for professional practice for youth work concerns the contrast between VET and TAFE competency-based (Broadbent, 1997:1998; Corney, 2004; Emslie, 2009; Bessant, 2012; Cooper, 2013) 'value-neutral' community services training programs that are delivered via certificate and diploma study programs, compared to university degree study programs underpinned by values frameworks (Corney, 2004). The former considered "class and practicum-based" and "largely content/curriculum driven" (Bowie, 2005) are seemingly "aimed at developing skilled technicians rather than ethical and reflective youth work practitioners" (Bowie, 2004, p. 37). In contrast, the youth work degree programs offered by Australian universities (Bowie, 2004; Corney, 2004) are underpinned by theory and practice (Corney, 2004) and regarded as 'value-laden' ~ these values described by Cooper et. al. (2014) as including "a strong commitment to social justice, social equality, democratic leadership and inclusive decision-making" (p. 5).

Bessant (2005) and Corney (2004) argue for a values-based degree-level education that will equip youth workers with a theoretical framework to underpin their practice, making them "better able to serve" (Bessant, 2005, p. 9) the youth work sector in contrast to youth workers receiving competency-based community services training, purportedly, lacking a values framework. Approaching the debate from a VET competency-based perspective Wojecki (2007) contends that successful learning and development lies not only in the specifics of a youth work curriculum, but also in the method of its delivery. He argues that "the required theoretical knowledge, values, skills and attributes linked to desired qualifications" (p. 222) are located within the competencies, and shifts the focus from "the what to the how" of youth work education proposing ways in which "a VET youth work curriculum might be envisioned and delivered" by drawing upon theories of workplace learning in order to demonstrate that "sites of youth work are sites of learning" (p. 223).

Whilst individuals lacking specific youth work qualifications, or associated qualifications, continue to gain employment within the field (Bessant, 2012), the last decade has seen a significant increase in demand for youth workers to come to the role with at least entry-level qualifications, or required to be undertaking study to gain

qualifications specific, or related, to the field. Emslie (2013) emphatically asserts that "to progress professionalization it is critical to require someone to have a specialist youth work education to be able to practice or teach youth work" and that "a quality education has long been considered a precondition for good practice in most fields and youth work should be no different" (p. 132).

> The arguments for and against professionalising youth work lead quickly to the call for youth work to better articulate what it is and what it does. There is a sense that youth workers need to bring more rigour and theoretical underpinning to analysis of their work (Barwick, 2006, p. 5).

The debate about what constitutes quality youth work practitioner training and education is an important one, particularly emphasising the need for an agreement that determines the basic professional requirements for those entering the field. Yet, absent from this discussion are the voices of youth work practitioners, along with accounts of their experiences as they enter and engage in the field of practice. Whilst the arguments for the 'ideal' educational pathway continue, and the calls for professionalisation and the creation of a professional accrediting body strengthen, youth workers from a broad range of educational backgrounds will continue to enter the field (Bessant, 2012). Accounts of their experiences in applying the skills and knowledge with which they arrive have the potential to make an important contribution to the debate.

Youth work – Accounts of practice

As mentioned above, research giving voice to youth workers has been largely absent from the Australian literature as discussion directly relating to the youth worker experience primarily focuses on definitions of youth work; the identity of the youth work practitioner; codes of ethics; youth worker education and training; and ultimately, the professionalisation of the youth work industry. Empirical studies that include youth workers as the central characters, to date, are lacking – despite the intrinsic role that they play in the lives of the young people with whom they work.

Despite there being a plethora of literature on matters relating to young people - their lives, their experiences, and issues that impact upon their lives, accounts of youth work in Australia that explore youth work practice - its aims, what youth work entails

and lived experiences of youth workers – are scarce. Youth work literature, both in Australia and overseas, repeatedly appeals to youth workers to articulate and define their unique educational practice (Flowers, 1998; Bessant, 2004; Spence, 2004; Barwick, 2006; Ord, 2007).

In an investigation of what, and how, youth workers help young people learn Flowers (1998) finds that when youth workers speculate about their practice that, although they "place value on helping young people learn in ways that are described as informal, flexible and creative" (p. 38), they are unclear when asked to "expound on the nature of learning and the benefits young people derive" (p. 40). He finds that whilst "their discourse is strongly optimistic about outcomes … this is belied by rhetoric which is often ambiguous and vague" (p. 40) drawing attention to the need for youth workers to reflect upon, and describe clearly, the ways in which they work. He calls for "more detailed studies of the politics and practice of actual youth work rather than theorising about abstract models of youth work" (p. 40).

Similarly, Evans & Bourke (2000) find that:

> The ambiguity and vagueness are partly a result of the difficulty youth workers have in relating their roles, approaches and styles. Many struggled to explain, or at least had to think about, how they approach youth work (p. 43).

Evans & Bourke (2000) examine the role and nature of relationships in youth work and elicit commentary from youth workers about approaches to their work, and in regards to the difficulties that they encounter in both their work and the work environment. They also discuss youth worker training and analyse ways of working to determine "style" differences between those who could be termed the "carers" and the "professionals" (p. 39). Whilst the youth workers in their study talk about helping young people to learn, and describe youth work as an active process, there is no reference to youth workers as learners, or the development of their practice.

Discussion positioning youth work within an educational framework has come to the fore in Australian youth work, with a view of youth work practice performing an educative role (Rodd & Stewart, 2009), along with explorations of ways in which to engage young people in informal education (Flowers, 1998; Stuart, 2002; Batsleer, 2008). However, this discussion rarely makes mention, or considers, the notion of the youth worker also being a learner, in practice. The focus remains on young people,

the issues and barriers that they face, and the benefits that they derive from engaging with youth work programs and services.

The study conducted by researching practitioners Rodd & Stewart (2009) strayed in this direction and touched on the concept of youth workers as learners as they discussed their findings of the significance of the relationships between youth workers and young people that form the foundation for the work. Whilst discussing the value of youth work "which was grounded in longer-term relationships" they refer to Martin's (2003) 'empowerment process' whereby more established relationships with young people over time can provide "opportunities to foster reciprocal helping, where the youth worker seeks to move into the role of learner and allow the other person to demonstrate their knowledge and skill" (p.8). They go on to report that "there was a strong rejection of the youth worker as 'expert'" and that "youth workers talked about the need to establish genuine reciprocal learning relationships" (p. 8). Here we find the beginnings of recognition of youth workers as learners in practice - open to learning and developing practice, acknowledging learning as a social and interactive process, in tandem with the young people with whom they work.

The few Australian studies undertaken by practitioners that report directly on youth work practice reveal little detail about the day to day lived experiences of youth workers, or the development of their professional practice. Instead the emphasis of practitioner research is on program description, evaluation and practice outcomes – with the primary focus upon the ways in which youth work supports and benefits young people. Within the funding climate that exists at present in Australia for human services, it is reasonable to conclude that agencies and programs feel the pressure of accountability and reporting to funding bodies, particularly with many programs no longer able to rely on recurrent funding, and the requirement to submit tenders for further funding with far more regularity. It is understandable that they would consider that their limited resources would best serve programs and young people by being prioritised and directed to produce evidence-based research demonstrating best practice outcomes and measures, hence positioning themselves for future funding – a point well acknowledged by Rodd & Stewart (2009). They recommend that the youth sector be more explicit in articulating the important aspects of their work, particularly ideas "that are not fully recognised within the current policy environment, which has tended to value short-term measurable outcomes" (p. 10). They call for more research

on the "value of relationships that youth workers establish with young people" in order to assist in the "recognition of the worth of professional youth work in the larger policy and funding context" (p. 10).

This review of the Australian youth work literature locates youth workers in Australia in an emerging profession striving for clarity and certainty in search of an identity, and its purpose. Balanced seemingly between social work and education, youth work is a complex and unique practice that draws upon knowledge from an array of fields. The ongoing debate about the professionalisation of the industry maintains its focus on the education and training of youth work practitioners and emphasises the need for a professional accreditation body to provide guidance and uniformity to strengthen the quality of the practice of youth work in Australia. The next section provides an overview of a number of learning theories that highlight the social nature of learning, followed by a brief discussion of workplace learning.

Learning

In this investigation into how youth workers become youth workers it was helpful to review the learning theories that particularly focus upon the social construction of knowledge. As the study explores the ways in which youth workers learn and develop their practice in the field this brief analysis of social learning theories is presented, followed by a short discussion of workplace learning.

Experiential learning

Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory (ELT) evolved from "the works of prominent twentieth-century scholars who gave experience a central role in their theories of human learning and development" (Kolb, 2015, p. xiii).

Within Kolb's experiential learning theory we find the influence of the works of:

- Dewey (1910/1997), deemed to be the philosophical founder of the experiential educational approach, who argues against the practice whereby

knowledge is 'transmitted' from teacher to student and calls for education to be grounded in real world experiences;

- Vygotsky (1962 /1978), whose social constructivism emphasises the collaborative nature of learning and proposes that learning cannot be separated from its social context, and determines that culture is central to the learning process – indeed, that it is the very force that shapes the learning process; and

- Rogers (1969/1983) who viewed applied learning as significant in that when a student, or learner, is involved in direct interaction with an activity, the experience holds more meaning for the learner.

Dewey (1938) writes that "there is an intimate and necessary relation between the processes of actual experience and education" (p. 7) in that learning occurs through experiential interaction and that each learning experience is unique as it is informed by each student's past experiences. Of equal import for learning to occur is the reflective process whereby the experience, and the consequences of the experience, are critically evaluated by the learner to increase knowledge and develop skills. Vygotsky (1962/1978) also advocates the notion of knowledge construction versus knowledge acquisition and proposes that full development requires social interaction with others, collaborating and communicating about real world problems in real world settings. Learning, he contends, is an active, co-constructive process, that occurs within social contexts as learner's build upon language, skills and experience which is shaped by each individual's culture. Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (1978) posits that the skill of a learner that can be further developed with guidance or collaboration so that it exceeds the range of skill that can be attained by the learner alone. The ZPD – the zone where learning takes place – describes the potential development which the learner is capable of reaching through collaboration with others, or with the guidance of another who is more experienced, or an expert. Rogers (1969 /1983) views the role of the teacher, or other, to be that of a facilitator and he too contends that knowledge is socially constructed and based on real-life experiences within the context of the social environment that serves the needs and wants of the learner. Rogers' student-centred learning:

- has a quality of personal involvement – the whole person in both feeling and cognitive aspects being in the learning event;

- is self-initiated. Even when the impetus or stimulus comes from the outside, the sense of discovery … comes from within;

- is pervasive. It makes a difference in the behaviour, the attitudes, perhaps even the personality of the learner;

- is evaluated by the learner … the locus of evaluation, we might say, resides definitely in the learner; and

- its essence is meaning. When such learning takes place, the element of meaning to the learner is built into the whole experience. (Rogers, 1983, p. 20).

The role of the educator, or mentor in this process, is to facilitate the learning by creating an environment for engagement, taking into account the capabilities and readiness of the learner. Experiential learning theory (Kolb, 1984) asserts that learning is grounded in experience. It is a holistic process whereby "knowledge is created through the transformation of experiences" (p. 38) as learners interact with their environment and use reflection to turn experience into learning (see Figure 2.1);
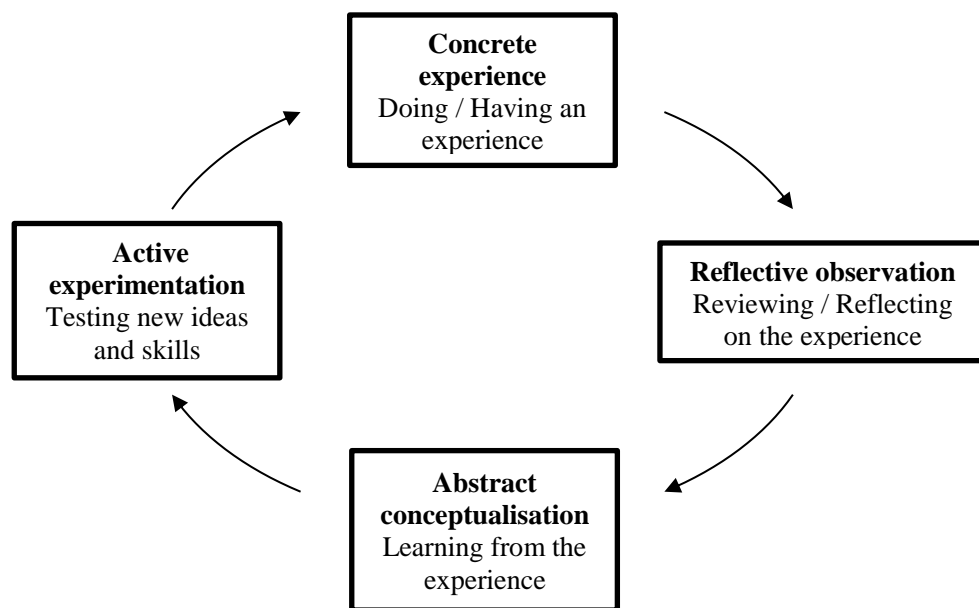
Figure 2.1: Kolb's experiential learning cycle (1984).

the central principle being that "learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from a combination of grasping and transforming experience" (Kolb, 1984: 41).

Learners are involved in a real-world, concrete experience. The learner is then asked to reflect upon this experience. The facilitator guides the learner to review and reflect upon the experience and consider the implications of the experience, and then encourages the learner to contemplate ways that the principles, or skills, that they have learned from reflecting upon the experience can be applied to future situations or actions.

Experience-based learning

Experience-based learning (Andresen, Boud & Cohen, 2000) supports a "participative, learner-centred approach, which places emphasis on direct engagement, rich learning events, and the construction of meaning by learners" (p. 225) relying upon all of the learner's relevant experiences as the foundation for learning. Boud & Walker (1990) developed a model that considers three stages of reflection:

- preparation for experiential events;

- reflection during an experiential event; and

- reflection after the event (p. 66).

The facilitator, or mentor, and the learner are considered to have equal partnership in a collaborative process that assigns considerable agency, control and self-determination to the learner. Experience-based learning (Andresen, Boud & Cohen, 2000) actively uses the learner's past and current learning experiences for new learning. A major element of experience-based learning is the central place of reflection and analysis. They suggest "that learners analyse their experience by reflecting, evaluating and reconstructing the experience … in order to draw meaning from it in light of the prior experience. This review of their experience may then lead to further action" (p. 225).

In contrast to Kolb's learning cycle, where the learner reflects upon an action in order to learn new strategies or ways of acting, Argyris and Schön (1978) conceived an alternate approach whereby the learner is required to reflect critically upon the theory-in-action (Finger & Asun, 2000) and its associated values, beliefs and assumptions in order to develop a new theory of action.

Single-loop learning, described by Argyris and Schön (1978) as a reflexive learning process, occurs when the action of the individual has not achieved the desired outcome resulting in the individual then adjusting the 'action strategy' to achieve a different outcome:

> to look for another strategy that will address and work within the governing variables. In other words, given or chosen goals, values, plans and rules are operationalized rather than questioned (Smith, 2013, para. 12).

Double-loop learning (Argyris & Schön, 1978), whilst still requiring the learner to re-evaluate the 'action strategy', also requires the learner "to question the governing variables themselves, to subject them to critical scrutiny" (Smith, 2013, para. 12) these being the values, principles and assumptions of the learner that influence the development of the action strategies in the first instance. Upon reflection, a change in one or more of these variables may result in a different ways of seeing or understanding. Houchens & Keedy (2009) deemed this approach to be

> superior in that it allows far more creativity and flexibility in developing new strategies to address the ever-changing problems presented by constantly-shifting contexts and circumstances (Houchens & Keedy, 2009, p. 51).

In adopting a reflexive approach learners may find that "it is no longer necessary to go through the entire learning circle in order to develop the theory further. It is sufficient to adjust the theory through double-loop learning" (Finger & Asun, 2000, p. 45).

Situated learning

Lave and Wenger's situated learning theory (1991) asserts that learning occurs as a function of the activity - as a dimension of the social practice in which the learner is engaged. They contend that social interaction is critical for learning whereby "legitimate peripheral participation" – the gradual mastery of knowledge and skill - sees "newcomers" move toward full participation in the socio-cultural practices of a community that embodies certain beliefs and behaviours to be acquired.

> A person's intentions to learn are engaged, and the meaning of learning is configured through the process of becoming a full participant in a socio-cultural practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 29).

Situated learning is unintentional rather than purposeful, where "learning is an integral part of the generative social practice in the lived-in world" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 35).

Communities of practice

Context significantly influences the process of learning. Socio-cultural constructivists consider learning to be predominantly a process of enculturation into a community of practice whereby individuals acquire knowledge, skills, attitudes and values, through participation and negotiation (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Participation

> refers not just to local events of engagement in certain activities with certain people, but to a more encompassing process of being active participants in the practices of social communities and constructing identities in relation to these communities (Wenger, 1999, p.4).

As youth workers enter the field and engage with young people, colleagues and mentors they will acquire knowledge and skills through their situated experiences as participants within communities of practice. As discussed further in Chapter 10, as newcomers to the field practitioners will seek to construct their identities, looking to role models and testing ways of being and doing, evaluating notions of themselves as they learn and craft their own personal practice within the context of their learning experiences.

Workplace Learning

> The emotional dimension of working life requires ongoing attention, which goes well beyond supportive relationships to include a sense of being a valued professional identity that is personally and socially valued (Eraut, 2007, p. 420).

Eraut's (2004) central questions for examining learning in the workplace:

- what is being learned;

- how is it being learned; and

- what are the factors that influence the level and directions of the learning effort? (p. 263)

point to the individual and social perspectives of knowledge and learning; the individual and group learning activities that give rise to learning (p. 266); and the contextual and learning factors that determine the level of learning that occurs in the workplace (p. 270).

The literature explores ways in which people learn in the workplace taking into account prior learning; the social capital that people bring; their experiences and ways of learning; their assumptions and beliefs about learning; their preparedness for engagement and learning in the workplace, and the organisational and structural opportunities for learning that exist there.

Non-formal learning

Increasingly, youth workers come to the workplace with youth work specific qualifications from TAFE or University, arriving with an experience of formal education, in addition to their general schooling. There continue, however, to be those who come to youth work without qualifications, and those who have 'associate' qualifications from other fields in education, health, psychology, recreation, to name a few.

Individuals also arrive at the workplace with a range of skills that have been acquired through 'informal learning', or 'non-formal learning' - a term Eraut (2000) prefers as the contrast to formal learning, rather than the colloquial descriptor (p. 12). Eraut (2002) theorises from a belief that "the majority of human learning does not occur in formal contexts" (p. 12). Marsick & Watkins (1990) demonstrate how informal learning can occur in both formal and non-formal contexts therefore, not limiting non-formal learning to spaces outside of institutions.

Formal learning is deemed by Eraut (2000) to be prescriptive or organised learning with specified outcomes and awards. Non-formal learning is that which "contributes to significant changes in capability or understanding or is associated with non-routine aspects of a new task or encounter" (Eraut, 2002, p. 12), or "integrated learning combined with everyday life and experiences" (Marsick & Volpe, 1999 in Gola, 2009, p. 335). Beckett and Hager (2002) seek to define non-formal learning not as inferior to formal learning, but as 'informal learning in professional practice'.

Eraut (2000) explores the range of learning modes in non-formal learning, with the distinction between them being the level of intention to learn. Upon this continuum he would have sit at one end deliberative learning; implicit learning at the other; and reactive learning somewhere in between. Naturally, there are a number of varying definitions and inclusions within these (Marsick & Watkins, 1990), yet most agree on the primary assumption of intentionality to learn. Colardyn and Bjornavold (2004) challenge the assumption that learning is linked to the learning conscience and contend that the structural context must be conducive for learning to occur (2004, p. 36). This notion is reflected in the workplace learning literature of Billett (2006) and Harteis (2003) who emphasise the active role of the learner in concert with the pedagogic qualities of workplace settings (Harteis & Billett, 2008) highlighting the importance of understanding how workplaces can support and sustain learning environments.

Workplaces as learning spaces

> Formal learning contributes most when it is both relevant and well-timed,
> but still needs further workplace learning before it can be used to best
> effect (Eraut, 2007, p. 419).

Eraut (2004) contends "the majority of learning in the workplace is informal, and involves a combination of learning from other people and learning from personal experience - often both together" (p. 248). Eraut (2007) understands socio-cultural and individual theories of learning to be "complementary rather than competing" whereby

> the cultural perspective on knowledge focuses on knowledge creation as a
> social process, whose outcomes may take the form of codified/reified
> knowledge and/or shared meanings and understandings that have not been
> codified or translated into mediating artifacts (p. 405).

Emphasising the significant role that cultural knowledge "acquired informally through participation in social activities" plays in work-based practices, Eraut (2007) acknowledges that much of it remains tacit, and "is often so 'taken for granted' that people are unaware of its influence on their behaviour" (p. 405). He defines personal knowledge as that which "individual persons bring to situations that enables them to

think, interact and perform" which "incorporates both people's capabilities - what they can do - and the understandings that inform them" (p. 406).

Billett (2011) presents the concept of the 'learning curriculum' that gives credence to the importance of learning experiences in workplace settings (p. 19). Elaborating on the work of Lave (1990) Billett highlights "the importance of the contributions of the social and physical world to individuals' learning" (Brown, Collins & Duguid, 1989; Rogoff, 1990; Salomon, 1997) (p. 21) recognising that "the kinds of activities and interactions that learners engage in are central to what they learn" (Rogoff & Lave, 1984) (p. 21).

Youth workers come to the field from a variety of learning and educational backgrounds. They arrive with uniquely personal experiences of learning, and with a range of skills and knowledge that influence the direction and development of their practice. Much learning takes place outside of formal institutions – predominantly in the workplace. The social aspects of learning are significant as individuals orient to their surrounds, engage and participate in the learning and development process as members of a community of practice.

Summary

This chapter discussed the history of youth work in Australia and reviewed the literature as it pertains to the youth work sector in Australia. Key areas of debate were highlighted in the issues relating to youth work as an emerging profession, particularly in regard to education and training as it supports youth work as professional practice. A brief review of a number of learning theories and a discussion on workplace learning was provided with a particular focus on the social construction of knowledge. The next chapter outlines the methodology selected for the research, and describes the methods and procedures used for the study.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter presents the methodological framework of the research and the methods employed for this study. The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences of youth work practitioners as they navigate the journey of 'becoming' professional youth workers. The study seeks to understand how youth workers learn their craft; to describe their experiences and explore the meaning that they make of these experiences. Whilst uncovering the "practice and professional craft and knowledge embedded in practitioners' practices" (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007, p. 612), the learning journeys, the 'becoming' of the participants, and the meaning that they make of these experiences are revealed.

An overview of the methodology and philosophy that underpins the research begins the chapter followed by a description of the methods and procedures used in this study including the interview design; the selection and recruitment of participants, and the data collection procedures. It then sets out the data analysis processes employed for interpreting the data.

Hermeneutic phenomenology

The methodology selected for use in this study is hermeneutic phenomenology informed by the works of Martin Heidegger (1889 - 1976) and Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900 - 2002). The following provides an overview of the philosophical foundations of hermeneutic phenomenology and presents justification for the method chosen to undertake the research.

> Whenever phenomenology or hermeneutic phenomenology is pursued in the research endeavour … the methodology used needs to follow from and reflect the philosophy chosen as it carries on throughout the project (Laverty, 2003, p. 16).

Phenomenology, the study of the "lived experience" (van Manen, 1997), has evolved through a number of philosophical paradigms making the selection of a particular 'type' of phenomenology somewhat challenging upon first engagement. In coming to an understanding of phenomenology, and determining which 'type' or school of thought would best serve the research, my journey began with Edmund Husserl's (1859 – 1938) pure or transcendental phenomenology; traversed through the more resonant view and philosophy of Heidegger's existential or interpretive phenomenology, and eventually found congruence within the hermeneutical phenomenology of Heidegger and Gadamer. The key challenges throughout this journey were to understand the philosophy underpinning each phenomenological approach; to clearly discern the differences; and to finally be quite certain of the alignment with my own philosophical position and approach. An introduction to the descriptive phenomenology of Husserl and the interpretive phenomenology of Heidegger provides an overview of the two approaches. The work of Gadamer, a student of both Husserl and Heidegger, is then introduced which discusses ways of understanding and interpreting the text which, altogether, demonstrates the rationale for the selection of the methodology for the research.

Phenomenology first emerged as a philosophical movement. The term can be found in the writings of Immanuel Kant's (1724 – 1804) transcendental philosophy, and comes into prominence with George Hegel's (1770 – 1831) publication "Phenomenology of Spirit" (1807). Franz Brentano's (1838 – 1917) descriptive' psychology, which he developed as the study of intentionality as an exact scientific method, significantly influenced the phenomenological movement in the early 20th century.

Husserl

Husserl (1859 – 1938), originally a mathematician, studied psychology and philosophy as a student of Brentano and is considered the 'father' of phenomenology (Polkinghorne, 1983; Cohen, 1987; Koch, 1996). He defined his phenomenology as a science - a descriptive analysis of the essence of pure consciousness (Husserl, 1931).

In seeking to explore the phenomenon, pure phenomenology as a purely descriptive methodology requires the suspension, or bracketing (Husserl, 1931), of the researcher's preconceived assumptions and "various beliefs in the reality of the natural world in order to study the essential structures of the world" (van Manen, 1997, p. 175).

Husserl's 'pure' phenomenology with the requirement to bracket one's assumptions and beliefs, to adopt a neutral stance in relation to the life-world and one's experiences, contrasted sharply with my constructivist approach to the research. Although quite certain that phenomenology, as the study of lived experience, was an ideal methodology for the study, I found it difficult to reconcile the exploration of a phenomenon with an expectation to 'suspend' my own historical and experiential lens. Husserl proposes that the researcher remain outside and detached, to conduct and report.

Heidegger contested the concept of phenomenological reduction in Husserl's pure phenomenology, arguing that it is not possible to detach from the world, to 'bracket' one's beliefs, and that the descriptions encountered from experiences in the 'lifeworld' are in fact interpretations through which the researcher must look to reveal meanings of the phenomena. I agree that it is impossible to entirely suspend one's assumptions and beliefs, or to bracket them consistently. Additionally, I had no desire to remain outside the research process: I brought to the research my curiosity, intrinsic historical interest, and desire to engage in a shared process of data collection, analysis and interpretation through a phenomenological methodology.

Heidegger

Heidegger, initially a student of theology, studied and taught philosophy at Freiburg University in Germany where he became Husserl's assistant in 1919, succeeding to the chair in Philosophy upon Husserl's retirement in 1928. Heidegger's most important and influential publication Being and Time (1927/1962), considered one of the most significant texts of contemporary philosophy, sets out to understand Being and "what determines beings as beings" (p. 6). 'Being' refers to our existence, that we are in existence – a state of being. Heidegger asks what is the being that will give

access to the question of the meaning of Being, and concludes that it can only be that being for whom the question of Being is important, the being for whom Being matters (Heidegger, 1927 / 1962, p. 12). Rejecting Husserl's epistemological approach, rather than seeking to understand phenomena, Heidegger's focus is "the situated meaning of a human in the world" (Laverty, 2003, p. 24) believing that "the primary phenomenon that concerned phenomenology was the meaning of Being (presence in the world) (Dowling, 2007, p. 133).

Husserl focused on consciousness as a singularly existing entity whereas for Heidegger, Being cannot be reduced to one's consciousness of it as one's consciousness is not separate from the world "but a formation of historically lived experience" (Laverty, 2003, p. 24), and that "to ask for the Being of something is to ask for the nature or meaning of that phenomenon" (Dowling, 2007, p. 133). Heidegger explores the lived experience whereby knowledge and understanding becomes an interpretive process rather a purely descriptive process (Laverty, 2003; Dowling, 2007). Heidegger's philosophy puts forth that "the essence of human understanding is hermeneutic, that is, our understanding of the everyday world is derived from our interpretation of it" (Reiners, 2012, p. 2).

Heidegger's phenomenology is "the science of the Being of entities" (1927 / 1962, p. 61) where the descriptions of everyday experiences are interpreted so that the hidden meanings of the phenomena are revealed. Shifting from the epistemological foundations of Husserl's phenomenology, Heidegger's ontological approach positions intentionality within the theory of Being, and considers phenomenology not as a descriptive activity, but as an exercise in reflective interpretation of the way human beings "exist, act or are involved with the world" (van Manen, 1997, p.175). "Being is a phenomena and the nature of that phenomena is that it conceals and hides itself" (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 21).

Heidegger's phenomenology makes no claim of a universal truth or essence, but seeks to delve beneath the described experience of the phenomenon to present a new view through reflection and interpretation.

> Heideggerian phenomenology respects the concept of self-knowing and that truth is as the person sees it and experiences it. There is no one truth: truth is multiple and context-specific (McConnell-Henry, Chapman & Francis, 2011, p. 29).

In reflecting upon and interpreting the descriptions of lived experience, eventually coming to a "clearing" (Heidegger, 1962), reaching "a place of sensible meaning, free of inner contradictions" (Laverty, 2003, p. 25) whereby the essences, the everyday experiences, "the things themselves" are brought to light beyond description, an understanding of what it means to experience the phenomenon is revealed.

Heidegger's divergence from Husserl's pure phenomenology occurs further as he challenges the notion of bracketing – the practice of setting aside one's assumptions and pre-conceived ideas and views (Crotty, 1996; Polit and Beck, 2008) so that the described experiences, the phenomena, can come to light. Heidegger (1927/1962) argues that it is not possible for the researcher to set aside assumptions and beliefs, that in fact it is impossible to separate oneself from the world and one's constructed beliefs and understandings. Giorgi (1994), an adherent to the Husserlian tradition, agrees that "nothing can be accomplished without subjectivity, so its elimination is not the solution" (p. 205). However, rather than bracketing, Heidegger suggests that the assumptions and beliefs of the researcher instead be made explicit, not removed or suspended. Gadamer (1975) asks that we "remain open to the meaning of the other person or text" (p. 268) and that whilst "this kind of sensitivity involves neither "neutrality" with respect to content nor the extinction of one's self … the important thing is to be aware of one's own bias" (p. 268). With the researcher's bias made known, "the text can present itself in all its otherness and thus assert its own truth against one's own fore-meanings" (Gadamer, 1975, p. 269).

Though he asks "What is the meaning and nature of Being?" Heidegger provides no definitive answer but instead explores the nature and meaning of Being - how humans exist in the world. He encapsulates the human consciousness of Being through use of the term "Daesin" which he describes as "that entity which, as Being-in-the-world is an issue for itself" (1927/1962, p. 215), "that entity or aspect of our humanness which is capable of wondering about its own existence and inquiring into its own Being" (van Manen, 1997, p. 176). Daesin exists by being-in-the-world and cannot be separate from the world (Heidegger, 1927/1962). Being-in-the-world is the existence of a Being with others in everyday life – the individual's world, the world as lived and experience by the individual, as constructed by the individual – the lifeworld as lived. All lifeworlds are considered to be unique, and the everyday experiences of each

individual are situated within the context of their unique lifeworlds (van Manen, 1997). Daesin exists in the everyday world of familiarity – at times aware, at other times lost in the everydayness as "Daesin's fundamental tendency is to turn away from himself to a self-forgetful absorption in his occupations in company with other people" (King, 2001, p. 41) whereby the meaning of Being is taken for granted as understood, or simply forgotten, hidden in the busyness of Being, remaining in the shadows, un-illuminated.

> The goal of hermeneutic inquiry is to identify the participants' meanings from the blend of the researcher's understanding of the phenomenon, participant-generated information (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007, p. 177).

In Being-in-the-world, Daesin's expressions of experience and understanding are conveyed and made explicit through language (Heidegger, 1927/1962). Heidegger purports that it is through language that meaning is shared; that Being-in-the-world is described and understood. Through language Daesin is disclosed and allows itself to be seen, projected from its own unique horizon, its own particular position and view of the world that it experiences. As Daesin uses the vehicle of language in order to make itself known, experiences are articulated so that they may be heard and understood. Through the medium of language individuals share their experience, their interpretation of Being-in-the-world. Through language individuals come to understand Being-in-the-world. For Gadamer, this sharing of experiences through a dialogical process leads to the fusion of horizons, resulting in new meanings and new levels of understanding.

Gadamer

> Narratives are a prime research tool that allow immediate access to the participant's world with minimal overlay of the researcher's language, pre-understandings and directive actions (Conroy, 2003, p. 16).

Gadamer, a student of philosophy influenced by Husserl and Heidegger, emphasises the importance of language and dialogue and the significance of the processes and interplay between questions and answers; the dialectical relationship between the interpreter and the text (Polkinghorne, 1983) through the application of the hermeneutic circle that leads to discovery and understanding. Extending upon Heidegger's work Gadamer views hermeneutics "not as developing a procedure of

understanding, but to clarify further the conditions in which understanding itself takes place" (Laverty, 2003, p.25).

> Hermeneutic phenomenology is grounded in the belief that the researcher and the participants come to the investigation with fore-structures of understanding shaped by their respective backgrounds, and in the process of interaction and interpretation they co-generate an understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007, p. 175).

Hermeneutics, from the Greek 'hermeneuein' – to "interpret" or "understand" (Palmer, 1969; Crotty, 1998) is the theory and practice of interpretation. In the current research context, in light of its more modern application, Odman (1988) offers a definition of "the theory and practice of interpretation and understanding (Verstehen) in different kinds of human contexts" (p. 63). "Hermeneutics moves beyond the description or core concepts of the experience and seeks meanings that are embedded in everyday occurrences" (Reiners, 2012, p. 1) and is concerned with how we understand and experience existence (Odman, 1988; 1989).

The main aim of the enquiry is "to uncover and understand uncensored data as it is immediately recounted by the participant" (McConnell-Henry et al, 2011, p. 33). Words of a text can be used to understand and examine the lived experience. With language being "the universal medium in which understanding occurs" (Gadamer, 2004, p. 390) van Manen suggests that it is in "ordinary language" that we find "the incredible variety of richness of human experience" (van Manen, 1997, p. 61).

Interpretation of the text moves beyond the textual description of the lived experience, uncovering the nature and meaning of the experiences that lie beneath the 'silt' - that which, according to Heidegger, impoverishes words and language, alters their meaning and creates a widening disconnect that increases over time, changing the use and meaning of language from the time of its first application. It is important also, in the present, to maintain awareness that the words and the meaning subscribed by one may, despite there being a common language, hold a different meaning for another (Gadamer, 1975).

Heidegger contends "that understanding is a reciprocal activity and proposed the concept of the 'hermeneutic circle' to illustrate this reciprocity" (Dowling, 2007, p. 134). Alvesson and Skoldberg (2009) refer to the same as "the circle of alethic hermeneutics" (p. 91) that, whilst viewed as complementary with, differs from the

hermeneutic circle of traditional objectivist hermeneutics that applies the hermeneutic circle in terms of continual review of the part (of a text) as related to the whole (of a text) in contextual interpretation. In Gadamerian phenomenology "understanding is derived from personal involvement by the researcher in reciprocal processes of interpretation that are inextricably related with one's being-in-the-world" (Dowling, 2007, p. 134) focusing "on meaning that arises from the interpretive interaction between historically produced texts and the reader" (Laverty, 2003, p. 28).

Gadamer's hermeneutic circle describes the dynamic movement between pre-understanding and understanding (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009, p. 92) during the process of interpretation by the researcher. The circle consists of two arcs. The first being the forward arc of projection - from which understanding becomes possible; the second being the return arc that provides space for movement from a fore-understanding to a new understanding and interpretation of the phenomenon under study.

> Hermeneutics must start from the position that a person seeking to understand something has a bond to the subject matter that comes into language through the traditional text and has, or acquires, a connection with the tradition from which it speaks. (Gadamer, 1989, p. 295).

The researcher enters the hermeneutic circle with prejudice, not an impartial position, resulting from the meaning made of their own lived experience in the context of their social, historical and cultural backgrounds. From this position, or stance, the researcher engages and projects into the hermeneutic circle through the lens of their background and understanding and dwells within the space, engaging in a dialogue "which we approach neither as its master, nor by passively surrendering ourselves to it, but on an equal footing" (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009, p. 122) whereby "the standpoint of the other speaks to us and we allow ourselves to be influenced by what we learn" (Wilcke, 2002, p.4).

In the quest toward a new understanding interpretation of the text involves constant revision and a continuous movement from the prior understanding or prejudice of the interpreter in relation to the subject (Gadamer, 1989) "between the familiar and the unfamiliar (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009, p. 121). Gadamer (1989) describes this process of movement from our fore-understanding, our stance of individual prejudice, and projection into an interaction with the phenomenon and the resulting new

understanding as a "fusion of horizons" (p. 307). This fusion of the horizon of the interpreter's prior understanding and the text describes "the encounter between the researcher and the topic of inquiry" (Wilcke, 2002, p. 4) whereby new understandings are reached through the expansion and movement of the hermeneutic circle which is in a constant state of flux as "all understanding emerges with the aim and in a context of meaning, of which the circle invites us to take note" (Grondin, 2003, p. 84). Our horizon, or vantage point – the place from which we first intend to engage with other – is not static but moves continuously as new understanding is realised.

"The horizon is the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point" (Gadamer, 1989, p. 302). As the researcher engages with the horizon of the text it is, in a sense, a conversation - a dialectical relationship, historically and culturally situated. The fusion of horizons, through language, is a process of translation. "Translation allows what is foreign and what is one's own to merge in a new form by defending the point of the other even if it be opposed to one's own view" (Gadamer, 1972/1976, p. 94). Allowing new understandings to come to light, this 'letting the thing be seen from itself' requires starting from a place of uncertainty with an awareness of one's prejudice, with a willingness to be open to the unexpected, to be open to other, to surrender to the possibilities as "a person trying to understand a text is prepared for it to tell him something" (Gadamer, 1989, p. 269).

> Hermeneutic phenomenology therefore appropriates elements of descriptive phenomenology, modifies them and incorporates them with the hermeneutic process of understanding (Wilcke, 2002, p. 3).

Understanding, and the subsequent interpretation, is not considered a single truth or universal fact. As Alvesson and Skoldberg (2009) conclude "the idea is not to reach any final answer - there is no "Shangri-La of knowledge at the end of the road" (p. 122). The result is but one interpretation informed by the horizon of the researcher and influenced by the horizon of the text. It is a co-construction that develops and emerges from the hermeneutic circle of engagement, reflection and interpretation.

The principles of hermeneutic phenomenology inform the methodological framework that underpins the research. As a qualitative research method, phenomenology involves the collection of rich data from the source - those with knowledge and experience of the phenomenon who can provide data about the lived experience of 'being' and 'becoming' a youth worker. This enables a deep exploration of the

phenomenon from a number of perspectives. The hermeneutic approach invites the inclusion of the researcher's stance and considers the prior experiences of the researcher to be an integral part of the research process throughout each phase – preparation, data collection, analysis and interpretation – relying upon this experience and engagement with the data throughout the transitional reflexive process of writing. This allows me to come to the research open to my own experience and understandings. I consider my own experiences, prior understanding, knowledge and membership of the field in which the phenomenon occurs to be an important factor in the research and its processes; particularly as questions arising from my own experience were the catalyst for my engagement in the study. As I make explicit my own experience and understanding I remain open to the fact that there are other experiences and interpretations – questions about which, in fact, triggered the intention for the 'turning toward' this study. Hermeneutic phenomenology engages contextually with the lived experiences - encompassing the experiences of the researcher and the research participants with the resulting interpretation being a co-creation of the meaning of the lived experience of the phenomenon under study. The next section considers the design of the research.

Research design

Aristotle argued "that a method of investigation must take into consideration the nature of the objects to be investigated" (Benner, 1994, p. 8). Qualitative, post-positivist research methodologies are a departure from empirical quantitative, positivist methodologies that focus on finitely measuring how humans react to the world. Qualitative research considers the ways in which humans subjectively experience being in the world; the ways in which they construct meaning as they interact with the world; and explores themes – the commonalities and differences – of human experiences pertaining to particular events, occurrences or phenomena. Qualitative research methods enable researchers to study social and cultural phenomena and examine the patterns of meaning that emerge from the data. This study adopts a constructivist paradigm (Guba & Lincoln, 1994) employing an inductive process whereby information gathered from the participants brings new constructs through their meanings and experiences.

Methodological application

> Interpretive phenomenology cannot be reduced to a set of procedures and techniques, but it nevertheless has a stringent set of disciplines in a scholarly tradition associated with giving the best possible account of the text presented. The interpretation must be auditable and plausible, must offer increased understanding, and must articulate the practices, meanings, concerns and practical knowledge of the world it interprets (Benner, 1994, p. xvii).

The application of phenomenology and hermeneutics has no directed or set method (Gadamer, 1975; van Manen, 1990) however, van Manen suggests that:

> there is a tradition, a body of knowledge and insights" and that "the broad field of phenomenological scholarship can be considered as a set of guides and recommendations for a principled form of inquiry (p. 30).

Van Manen (1997) suggests a "methodological structure" (p. 30), a framework for hermeneutical phenomenological research describing it as being "a dynamic interplay among six research activities:

- turning to a phenomenon

- investigating the phenomenon

- reflecting upon the phenomenon

- describing the phenomenon

- aligning with the phenomenon

- holistic consideration of the phenomenon" (p. 30).

van Manen (1997) urges the researcher to "remain strong" in their "orientation to the fundamental question or notion" (p. 33) and to maintain an avid awareness of "the significance that the parts must play in the total textual structure" (p. 33). Whilst "a certain order is implied in the methodological presentation" he cautions against considering the research as a step-by-step process, but rather understand that any of the aspects may be attended to "intermittently or simultaneously" (p. 34).

Role of the researcher

As a member of the youth work culture and community as a practitioner across a variety of contexts for twelve years, immersed in its social, cultural and political practices, my fieldwork experience provided the foundation, and the catalyst, for this study. My longevity in the field provides a 'desirable level of authentic participation' in the culture (Reason, 1998) to support the investigation, collaboration and articulation of these constructs (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007). As discussed in Chapter 1, the research arises from a moment when it dawned upon me that I had 'arrived' as a youth worker. The moment that I realised that I was 'enough' - that I had 'become' - and that practice complexity could be taken in my stride. Taking the time to reflect upon my journey it occurred to me that no two journeys could possibly have been the same. I wondered how the experience had been for others.

In order to understand the phenomenon, the lived experience, of how one 'becomes' a youth worker, I needed to go to the source – to youth work practitioners – to ask those who have experienced the phenomena about their experiences. Phenomenology stems from going back to the source - to how things are; in the words of Husserl (1970) to "return to the things themselves" (p. 9). I needed to ask youth workers questions that elicited information about how they experienced the phenomenon under study. This could not be uncovered by short-term observation; by gathering information about them; by asking others or making assumptions based upon associated data. I needed to ask them questions about their experiences - beginning from their first notions of becoming a youth worker. I needed to discover their backstory. I needed to ask about their first experiences, their first perceptions, the preconceived ideas and assumptions that they may have held about the phenomenon; and then explore further to learn if, and how, those ideas were upheld, altered or transformed over time as they engaged in, and developed, their practice.

This study established "a renewed contact with original experience" (van Manen, 1997, p. 31) and gives voice to youth work practitioners in the field. Youth workers were interviewed in order to elicit personal, detailed and authentic accounts of the lived experience of 'becoming' a youth worker. The data was analysed, interpreted and co-constructed through engagement with a "hermeneutic circle of understanding" (Laverty, 2003, p. 21) resulting in the creation of a rich textual description of the experience of 'becoming' a youth worker.

The investigation

The remainder of the chapter describes the processes and procedures undertaken to prepare and conduct the research, and provides justification for selection of this particular methodology.

> The "data" of human science research are human experiences (van Manen, 1997, p. 63).

Purpose

The purpose of this hermeneutical phenomenological study was to uncover the essence of how youth workers 'become' youth workers and develop their practice. The knowledge derived from this study may contribute to a field lacking a significant body of research and potentially encourage further inquiry. It will provide an interpretation of youth worker's experiences that may resonate with other individuals on their professional practice journey.

Design

Interpretive phenomenology was selected to explore and describe the participant's experiences of becoming a youth worker. Human beings represent their work through words and language (Heidegger, 1996), and "conversation is the common technique we all use to learn about phenomena in our world" (Fink, 2000, para. 16). Youth workers with experience in the field were identified and interviewed, and their experiences of 'becoming' youth workers were explored as a phenomenon. The study acknowledges the youth work practitioners as real-life participants in the research. The emergent, dynamic design of hermeneutic phenomenology research aims to "ward off any tendency toward constructing a pre-determined set of fixed procedures, techniques and concepts that would rule-govern the research" (van Manen, 1990, p. 29) and was selected so as to reveal patterns drawn from the data with flexibility as the research project developed.

In order to uncover knowledge that reveals the lived experience of youth workers in the field it is essential to give voice to those practitioners living the experience to

provide descriptions about how youth workers undertake and develop their practice and make meaning from their experiences.

The Participants

> There is one guiding principle in selecting the sample for a phenomenological study: all participants must have experienced the phenomenon and must be able to articulate what it is like to have lived that experience (Polit & Beck, 2008, p. 358).

Purposeful sampling strategies set out to "enhance understandings of selected individual's or groups' experience(s)" (Devers & Frankel, 2000, p. 264) and seek out "experiential experts" (Smith, Flower & Larkin, 2009), individuals who are "information rich" (Devers & Frankel, 2000) who offer insight into the phenomenon being investigated (Creswell, 2007).

Opinion within the literature varies with regard to the ideal number of participants for a phenomenological study. Qualitative samples "tend to be small, non-random, and intensively studied" (Polit & Beck, 2012, p. 523) as such "phenomenologists tend to rely on very small samples – typically 10 or fewer participants" (Polit & Beck, 2004, p. 311). Sanders (1982) and Boyd (2001) argue for fewer than 10 participants and believe that small numbers can yield sufficient information. Fink (2000) believes that a large number of participants could "hinder the researcher's ability to get 'in-depth' and miss the opportunity of getting an understanding of each respondent" also advising a limited number of respondents" (para. 19). Morse (2000) considers the quality and amount of useable data and contends that

> there is an inverse relationship between the amount of useable data obtained from each participant and the number of participants. The greater the amount of useable data obtained from each person ... the fewer the number of participants (p. 4).

Engaging in additional interviews to reach a point of saturation "in which a clearer understanding of the experience will not be found through further discussion with participants" (Sandelowski, 1986) is recommended to ensure quality (Bowen, 2008; Kerr, Nixon, & Wild, 2010). However, as Guest, Bunce and Johnson (2006) observe that "although the idea of saturation is helpful at the conceptual level, it provides little

practical guidance for estimating sample sizes for robust research prior to data collection" (p. 59).

Purposive criterion sampling (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Creswell, 2007) was employed for this study whereby "all individuals studied represent people who have experienced the phenomenon" (Creswell, 2007, p. 118) have a work history within the field from which to draw upon. Participants who met the inclusion criteria were contacted and self-selected themselves into the study. Stated criteria for recruitment were: -

- employment in a paid capacity as a youth worker

- work history of direct (face-to-face) service delivery with young people for a minimum of two years in order to have a reasonable period of time and experience in the field in order reference and describe a 'learning journey'.

A total of eight (8) participants who met the inclusion criteria were recruited – drawn from Youth Programs in NSW. These programs were government-funded to deliver a range of youth services via youth centres and outreach programs in the community. Services provided by these programs included mentoring and education support programs, health services, life skills and recreational programs and individual casework support.

Hermeneutic phenomenology makes no claim to represent anyone, or generalise about any group, other than the participants of that particular study rather, the findings are relevant from the perspective of the researcher and the audience as "the intent is not to generalise to a population, but to develop an in-depth exploration of a central phenomenon" (Creswell, 2005, p. 203). It is acknowledged that the purposive sample is not representative (Miles & Huberman, 1994) of any individual or group; and that a representative cohort was neither identified, nor sought. The study did not seek to balance or arrange the cohort by gender, age or location, or seek to specifically recruit youth workers employed across a variety of contexts and settings, or from particular educational backgrounds.

<u>Recruitment</u>

Prior to the commencement of the study consent from the managers of a number of community service youth programs within the research catchment area was sought and secured (Appendix A). An application for permission to conduct the research was submitted to the Human Research Ethics Committee and the notice of approval was received from my Institution (Appendix B) prior to the commencement of the recruitment process. Flyers (Appendix C) were forwarded to a number of youth services with an invitation for youth workers to take part in the research.

Individuals who confirmed interest in participating in the study - either upon initial face-to-face or telephone contact with services in the first instance, or after receiving information via the supplied flyer at the service, were contacted by telephone and/or email and provided with an information sheet that further detailed the study (Appendix D). The voluntary nature of their participation was made explicit and individuals were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time. A total of eight youth work practitioners agreed to participate in the study.

Table 2.1 below provides an overview of the participants

Participant (Pseudonym)	Gender	Formal Education Training	Intentional / 'Accidental' Entry	Years in Practice
Anton	M	-	Accidental	15+
Melinda	F	CERTIFICATE/S (Youth Work) (Community Services)	Intentional	8
Nick	M	DEGREE (Psychology)	Accidental	4

Alex	F	CERTIFICATE (Drug and Alcohol) P/G DIPLOMA (Social Health)	Intentional	6
Nathan	M	DIPLOMA (Community Services) DEGREE (Social Science / Human Services)	Intentional	8
Gary	M	ADV. DIPLOMA (Health)	Accidental	12
Jess	F	DIPLOMA (3) (Community Services) (Drug and Alcohol) (Case management)	Intentional	9
Jon	M	DEGREE (Environmental Science / Human Ecology)	Accidental	10

Table 3.1: Profile of research participants

Interviewing

Kvale (1996) defines the qualitative research interview as "an interview whose purpose is to obtain description of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena." (p.5). In reference to the data gathered during the interview Kvale describes the experience as

> a construction site of knowledge … literally an inter view, an interchange of views between two persons conversing about a theme of mutual interest," where the researcher seeks to "understand the world from the subjects' point of view, to unfold meaning of peoples' experiences (p. 2).

In-depth interviews are used to develop greater understanding. "The research interview is based on the conversations of daily life and is a professional conversation

… a conversation that has a structure and a purpose" (Kvale, 1996, p. 6). Kvale (1996) views the process as "neither an objective nor subjective method" as it is by essence an "intersubjective interaction" (p. 65).

The interview

Ideally, phenomenology calls for a single open-ended question to begin the interview to elicit description of the phenomenon with subsequent 'conversation' stemming from this singular enquiry (Becker, 1992) as opposed to the structured interview that allows for little, if any, flexibility or freedom. Whilst the unstructured interview is considered ideal in a phenomenological enquiry, the semi-structured interview "allows depth to be achieved by providing the opportunity on the part of the interviewer to probe and expand the interviewee's responses" (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p.88) enabling "the researcher and the participant to engage in a dialogue in real time" (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Often employed in phenomenological research the semi-structured interview requires the preparation of an interview schedule or "guide to facilitate a natural flow of conversation, and can include key questions or areas the researcher wants to discuss" (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014, p. 365). The guide simply provides a structure and allows for flexibility on the part of the interviewer (Kvale & Brinkman, 2008) to engage in further questioning whilst maintaining focus throughout the interview (van Manen, 1990).

Eraut (2004) outlines some of the problems associated with conducting interview studies that focus on "how people learned to do what they were (then) doing" (p. 249) finding that:

- informal learning is largely invisible, because much of it is either taken for granted or not recognized as formal learning, thus, respondents lack of awareness of their own learning;

- the resultant knowledge is either tacit or regarded as part of a person's general capability, rather than something that has been learned;

- discourse about learning is dominated by codified, propositional knowledge, so respondents often find it difficult to describe more complex aspects of their work and the nature of the expertise (p. 249).

Similarly, anticipating much of the same, I decided to conduct a semi-structured interview and developed an interview guide proceeding with the assumption that it would benefit both the data collection process i.e. preparedness of questions to guide the interviews; and assist in maintaining the focus on the purpose and intent of the interviews. It was hoped that this would ensure richness of the data in providing some certainty and focus for the interviewees as my own experience informed me that youth workers were generally unused to being asked about, or asked to articulate opinion or ideas about, their profession or practice. A copy of the interview guide was provided to all participants in the days prior to interview, primarily as a courtesy, and to promote a comfortable environment for the participants by revealing the nature of the questions. Most of the participants had not had the opportunity to read through the questions. Some had glanced at the guide prior to interview so were aware of the concepts that would be explored, and a couple of participants had purposefully reviewed the questions and given some consideration to the questions prior to our engagement.

Open-ended questions were formulated to elicit information about the phenomena being researched, seeking authentic accounts of the lived experiences of youth workers - their daily activities in their practice and engagement with young people - aiming to encourage lengthy responses and to generate data about their practice experiences in the field that had the potential to provide, and contribute to, a "rich, thick description" (Cresswell, 2003).

Data collection

The interviews were conducted over a six-month period in 2012. Two of the interviews were postponed as work demands took priority. One participant was a late 'stand-in' for the arranged participant who suddenly and unexpectedly became unavailable and had presented the opportunity to a colleague who did meet the study criteria to take their place. Informed consent was acquired prior to interview (Appendix E) and the voluntary nature of the participation was, again, made explicit. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted, and recorded, using the prepared interview guide (Appendix F) that had been provided via email to participants prior to the scheduled time of interview.

All but one of the interviews was conducted at the workplace of the participants. A quiet, private space was requested and confirmed prior to interview for confidentiality and recording purposes. One participant requested that we conduct the interview at my private work office as it would be better suited, as well as a more convenient location on the agreed date. Prior to each scheduled interview there was a brief period in which I was able to chat informally with the participants before beginning the interview, and all participants appeared comfortable and at ease, if not upon commencement of the interview, within a very short period of time as they engaged in conversation.

The semi-structured interviews allowed the participants and myself to follow pathways that expanded beyond the prepared questions (Creswell, 2007). Each interview was allowed to move tangentially and beyond the prepared guide, with follow-up questions prompting further detail, posed to the participant at appropriate times for clarification, confirmation or to elicit further information or comment with timely periods of silence allowing for the participant to add to their response (van Manen, 1990). The interviews ranged in length of time as planned between and hour, and an hour and a half, with the exception of one extraordinary lengthy interview extending beyond two hours. This final interview was a result of a meandering, wide-ranging conversation between two 'old-timers', having the luxury of time at the end of the day, occasionally drifting off on philosophical tangents that strayed well beyond the purview of the intention of the interview.

The interviews were conducted conversationally using the interview guide to steer and progress the interview. Notes were taken during the interview where key words or phrases were noted during the participants' responses so as not to interrupt the flow of conversation and were then referred to for follow-up questions where relevant or appropriate. The interviews were not hurried or rushed – at times allowing the end of the response to sit, to allow 'space' for further response; to allow the participant time to ponder and perhaps decide to continue, or react, at times, to their own commentary! A respectful space was created whereby responses were not cut through or trampled – with most of the participants appearing comfortable throughout the interview.

Within an hour of each interview I wrote field notes, or memos (Miles & Huberman, 1984), recording my reflection of the experience of the interview – essentially a recollection of my impression of the interview, the interviewee's demeanor and level

of participation, and my perception and feelings about the engagement. Following the first two interviews this reflection led to the addition of two questions to the interview guide (Appendix F) that I felt would be of value, and would further enhance the data collection.

The questions were added to the interview guide as a result of my encounter with Melinda as the second interviewee. I happened to ask in the course of the 'conversation' about where she was headed as a youth worker, and the "any advice for youth workers?' was a rounding out question as the interview came to a close as I had arrived at the same question at the conclusion of the first interview. It was upon reflection after the second interview that I decided to include both of these questions for the rest of the interviews to round out the conversation and complete on a positive projection of hope and aspiration, but also to get an understanding of how youth workers viewed themselves - their strengths, their interests, and what they hoped for themselves for the future having engaged in practice for some time.

Ethical considerations

Research participants were informed about the purpose and design of the study. Informed consent was secured prior to interview, and confidentiality, in that no identifying information would be included in the reporting, was a provision of the agreement to participate. I have adhered to the protection of the identity of the participants to the extent that I have excluded particular details of their lives and experiences that otherwise would have added depth and fascination to their accounts, and my findings, but might more easily identify them in the field. Where I have felt that certain details about an individual would lead to their identification, including names and locations of services where they have worked throughout their journey, I have alternatively described them, or excluded them altogether.

In view of my role as a researching practitioner and member of the youth work community I took a position outside of the sector prior to conducting the research. During my time as a youth worker, whilst aware of the programs from which the participants were selected, I had had a professional connection with only one of these programs that was within the locale that I had worked during my first five years in

youth work. My professional contact with one of the participants of this study during that time had been only in passing, and was quite dated as since that time I had worked in a different region altogether for some years. Whilst we shared knowledge and an understanding of both service regions, and the programs and long serving players within them, I did not feel that this presented a conflict and in no way did I consider this acquaintance influenced or impeded the integrity of the research.

Participants were aware that they could withdraw from the study at any time without obligation or consequence. Consideration was given regarding risk of harm – such as the potential of raising of issues i.e. recollections of experiences or incidents in the workplace that may trigger emotional responses – and ensured that access to a list of support options was available and on-hand should such a situation appear to arise (Patton, 1990).

Data analysis

Phenomenological analysis begins as soon as the first data is collected. The analysis, or rather the explication of the data (Hycner, 1999), is an "investigation of the constituents of a phenomenon while keeping the context of the whole" (p. 161). Explication of the data involves immersion in the data to discover patterns, themes and relationships followed by a "reduction of large interview texts into briefer, more succinct formulations" (Kvale, 1996, p. 192) eventually producing a creative synthesis relying on the researcher's interpretation and insight. It is important to be aware that the researcher is involved in the study, and to accept that "the researcher's experiences and insights are an important part of the inquiry and critical to understanding the phenomenon" (Patton, 2002, p. 40).

Hermeneutic analysis was undertaken by identifying recurring themes within and between cases, and selecting exemplary quotes to illustrate themes (van Manen, 1990). Following the transcription of the data, the interviews were reviewed for further journalling and reflection of the interview in situ, mentally returning to the setting, re-engaging with the participants' stories and their responses.

The transcribed interviews were read a number of times to gain an understanding of each interview and a sense of the emerging themes. Individual transcripts were

repeatedly read throughout the analysis phase, and continually referred to for confirmation throughout the analysis and interpretation in order to reach the deepest understanding of the meaning of the experiences as possible.

1. Each transcription was read through as a "case" and I identified "various aspects (themes) of the individuals' experience" (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007, p. 177). As I engaged with the text I sought to identify the participants' meanings through my understanding of the phenomenon of becoming a youth worker (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007).

2. Each case was re-read and phenomenological themes or "meaning structures of experience" (van Manen, 1997, p. 41) – the essential aspects of the lived experience - were identified. "Understanding occurs through a fusion of horizons, which is a dialectic between the pre- understandings of the research process, the interpretive framework and the sources of information." (Koch, 1995, p. 835). First there was an understanding of what the text was saying, and what it means, followed by an understanding of what that means to me as the researcher. This fusion, this understanding is a 'conversation' between the text and the reader from which new understandings emerge.

3. Exemplary quotes, or thematic statements to illustrate themes, commonalities and contrasts were isolated using the "selective or highlighting approach" (van Manen, 1990, p. 93) as the phenomenological description "is an example composed of examples" (van Manen, 1990, p. 122) created in such a way as to provide the reader with access to a clear sense of the phenomenon.

4. Participating in the "dialogical process of constructing a text (van Manen, 1997, p. 127) the process involved "one of co-construction of the data" with the participants (Laverty, 2003, p. 21) as I, as the researcher, engaged in the "hermeneutic circle of understanding" (Laverty, 2003). Maintaining a focus on the central question and the "overall design of the study" (van Manen, 1997) required mindful dedication. Remaining open to what the text was saying; continuously returning to the parts in order to view the whole of the structure (van Manen, 1997; Crotty, 1998) in light of the themes; and staying true to the accounts and meanings of the text required a particular discipline, and focus, as the interpretation of the phenomenon was crafted.

The presentation of the interpretation of the phenomenon does not seek to make universal claims. It is

> always one interpretation, and no single interpretation of human experience
> will ever exhaust the possibility of yet another complementary, or even
> potentially richer or deeper description (van Manen, 1990, p. 31).

Trustworthiness

In presenting criteria to assess the quality of the interpretation van Manen (1997) states that "human science operates with its own criteria for precision, exactness and rigor" (p. 17) and recommends orientation, strength, richness and depth be the determinants in assessing the trustworthiness, or quality, of the research. Orientation speaks to the engagement of the researcher with the participants and their stories. van Manen (1997) cautions against losing sight of the purpose of the research, or becoming "side-tracked" from the research question (p. 33) The strength of the text lies in the interpretation of the phenomenon and its capacity to express the essence and meanings of the participants' stories with the challenge for the researcher to guard against settling "for preconceived opinions and conceptions" (van Manen, 1997, p. 33). The richness of the text is determined by its quality in that the use of thick description of the phenomena, using ordinary language in its narrative, is best able to articulate and portray lived experiences. The presentation of the phenomenon requires evidence of searching, demonstrating depth by reaching beyond the surface of the data to reveal hidden meanings and understandings of the lived experiences of the participants.

Limitations to generalisability

The small size of the study, the exceptional experience of many of the participants, and the limitation of a single interview does not make claim that the findings and interpretations emerging from this study are representative of the experience of 'becoming' for all youth workers in Australia. Extending this research to a larger sample of the youth work community would add strength to its findings. However, the experiences of the practitioners in this study present an understanding of the

phenomenon of 'becoming' a youth worker that will resonate for some, and may provide valuable insight into, and raise further questions about, the development of professional practice for youth workers in Australia.

Summary

This study used a phenomenological, qualitative research design to explore the experiences of youth work practitioners. Youth worker participants were selected who were currently practicing youth workers who had had a minimum of two years experience of direct contact work in the field. The study was approved by the Ethics Committee at the academic institution overseeing the research, and permissions granted by the Agencies from where the study participants were drawn. Recruitment involved the issuing of flyers to Youth Services and direct contact with Service Managers to secure permissions to approach youth workers within the services. The purposive sample was made up of 8 participants. Upon receipt of signatures for informed consent, semi-structured interviews were conducted that were electronically recorded. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and analysed with the emerging themes articulated and explored in the following chapters.

CHAPTER 4: ORIENTATION

Introduction

The purpose of the research was to develop an understanding of the lived experience of youth workers as they navigate their journey from entry into the sector; learn their craft; and develop their professional practice. This qualitative study used a purposive sample of eight youth work professionals employed in youth work programs in a large Australian city.

The presentation of the findings of this inquiry includes:

- a reflection of the participants' journeys;

- a presentation of the 'invariant structures' - the essential themes; and

- a hermeneutic summary of the essential themes.

Essential themes underlie the shared experience of the phenomenon. In attempting to capture the essential meaning of the lived experience, van Manen asks that we consider:-

Is this phenomenon still the same if we imaginatively change or delete this theme from the phenomenon? Does the phenomenon without this theme lose its fundamental meaning? (van Manen, 1990, p. 107).

Summary of Findings

The central research question:

How do youth workers learn to become youth workers and develop their professional practice?

The aim of the interviews was to elicit the stories and understandings of the participants. I wanted to learn how it was that they had arrived at youth work as a profession; to learn of their experiences of their engagement in practice; and to

discover how each had learned and developed their craft. It was also important through their definitions or descriptions for each to draw out each participant's understanding of what a youth worker is and how they see youth work as a professional practice

The stories of the participants revealed that there were three key phases of practice experience:

- an initial phase upon entry into practice as youth workers adjusted as they stepped into the reality of the work;

- a primary development phase that followed as practitioners gained experience and became grounded in the work; and

- a secondary consolidation phase of development as youth workers crafted their personal mode of practice as a result of their experiences.

Throughout each of these phases the participants spoke of the challenges that they experienced at organisational, professional and personal levels. They demonstrated that these were key learning experiences that contributed to the understandings and development of their practice, which also highlighted the importance of acknowledging, and managing, these experiences well in order to sustain their professional practice.

The findings of the research are presented in four chapters - each focused upon one of the four primary themes emerging from the data. This chapter, Chapter 4, Orientation, explores the back-stories of the participants that reveal a shared ethos – a pre-disposition to the work, a vocational calling as such, and describes the experiences of the practitioners as they first negotiated the reality of the work, and the complexities of the role. Subsequently Chapter 5, Developing practice, delves into the practice experiences described by the participants as they navigated the practice environment and became immersed in the work. Youth workers reveal the ways in which they learn, and the strategies that they develop in response to their learning experiences. Chapter 6, Disorientation, uncovers the challenges and difficulties associated with the engagement in youth work practice for these participants. Youth workers describe a range of experiences that affect their capacity to optimally engage in practice, as well as the result of these impacts. Stemming from these experiences are the ways in which they address and manage these challenges in order to remain in, and continue,

their practice. Finally Chapter 7 - Sustaining practice - speaks to the structural supports and resources that youth workers access as they learn and develop their practice, particularly in the face of the challenges that they encounter throughout their practice journey. As youth work practitioners identify and access these supports, they adopt professional and personal strategies to sustain themselves, and their practice, to ensure their longevity in the field.

Within each of these over-arching themes, further sub-themes, listed below, were identified as core experiences of the journey for youth work practitioners.

Orientation

- Pre-disposition
- Reality of practice
- Understanding the role

Developing practice

- Understanding the work
- Learning the ropes

Disorientation

- Challenges
- Crossroads
- Crisis
- Collapse

Sustaining Practice

- Organisational support
- Professionality
- Wellbeing

The remainder of this chapter takes up with the back-stories of each of the participant youth workers, and explores their experiences as they arrive and orient to the field.

Pre-disposition

Each participant clearly described his or her pathway into youth work. Youth workers first described their back-stories – the reasons, events and rationale that led to their decision to specifically work with young people. It became apparent that, whether they arrived by accident or design, there existed for all an underlying pre-disposition for service - for contribution and connection - a desire to build community. For some, their natural affinity was identified and encouraged by others – subsequently setting in train a series of events that would lead to an unanticipated and unplanned career in youth work.

It is important to note that throughout the reading of the descriptions of the journeys of the participants the reader may get a sense of a story perhaps half –told, particularly in relation to descriptions of the personal and professional backgrounds of the participants, work settings, and in reference to locations. Ethical considerations regarding the protection of the identities of the participants take precedence – especially considering that the participants have been drawn from a single metropolitan locale. The unique nature of the personal and professional lives of each of the participants, if detailed and revealed, could indeed make them easily identifiable. Whilst this account would certainly be richer, and most certainly more fascinating, should the stories of the participants be shared in full, it is more important to uphold the ethical principles of the research endeavour as promised.

Gary's background in human movement and personal training had included working with young people in schools through sports programs, as well as whilst working at the local gym. He was initially invited "to come down and work with some of the young people" at the local youth service. Having already received positive feedback from family and friends regarding his engagement with young people, and subsequently from the local youth service, he decided to give it

> … a bit of a shot … there was a few more opportunities … so I took them on at the time and started to feel that was my place, you know, working with young people … I said I had enjoyed it but I didn't know that was something I wanted to do as a career … [I] started to feel that's where I should be..... (Gary).

Similarly, **Jon**'s entry into youth work came about after he had completed studies at University, returned to the community and set up his own local business. He found himself "quite naturally gravitating towards positions of leadership" within his community, and

> Those positions brought me into contact with people who were a bit younger than me … particularly between 12, 13 and 18, and although I didn't recognise it then, there did seem to be something quite organic happening where there was a natural mentor relationship developing it just seemed to be a very naturalistic thing to do … I'm naturally drawn towards wanting to see the best outcomes for them (Jon).

As funding for a program for young people became available for his community he "was seen as a person who could do it and they gave me an opportunity".

Nathan was working in IT, and whilst the sector was teeming with an overload of workers and reeling from the dotcom bubble, it was suggested to him that he might be interested in doing "some stuff around training" - perhaps changing direction. A friend of his was planning to get into community work, so after some thought Nathan felt that "with some of my background stuff I do have a fair bit of life experience" and enrolled into a Diploma course at TAFE, completing a community placement as part of his studies "and then from there a youth work job came up" . Nathan's personal history contributed to his belief that he would be well-suited and able to work within the field of community services. He explained that he had been

> … a ward of the state … I was out of home and had three different foster families … I guess it's part of that whole process I sort of looked at … obviously the challenges of being in foster care and not having a strong parental figure and growing up without that and still attempting to get an education and things like that (Nathan).

He also recalled that

> … when I was growing up everyone said I was a good listener … but I mean it's empathy - it's partially based on that underlying rapport, which I guess is the heart and soul of any of the helping services … it's also about that empathy, that tapping into what makes you a human being … I think nurses have it … teachers need it a fair bit … there's a lot of different professions that need it (Nathan).

Nathan pursued further qualifications whilst continuing to work on a casual basis as a youth worker across various agencies for the duration of his studies – graduating with a Social Science: Human Services degree.

Echoing Nathan's connection with his experiences when growing up, the assistance and support that **Melinda** had received from youth workers during   her "troubled teenage-hood" inspired her to want "to give something back - from what I was given - so that was why I decided to go and do it". Melinda purposefully undertook studies in youth and community services work.   Undaunted by a challenge, she completed her student placement

> … at a crisis refuge … I put myself straight in there. I just thought I was going to sink or swim, and I enjoyed it that much so I stayed on as a volunteer and then they offered me casual employment (Melinda).

Melinda explained that she worked at the crisis refuge for several months before taking up a casual position with a youth specific service. She continued in this casual position for the duration of her studies. Following graduation Melinda secured a full-time role at another program, returning after a year to take up a full-time position with the Youth service where she currently works. Melinda felt that the challenges that she faced as a young person, and her subsequent recovery from numerous traumas, gave her a unique understanding and desire to "relate to the young people [and] identify easily with those kinds of issues, and where they're coming from".

Jess and **Alex** always had a sense that they wanted to work in the human service field, but both expressed that they had intended to specifically work in the area of Drug and Alcohol education, or counselling, respectively. Jess hoped to focus on harm-minimisation through education and "fell into youth work actually … I really enjoyed it, so I stayed in youth work". This was a result of her student placement where she

> … decided I wanted to work more in prevention, and early intervention, and I thought young people are a really good place to start 'cause that's where people often get into trouble, it's when they make those decisions and don't realise consequences, and so you can work with young people at that point to identify a strong sense of self and a direction (Jess).

Alex's focus also came about as a result of her student placements. So whilst

> … it wasn't youth specifically at first, it was drug and alcohol … I did my placement[s] at a youth counselling service and an adult counselling

service … and the youth one really connected … I just loved it, I just fell in love with it straight away and I decided to stick with youth work (Alex).

Each was driven by their curiosity of the human condition, as well as a need to reach out, understand, and offer care and concern. Jess spoke of when she was younger:

> … growing up always wondering, questioning the world, trying to figure out why some people landed in environments … how they landed up in certain environments and other people didn't; and why some people got given lots of opportunity and others didn't; and I guess that trying to understand the world I also realised that I had a lot of empathy for humanity in general. So I really cared about people, especially people who weren't able to be their best self (Jess).

Alex's inspiration was driven by "this connection with people that I love; like I love, to hear people's stories … I wanted to find out the story behind the behaviours".

Nick had heard the stories - at the other end of the spectrum. Driven, too, by curiosity, and a desire to contribute Nick was open to any possibility that involved harnessing his passion and his range of skills. Following his departure from a previous life path of service, he had spent a number of years working in aged care which

> …gave me a lot of insight about that side of the life cycle, and I wanted to understand the other end as well, you know - what happens (Nick).

Whilst working with at-risk young people was not part of a specific plan, it was an opportunity that appeared just as Nick was preparing to embark on a new path. He had recently completed a degree course in counselling and was engaged in practice with the elderly "so I thought it would be a refreshing change … to work to the other end of the life cycle – something a bit challenging". The youth program position happened along at the perfect time, and place –

> … it was a job that was available, I was ready for it, it kind of ticked all the boxes … they had the kind of fit that I wanted for myself (Nick).

Anton wasn't quite so confident as he hesitantly made contact with an adolescent service that was seeking an artist-in-residence to work within a health service program providing a holistic team approach to working with young people. Anton was an artist first and foremost. He happened to hear of the position, and it was directly suggested to him that he apply, by someone associated with the childcare centre where he was working.

> I feel like on some level I scammed [my way into] that job in a way because I really didn't see why me … I was a little nervous about the idea … I was untrained … In essence it was acknowledging activity as, all expressionistic activity, as sort of a legitimate thing in and of itself with a therapeutic goal. … So, yes, I got that. And then bumbled on from job to job since (Anton).

Anton "bumbled on" through a steady and long lasting commitment to young people over the next 26 years.

Each of the participants in this study were able to identify and express the reasons for their desire to engage with the youth sector, and why they committed themselves to be in and of service to a cohort of young people.

The foundation essence, at the basis of all action and before action begins, is an underlying calling or disposition for the work - a call to service; a call to community that recognises that young people are an important and inherent group within their community. There is recognition and acknowledgement that young, vulnerable and early travellers can find themselves at a crossroads - each with unique circumstances; and that the challenges that they face - the barriers to full participation in their community - are often not of their making, nor within their control.

All of the participants in this study demonstrate a personal connection - an intimate rationale highlighting that they are committed to immersing themselves in the work, to providing support and assistance, and, at times, a compass, for the members of the cohort that they serve.

Reality of practice

> To be quite honest, I don't think anything can actually prepare you … I think everyone has a very one way view [of] thinking coming into the field, and I guess the biggest thing would be - from my experience … I'm coming in thinking I could save the world, and just realising that that's never going to happen (Melinda)

The participants' varied experiences - whether being new to the role as a novice youth worker, whilst not entirely different from each other, were markedly dependent upon their entry pathway to youth work. It became apparent that the level of specific knowledge and/or skills determined which factors were more significant for

individuals as they stepped into the world of practice – i.e. those aspects which were more challenging in their experience of learning to do youth work.

Two branches of reported experiences emerged from the data:-

- the experiences of participants who had planned their pathway into human services and become 'intentional' youth workers,

contrasting with

- the experiences of those participants who had fallen into, or been led to the work – those who were 'accidental' youth workers.

Participants who entered youth work via a planned pathway, having engaged in sector specific tertiary studies, and experienced different challenges as they entered the field as 'intentional' initiates as compared to those who came to youth work via an alternate pathway. The 'accidental' entrants, who arrived without specific knowledge or experience of the sector, whilst definitively initiates, arrived with prior experiences of working in relationship with others in the world.

Until recently, many youth workers came to youth work without specific qualifications. Whilst the last decade at least has seen a persistent movement toward the professionalisation of the sector, with those entering youth work now usually required to hold at minimum a TAFE qualification, for many years general relevant skills or experience were often acceptable for entry level positions. A common pathway for those without qualifications was working first in youth refuges or youth centres as support or recreation workers where turnover and therefore demand for staff was quite high. After a period of time support workers would 'qualify' for youth worker or case manager positions having gained experience and practice knowledge. These would include both those who planned entry into youth work and sought associated casual work to complement, and fund, their period of study, as well as those individuals interested in working with young people who may then seek to gain qualifications after coming to the work.

The 'accidental' youth workers in this study each arrived having had previous work experiences in the world. Although lacking sector-specific training, knowledge, or peripheral membership of the filed, they had, to varying degrees, experiences of other

people-centered working environments prior to coming to youth work. Whilst two of the participants who intentionally pursued human services studies had prior working lives in consumer-focused work before taking up specific studies, their previous roles differed in that the prior work or volunteer experiences of the 'career-switchers' involved 'client-centered' work - working in relationship with children or young people through either community-based engagement or paid employment.

Tertiary programs undertaken by 'intentional' initiates include workplace experiences through various student placements enabling students to make a partial entry into the world of human and community services. Some also gain experience as they engage in casual work within the sector during their period of study. Entry-level qualified initiates, whilst lacking in as much experience in the world, bring to the youth-worker role a broad range of specialised knowledge; an introductory understanding of the sector; and practicum experience. Tertiary pathways into youth work are diverse as practitioners may come from a range of backgrounds - not solely community-based or youth work specific. Practitioners may arrive at youth work with associated qualifications and experience in community services, social work, counselling, psychology, teaching, and/or health – that includes relevant theoretical and/or practicum knowledge and skills.

The small cohort for this study between them arrived with a range of tertiary certificates, diplomas, degrees and post-graduate degrees across a variety of disciplines - the fields of knowledge including social and community services, health science, psychology and social sciences – each relevant and valuable for the multi-faceted, multi-modal role of the youth work practitioner.

Throughout tertiary preparation for professional practice 'intentional' initiates acquire not only skills and knowledge, but also a cultural understanding of the key terms, phraseology and language of the field – the youth and community services sector. Intentional initiates have, during student placements and casual positions during the period of their study, been exposed to the day-to-day processes and experience of the delivery of human services that provides them with the opportunity to become introductorily engaged as provisionary members of their chosen professional community.

'Intentional' initiates benefit from cultural insight and awareness; awareness and knowledge of the general cohort; and differing degrees of the history and knowledge of the background of human services – its social and political history, rationale, current issues, plus current topical and relevant knowledge relating to the sector. Learning about, and within, the context of the 'work' provides student practitioners with the beginnings of networking and connections; an understanding of systems, associated agencies, funding bodies, policies and procedures – the social and political state of affairs for young people and the community services – that provides a starting point, a foundation from which to operate and to advocate for their client cohort. The 'authorised' actioning and developing the art of advocacy and negotiation begins when youth workers take ownership of their first 'qualified' professional role.

Orienting to the practice environment

Upon entry into the youth work practice environment, or when transitioning to a new position or workplace, youth workers experienced a range of challenges as they adjusted to the reality of the work, a new context or a changing environment. The key challenges upon commencement centered on the complexity and the nature of youth work - orienting to the requirements, and understanding the complexity of the work.

> I think it's a big shock factor once you get in here … It's a learning curve
> … I don't think anything prepared me whatsoever for what I was going into
> (Melinda).

For 'accidental' initiates, the challenges were related to both the practical requirements of the role, and the specific skills and processes required to act and function within the environment. Orienting first to the work itself

> A lot of people walk into the job and think that's not what I thought it was
> … (Gary)

as well as understanding the processes involved. For those with no previous exposure to a human services working environment, this meant that most aspects of the role were unknown and unfamiliar thus resulting in a steep learning curve. Jon noted that whilst he arrived at youth work with a great deal of energy, his early interactions with young people certainly "lacked the skills and resources, and an awareness of what's healthy" in terms of professional engagement. Gary realised that he had arrived with

no previous knowledge of the structures and processes involved in the work and found that

> I didn't have the ability to refer and a lot of things like case managing … so a lot of that was very fresh for me … I didn't have the training or necessarily the expertise to carry out that sort of stuff at that stage (Gary)

So instead he focused on engagement, mentoring and general support as he learned the processes and functions of the work. Intentional initiates, despite their sector-specific training and their participation in real-world settings during study placements, reported that they were less than prepared for what they encountered as they oriented to their roles. Melinda had envisaged youth work as an enjoyable pursuit where she would be spending time with young people and engaging in activities

> … something I always viewed being a youth worker is as such a fun job with being able to hang out with young people and doing sorts of fun things … (Melinda)

She was quite unaware that the job would prove to be complex, demanding, unpredictable.

> I really think that; and a lot of people that did the course with me I believe were the same way - thinking that we were just going into such an easy fun job that was going to be great every day, and not even comprehending how intense it would be, or all the failures I think that you face (Melinda).

Melinda found that the reality of the work bore little resemblance to the scenarios and role-plays constructed and enacted in the learning environment of the TAFE college classroom. Whilst concepts and practices were studied and learned, they seem to have remained concepts only - unconnected from reality, outside of tangible real-life, real-world examples or experiences

> I think as much as I talked about dealing with young people with mental illnesses and drug and alcohol issues, I never realised that it was actually real (Melinda).

Melinda acknowledged that everything only became 'real' once she was in the field - engaging with the reality of young people's experiences; upon being confronted with real-world situations.

Understanding and establishing 'boundaries' – a key requirement for professional practice in any of the human services – was another issue raised by Melinda as an unknown before stepping into practice. She commented:

> Boundaries was definitely a big thing for me to start. It was never something that I was ever really taught or comprehended that would be an issue when I started, and I did overstep boundaries a lot of times and faced a lot of issues over it. So I think that's probably the most important thing that I've learned (Melinda).

Jess, however, was very firm about having had an acute awareness of needing to establish very clear boundaries when she first began her youth work practice

> My boundaries are VERY strong … They always were quite strong because I was - I started so young I didn't want those boundaries to be blurred because of the age difference. I was 20 when I started doing youth work so there were people older than me that I was working with … (Jess).

Learning to identify and manage their boundaries from experience was therefore important. Some also cited their own youth as having been a challenging factor as they sought to present themselves in their professional roles:

> Initially, it was definitely the biggest thing I think was my age. I was very close to a lot of the young people's ages that I was working with … so they took me more of as a friend rather than a youth worker. I think it took me that extra bit of time to earn their respect because they would look at me and go, "You're only two years older than me. What are you talking about?" … and sort of assuming that I took drugs and did all sorts of things that their friends did that were my age (Melinda).

Nathan also developed an acute awareness of needing to develop professional boundaries having worked at a crisis centre where he found that it was easy to "get caught up" in the drama.

> Actually, it was something I recognised - it was a case of drawing a line between myself and the client group, because I was young … I was working with a lot of homeless young people; it was very much a case of drawing that line between myself and other people. It was a really big challenge (Nathan)

Nathan reached back with ease to his early youth work days, recognising that as a worker it was important to come to understand that there was a responsibility to the client group, as well as to himself, to establish the grounds for practice – determining

what best practice looks like, and finding the professional balance that works for the youth worker, and the client.

> One of the things is when I was starting I was quite young, and I was close in age to the peer group. (I just said peer group - client group!!! … which was the exact problem - that you were one of their peers) and you could be a peer that knew a little bit more about a certain subject and things like that, but you weren't really different to them. I think I've learned a lot about what distance to set myself as a part of that (Nathan).

Learning professional boundaries includes the need for mindfulness in regards to one's own professional behavior – learning to identify and manage personal and professional responses to the behaviours of those whom you have agreed to assist, support and 'be there' for as part of the 'contract' of service provision.

> …you know, in the real world, outside of youth work ... if somebody was to raise their voice at me I'd put them back in their place – like pretty quickly – and most people in the world would - but when you're in an environment where you're supposed to be the professional you've got to just kind of stay calm, and - and it's really difficult, it's a very challenging thing to do. (Jess).

Melinda experienced a baptism of fire as she took up her first full-time position. Unbeknown to her she entered, and survived, what she was able to later recognise as a test of her mettle, her authenticity, and her commitment

> I was drowning at the deep end. When I was placed in this position, the most [time] workers last[ed] in that area was three days … and I was not aware of any of that … The young people really tried to run me out. They did their best - so I had come out and had my car on bricks. They'd taken my tyres. They'd scratched my windscreen. I've been threatened … all sorts of horrible situations. (Melinda).

Establishing professional boundaries goes beyond the face-to-face interactions in day-to-day practice. Initiates, in particular, spoke of the challenges in finding themselves struggling with the mental and emotional aspects of the work. Caught up in a dilemma of feeling morally obliged and striving to provide support and assistance – doing the work and wanting to do the best that they could – youth workers would find the work bleeding into their after work spaces, at personal cost to themselves. Recognising, and learning to professionally manage the human aspect of the work results from experience and practice review. Upon reflection initiates noted that when they first

began their practice as novice youth workers they found themselves caught up in emotion out of genuine concern for the young people with whom they worked:

> I think when I first started I used to worry a lot, yeah, the worry was the big thing for me … So it was that constant what is going, you know, I was like hang on - that is okay if you are not hearing from them; it is a good thing, just leave it, you know, let them contact you … (Alex)

which could result in trying to be everything, 'rescuer', to everyone, for much of the time – trying to do as much as humanly possible without the luxury of hindsight, or a body of work or professional experience to reflect upon, to determine best practice – for the clients, and for oneself.

Melinda spoke of coming into the work with "a thinking of fix-the-world" subsequently finding that the reality of the work has meant that "I've taken a lot of things home with me that have brought me down". The immediacy and intimate connection of the youth worker to young people, along with the issues and circumstances facing these young people were experiencing, or 'at-risk' of experiencing (harm, homelessness, isolation) can account for the ease with which workers may find themselves immersed and harnessed to the protection and concern for their clients, or 'the cause'. They often found themselves ruminating long after the shift had ended, and the doors had closed, not

> … being able to switch off when I leave work. When I was younger I definitely struggled with that … I found it very difficult to switch off when I got home - so taking a lot of it home with me, emotionally (Jess).

Whilst 'accidental' initiates spoke of a similar need to find balance at later stages in their practice experience, their prior experiences working with people, and learning to adjust to work and workplace environments, had equipped them with requirements for professional workplaces in their approach and ability to build relationships. The challenge for them was in not being equipped with the specific skill-set required for the work, the practicalities of the same, and finding ways of navigating their entry into the unknown.

Those who had fallen into youth work recognised that they lacked sector-specific skills and knowledge:

> I came in with a skill in sport and recreation so I didn't have the ability   to refer [clients] and a lot of case managing stuff like that, so a lot of that was very fresh for me … (Gary)

> I knew what I wanted to achieve, but I perhaps needed to develop a lot more skills to be able to do that (Jon).

They were prepared to explore and use a variety of strategies to learn the skills required to begin to meet the needs of the young people that they were working with.

> I was desperately searching for models I suppose. I was absorbing all these ideas around [youth work] models and I'd try to find the one … I would just click with and went with that … I thought that's what you did (Anton)

Nick came to the work equipped with relevant tertiary qualifications and experience in an associated discipline believing that the skills that he brought to the position could be effectively translated and applied in his new role

> I came with a set of knowledge and a set of ideas, a set of theories, set of interventions, and – they haven't worked – in fact they're like *@#*@#!   I thought I was such a big shot! So you start over again, and you kind   of [get] interested in what other people are doing … (Nick).

For some it was simply a matter of forging their way into the work through necessity or desire – just getting on with the work, gaining practical experience through trial and error, and building an awareness of practice and the requirements. Jon's first role involved program coordination along with regular consultation, liaison and reporting with stakeholders – a role usually requiring some years of experience within the sector.

I had very little training - no academic background, no youth work tertiary education. Basically, I was obviously quite confident, and quite good, and I just kept [getting] more and more responsibilities associated with it. There was a lot involved ... I think I was able to function at a relatively [good] managerial level ... it all happened very quickly … I wouldn't recommend that as a pathway (Jon).

Whilst managing to achieve success, and survive, Jon reported his entry into youth work as being quite a haggard experience, supported only by the skills that he brought to the role – problem solving, communications, relationship building, etc. He felt he was significantly challenged by his lack of experience and understanding of the sector, and the way in which it could operate. However, when it came to engaging

with young people he was enthusiastic and confident, and he simply dived in – keen to gift his energy to the role:

> I had enormous amounts of passion and willpower … if someone set me a task - I would approach it with a lot of determination to try and achieve it, but without a lot of skills and resources … so, I mean I suspect that I may have used an unhealthy [level of] power and control (Jon)

He later recognised that his early practice relied upon the knowledge and life experience that he brought to the role - what he knew at the time - prior to his actions being informed by the acquisition of sector specific knowledge and his practice experiences.

Similarly, Gary sought to contribute as effectively as he could during the early days as he became acquainted with the expectations of the role and the environment. Using the skills and knowledge that others had highlighted as his strengths – leading to his decision to step into youth work - he focused on the elements that he believed that he could enact confidently in the first instance.

> I didn't have the training, or necessarily the expertise to carry out that sort of stuff at that stage so I was more [focused on] mentoring and trying to pass on my experience from myself to young people and to try and be a positive role model (Gary).

Gary had earlier shared that this was a key motivating factor for him becoming involved in youth work. From a personal and community-minded perspective he was keen to apply that which he had found to be beneficial for him as an emerging young man. He believed that there was value in passing on that which he had learned; that had contributed to his own growth – that which he now hoped to share. For Gary, being a positive role model, and providing individual interest, concern and interaction was an important first step in the engagement:

> … understanding what life is about, trying to take what I learned as a kid and trying to give that back to young people … I can't sit here and tell you what it feels to be you, but I can tell you how to prove who you are as a person and the way you think … I think it's just about using all the good things that you got from your background, and learned from other people of course, and putting them out there for young people to see (Gary).

<u>Complexity of the work</u>

Whether an accidental or intentional initiate, youth workers entering the profession for the first time arrive and engage with the work as novices. Whatever their strengths as they enter the arena, youth workers quickly come to understand that the work is challenging, professionally and personally, and that the work, and their understanding of their role within it, evolves as the experience unfolds.

The primary challenge for many is having their pre-conceived notions and assumptions of enacting practice thrown sideways, or turned completely upside down. Notions of a structured, forward-moving engagement with the young people with whom they work are quickly tipped over:

> You can't expect things to happen straight away, no it is not going to happen straight away, it takes time ... you kind of get a bit of frustrated thinking "What is going on?" "Like am I actually doing anything at all?"
>
> … you can be ten steps forward and then ten steps back. (Alex).

So too are notions of being 'in control' of how they engage and deliver their 'service', and the manner in which young people access and engage with youth work services and programs

> … realising that I can't walk [in] thinking I was going to have my own personal thing and everything would be fine; I could just talk them into it and talk them out of things, and everything would be fine and dandy, and it doesn't happen … It has not happened once! (Melinda).

Again, the intensity and confrontation of the work can reach beyond the professional plane at times impacting upon the psyche of the youth worker – sometimes blind-sided by life experiences that could not have been foreseen or expected as they first set out to become a youth worker

> It is a very intense job, and it's not fun and games every day, but there are going to be those values that you have to face - and you got to live through death and all sorts of things. I had no idea, and no comprehension whatsoever, that I would be able to face the death of a young person coming into this field (Melinda).

As youth workers orient to the role and the environment the challenges present quickly, and often. Upon reflection some way down the track, Nick - who first stepped into youth work confident that he was well-armed and more than well-

equipped – articulated the inner self-talk and recriminations that arise in the struggle to grasp one's bearings in an unpredictable and often changing environment

> I've only started to become confident in my work in the last year - the last 12 months - so I've had three years of - often you go in thinking "What the hell am I doing here?". "How am I going to reach this young person?". "Oh god - that's another lost opportunity" … [it] took me a long time to be myself, and kind of trust what I know, and trust what I can offer to young people (Nick).

Understanding the role, and working out what the work is, is a process of discovery through experience and engagement.

> … one of the biggest challenges that take place when people are in community services - you need to take at least a year to start learning how to really make a few changes, so to some of us it's a challenge … I saw that with a lot of youth workers … like a kid going from prep school to high school (Gary).

The learning and the experience is incredibly varied as youth workers engage with young people in many different contexts. A first engagement experience for one youth worker is rarely very similar to that of another. The challenge is made more manifest by the very unique and individual experience of each practitioner who enters the field.

Understanding the role

Regardless of background or entry pathway the variance and complexity of youth work roles, along with different descriptions and approaches to youth work, often sees individuals floundering as they negotiate their own understanding of their role as a practitioner. The struggle to define the role is ongoing and presents itself throughout the various phases of a youth worker's professional career – particularly during the early stages, or as a result of a change of circumstance i.e. when transitioning to a different role or changing context (program, agency, type), or as situations arise that demand further consideration and reflection.

One of the key difficulties in defining the role, and therefore finding clarity in understanding the role, is the multi-dimensional and complex nature of youth work. Whilst Service Agreements determine the goals and aims for Program Delivery, that youth work is a human service by default infers that there exists no clear and simple

method to provide support – just as there is no simple explanation of what it is that youth workers do – hence, the 'art' of youth work is an evolving process for each individual practitioner.

When youth workers are asked to define what a youth worker is, youth workers often struggle to provide? a definition, or explain what it is that they do, no matter their background, nor their length of service.

> I think a youth worker is quite a multi-faceted role … where you can kind of take on the hat of a whole heap of different roles within their life … So there's the coaching and there's the role modelling - I think role modelling's a really important one if you're aware enough of what you're doing … it's actually quite a unique role in itself … I think it's important to understand the role (Jess).

Definitions of youth work in the literature emphasise the professional nature of the role, particularly identifying the relationship between the practitioner and the young person and the holistic framework within which youth work is practiced. Whilst a number of youth workers specifically referred to 'boundaries' demonstrating their understanding that the role is a professional role Jess is very clear about youth workers' need to understand the relationship between themselves and young people as clients.

> ... I think it's really about being a support person, but professional support, that they know that you're there – you're getting paid to be there so … I don't like the concept of people acting like an aunt, or a mother, or a ... you know, a friend because they're not, and it's actually not … I don't think it's very respectful to young people to act like that's what you are when you're actually getting paid to be there in their lives (Jess).

Whilst it is already difficult for those with industry-specific training to define and succinctly describe what it is that youth workers do due to the complex nature of the work, the difficulty for those entering without the specific background knowledge the confusion must surely be magnified as represented by Gary's struggle to identify, or even find, a baseline from which to build any understanding of what it means to be a youth worker:

> … I was finding my way and that was a bit of a challenge - trying to find what [my] purpose was as a youth worker … A lot of different people come on board with a lot of different skill sets and I didn't really

understand what the role of the youth worker was because I was confused … a lot of people talk about what they thought their role was (Gary).

Another part of the confusion is not only the multi-dimensional nature of the role, and that different skills are required and called upon for different roles in different settings, but that there is significant variation between service models, contexts and service delivery environments. Whilst the demands and requirements of youth work vary across the industry – contributing to the unpredictable nature of the role and therefore the difficulty of simplistically describing the work – Anton views as a positive that the 'broad church' of youth work enables individuals from a range of fields to enter, and contribute to, the industry with their unique skills and knowledge.

> One of the good things about youth work is that if you're an anthropologist you can bring that to youth work. If you're a sociologist you can bring that. If you're a teacher, if you're a nurse - you can bring all that to youth work … I think that's very useful. And having done art school, I don't consider that not related. I just consider it peripheral … but still very important to [young people's] personal development, and also development as a worker (Anton).

Whether associated, alternatively qualified or specifically trained the key to understanding the role is to understand the program service model, the cohort and the environment. Past experience is not necessarily a predictor of future experience. Regardless of whether the youth worker is new to the field and the role, or experienced but arriving new to a service, cohort and environment – the key to understanding the role is in understanding the context within which one intends to practice.

> I see the challenge is understanding my role really - I hadn't worked with young people - although I had like a youth group [with a previous role] - but it's this particular population too - it's contextual … I worked with very well much resourced young people. They weren't young people that were in and out of jail, getting in and out of trouble with the police and stuff like that, so it's a different client group. So I guess understanding my role in this context, and then kind of learning what works and what doesn't work, so yeah, the beginning was very much about that (Nick).

Context includes mindfulness about the situated role of the practitioner - the reasons for being in the environment, for engaging with young people. Jess emphasises the importance of having a strong awareness of the professional nature of the role, and

having an informed and holistic understanding of the reasons for the youth worker's place and practice - remembering why the services are there, who they are there for, and understanding that practice is service.

> I think it's really about understanding what the industry is, what the role of the youth worker is, and the fact that it's a professional role. I think a lot of people go into the industry because it's fun, and they think young people are cool - like that's not the right reason for going into the industry. So just having a clearer understanding about what this industry actually *is,* and then making sure that you do develop your skills as much as possible, because there's lots of short courses that can, you know, give you that toolkit to then work with young people (Jess).

Summary

This chapter presented a hermeneutic summary of the first of the four themes emerging from the data in this study. The entry pathways into youth work taken by the participants were described and revealed a pre-disposition for the work as practitioners shared their motivations and intentions. The experiences of the participants as they encountered the realities of practice were explored which highlighted the complexities of the work and the difficulties faced in understanding the role. The next chapter examines definitions and understandings of youth work, and describes the various ways in which youth workers engage in the work and develop their practice.

CHAPTER FIVE: DEVELOPING PRACTICE

> For many years the task of being a worker with young people has become increasingly complex ... Workers with young people are quite often at the forefront of practice with regard to a range of issues, including those associated with ethnicity, gender, social justice, criminal justice, law reform and many others. Put simply we are expected to be highly skilled and well informed on a wide range of breaking areas' (Wilson, 1995 in Grogan, 2004, p. 10).

Introduction

Eraut's research into early career learning at work (2007) asks: -

- What is being learned?

- How is it being learned? and

- What factors affect the level and direction of learning efforts? (p. 404).

Were this a study into a clearly defined and more commonly understood 'profession' it would be logical to next immediately present the findings about how the participants in the study learn and develop their practice as they orient to the field and embark upon their workplace learning trajectory. However, considering the diverse range of work, training and expertise in the youth work field, and that "perceptions of youth work … are underscored by a fundamental lack of understanding about the youth work field" (Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, 2004, p.2) it seems proper to first explore youth work in order to provide some understanding of what it means to be a youth work practitioner; and to understand what is being learned.

Understanding the work

> It takes a lot of self-awareness I think to be a youth worker. You have to know why you're doing what you're doing all the time (Jess).

Youth workers are well able to describe the purpose of their work, but they struggle to clearly articulate what it is that they do. Sercombe (1997), the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (2004) and the Australian Youth Affairs Coalition (2014) provide definitions that speak to what youth work is, whereas often youth workers rather tend to turn their minds to describe the how youth work is done.

> Sercombe (1997) suggests that youth work can be defined as the practice of engaging with young people in holistic manner in a professional relationship in which the young person is the primary client (p.21) and describes youth work as "a practice in which clients, at a point of vulnerability, are engaged in an intentionally limited (and therefore safe) relationship directed towards the transformation of their situation" (Sercombe, 2010, p14).

When asked: What is youth work? or What is a youth worker? - youth workers can be "ambiguous and vague" (Flowers, 1998) and are more able and keen to describe what youth workers do, and how they do it.

> Defining youth work has its limitations. The scope of youth work is very broad with regards to the range and types of issues youth workers address, settings in which youth work takes place, levels of practice, personal values and beliefs, and the models, methods and approaches utilised. Youth work is complex and multifaceted, which is one of the reasons there has been such difficulty in producing a succinct and encapsulating description (Australian Youth Affairs Coalition, 2013, p.2).

Acknowledging the diverse range of work, training and expertise in the youth work field that underlies the difficulty of defining youth work, the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (2004) identifies "at least three factors that make youth work unique:

> Youth work is the only profession with a discreet focus on the age 12-25. Youth workers must have specialist knowledge of the developmental characteristics of adolescence.

Youth work considers youth in the context of broader issues and is not narrowly problem focused.

> Youth work considers the development of the whole person. Youth workers have a range of knowledge of generic and specialist community services such as law, health, schooling, recreation etc" (p.14).

The Australian Youth Affairs Coalition's (2013) National Definition of Youth Work – a result of an extensive national review and broad consultation within the sector - determines that youth work is:

> a practice that places young people and their interests first …

a relational practice, where the youth worker operates alongside the young person in their context.

> an empowering practice that advocates for and facilitates a young person's independence, participation in society, connectedness and realisation of their rights (p. 3)

Defining youth work as such places young people at the centre of youth work practice. The primacy afforded young people in Sercombe's early work (1997) highlights where the agenda must lie when making claims to act in the role as a support and advocate for young people. Second, the emphasis and clarification about the relationship – again – highlights where the agenda lies, and whose agency is being promoted. Recognition of both of these is then reiterated, and acknowledged as being enacted in the physical, social and political space that young people occupy.

What is a youth worker?

> Basically, I think just a guide to help young people through (Melinda).

In order to understand what is being learned as youth workers 'become' youth workers, participants were asked to define, or describe, a youth worker. Whilst responses rarely resulted in a clear definition of what a youth worker is – there were echoes that reflected or resonated with elements presented in youth work literature.

First and foremost, the obvious identifier being the reference to working with young people was clear – that youth work was "defined by the target audience, so defined by that we work with youth" (Nathan). Nick offered that "there's a job description that defines your work, and there's a program … limited by funding conditions – that you can work between this age and that age … so [youth work is] partly defined by those structures". Whilst no further 'formal' definitions were made mention of, young people as individuals or as a cohort were naturally central to the 'definitions' or descriptions that followed.

> Participants described a youth worker as "someone there to support young people and advocate for young people' (Melinda) who is "able to communicate with young people - so show an interest and actively listen" (Jon).

> … a youth worker is someone who is a mentor for young people and has the ability and skills to help young people achieve what they want in life … giving that sort of support … role-modelling … being able to give young people some skill set for when they move on from your service to manage some of life challenges and do things themselves … (Gary).

The struggle to articulate exactly *what a youth worker is* is apparent as participants tried to provide a definition that succinctly described a youth worker, often tending off on a tangent. As discovered by many before them, to draw upon one or several aspects of the work in search of a definition does not satisfy the aim of encapsulating the totality of the many facets of the work or the role, hence summaries - whilst unsatisfactory - are the result of the best offering available in the moment i.e. "mainly it's about supporting young people to develop the skills to be independent - being a positive influence on their life" (Jess).

Anton provided a more over-arching view of the aims of practitioners that spoke more to capacity, yet placed the role in its professional context:

> … someone who engages with young people on the basis of a couple of things: a model, a goal and a genuine interest in young people. So I think that they've got a way that they want to do something, they've got something they want to achieve and they've got some sort of official means or a support capacity to do it (Anton).

There was a strong focus on the professional relationship defining a youth worker throughout whereby "it's really about being a support person, but professional support; that they know that you're there – you're getting paid to be there" (Jess) and acknowledging that young people's interests are central to the work:

> There's a lot of different ways of defining it in terms of professional models … different practice perspectives that you can have on any individual problem … it's something that is defined by the needs of the target group (Nathan).

As youth workers seek to serve young people in their context … "we just work with people where they're at" (Nick) - a familiar refrain in the lexicon of the field - within the limits and structures in which practitioners are professionally positioned.

In their attempts to define a youth worker participants tripped quickly to descriptions of aspects of the role of the youth worker as they sought to explain what a youth worker is with descriptions of what it is that a youth worker does.

> I mean you act as an advocate, you act as sort of a mentor, you act in a professional capacity, which means having those boundaries … and I think that's actually a very important part of the role defined by what those boundaries are - setup in professional practice (Nathan).

It is difficult to simplistically define a youth worker or to easily describe what it is that they do, particularly considering the range of contexts within which youth workers engage with young people and the different mandates for service delivery held by the range of programs available to young people. The descriptions provided by the participants communicate the underlying skills and attributes required for practice, and whilst seemingly vague they form the foundation for the how of youth work. Interestingly, there was little description of the practical work – the activity of the work – but more so references were made to what builds the foundation that provides a platform from which to do the work. These attributes were considered core as they focused on the engagement with young people; developing relationships with young people, and by inference it is from these that the practical work flows.

Youth workers were very clear about what they believed makes for 'a good youth worker', with the primary concern remaining focused on practice that provides an enriching experience for young people. Jon talked in particular about the importance of "good interpersonal communication skills" and those who are able to be

> a little bit strategic in the way they develop relationships with youngsters … they either can intuitively do that really well, or they can be quite strategic about it and recognise, and be that one that says "Don't ask that question now (Jon).

In that same frame, speaking about the connections that become the building blocks or foundation, of relationships with young people Jon reflected on others he had observed engaging with young people, and also upon his own experience as a young person, and believed that young people have "an eagerness to learn, and to become an adult" and

> … actually hunger for role models, mentors … people who are good to you and kind; they're also passionate and willing to show you things and to talk to you and to spend time with you … I think it's complex. A youth

worker is someone who has time for young people, is able to communicate with them in a way that gives the young person a sense that that person is genuinely focused on them and is not just glibly sharing his knowledge or whatever. They're actually like having human interaction. I really get the feeling that young people recognise that and that makes a big difference (Jon).

Participants emphasised not only the importance of having the ability to communicate well, but also suggested that there is required a skillful measure with each individual, with each engagement, requiring one to learn to use that skill mindfully, with intention, tailored toward each personality, circumstance and situation.

Often it's about being someone that they can just talk to and bounce ideas off and that listens to them; and also things around advocacy … because they sort of trust you to listen to those problems as well (Nathan).

Participants emphasised that the ability to communicate alone is not enough. What is important to practice in youth work is the ability to use communication to build professional relationships that provide a sense of safety and personal space; that convey a respectful understanding and genuine concern for young people; that seek to assure young people that their 'mandate' is the priority.

A good youth worker is someone who has reasonably good interpersonal communications skills … they're a little bit strategic in the way they develop relationships with youngsters … Some of the young people want to sit down and have that conversation right now and then, but some don't, and some just need you to be around, and it might be weeks or months before they feel safe and trusting. So I think someone who can intuitively do that really well, or they can be quite strategic about it and recognise and be that one that says – "Don't ask that question now" (Jon).

The narrative of the youth workers is infused with a sense of needing to 'keep it real' – that engagement with young people is a two-way street, and that building trust requires youth workers to "approach [with a] really non-judgmental manner" as young people "are always trying to - they will sniff you, and they will get you straight away, and if you are trying to be fake, or not real, they will know it" (Alex). Whilst constructing a professional relationship, and in doing so demonstrating that the needs of the young people are central to the working relationship, Anton suggested that a "good youth worker" is

someone who I think is effective, has a level of humility, or someone who's genuinely able to give service. Service is a really important notion around

youth work … it's all small, slow, quality service, makes for huge changes in individuals overtime, I really believe that. So the notion of service, I think it's a really important one.

What is it that youth workers do?

Again, when asked directly to describe what youth workers do, due to the varied nature and complexity of the work, along with the differing program types and the range of service models of delivery, the youth workers could be vague as they found it difficult to describe all that they did in simplistic terms:

> … the actual work that you're doing on a day-to-day basis … can be as varied as being sort of a crisis, first aid kind of thing to community development work; to first-contact counselling; to life skills; to job seeking …or just making documentaries (Nathan).

Youth workers generally reached for broad descriptions to convey ideas of what the work is about and what it achieves as: "You're a referral point, you do accidental counselling … it's such a unique role" (Jess). Alternatively they provided an overview of what the work encompassed: "I think that often we function as a sort of form of alternative education" (Nathan). They often struggled to provide a succinct description for the role that involves a range of aims and activities:

> … you are connecting with young people, and you are basically independently working … you are helping them with some of the stuff that parents should be helping them with - things like basically new skills and just getting ID, birth certificates, driver's licenses … and also kind of just being a constant in a way … (Alex).

In trying to explain the work practitioners described not so much the detail of the work, but spoke instead of the ways in which they sought to provide an environment for engagement with young people, the space within which the work can be done.

> … so, if they come into the space, firstly it's a secure space that you're supervising, and secondly the conversations that you can have in here can be quite positive with young people; giving them opportunities to showcase their talents, providing those spaces for those opportunities, and also engaging with young people so that you can potentially educate them around issues that are really important to them in a way that engages them that is different to school or parents - being non-judgmental, and just being open to listening to what's going on for them (Jess).

The focus on creating a foundation to enable effective engagement is a primary theme as youth workers describe the practice of being a youth worker. They also convey the uncertain and unpredictable nature of the work which ultimately finds practitioners dispensing with expectations, and rather learning to listen, responding to moments and identifying opportunities to engage. As Jon suggested:

> … once you build a relationship on trust and rapport, and engage them, their interest, they're so much more likely to listen and engage … It takes a long time - that process of trusting, rapport building and listening … There's often these moments where there's like quite a … there's a breakthrough moment in terms of trust and relationships, and often they're serendipitous. They don't only happen while you're shooting baskets, so it might be actually sitting down in a more formal meeting, a casework meeting or something, and you just realise the relationship, level of trust and the level of what's being communicated increases dramatically; then they'll open, and stay open (Jon).

Perhaps the difficulty of describing the work is due to the uniquely individual relationships that develop, with each young person presenting with unique circumstances and selves. Perhaps a different approach in the asking might provide a more detailed description of the work. Youth workers are keen storytellers - their passion emerges as they share anecdotes, the human stories. Youth workers also seem more comfortable talking about the 'other', and less certain when asked to describe themselves. Nevertheless, the descriptions of youth work provided by the participants in this study unwaveringly place young people at the centre of their practice; emphasise that relationship building forms the core of their work; and assert that the role of the youth worker is essentially that of supporter, advisor, navigator, educator and advocate as they work with young people within a holistic framework.

Learning the ropes

Having been asked to define or describe a youth worker, and to then describe the work that they do – in general, and then more specifically – youth workers were prompted to share their views and experiences of learning to become a youth worker:

- How did you learn to do the things that you describe?

- How have you changed in the way you work since you first began?

- Who have you learned from in your time as a youth worker?

- What advice would you offer to others coming into youth work?

Each of these questions sought to generate or elicit responses that would reveal their experiences of learning as they learned to 'become' a youth worker, what their lived experience had been to now.

Eraut (2004) writes of the difficulties of gleaning information from interviews with practitioners when seeking to uncover how people learn in the workplace - particularly in relation to understanding and identifying what has been learned, and how it has been learned. Entrenched understandings of 'learning', embedded in the language of formal learning and propositional knowledge, along with the challenge of recognising or giving value to tacit knowledge that is often mistaken as everyday, ordinary knowledge, can make it difficult for practitioners to draw out and "describe more complex aspects of their work and the nature of the expertise" (p. 249).

Whilst Eraut's propositions ring true to a certain extent, participants managed to convey their experiences and a reveal a strong sense of what a youth worker is; and their descriptions of the work, along with particular examples of practice, revealed the meaning of their experiences as they reflected upon their learning and development as intentional, conscientious practitioners.

How the work is learned

Participants reported that engagement, experience and immersion in the youth work role provided the foundation for their learning. Beyond initial orientation to the role, beyond the early days of adapting to the environment, engaging in the work generated an openness to possibilities – in time coming to an understanding that there was no single learning pathway; no given or known 'right' or 'wrong'; and a growing realisation that the role required flexibility, creativity, adaptability – an holistic and fluid approach. Personal practice methods and design emerged over time with practitioners primarily learning that the client body as a cohort, and individual young people, were the main contributors and determinants of what, and how, they learned

and enacted their practice – in a sense professional learning and development was ultimately client-led.

In the first instance novice youth workers looked to mentors, and the examples and support of others – youth work colleagues in particular – in tandem with their engagement in the role that became the experience upon which they drew to reflect and further learn.

Mentorship

> It was about 4 years … David was an excellent mentor and that helped me stay with youth health … a lot of the basic knowledge that I picked up during that process certainly - I think it's in a very good state. I mean my group work activities, and I do a lot of group work, my training is certainly richer in that sort of activity. (Anton).

Colleagues in the workplace are the primary source of support and learning for novices as they enter the field. The majority of participants' responses in the first instance referred to mentoring from other staff and learning from colleagues within the workplace – those who have been in the position for some time:

> Obviously my colleagues are a big thing - the people I work with are so talented and have so much experience, more experience than me, and so I really pick up on their skills … (Alex).

Working as part of a team of youth workers provides opportunities for "observing other workers", to receive "training through all the other workers", learning through "debriefs" and by "receiving "feedback".

> We do reviews; we do breaks with each other - we are quite supportive, so you know we have teams … We meet every Tuesday so we discuss clients, how we are going and where we are going … (Alex).

As new youth workers worked alongside experienced practitioners they reported learning through observation particularly noting "what's working …that other people are doing", and "picking and choosing the things that you've seen them do and say that have worked really well". The importance and benefit of learning from others already in the field was reinforced by Gary when asked what advice he would give to others coming into the field:

> I think you should try and put yourself in the position of working with someone with experience [who] can show you - I think that's a big part of becoming a good role model and a good youth worker … go out there and learn (Gary).

Anton benefitted substantially from the advice and counsel he received through regular association and contact with a colleague who held a similar position at nearby program for several months

> … we got to talk about so many things. And she's very good. So, I think that was - and in fact probably in terms of where I was struggling with at the time in terms of sort of advising staff … I think it was better for me than probably study would have been because it was a very active learning (Anton).

Learning on the job

> I threw myself at the deep end … sink or swim. I think experiences are the main things - most definitely. Trial and error … (Melinda).

Experiences provided the key learning opportunities for youth workers to understand and develop their professional practice. Overwhelmingly, the data showed that experience, even "years of experience", was believed to be fundamental to developing professional practice; to learning how to 'become'- in the words of participants - "a good youth worker". The three key learning requirements highlighted by the participants were: -

- learning to engage with young people and learning the cohort;

- developing skill sets specific to current practice; and

- trusting in the process – persistence and adaptation in practice.

Nathan spoke of understanding engagement - about empathy and rapport - "which is the heart and soul of any of the helping services … like nursing, psychology, social work" and whilst rapport can be developed through "practice wisdom… your own sort of kind of instinct… it's also about that empathy, that tapping into what makes you a human being". Therefore, he suggested that learning and developing ways of "building that rapport, understanding particularly how young people work, as well as young people as a group" was central to creating a foundation for practice, for connecting and developing relationships with young people, in order to participate in

the work. Whilst lamenting a lack of understanding or recognition from government funding bodies, particularly in regards to unrealistic notions of calculating 'success' and outcomes for young people, Anton shared his belief that:

> What makes a good citizen's got nothing to do with how a case's working; it has nothing to do with what I say to them; but it does have to do with my modelling, and it has to do with just how enmeshed I am with them, and how they are with the rest of the community. I really do think that's right. So that's what creates these citizens - connections between people - and you can't teach that, it's not a course … (Anton)

He emphasised the need to understand what 'success' means – what the work is and is not about – something that can only truly be learned from experience and engagement in the field.

In some settings youth workers are responsible for "a large number of young people and you need to be able to prioritise giving out that time amongst each young person" (Melinda). A number of factors come into play such as supervising the space, being mindful of the personalities and groups in attendance, having a sound awareness of safety issues that include "identifying risk", whilst coordinating activities and responding to individual needs as they arise. So whilst noting that "we do what we can, but it is hard" Melinda stated that "once you learn the group of young people, it's a lot easier" which can only come about through time, and experience.

At times for some of the study's participants, the reality of youth work bore little resemblance to their prior expectations of working with young people. Nick – who had had some engagement with young people in a previous incarnation – found that whilst he had "worked with very much well-resourced young people - they weren't young people that were in and out of jail, getting in and out of trouble with the police and stuff like that", that the experience had not necessarily equipped him for this work. Nick found that "it's a different client group, so I guess [the challenge was] understanding my role in this context, and then kind of learning what works and what doesn't work." Similarly, Jess's experience of coming to a new role after a lengthy period of service in her first youth work position was somewhat challenging and required renewed learning and understanding. Whilst the practice context was similar as a drop-in youth centre, the role carried more responsibilities and the youth cohort presented with a range of very different and acutely challenging issues. Jess was confronted with unexpected behaviours as she replaced a departing manager with

whom the young people had obviously formed strong bonds – "there were a couple of young people that were really rude and aggressive toward me". At times she struggled with engagement as she found herself renegotiating her base as she worked patiently, and painfully, to establish professional authority and credibility in building trust with the young people who had no time for this 'new' worker.

> I cried. In front of them. Because they were just so nasty. At the end of the day, when you try and appreciate that it's not about you, but when they're saying very specific things towards you it can be quite hurtful, and sometimes you just have enough of being, kind of, the punching bag for someone (Jess).

Drawing upon available support, and reflecting upon circumstances and ways to reach this particular group of young people, and determined not to give up, Jess focused on looking forward and applying consistent strategies:

> that's what I was saying about working with your strengths, often they don't behave like that because you provide that space for them that they don't want to behave like that … it's just getting through it and knowing that it's going to end. (Jess)

Eventually she achieved success with persistence and belief in not only her own capabilities, but also in the potential of the young people to participate in relationship building. She found that:

> they came around slowly. They're probably THE young people that are the most stand-offish … to me, but they have slowly come around, and it took time (Jess).

Moving beyond the period of conflict and challenge, after investing energy and time into creating, building and asserting a professional relationship, Jess successfully established the "space" for positive and constructive engagement for 'the work'.

Learning on the job involves youth workers learning how to apply the skills that they have learned that they bring with them to the role; learning further skills relevant to the context of the role that they take on; and learning to create a professional framework for their own practice with a view to best practice for best outcomes.

Qualified and well equipped for the role Alex engaged in "learning more skills, and counselling skills … asking a lot of questions … learning the skills and how to approach the situations". However she found that she was "falling into the rescuer

role all the time" - a challenge regularly experienced by novice youth workers who come to the role, eager to assist young people to overcome circumstances and achieve their goals, whilst keenly aware that often the young people do not have the capacity to function as well they might had they had experienced stable and consistent environments growing up. Therefore when

> a client says "I need to go to X, I need a lift" - I am like "I will take you, I will take you" ... but also just even with like Centrelink stuff, always kind of filling out the forms and doing it because it was easier, and quicker" (Alex).

Alex, after a period of being caught up in the role of 'rescuer' and reflecting upon her practice, came to understand how this affected the practice processes, experience and outcomes for young people, and determined that:

> I can't do that because I am not teaching them anything from doing that. They are not learning their skills … so it is about stepping back from that (Alex).

She came to realise that:

> the most important role we're playing is to educate the young people on how to guide themselves I think, and give them the tools to be what they want to be, and to make them realise that they can do what they want to do - despite the obstacles that they will face (Alex).

Being immersed in the work through the application of skills and learning through understanding, youth workers found that the experience of the work grounded them in the real and everyday events, in time, revealing what is and isn't effective, prompting them to further explore in order to develop their practice and discover new ways to fulfill their roles.

Nick was quite thrown by the experience of working with a cohort that was fundamentally unknown to him before. Whilst having previously practiced successfully as a psychotherapist with older people, and confidently approaching the role as a skilled and experienced practitioner "knowing what counselling and psychotherapies, and all the frameworks that need to be there, to have effective therapy" - he sought to apply his knowledge and skills and ideas in this context of youth work but unexpectedly found that:

> I had to deconstruct all of them! I had to work out why are young people coming? I used to get really distressed. I booked them, and I booked them, and they don't turn up! Or they turn up two hours later – I think what the ??? And so I used to get really distressed.   But then I was, you know, prior to that I was working with others who would turn up every week at their appointment time … Young people just kind of pull the rug from underneath you, and then you have to start again …(Nick).

Discarding notions that the answers lay in the knowledge with which he was armed, or within the experiences that he had worked through before, Nick recognised that he needed to learn and understand the context, and the cohort, in order to understand what was required to develop an effective practice for this particular client group.

> I had to listen to young people. I had to learn from them. I had to deconstruct my counselling ideas, and what worked and what doesn't work. I had to actually learn on the job - yeah, I had to actually find my way of reaching them, and they taught me how to do that. I've had to find a modality that fits the practice … I have developed yes – so over the years – kind of what works and what doesn't work – by process of elimination and restructuring … (Nick).

Those coming to the role without formal training in the community services field sought to learn and develop practice-specific skills that would provide them with a stronger foundation and a greater confidence and 'authority' within the role. Gary suggested that a range of learning activities and opportunities contributed to his practice development. After a period of time within the field he undertook formal studies in community services whilst continuing in the work. Early experiences where he learned

> … from the workers I worked with who come, as I said, from more social and teaching backgrounds, who understand how to case manage young people, and what to program and what to not … (Gary)

contributed to his emerging practice, as well learning the technicalities around "the process that needed to take place and the systems" leading him to look for further challenges to build on his capacity and skills within the field. To support his practice Gary engaged in

> lots of other training related to youth work … aspects like case management training and a lot of other things [that are] going to give me a little bit more opportunity not just to work with people but the whole community itself (Gary).

Although at face-to-face level Gary was confident and comfortable in his engagement with young people, initially relying on his strengths such as sport and recreation, he continued to pursue challenges that would extend his skill base

> I like to challenge myself into doing art with young people and I explain to them I am not that great - so maybe it's something that going to teach me or give me skills … so maybe next time I will have the ability to do this skill myself. I am just trying to take a little bit of everything I guess (Gary).

Whilst seemingly innocuous, apart from building on his own skills, in doing so Gary provided a mentoring and learning opportunity for the young people on a number of levels as he learned side-by-side with them – taking on a challenge with them without fear of failure; participating in a new venture with a view to learning as well as a relationship-building practice exercise that created a space or opportunity for seemingly innocuous, but intentional, conversation. These are the moments Anton referred to as he describes strategies and skills – intentional actions when actively engaging with young people. Over time he learned that for young people "their understanding is talk's secondary. To me the basketball is secondary … we can lead in those spaces" emphasising the need to remove the sense of confrontation from the engagement "for kids that are inarticulate or challenged, take them somewhere where something else is happening, and then it's just conversation". Gary, too, reflected that practice development evolves over time - first beginning with 'learning the ropes' in order to identify aspects and skills that can be enhanced or built upon. He reflected:

> … you need to take at least a year to start learning how to really make a few changes … I think since I first started that was a challenge but now it's not as overwhelming and I feel quite confident to talk to people within the community and get to meeting other community members and speak on behalf of the service by myself … so I think that's a challenge I've overcome a little bit since the start and I feel I know what I am doing … (Gary)

This building of confidence and development of professional authority then contributes to the best practice and service that can be provided for young people in one- to-one working relationships, or in service as an advocate for individuals or the needs of the cohort.

Similarly, for Melinda, engagement in the work for the first couple of years essentially served as her apprenticeship. Whilst she had undertaken youth work specific studies, stepping into practice was, for her, the beginning of the real learning.

> When I was placed in this position, the most [time] workers lasted in that area was three days… and I was not aware of any of that … (Melinda).

Facing such a challenge, arriving in a position that seemed almost untenable, Melinda reported that essentially the reality of the work bore no similarity to that which she expected

> I don't think anything prepared me whatsoever for what I was going into. I really think that — and a lot of people that did the course with me I believe were the same way - thinking that we were just going into such an easy fun job that was going to be great every day, and not even comprehending how intense it would, be or all the failures I think that you face (Melinda).

Despite the immediate challenges, and the shock of adjusting to an environment and circumstances for which she felt entirely unprepared, Melinda learned to do what many new workers to the field learn to do

> They never prepare you for the fact that not every young person is going to be a success and that you do have to pick yourself up and keep going (Melinda)

In moving beyond the initial shock, beyond numerous challenges and events that could otherwise be catalysts for escape or retreat, in giving the experience time Melinda reported

> … but I really stuck it out and I think the young people have taught me a lot more than I realised at times … (Melinda).

Once settled into the role and in 'sticking around' she was able to create the foundation for practice and develop trusting relationships with members of the cohort. Melinda experienced the 'walking beside' the young people with whom she works, to learn them, their realities, their lives – and in time she was able to step back from the immediate presenting issues and take a broader view of the young people's environment and community, which in turn, benefitted her practice and ongoing engagement with young people.

> The respect that they have for people, I think, that's really an eye opener for me - it's a very, very different community … The young people I work with now, they're so family-oriented which was very unusual for me to see, unlike the [other] young people, they all look at each other as family, and I'm a part of the family and they're very protective of their own group. And yeah, I just think with respect—I don't know, I've learned so much. I

> couldn't even really name it to be honest but I think they've taught me as much, if not more as I have taught them (Melinda).

Learning from young people, which was significantly reflected in the notions of 'sticking with it', was often cited as key to understanding the work in the context in which youth work practitioners found themselves. Learning from young people often reflected an acknowledgement of a shared humanity; an acknowledgement that there was no 'better', no necessarily 'correct' way of doing things that could be imposed if the work was to be respectful, or effective. Situated, contextual understanding enabled these youth workers to then reflect, re-evaluate, and adapt approaches and relationships with young people. Being open to learning requires a level of flexibility in thinking, and creativity when engaging in new practices. In adopting a flexible approach, and being open to all forms and sources of learning, practitioners are more open to understanding the positions and circumstances of not only the young people with whom they work, but also the communities within which they move or reside – whether they be familial, cultural or social.

> The important thing I've learned is that in this community, particularly working with indigenous young people and their families, is that the only way it'll work is through that process of self-determination, dignity and respect. We must go in and listen, find out what's going on, not say "I'm this, and this is what I'm going to offer you," … so it's a fundamental shift in approach (Jon).

Jon reflected upon 'the moment' where he stepped aside from being the One-That-Might-Well- Know to become One-Who-Is Open-To-Knowing – when the 'Aha' moment occurred and a new understanding profoundly influenced his approach to the work. Rather than a 'should do' approach of implementing strategies that are supposedly best applied to effectively achieve outcomes, Jon's practice evolved to being open to there being many ways – to consider, to relate and to achieve.

> I think it takes a long time for people to have that experience where they basically have that cathartic moment where they realise that's the way to go. I'm not saying it's like The Way, like a cult, but I just think what happens when I shifted, what happens when I – it actually happened to me up [North] when I was up in there, and I was working with those young guys and one of them … I'd walk up and say to him and say "We need to go to [Town] and do your Centrelink …" and it'd be a really hot day, and he just look at me and go "Get f****d … we're goin' to the creek for a swim!". Anyway, I realised that he was right, and who was I? There was this point where my whole world just did a one-eighty … 'cause I realised

> he was right - that in an environmental and human sense, I was the one who was wrong … and from that moment on, my relationship with him, his brother and the other guy that I had really improved … I think that I've found a reasonably good way of being in that community - hearing and listening; and I think the respect you get out that is amazing (Jon).

Looking beyond the regular and the pedestrian Anton challenged the norms. Whilst sounding somewhat defiant he provided an apt example of a grounded reflection-upon-practice, suggesting that 'what works', or appears to work, is not necessarily a 'right' response or approach for all occasion and he considers reaching for new ways of engaging with young people, allowing for a little flexibility in approach and practice.

> What are some different ways that we can approach problems rather than solution- based stuff? Because helping young people understand and come to terms with the reality of their life is probably just important as changing their life … we create these sort of precious spaces and then we get upset when there are no lessons in those spaces … So what if, we're going to wreck the chandelier, well what's a chandelier doing here? It's a youth centre. So, they want to paint the walls. Awesome. Go for it man. Looks great - tomorrow we'll make it white again. We do get kind of precious around our built environment for kids. And I don't get it. I was knocking around people's sheds and garages with paint. Anything we wanted, we did whatever we wanted when we're kids. … I think there's a level of competence of building kids who get no experience, all sorts of things, even a good 'sort of damaging stuff' you know. You learn something when you throw a watermelon off a bridge ... So yeah, in a built environment I think all these things are important ... (Anton).

Formal education

> … there are always opportunities to keep learning, and doing that makes you feel more confident about yourself and your ability to do your work …(Gary).

Study and training undoubtedly contributes to professional development. All participants engaged in study and/or training either prior to arriving at youth work (those who specifically undertook community services studies in the first instance); and all practitioners engaged in some form of study or training throughout the period of their professional practice. Formal studies, as outlined earlier, included a range of courses – certificates, diplomas and degrees. Those participants who engaged in specific community service or youth work studies undertook work experience through

student placements in real-world community service or youth work programs as part of their TAFE studies. A number of participants gained further experience in volunteer or paid positions as they completed their studies. Melinda completed 240 placement hours at a crisis refuge and "enjoyed it that much so I stayed on as a volunteer, and then they offered me a casual employment … I stayed there for a little while" before being offered a casual position at her current workplace where she stayed for two years whilst completing her studies before moving a full-time role at another Service after graduating. Nathan found himself juggling his studies whilst completing his first placement for his Diploma at an inner-city community outreach service

> I moved from just doing a student placement, to trying to finish student placement hours at the same time I was working - doing three hours extra at night at King's Cross, which it was fun. It was certainly a sort of a wakeup call (Nathan).

He then completed a further student placement at a Youth Service when he transferred to a course interstate therefore providing him with a range of experiences in different settings. Jess completed a number of Diplomas – the first being a Diploma in Community Services.

> During that Diploma I did one placement at [an inner-city outreach service] where I continued to volunteer for another 2 years as well as my second placement [which] was at [a] Youth Centre. I then went on to do a Diploma in Alcohol and Other Drugs which was something I wanted to specialise in - during that study I was casually working at [a] Council as a youth worker … I've also done a Diploma in Case Management as well (Jess).

Most youth workers didn't explicitly report upon, or perhaps entirely recognise, the learning and professional development benefits of their tertiary studies. Whilst not necessarily apparent – to themselves or to others i.e. Melinda's belief that "nothing" from her course provided benefit or preparedness for the job - the data shows that the embedded experiences of student placements provided a starting point - a grounded, situated perspective, and an impetus for future practice. The embedded compulsory component of the qualification enabled students to become familiar, certified, and authoritative to a degree, as they move further and deeper into the work to learn, develop, and evolve as practitioners. Even those within the field, many coming from different backgrounds and varying levels of study or training, view differently the

skills and knowledge that other practitioners bring to the field. For example, Nick felt that a certain depth of knowledge is required as

> … youth work is not easy. It's a very complex, complex work with many kinds of layers and complexities and so on ... young people come here, and you know they're in crisis; and they're cutting, and they're contemplating suicide … (Nick).

He believes, from the place where he observes, engages and practices, that

> … to be able to be effective you have to more training than having two years of TAFE, or however many years they provide at TAFE, you know, to do this work … (Nick).

Whereas from another perspective, when asked what she would recommend for future youth workers coming into the field, Alex suggested that broader life skills and experiences were equally valuable for practice and recommends that youth workers come to the field with

> … life skills in something, like sports, or something like that, so you kind of have something to offer - like something specific … it will be good for your own program, it adds to other programs … like music or art … or even like cooking … already having something that you are passionate about yourself, and then you can bring it to your work … some sort of passion that you have, and then you can teach other people (Alex).

Perceived benefits from formal study are relational to the background, the interests, the motivation and outlook of the individual, particularly in ways that they can apply that which they have learned. Whilst one practitioner may work within a theoretical framework, another practitioner may seek to work within a practical, active and embodied framework – hence, finding value in different aspects of education and learning. Different programs deliver different services, with some centres structured to deliver a range of services for young people. Young people's needs are varied where for some it may well be enough to be acknowledged; to have the opportunity of contact and informal engagement with other young people with access to adults willing to listen; whilst others may be seeking intensive support and assistance. Different skill sets are required for the variety of services found within the youth sector.

Jess spoke not of 'book knowledge' but rather what, and how, she had learned at TAFE from "an amazing teacher that really inspired me"

> … he taught me how to run really fun activities, and engaging activities …
> the education aspect of things - so a lot of my skills were developed
> during that Diploma. It was very hands-on … everything that we learnt
> was through activities that we then could use with other people (Jess)

Such activities were strongly reflected in her current practice and significantly informed and served the project work that she developed to inclusively engage with a broad range of young people.

Nathan viewed himself as predominantly a facilitator of the range of activities and services that can be available on any given day in the very busy and unpredictable environment of a drop- in youth service. He reflected upon his formal learning – first through Diploma studies, followed by a degree in Social Science and Human Services - which he described as a foundation for his professional development.

> One of the things with facilitation is its things about prioritisation … that
> expert definition of need - and that's something I've learned through
> university and TAFE, with being taught various decision-making
> processes, decision-making structures … (Nathan).

During his studies at TAFE Nathan reported that while aspects of the "values and ethics courses were quite challenging for all the students" and "confronting because you were placed in situations where you were in ethical dilemmas all of the time" he found that it was a "really good grounding in that regard'. Articulating further into a degree program, and delving into the theoretical basis for action, he found that

> University kind of expanded on that in terms of understanding not just your
> own ethical decision-making frameworks, but also understanding that there
> were different types of professional ethical decision-making frameworks …
> (Nathan).

This study broadened his understanding of professional practice, and encouraged new and different ways of thinking.

Similarly, Alex sought to increase her knowledge and expand on her skills in order to widen her scope for practice. She "decided to go to University and complete a post-graduate diploma in social health … a specialist counselling diploma" so that she could "do counselling as well as case work because I wanted to feel more equipped - to be able to like deal with some of the stuff that was coming up …". She also stated that it meant that she would "actually have something valid". Although already qualified and an experienced youth worker, for Alex, undertaking further studies,

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acquiring specific counselling skills and knowledge and gaining formal degree credentials strengthened her confidence by "validating" her skills. It enabled her to feel "better about myself" when providing support to young people.

> I get concerned that I could be working with someone with psychosis and I'm advising them or pushing them to do things that maybe they're not ready for or not able to do - and that's a constant worry for me, so I just want to know that I've got the skills (Alex)

Having the skills provided her with a sense of reinforcement and assurance for her practice.

Industry training

> We've got CCWT; thank god for that - without it we haven't got much else (Anton).

Each of the participants in this study attended short course industry-specific training and/or workshops that are conducted by the Centre for Community Welfare Training (Registered Training Organisation under the umbrella of ACWA - the New South Wales non-government peak body for community organisations working with vulnerable children, young people and their families). Courses and workshops are offered via an annual Training Calendar and are conducted across a range of city and regional centres throughout New South Wales. Industry-specific training enables practitioners to self-select training that is current and relevant to their specific practice needs. Training and workshops range from single day seminars or workshops, to extended accredited training requiring ongoing or repeated attendance over a period of time.

In-house training, as well as that offered via CCWT through the ACWA calendar and YAPA (Youth Action – the state peak body for young people and youth services in New South Wales), identified and attended by the youth workers in this study included case-management training, dealing with vicarious trauma, challenging behaviours, group work, cultural learning, working with LGBTQ youth, team building, leadership, and management skills. The range of training available over time is extensive and updated regularly to reflect industry needs in that Anton remarked that "… a lot of the CCWT training - I don't even put it on my CV anymore because I

just can't keep track". Some services and programs organised for the training to be made available in-house - Nick reporting that practitioners in his program were able to access three or four training programs each year that were provided for anyone who is interested across the whole service. Melinda reported for her program that "it's really a matter of choice because it's not a mandatory training. It's in-house training and it's optional …" and "they're regular … so you can go to them as many times as you need to".

Identifying training needs early, and often as needs arise, would be of benefit for youth workers, particularly as a number of practitioners noted that whilst the issue or client-cohort specific training was of great value – they recognised that earlier access to some training would have allowed them to develop skills and knowledge to better support them in their practice with young people, and the communities within which they work.

> … another great one I did was indigenous cultural learning respect training. It was very upsetting that it took them three years to give me that training. I wish I'd had it when I started in the community, but just to learn the way in which—it's very hard to explain this - the pecking order of each family … I never understood any of that - the way in which I presented myself to them, and how I could gain their respect. I never knew to call the elders "aunties" and "uncles" … I used to just call them by their first names and had no idea that I was actually being disrespectful … I was just very lucky that I did gain their respect before I did the training. But yeah, it was absolutely an amazing training. (Melinda).

Jess spoke of her work with a particular client where the issue presented was beyond her realm of personal or professional experience and knowledge. Subsequently, having identified that training pertinent to the issue would benefit her practice she attended the relevant training in the following months. Whilst she was able to use and reflect on her experience of working with this particular client, she acknowledged that until she attended the training she was uncertain about her ability or effectiveness around this particular issue.

> I was talking about this case, not using names, and then we watched a video and it was young people being interviewed and then I saw him on the screen and I freaked out 'cause I thought "Oh gosh – I hope no one makes the connection" 'cause I told the story quite specifically in training but didn't mention names - anyway and they were asking whether [if] anyone who's a worker who's not necessarily from the similar background - can they be helpful too? And I was like "Here is the moment of truth - I'm

either going to be humiliated in public, or what ... and he said 'Well yeah actually. At my old youth centre, my youth worker ... she was really helpful" (Jess).

Whilst an unusual feedback loop, Jess received affirmation that although uncertain, she had been able to provide appropriate and helpful support and assistance, and was able to reflect upon the experience in a supportive learning environment – sharing experiences with other practitioners, and further building on her skills and knowledge to support her practice.

> So I think you go, you need to develop skills, and there's some awesome training out there … obviously someone identified it as an important thing to know … (Jess).

Youth work practitioners attend training for a number of reasons – primarily for support and renewal in relation to their current practice, and to acquire new skills and knowledge relevant to their specific role and context. Still, after many years of experience Anton believed that "the training is really important, and I really love the short course trainings that I've done" and that regardless of the knowledge and skills that practitioners may already carry, revisiting that which may already be known can lead to a state whereby new training has "revitalized your understanding of things".

> I remember going to a strengths-based thing where - obviously everyone always tries to be strengths-based - but when you really get to enact and operationalise that stuff you realise how little your desires mean in that context. So I think some of that extra training did help,, in that sense to break down some of those concepts … [such as] "I've got to get kids to be this, or to do this … (Anton).

The pursuit of new skills and new knowledge was important for Nick in his search to "find a modality that fits the practice". With the support of the youth service for which he works, Nick located and identified a method, and the associated training, that would provide a more relevant framework to inform and support his practice in this specific context, with this specific cohort

> … a kind of short term intervention - psychodynamic oriented, that's helping me conceptualise the way it works so when I work purely in a counselling role I look at it as short term, and doing as much as possible – what you can do today, 'cause young people relate to psychotherapy / counselling in a very different way to adults (Nick).

Melinda and Jess shared their training experiences as they currently transitioned into staff management roles. Melinda, whilst seemingly a reluctant delegate, emerged through a testing period with greater confidence and a new set of skills after attending training for new managers

> … I learned a lot from that … being able to manage a team. I've never done that before. It was always just me by myself, being managed, so it was very difficult for me to go into that position ... it was very hard to get feedback - to me it felt like criticism. So I just learned how to do that positively … and a little self-management (Melinda).

In contrast, Jess specifically sought out her current role "'cause I needed to be challenged in a new way" and this role meant that she would have staff to work with and manage.

> My main thing now is that I'm working on developing my skills in management of staff as well … so a lot of my training since I got here is oriented to team building and leadership and coaching and management styles ... so that's brand new to me (Jess)

providing her with the challenge that she was seeking, and using this to learn new skills and further develop her knowledge.

Industry association and resources

> … you might go to training, go to a conference, or you might read an article from them, or just something in a documentary about an innovative approach to something around youth homelessness in another country and realize that there's elements of that that you can take and apply to your own professional context (Jon).

A number of participants made mention of associated activities that provided networking and learning opportunities. Anton particularly noted, in relation to training, that a specific training component that he is currently completing online "is a less fine experience because I'm not getting to talk and hang out with different people" as would normally be the case with in-house or venue-based industry training. Similarly, attendance at industry conferences, when time and funding permits, stimulates and engenders learning and engagement alongside practitioners and colleagues from local, regional and national programs and agencies.

> … I think they're really renewing and also really powerful for cross-fertilization of our needs. Really good projects have come out of meeting people at conferences and saying, "I'm interested in that too. Let's do something together. Or perhaps, can I have a look at what you do?" (Anton).

Nick keenly reported that he would be attending an international practice-specific conference in the coming months. Encouraged and supported by the Service that he worked for in that whilst "they're not paying for my trip … often they give you time to do those sorts of things that you're passionate about" Nick acknowledged the value in working for an organisation that had a clear mandate for capacity building, and the benefits that would be derived from attending the conference for his professional practice development.

Occasional opportunities that also arise through invitations for practitioners to respond and contribute to research and reviews undertaken by industry peak bodies:

> I guess I would consider my involvement with YAPA and AYAC as professional development as well. So responding to the ethical [code of practice survey] for workers, the ethical questions for workers … and reading what is said about that. Allowing yourself of these sort of opportunities I think again builds a sort of philosophical base that you can draw on when things get tough, or when you need to make a decision (Anton).

Such opportunities provide platforms for engagement and learning in relation to systemic, industry-wide issues that inform or impact upon youth work practice and service delivery. Aside from networking and engaging through industry training or conference gatherings Jon revealed that

> there's a lot of people that I've learned from and I've really come to admire them, and when they talk in meetings … the things they say, and their practice and their approach … that's been a really key way I've learned. I've seen someone else do something well, or say something, and I've really tried to model or incorporate that into my own practice.

Opportunities to congregate, opportunities to learn of the ideas of others are not limited to connections with colleagues and associates within the youth work industry but also come

> from people who talk about principles of humanist approaches to things; they come from social workers, they come from academics … [through]

the University … Law Society talks … there's a lots of free stuff you can be involved with (Jon).

Industry-related sources of information and knowledge are also available and accessed by youth workers

Reading … I think reading is really important … remaining informed (Anton)

via regional, state and national industry websites for young people, youth workers and youth services that also provide information and links to publications and literature that support youth, youth work and youth work practice.

I'm a great supporter of the YAPA websites … also for me there are other sources ... the Australian Clearinghouse for Youth Studies - so I'm quite an avid reader. I do try and immerse myself in it, but one of the frustrating things about my role now is I feel so busy, I don't have as much reading time or energy for reading as I would like … (Gary).

Supervision

Supervision helps youth workers gain a clearer understanding of the function and purpose of adolescent clients' behaviour (Pfeifer, 2011), and gain insight into their own reactions through reflective practice (Schon, 1983).

Education and training, mentorship and practice experience are essential for professional learning and development. What appears to be crucial in supporting youth workers at both a practice and personal level, and therefore in effect supporting their continuous learning and development, is the grounding and reflection of practice experience through regular supervision.

Supervision is available in various modes depending upon availability and access. Youth work services and programs are generally expected to provide supervision for youth workers - usually with their line manager, coordinator or team leader – where practice experiences and concerns may be raised and explored. Generally, practitioners are encouraged to reflect upon their practice, with a view to designing strategies for ongoing or future engagement with the issue of concern. This is also a space for supervisors to 'check-in' with youth workers at a more personal level – assessing time management, client loads, professional development plans and general

administrative matters. Some youth workers are provided with access to regular independent external clinical supervision, and some youth workers are provided with group supervision that involves their immediate or extended team. Many human services agencies provide access to an Employee Assistance Program that offers independent, short-term counselling support.

The participants in this study did not specifically describe what supervision for them entailed - though this was more a reflection of their understanding that I, as an insider, would know what they were referring to - however youth workers were keen, passionate, and quite certain about the benefits of supportive management and quality supervision.

Supervision provides a professional space for practitioners to report, review and reflect on practice.

> I was always falling to that [rescuer] role, and it wasn't until supervision
> that I realised that what I was doing … (Alex)

Good supervision is not necessarily contained to formally arranged sessions, but includes access for youth workers during their day-to-day practice when unexpected challenges or incidents may arise.

> I debrief with my boss and she'll, you know, we'll discuss how else it
> could have been handled, or what is it, you know, that is challenging me,
> and I actually get given that space to discuss it … (Jess)

Though not all supervision is deemed equal - much is dependent on the skill of the supervisor. Other factors affecting the quality of supervision can be the time dedicated to supervision – whether it is regular, and planned; and the appropriateness and structure of supervision – particularly in maintaining a focus on practice, and practitioner, matters.

> I think supervision – where it works well it's the best professional
> development you can get. When it works poorly, it's a waste of time
> (Anton).

Additionally, the responsibility for the provision of supervision lies with the program or the agency which can leave youth workers floundering if resources are stretched or practitioner support and development is not a priority, or well organised.

I think that's a big problem with big organisations … I think people get too busy and don't have time - so that supervision in the past was not so good – so I hit a few walls sometimes. … that's the effect on many workers and there's no communication and it becomes challenging in that period – you know like you are progressing and you are not being heard … (Gary).

Practitioners also voiced their preference for different styles and forms of supervision

… they do the group supervision as well – I don't particularly find that that useful for these kind of things … I'm very comfortable with doing that myself and coming up with the best, you know, the next time how I'm going to handle it and coming up with my own little plan in my head as to how to approach it next time (Jess).

It is difficult to convey the depth of feeling and gratitude that youth workers expressed when speaking of the authentic and personalised support that they received. This cohort was atypical in that each felt solidly supported in their current roles and spoke of the respect and appreciation that they had for both those internal and external supervisors who had provided support that was genuine and personalised; that contributed to their self-belief and gave them confidence – empowering them to reflect and develop their own practice rather than providing instruction.

A good internal supervisor is as like gold as you know. External clinical supervision where it's been appropriate for me to have it has, again, been absolute gold … These clinical practitioners that have developed sort of a super-calm, totally non-judgmental approach to things … these are very valuable people to our industry (Anton).

As a new manager Gary acknowledged that he was on a learning trajectory, and that whilst the supervision that he engaged in (particularly when seeking guidance for the supervision that he provided to his staff) could be challenging - being as direct and as constructive as it is - the experience had contributed significantly to his professional development

… she is all about trying new things and giving them a go, but being able to communicate things - like she feels like you need to step up and communicate too. So it's not about putting you down, but about supporting you – "If you feel like you can't do it, I will support you better" - and I think that's a big thing in development. I feel like I have grown so much since I have been here. I have grown more in the past year and a half to two years than in the eleven years I have been in work (Gary).

That some agencies and services are able to, and do, ensure access to external supervision provides youth workers with not only an independent space for

critical reflection and professional support, but also provides practitioners with a sense of worth in that an investment is being made in their personal and professional development.

> They pay for external supervision once a month … the external supervision is fantastic. The fact that they pay for it is great. The fact that they see that as a valuable element of surviving in youth work is good, and so that's where a lot of the self-reflection happens (Nick).

Personal reflection

> Self-awareness, and questioning yourself, constantly thinking about why you're doing what you're doing … a lot of reflection along the way … (Jess).

Youth workers demonstrate their engagement in critical reflection (Schön, 1983) – "an ongoing scrutiny of practice based on identifying the assumptions underlying it" (Fook, 2007, p. 363) - through anecdotes and their stories of working with young people, rather than theoretical discourse, often revealing through sidebars the minutiae of the engagement, or the consideration given to moments or events that have occurred in their daily practice:

> I think - "I can handle it", but sometimes it's like "You were really nasty yesterday, and I'm going to show you that nothing you do is ever going to push me away" 'cause that's also sometimes what they're trying to do - is see you give up on them, and they can say "See, I told you so – she's not here for us" kind of thing (Jess).

Their expressions as they speak of the fundamental lessons learned indicate that reflection has occurred, at times, to the depths of their beings as they seem to have questioned their own very essence, not simply their practices.

> When I feel that they've attacked me, and all of a sudden my pride's "Look at me". So that's where I've learned that there's no room for pride. There's room for community pride, and for appropriate senses of joy, and doing things well and all that sort of stuff. There is simply no room in my mind for individual pride of 'I've built this edifice and you damn well kids will bloody appreciate it and use it' (Anton).

Predominantly, youth workers reflect-in-action (Schön, 1983) and reflect-on-action (Schön, 1983) and learn, over time, to develop perspective and balance as they assess,

and re-assess, the effectiveness of their engagement with young people and the work that they do.

> I mean there are obviously times where you go home at the end of the day and you go "I should have done so much better" - but it's about knowing you're only a human being … (Nathan).

Timely reminders can be welcome as there need not be a repetitive mantra of reflection, reflection, reflection – as practice does not always benefit from constant critique and incision.

> Over-thinking can be a killer. Practice reflection can be a killer. It's sometimes the last thing that you need to do ... There's things like just don't always reflect on everything you've done and can do, but don't. Don't beat yourself up about it. Give yourself time and space and patience and care (Nathan).

Through experience, reflection and discovery over time, these study practitioners came to understand that all experiences were part of the learning and became less critical of themselves; learnt to worry less and instead reflect more; and came to acknowledge and accept the reality, and the humanity, of professional practice in the human services.

> ... like you're human - at the end of the day, so there are going to be times where you're not going to say the best thing that you possibly could have said at the time, but as long as you sit back, you do debriefs, you reflect, you're open to feedback … and you know you want to develop, you want to grow ... you don't think you do everything perfectly all the time, 'cause if you do have that opinion then you're never going to really grow (Jess).

Summary

This chapter explored youth work as a unique practice and highlighted the difficulties for youth workers in articulating terms to define youth work. Youth workers were found to be better able to describe what they do, and how they do it. Construction of a concise definition for youth work practice remains elusive amongst practitioners.

This chapter also revealed the ways in which youth workers learn how to do what it is that they do. As they engage in and develop their practice youth workers fundamentally learn from experience. They recognise that their learning and

development is guided by the needs of the young people with whom they work, and is informed by their interactions with them. Youth workers recognise that that their learning is intertwined with the learning of young people and that the sharing of knowledge leads to a co-construction of the same.

Practitioners also learn from, and are significantly supported by, colleagues and mentors as they learn to be in relationship with young people and develop their professional practice. They find value in formal, informal and industry-based education and training. Collegial engagement with members of the broader community of practice, whilst infrequent, enhanced and stimulated their professional development.

The practice of youth work was found to be complex and demanding. A good deal of learning was derived from the challenges that practitioner's faced as they first entered the field. Each of the participants encountered significant challenges at different times throughout their journey – challenges that were confronting and, at times, debilitating. These experiences and their sequelae are described in the following chapter.

CHAPTER SIX: DISORIENTATION

> Disorientations are a spectrum of widely varying experiences that in all cases disrupt everyday ways of acting and being … the effects of disorientations are very different in different cases (Harbin, 2016, p. 154).

Introduction

Within the youth work field it is understood that not all who come to youth work will remain. Whilst many stay the course for a couple of years

> … someone told me that two to three years is the average for people to be in youth work … (Jess)

by this time practitioners will either have made a commitment to continue working with young people or, considering the challenges, decide to leave the field to pursue other ventures.

Reasons to depart are varied – and few could be offset by a low rate of remuneration. A range of factors could find someone at the crossroads – suddenly, or gradually, deciding to seek to move to either an associated position or to leave the field altogether. Whilst matters relating to early career experiences and retention are addressed in the literature in the fields of social work, education and health - there is little recorded in relation to the Australian youth worker experience. The participants in this study were unusual as compared to what could be considered a representative cohort as all are practitioners of four or more years' service, therefore having progressed beyond that fabled 'test' of surviving the field. However, the data revealed that for each of them their experience of 'becoming' a youth worker involved facing, and overcoming, a range of challenges. Some will experience significant moments at a crossroads - where the decision to remain, or take flight, must be made.

There are likely more numerous accounts of personal challenges within each of the lived experiences of the participants in this study that did not arise in these conversations that would reveal more than this dataset - had these strands been further explored at the time. Nevertheless, the accounts found within the data reveal both common and unique experiences with threads that are certainly indicative of the general reality of the youth work practitioner experience.

> … it would be erroneous to paint the picture that a career in … the human service will inevitable be traumatic, short-lived and result in burnout that culminates in the physically, emotionally and psychologically destroyed practitioner leaving the helping professions forever. Whilst burnout and vicarious trauma are real and important issues to be tackled in the human services, they are sometimes overstated and portrayed as endemic in relation to their incidence. (Lonne, 2003, p. 277).

Whether a cause for reflection, a mental, emotional or a physical stepping-back – each of the participants in this study described circumstances where they found themselves challenged in practice, or experienced disorientation at various times throughout their careers. The experiences that they described resulted in:-

a) a need to determine a response - to make an adjustment to practice;

b) a need to determine a response – to take significant action;

c) a need to access resources and supports – to strengthen self to remain in practice; or

d) a need to step away entirely from practice - for relief, recovery and restoration.

> Stress can be defined as the emotional and physiological reactions to stressors. A stressor is a demand situation or circumstance that disrupts a person's equilibrium and initiates the stress response (Zastrow, 2014, p. 377).

The data showed that were of varying degrees of intensity of disorientation experienced by individuals within the cohort. The range of stressors and experiences that led to disorientation varied from those arising from situations and circumstances that could reasonably be expected as part of the professional experience for a practitioner in the human services - as a newcomer; as one gaining experience as they encounter new situations or move into different roles or new practice environments - through to circumstances that result from challenges to the personal core of practice, personal crisis, or the accumulation of many, many stressors over time. As expressions and statements from the data that described distress or disorientation were identified – the various levels of intensity have been categorised as challenges, crossroads, crisis and collapse.

Challenges

> I've been there when the police have come in and raided, and taken young people away … it's very traumatising. It is a very traumatising field (Melinda).

The first level of disorientation was located within those experiences of a nature that could readily be expected to occur in the field, in any human services field, and as a result of the practice experience. This level could be viewed as the least acute on a spectrum that considers the levels of stress and disorientation experienced by youth workers - a base level of what could be considered not out-of-the-ordinary work-related stress. These were experiences that could be described as expected challenges within practice – as a novice, or as an experienced practitioner – essentially arising when first engaging in practice, whilst learning the ropes, or further down the track when facing new or unexpected situations.

Each of the participants described situations and challenges in practice that were confusing, disarming or confronting that occurred not only as they first entered the field, but throughout their ongoing practice; particularly as a result of experiences arising in new situations or different contexts. The disorientation resulting from these experiences was found to be manageable and able to be addressed, and such experiences were reported as learning opportunities whereby the disorientation was temporary, and practitioners found ways to accept, understand and learn from their experiences. These experiences brought about new understandings as they adjusted or strengthened their approach, and their practice.

Many of these regular level experiences of stress or disorientation were related to youth workers stepping into the field and their early experiences of engaging in practice. Discovering the reality of practice was disconcerting for many as their expectations and assumptions were challenged, and beyond their control.

> When I first started … you kind of get a bit frustrated thinking "What is going on, like am I actually doing anything at all?" (Alex).

Whilst there was not a great deal of overt discussion about youth workers' expectations of practice, the data shows that there were general assumptions held about the way the work might unfold. Assumptions that engaging with young people

would involve an ordered approach and timeline whereby clarification about the assistance sought would made; that goals may be set, and ways of achieving these would be negotiated and acted upon. But once immersed in the reality of the work practitioners learned that the practice was much more complex, and that planned or anticipated outcomes could not be predicted.

> They never prepare you for the fact that not every young person is going to
> be a success and that you do have to pick yourself up and keep going …
> none of that comes into the course … a lot of it was just role playing …
> that's not what you thought about it [youth work] at all (Melinda).

The primary challenge for youth workers entering the field was learning to understand the emotional sphere that one enters when engaging in work within the human services field

> … it's more also about being able to switch off when I leave work. When I
> was younger I definitely struggled with that. If someone was sad, or going
> through something, I found it very difficult to switch off when I got home
> – so taking a lot of it home with me – emotionally (Jess).

Finding a balance between personal care and concern, and the professional nature of the role takes time as practitioners learn from their experiences that setting boundaries is a professional, and emotional, protection for both their clients, and themselves. Alex

> used to worry a lot … worry was the big thing for me … that constant
> 'What is going on?' … then falling into the rescuer role all the time …
> saying yes, yes, yes, rescue, rescue, rescue … (Alex).

Whilst demonstrating her humanity and the driving force that brought her to the work, this became a challenge when it impacted on her own personal time and health, and did not serve well the young people with whom she was working to empower as they moved toward independence. For Nathan it was about learning to detach somewhat in order to maintain a professional stance and a level of objectivity

> When I first started working – the area I was working in was in a fairly
> crisis-prone area … and I think one of the things is that I now get caught up
> less in any individual crises … where I was working initially you'd have
> people potentially overdosing; you had days where ambulances were being
> called … it's very easy to get caught up … (Nathan)

The complexity, the unpredictable nature of the work, within which drama can very quickly unfold, necessitates a constant seeking of balance and calm. These 'boundaries' often spoken of – not just in youth work – but in all professions, are of the utmost importance in order to maintain a professional approach and a responsible, reliable engagement with young people.

Melinda's early experiences as a youth worker saw her wanting to be all things to all people which resulted in those boundaries becoming blurred, and leading to her distress as an unhealthy dependency developed.

> … I've taken a lot of things home with me that have brought me down … when I was having days off or if I was sick or just having a day off I was still getting the phone calls … outside of hours … all sorts of things … I encouraged that, not realising at the time, thinking I was doing the right thing (Melinda)

The next few months found her stepping back, adjusting and developing new practices that included clear boundaries being created. Whilst the phone calls and demands from young people continued through "quite a few months of hell", with support of her manager and "regular debriefing with her that got me through those times" she was able to establish and maintain strong boundaries that resulted in more appropriate relationships, and better outcomes for the young people with whom she was working.

Gary spoke of needing to learn to be quite clear about separating work space from personal space. When mentoring his own staff he was quite insistent that work phones be switched off, making it clear that it was not okay to be having contact with clients outside their work hours, and it was also not okay for work to contact workers and intrude upon their personal space.

> … people do that a lot, especially in the field, they get themselves too attached to young people's lives and the community and they forget they are not their parents, nor their siblings, not running the whole community and that the community can function without them - so people have learn how to say no …

The unpredictability of the work includes the unpredictable nature of the client cohort. Nick had come to youth work after working with an entirely different clientele. The environment that he had previously worked in was structured and predictable,

allowing him to focus on the engagement with his clients, and a level of certainty about future contact that would have allowed a level of forward planning on his part. Entering a new environment, where structure and predictability is not often a part of the lives of young people experiencing an array of issues, presented Nick with an unexpected level of mental chaos in comparison to the linear stream that he had been used to:

> I had to work out why are young people coming? I used to get really distressed – I booked them, and I booked them, and they don't turn up! Or they turn up two hours later – I think what the … ? And so I used to get really distressed … … I had the assumption that young people behaved like [the] elderly, like my older clients, who will just come week after week after week. (Nick)

One of the key elements of the complexity of youth work is that the unpredictability of the practice of youth work encompasses the entire sector. With so many different and varied contexts within which youth work services are delivered – youth work can present and be described in practice in many different ways. Residential work, outreach work, drop-in services, drug and alcohol services, mental health services, early intervention – whilst all seeking to support and provide assistance to young people – each involve different ways of doing. Additionally, the client cohort can present in many different ways, and at times youth workers require an awareness of practices particular to age, locale and culture. Often there is no preparation for the work that presents.

> I found I walked into what was quite a complex work situation … a level of responsibility that was 24-hour care for [young people] who had been seriously traumatised … [they] had some really challenging behaviours (Jon)

Learning, first, then adapting to the environment, and the cohort, and customising practice to the circumstances that present can be demanding and stressful, and disorienting, particularly when no similar context or circumstances have been encountered previously. Whilst having had connections with young people in prior work, Nick acknowledged that they were "well-resourced" and not experiencing the multiple issues that affected the young people with whom he now worked as a youth worker:

> … often you go in thinking "What the hell am I doing here? How am I
> going to reach this young person? Oh god - that's another lost opportunity
> – I shouldn't have f***ed up that session" (Nick)

Not only do practitioners find themselves in a position of seeking to ensure that their engagement with young people is appropriate, professional and enriching as they feel their way through new territory, they may also contend with a constant questioning of the effectiveness of their practice until they, and the young people with whom they work, navigate the spaces and the connections as they develop a working relationship.

Jess's start in new position at a different youth service presented her with a challenge that she could not have predicted. Upon arrival the young people accessing the service were angry and confronting due to the circumstances of her arrival. As she was replacing the previous manager – whose departure from the service had upset the local young people – they undeservedly took it out on Jess and sought to make her experience miserable. Maintaining a professional stance in the face of a stream of negativity and personal attack – which is not an entirely uncommon experience for many youth workers at some point in their career – can be decidedly stressful. Suppressing a natural human response to personal attack – fight or flight - requires a keen awareness and a determined presence of mind, whether a practitioner is a novice, or an oldtimer.

> … now, and it always has been, certain behaviours really push my buttons
> and that's one thing I have to be really aware of – that's when people get
> quite aggressive 'cause I don't like conflict myself, and I can easily be
> quite intimidated by people if they raise their voice and pose as quite
> threatening (Jess).

Being human, and experiencing very real emotions in the moment, is an unavoidable and very personal element of engagement in human services work. The challenge, for youth workers, is maintaining a stable and reliable front, whilst locating and maintaining a professional perspective.

As shall be explored in the following chapter, acknowledging and exploring the mental and emotional impacts of the day-to-day work at both professional and personal levels, and accessing supports and resources to assist in the personal management of such, is key to developing practice and sustaining self.

The practice environment operates within an organisational structure or framework – elements of which can also contribute to stress experienced by practitioners as they seek to fulfill the requirements of their role. Jon's experience, described later, led to him becoming quite disillusioned, as whilst he had clear views about what he wanted to achieve, he felt let down by

> … the challenging part was the lack of resources … a lot of people promising to be a part of the youth work … but not delivering … realistic expectations around all the stakeholders; expectations about yourself; so I've been challenged by having inappropriate or unrealistic expectations (Jon).

The focus for youth workers is inevitably the well-being of young people, and their role in ensuring that service provision is of the best standard possible. Often, beyond the control of practitioners on the ground – at the 'coalface', organisational decisions, directives or shifting priorities impact the ability of practitioners to provide, what they consider to be, best practice and quality service and resources for the young people seeking assistance and support. With young people at the centre of their practice it can be difficult for youth workers to understand and reconcile the needs and decision-making of the parent organisation when focused upon strategies that serve the best interests of the client cohort.

> Sometimes, remaining in the industry for so long, you can often be disappointed by individuals and organisations – sometimes the moves that are made within that – sometimes you just get a bit like - I just don't want to be here. I'm here for the client group. I'm not here for the organisation as a whole. And sometimes I see that that needs almost a healing … as youth workers we get wounded by organisational moves, specific client interactions, the things that go wrong (Nathan).

Crossroads

The next level of disorientation involved experiences that were beyond general practice challenges and concerns and involved situations that practitioners found stressful or confronting to the point that considered exertion was required - to force or enact change. Rather than being a case of identifying an issue, addressing it and learning from the situation - existing within the space and applying new knowledge,

practitioners engaged in a serious review of their circumstances with decisive reflection, planning and action to initiate a new course. Such situations, whilst confronting for the practitioner, were manageable via decisive action – thus being within the means of the practitioner to determine a course of action; to be proactive in order to 'correct' a situation causing discomfort, distress and disorientation.

These experiences went beyond the reasonably expected circumstances of navigating practice situations and events, and are deeper and of greater significance in that the practitioners found these situations not merely to be a challenge, but were disorientating enough to be confronting at a personal practice and level of ethos – requiring a searching within about the practice environment. Two variations of crossroads were revealed within the data. The first variation, similarly experienced by Jess and Anton, found practitioners conflicted by the workplace practice environment in regards to their own practice ethics and beliefs. The other variation experienced by Nick found him questioning the efficacy of the set of practice tools he brought to his practice, and the suitability of these within the context of the presenting practice environment.

Jess and Anton described situations where they had found themselves struggling with ethical dilemmas that confronted them in the workplace. For Anton it was a matter of the reality of the ethos of the programs contradicting the perceived, or promoted, empowerment of the young people that the program claimed that they served.

> A large charitable NGO was not the place for me. I just felt deeply uncomfortable … it had moved across into this charitable model where you've got these rich givers and the poor kids … I understand the motivation around all that, but it seemed to me to be as much about the giver … it was pre-supposed what the kids wanted … it was a real culture shock after being in that super supportive and caring environment (Anton).

More than a decade, and several positions later, Anton found himself similarly confronted whilst working for another large NGO - again, questioning and conflicted by the underlying motives of the agency in regards to their engagement with young people. Again he questioned the ethics of the agency and their practices, whilst at the same time acknowledging that the experience allowed him to find his "solid foundation":

> … suddenly the marketing department made me feel deeply uncomfortable in a really pivotal situation where I thought - this is not empowering young people as much as it looks like it is … look at what we're doing. Again, this sort of pivotal moment tells me that I'm not working for an ethical organisation … I can abandon this, quite easily. So actually, I flat quit, which I've never done before … I mentioned my work agreement and things that I thought that they were doing wrong. They gave me my marching orders … I found myself cleaning out my desk two hours after writing a letter which I thought was a really reasonable critique of their methods (Anton).

Jess found herself at a crossroads after a number of years of working in her first job. Her decision was based upon her unease and dissatisfaction - not necessarily with the work that she enjoyed, but with the position that she found herself in at an organisational level. Whilst acknowledging that she had concerns about becoming 'institutionalised' by remaining at the one service for too long, her decision was primarily driven by the fact that she felt unsupported, sabotaged, and at times thwarted in her efforts to develop projects that were at the core of her practice.

> … my manager did not possess good management skills and it was almost like a competition with him - like he wanted to be the 'name' that people would mention when talking about [the] youth service. Because I'd been there for so long it was my name being used [recognised] and it felt like this ego thing. … I didn't want to play that game. I wanted someone to support me, and he didn't do that (Jess).

As information was withheld from her, and her projects were not approved, Jess felt that her manager was undermining her for reasons that did not support her, or her standing in that community, or her practice with young people. She felt that there was no real option but to step away, review her professional goals and seek a position where she could positively engage in her practice with young people, and thrive.

Unlike the experiences of Anton and Jess, whereby the challenge for them was identifying the causes of dissatisfaction and distress and then determining whether to remain in an environment that posed such dilemmas that were unlikely to change, the cause of distress for Nick, once identified, was not external but one which challenged his professional expectations, and his expertise. For Nick the challenge as far as his preparation and qualifications were concerned was considerably confronting. Not only was he first challenged by the unpredictable nature and attendance of his new cohort of clients, but he then found himself constantly questioning the efficacy of his

approach. Despite persisting for some time with the tools and knowledge that had been central to his training, and suitably effective in his previous role, the application of the same, unexpectedly, did not transfer to a new setting and a new context.

> I had the assumption that long term therapy is better than short term therapy – I don't believe that anymore … I came with a set of knowledge and a set of ideas, a set of theories, set of interventions, and – they haven't worked … I thought I was such a good shot! (Nick).

The sense of disorientation experienced by Nick was significant – particularly as it challenged his expertise, his chosen field of practice, but also as despite his efforts he recognised that his methods were not serving the young people that came to him for help. At this stage Nick could easily have accepted that this was not where he belonged – that his skills and expertise were best directed elsewhere – and chosen a different path. But, standing at these crossroads

> I came in with, knowing you know what counselling and psychotherapies and you know all the frames that you know, need to be there to have effective therapy and so on and so forth – I had to deconstruct all of them (Nick)

he determined that there must be another way – to further build on his skills in order to provide an effective service to the cohort.

So you start over again, and you kind of become interested in what other people are doing, and that's how I found [this model] - it's quite evidence-based (Nick).

Reflecting on his practice, and striving to understand the reality and needs of the young people, Nick searched and reached for other possibilities, successfully locating other modalities that would prove to be more suitable and more effective for his client base.

Crisis

Whilst the first two identified levels of disorientation involved circumstances or situations that were manageable within practice, at times the level of distress or disorientation described was such that it required specifically directed attention, or active intervention. Essentially, the practitioners found themselves in crisis – where

serious assessment was required as they were overwhelmed and unable to continue as they were - upon same path, in the same fashion. Circumstances were attributed to personal and practice related events. Regardless of the cause, this level of stress led to an interruption of capacity yet, despite the circumstances, with support the practitioners remained connected with their practitioner role and the field.

Two accounts of personal crisis located in the data describe circumstances where the levels of stress had built over time through an accumulation of tensions resulting from numerous incidents and events for each of these practitioners. Both youth workers acknowledged that they had just pushed through until there came a time, or a trigger, that exposed the true extent of the nature and levels of stress that they were experiencing, which forced them to acknowledge the issues confronting them.

For Gary it was an accumulation of stressors that were having an impact upon his personal life but, as he describes, he was attempting to push through

> At the time I had a whole lot of things going on - a relationship going down, lost two friends - there was a lot for me to take on board and I thought I can get through it … keep just battling on, and that's how all the generations did it, and I didn't understand what depression is. I pushed myself too far and I realised I should have spoken up earlier and said I need some time off … (Gary).

Experiencing crisis may or may not be a direct result of, or directly related to, the work. The primary stressors may be personal, or arise from issues faced at work – or indeed, a combination of the two where either alone may be usually manageable, but stress exacerbated by more stress may overwhelm. The nature of the work requires an awareness on the part of the practitioner – particularly as the work is very much about relationships and engagement with people who are often experiencing distress or presenting challenging behaviours – of their capacity, their levels of tolerance, and the issues that come as part of their own history, their baggage, or the issues that they are trying to manage in the here and now. But even when all of these things are attended to, there can be what's known as a 'critical incident' or 'final straw' that may trigger a physical, mental or emotional response in even the most experienced practitioners.

> … we had a lot of incidents that built up to that final one that sort of just broke me a bit. That was my biggest downfall where I kept thinking that I

was okay and pushing on … that one last one just sort of struck and broke the camel's back, and I couldn't do it anymore (Melinda).

Whilst the incident itself was not the sole cause of Melinda's distress, as she noted, the impact of the distress caused by the incident was such that she had not yet returned to her usual role at the time of our interview. With unconditional support from her supervisor and employer she was involved in managing a return to work plan whilst on 'desk duties' at a different location

I have a rehabilitation worker that's working with me, as well as a caseworker under Workcover, and my boss and I see a psychologist weekly now (Melinda).

Melinda planned to return to face-to-face client work gradually – in a measured and monitored manner – with full support from her manager and workplace – within a negotiated timeframe.

I feel better - for a few months now – I'm just working part-time. Going back - the passion is not going to go away (Melinda).

At the time of interview Melinda had made a number of visits back to the youth centre, and maintained a strong desire to remain working with young people. Gary spoke further of recognising that he was better positioned to monitor and acknowledge his levels of stress - particularly resulting from work matters, and identified the need to take some time out from work to rejuvenate. Both practitioners benefitted from positive support from their supervisors – and remain in practice having been able to step away, reflect, and with support determine their capacity to re-engage in practice.

Collapse and departure

Vicarious trauma has been defined as "the enduring psychological consequences for therapists of exposure to traumatic experiences of victim clients" (Schauben and Frazier, 1995, p.53), although it is arguable that it is an equally valid phenomenon for all human service workers who are exposed in a secondary fashion to client trauma. (Lonne, 2003, p. 281)

The most acute experiences of disorientation reported in the data finds practitioners exhausted beyond endurance - where they have arrived physically and/or mentally at

a crossroads, but find also a wall - having reached a point where they can no longer continue, or remain, in practice. In order for their selves to survive, they determine that it is time to walk away, to retreat. Prolonged and chronic stress has resulted in burn out where these youth workers find themselves mentally and emotionally depleted, and in need of respite and repair.

The extreme end of the spectrum – the most acute measurement of stress experienced by youth workers in practice – results from the accumulation of stressors where there is a reported a build-up of increasing levels of distress, and the resulting level of stress leads to the decision to walk away. Anton and Jon reported reaching a point where stepping away was the only option. Whilst Jon's departure was unplanned, Anton had reached a crossroads where he could recognise the need to step away, to depart, before finding himself entirely shattered and disillusioned altogether.

Jon's experience involved challenges, crossroads, and crisis before he finally departed the field. Having worked within his first position for a number of years, and having experienced the regular challenges of someone new to the field in his face-to-face practice, the stressors that led to his eventual collapse, on top of an accumulation of regular practice stressors, were structural, organisational. He recalled that

> … at some point my relationship with the organisation that was employing me turned a bit sour, and I felt unsupported and overworked, and there was no longer follow-through … all these supposed other components of the program that rationally seemed like they needed happen didn't happen … a variety of factors from the top … became stressful and difficult.

Feeling unsupported, under-resourced, and disillusioned on the back of false promises Jon's levels of distress were exacerbated as the lack of support undermined and impacted his capacity to practice

> … things that I was doing on the ground became stressful and difficult, to the point where I had something of a breakdown and left in a not particularly well-planned way …

After experiencing dissatisfaction and confusion due to the lack of support and scant provision of resources, Jon found himself in crisis as the lack of support resulted in even more stress and confusion and disorientation. At a crossroads, and likely with little choice due to his mental state, he experienced the distress of an unsupported and

personally devastating departure from the service, Jon was left depleted and without a lifeline of support as he withdrew from the work, and the sector

> … I had a year off from that … took a year off from youth work to regroup and rebuild myself as a person because it really shattered me … I'd built this relationship for four years by that stage, with those boys, and instead of it being a structured and well-planned exit, it was quite distressing for everyone … (Jon).

Jon highlighted the severity of the impact that the spiral of events had upon not only him, but upon the clients with whom he was working. The sequelae, whilst unknown, can be imagined to be at least disorientating and shocking for the young people with whom Jon was intimately connected for such a significant period of time, which further contributes to his level of long-term distress and regret.

Anton's experience was more measured and planned, but a crossroads and a need for withdrawal from the environment nevertheless. Having worked in association with youth health for almost five years he recognised the exhaustion he was experiencing, and the psychological toll that was having an impact upon him, and was able to act in a way that allowed him to maintain a connection with youth work whilst stepping back from the intensity that had the potential to lead to total burnout.

> I needed a break from youth and young people and particularly health … I think being in health for too long can leave you with a sort of a distorted image of what's going on with children and young people, so you know, like they're all dying, you know - there's a notion that everybody's in distress … Not being in contact with sort of the 98% of kids who are ticking along ok and just encountering one or two issues, instead of these dire issues kids, so I needed a break from all that …

Anton decided to step away from full-time practice and pursued his passion for art enrolling in studies at University. However, Anton maintained his connection with youth work by continuing to work in a casual capacity for the following three years before returning to youth work full-time. Although becoming mentally and emotionally depleted and needing to step away, being in control of his exit from full-time engagement provided Anton with a level of empowerment and ownership in comparison to the trauma experienced by Jon, allowing him to maintain a positive connection with the service, and able to taper from his position before moving to a new job with a different focus, and less intensity.

This chapter described the some of the challenges that youth workers face as learn and develop their practice. Challenges ranged from issues arising for newcomers that could normally be expected as they enter the field and adjust to the environment and engage in professional practice, through to significant challenges that impact upon the practitioner's capacity to practice that required a concerted effort and response to return to equilibrium. Youth workers recognised these in retrospect as learning opportunities and described the strategies that they adopted to support their practice. They learned that care for self was important to maintain a capacity and a desire for practice. The next chapter describes the supports and resources that practitioners identify as vital to sustain themselves and their professional practice.

CHAPTER SEVEN: SUSTAINING PRACTICE

> The reality is that the overwhelming majority of workers, although at times experiencing considerable occupational stress, generally cope quite well and productively use a range of coping strategies. They live life to the full, enjoy a challenging and stimulating career while experiencing the personal rewards that helping others can entail (Lonne, 2003, p. 277).

Introduction

Through engagement in practice, in negotiating the day-to-day challenges of the work, youth workers learn through their experiences to develop a keen awareness of self – in both their professional and personal capacities. Such awareness is required to not only to ensure that ethical and appropriate practice is being enacted, but to also monitor and manage one's practice, and its effects, in order to support and care for self as a practitioner in the human services field.

Longevity in the field requires availing oneself of professional and personal supports; being mindful and aware of self; and taking professional and personal care and responsibility for monitoring and regulating oneself in practice. The participants in this study predominantly spoke of accessing the support of colleagues and mentors, and maintaining regular contact with team leaders and managers, relating theses as positive experiences that encouraged them to reflect on their practice and their professional journeys.

In this section I separate out the organisational, professional and personal aspects of support and self-care that strengthen and sustain the practice of youth workers through the actions that fall within these categories as reported in the data. Organisational support identifies those elements that are provided by organisations and agencies as structures or benefits that support, and contribute to, the professional development of youth workers. Professionality looks at the strategies and actions taken by practitioners to sustain and support their professional selves in practice – many of which stem from practice learning experiences, and the practice support and advice from colleagues. Personal wellness reveals the ways in which youth workers

attend to self-care outside of practice, away from the workplace, in their personal lives.

> … it's not just about the young people you manage, but it's about you as well because sometimes people forget about that, and they're caught in their day jobs, and the clients, and they forget about themselves … [they need to] make sure that they don't forget themselves – especially if they want to have a long, prospering career … realise when you are pushing it too far – that's important. (Gary).

Organisational support

Organisations and agencies are positioned to support youth work practitioners through the provision of structures and resources that acknowledge and value the importance of the work; that recognise the uncertainty and complexity of the work; and understand the need for regular and ongoing professional development and support.

Coordination and management

Much of this support is located in the relationship between youth workers and their team leaders, coordinators or managers where supervision is provided on a regular basis that attends to practice management and support, and where up-line contact and support is available to staff outside of formal arrangements. As noted earlier in the findings, whilst quality management or supervision is not necessarily the norm, the youth workers in this study reported positive relationships with their current team leaders and managers and acknowledged that their leadership and support, along with supporting provisions, significantly contributed to their professional learning, development and well-being.

> … my boss is very approachable – and I would call her straight away after, if I wanted to, and even if it was outside of work hours she'd talk to me, and she would encourage me to come in and have a proper chat with her if I wanted to ... (Jess).

When Anton took on the role of program coordinator for the first time his organisation ensured that he had additional access to a quasi-supervisor – a

coordinator of another program - for several months as he learned and prepared to take on board greater responsibilities. He was quite explicit about the strength of that support

> It was almost like a counselling space … an informal mentoring service … we got to talk about so many things … and in fact probably in terms of where I was struggling at the time - in terms of sort of advising staff - I think it was better for me than probably study would have been because it was a very active learning … I think they're sort of ongoing relationships that are really super valuable (Anton).

The provision of regular supervision, as discussed in an earlier chapter, benefits practitioners through ongoing contact and conversation with an experienced practice colleague who has knowledge of the workings of the program, the client cohort, and the practice environment.

> … it wasn't until supervision that I realised that was what I was doing (Alex)

Supervision, designed to support youth workers in managing their practice and their workloads, provides an opportunity for youth workers to discuss client matters, and reflect upon events and issues of concern, and seeks to build practice confidence when supervisors inhabit the role of 'champion' to support the individual's learning and development. Some organisations are able to provide an additional resource that supports youth worker practice in the way of external supervision

> I would say the other best stuff has been external supervision (Anton)

which not only enables access to supplementary independent support, but as an organisation there is an acknowledgement that the work is challenging, and that provision of access to additional support is justified due to the complex nature of the work;

> The external supervision is fantastic – the fact that they see that as a valuable element of surviving in youth work is good … (Nick).

The financial investment is worthwhile not only in supporting practice, but also to support the well-being of those working within the organisation. It also signals to youth workers that the importance of the practice is recognised and that there is value

in supporting them in order that they may best support the young people with whom they work.

Quality management and support is an ideal. Those that have it – recognise it, acknowledge it, and value it.

> I think it's also important for managers to know how to manage … I think that's very important in the job and when you are supported - you start to feel confident in what you can do (Gary)

A number of the participants in this study had experienced, or witnessed, the fallout that results from less than 'good quality' supervision and management. When professional support is lacking, or worse – when feeling alienated or conflicted as a result of the actions or behaviours of those positioned to provide that support – youth workers may develop a sense of disconnect that, in turn, negatively impacts their relationship with the work, and their practice. But when management and supervision is ideal, or at the very least 'good', the potential for youth workers to thrive is greater.

Team membership

> The retreat is a time for, we go away, we kind of disrupt our regular thing 'cause you won't be able to have a retreat in-house, so we go away and it's a community building thing, reflection and sharing of experiences (Nick).

Not all youth workers work in teams. Some youth workers may be the sole provider of youth services in an area – alone, or as a member of an organisation or program providing a suite of services to the community - as may be more often found in rural and regional areas. The participants in this study, however, each reported experiences of being part of a team of youth workers, even though some youth work teams may still be found to be servicing a number of differently funded programs under the auspices of a single youth service banner:

> we kind of operate as 3 teams - although there are solo practitioners who get funding and that can only support one person – but you know it's [to] reflect on our practice; what is important, what the values are – that we are a whole as an organisation (Nick)

As important as quality management and supervision is to youth workers and their practice, just as importantly, youth workers find solace, strength and, at times, courage in being a part of a team – as part of a community of practitioners

> We're a very good team obviously. If it wasn't for the team, I don't think I would still be in the field. We have such a wide range of skillsets and experiences amongst our team, and we're fairly close. So I think that's a very positive thing for us and we all stick together. If crisis happens, we're not on our own. The whole team deals with it, so that's been really good (Melinda).

The support that practitioners found in being part of team – in having access to fellow practitioners – appears ongoing and continuous. As novices many practitioners reported there being significant benefit for their learning as they entered the field – through observation, advice and consultation. As developing practitioners being part of a team provides a sense of community - a group where the shared environment and shared professional experiences within a shared practice framework may counter feelings of isolation or 'aloneness' in the experience, and makes available a broader range practice knowledge.

> Obviously my colleagues are a big thing - the people I work with are so talented and have so much experience - more experience than me. I really pick up on their skills … we meet every Tuesday … just like if you are stuck with a client - we discuss it with each other and get some ideas … different angles because, you know, you don't have all the answers … someone else has probably been in it too with their clients, and have done this, and tried this. It is all about getting ideas and trying things (Alex).

Where provisions in are in place to provide youth workers with opportunities to work within a localised or broader team, professional learning and development experiences appear to be significantly enhanced and supported as a result of access to a body of learning and practice experiences. Membership of a team, or a community of practitioners, provides youth workers with a sense of safety and security, a sense of belonging, and in essence, a platform from which to stretch beyond with the knowledge that there is, in a sense, an advisory and support panel who 'has their back' – a nest to which they may always return.

Professional development opportunities

Youth workers spoke keenly about the importance of access to ongoing learning and development opportunities. Organisational support, whether through financial support or through the allocation of time away from practice, enables youth workers to access not only the specified learning and development event - study, training, conferences, etc. – but also enables access to other practitioners within the broader youth work (or specific practice) community. Most of the participants in this study – whether accidental or intentional novitiates – accessed the local training available through the local peak body for community organisations

> Again, the training is really important, and I really love the short course training that I've done … (Anton)

They reported that they found them to be of value, relatable and applicable to their immediate practice. Each of the participants were supported and empowered to plan and organise for their own specific training needs and requirements

> … a lot of my training since I got here is oriented to team building and leadership and coaching and management styles … so that's brand new to me 'cause I needed to be challenged in a new way (Jess).

Such opportunities could be found to not only support practical and theoretical professional development, but also innervated youth workers with a sense of renewal, motivation and confidence for continual improvement and learning in practice. Nick, in particular, in his search for specialised training to support his practice appreciated the organisation's support and encouragement

> there's a pool of money there that actually allows us to go and do the kinds of training that we want (Nick)

Nick received this support as he sought solutions to the practice challenges that he encountered and set out to tailor his knowledge base to the needs of his clients

> I was trained in long term models of psychotherapy which doesn't work with this kind of population … I've had to find a modality that fits the practice … I actually found what I needed – the short term narrative which I found, discovered in my time here, I went overseas to train in it – I feel much better with it (Nick).

At the time of interview Nick was planning on attending a conference in the UK, and although he was covering his own costs of travel, he was grateful for the fact that

> … often they give you time to do those sorts of things that you're passionate about (Nick)

The organisation's commitment of resources for practitioner training and participation demonstrates their support for continuous learning that values not only individual professional development, but recognises that the investment benefits both the practitioner, and the client cohort. When youth workers are supported in their training and development goals and pathways, they build upon their expertise, and in light of the support that they receive it would be reasonable to expect that this would also, in turn, engender a greater sense of belonging and well-being, and therefore loyalty and commitment to the organisation as practitioners feel supported and valued in their practice.

Opportunities for attendance at community and youth work conferences can be sporadic, as Anton noted that often there is no discretionary budget:

> ... there's not enough money around for getting people to conferences … the profit element is just so bare (Anton).

However, when such opportunities do arise the benefits of networking and connecting with other youth work practitioners can create

> … a really powerful force - cross-fertilization of our needs - really good projects have come out of meeting people at conferences (Anton).

Youth and community workers come together from a vast range of practice environments and contexts, but often identify shared practice experiences and benefit from the collective knowledge that is uncovered at a micro or macro level throughout the proceedings.

> … you might go to something at YAPA, go to a conference … and realise that there's elements of that that you can take and apply to your own professional context (Jon)

These realisations extend such benefit to the young people with whom they work.

The provision of structures and resources that support youth workers in their practice promotes positive relationships within the organisation within which practitioners are able to draw upon the expertise and knowledge of supervisors and colleagues as they learn and develop their practice. Youth workers who are supported to attend training, study programs and conferences feel valued and benefit additionally from external collegial connections and associations. Supporting practice in this was encourages reflection on practice, supports continuous learning and development, enhances capacity and confidence, and engenders a professional approach to practice.

Professionality

> … my background is quite solid - helps me also manage from a self-- care perspective as well, so I tend to understand and I can see signs of when I should step out and have a rest or I am going to burn out. I think that's also sort of a mature thing that happened over the years - it wasn't necessarily part of me when I first worked in youth work … something I learned from other workers who mentored me (Gary).

When considering professional support and the ways in which youth workers sustain themselves, and therefore sustain their practice, what emerged from the data was that when reflecting on challenges, and then leaning into discussion around self-care, practitioners identified issues relating to their practice that were challenging, and described strategies and changes of action that they then applied to their practice. Whilst 'professional support' might usually consider the support of other professionals – as has been included above within organisational support, this section specifically speaks to professionality - the professional responsibility and approaches demonstrated and adopted by these youth work practitioners as they described in relation to their actions, and reactions, as they sought to adjust or improve their practice.

In identifying aspects of practice that cause distress or disorientation, and taking responsibility to find solutions, to seek balance, youth workers learned that in order to sustain their practice, and themselves, they needed to address and rectify those aspects that unnerved, challenged or depleted them at either a personal or professional level.

Self-care in the professional context includes locating a professional balance first through the setting of clear professional boundaries that serve and protect young people, as well as the practitioner and their ongoing practice

> I think I've learned a lot about what distance to set myself … I'm not as caught up in their needs … it's very easy to get caught up as part of that group that you're supposed to be encouraging to develop capacity, but by the same token it's also not remaining removed from that and isolated from that and untouchable (Nathan).

Whilst youth work practice requires knowledge and skills, and the support of colleagues, supervisors and management, without personal reflection and a grounded connection with the broader aspects of the role – the work has the potential to become overwhelming

> Well, just that - the frameworks, and understanding of what your role is, and how to self-care, and knowing your boundaries (Jess).

Many of these practice 'epiphanies' and realisations can only come about as the result of experience in the field, as youth workers experience challenges and disorientation

> … people push themselves and then get to the point where they get over the mark and then they can't bring themselves back (Gary).

and through reflection on practice - upon identifying the challenges or causes of disorientation - practitioners are then able to experiment their way through determinations of different responses to a range of practice settings and scenarios

> What is that professional role? I think that's the big thing. It's just "Okay, so I'm just going to help, and I'm not here to save by helping. I'm here just to assist and then once that assistance is done, I'm just sort of over here then" (Nathan).

Once identifying through experience that self-care is a core consideration in sustaining the personal and practice self, youth workers come to understand the importance of becoming attentive and mindful of their circumstances and the realities of the work,

> People have to learn how to say no, I learned how to say no, it took a while it's hard … I think that's part of self-- care. I do it even when my manager tries to push something to me and I feel like I don't have time to do it, I tell him no I can't do it. I'll be upfront with him, and I think that's

> important - saying that you are not available all the time and that you are not going to drop everything you do. It's not being disrespectful - just being honest (Gary)

Regular monitoring of their workloads and their levels of capacity help them develop realistic strategies to manage their professional selves:

> I just think it comes with experience, and like, years of working in the industry, you just start develop an ability to switch off, and it might be based on coping - otherwise you burn out and you wouldn't be in the industry for much longer … I just know, I guess, maybe it's just more value for myself as well, and knowing that if I'm not my 100 per cent self then I'm not going to be much use to anybody else. So it is a survival thing, I guess, to be able to do that otherwise you don't - you won't - last. (Jess).

Similarly, Jon identified the need to step back and separate himself emotionally on several levels as he attended to a broad range of responsibilities - to the organisation management, to the staff and to the client cohort.

> Being aware of self-care … particularly for me with what I have to do in terms of funding … because I find it emotionally draining and I have to de-personalise it constantly … maybe some of the insults you got from young people who are testing you, and de-personalise passive aggressive stuff from colleagues - it's just separating out your core being and just going with a healthy emotional attachment. I think this is what I'm learning here. I'm still well in the process, although I struggle all the time (Jon).

The 'process' of seeking balance is an ongoing concern for all practitioners. There is no magic clearing upon where one arrives – the challenges continue, through ebbs and flows. The process is ongoing until there are no challenges, unless dissatisfaction and disengagement win out and the desire to remain, and sustain self in practice, has gone.

Working within the human services presents many challenges and for many the focus is often on the 'other' as they enter the field with the desire to engage with young people in order that they may potentially enhance their quality of life, and assist in their personal development journey toward independence and participation in their communities. Sometimes, quite unexpectedly, engagement with the lives of others may stir or trigger memories or reactions of past events and experiences for practitioners that may remain unresolved or unattended in their own lives. Human services work requires consistent mindfulness of the nature of one's interpersonal communication and responses within professional practice and engagement with a

need to identify causes of distress or disorientation that may impact the ability to maintain balance and the professional stance

> … I think I made my mistakes at the beginning with boundaries and that really taught me that I needed to help myself before I help others. I went through [a] counselling process and really dealt with my own issues while still being a casual … skilling myself just to ensure that I'm in a good place to help the young people (Melinda).

Reflection on practice and events provides practitioners with the opportunity to review and identify practice issues, and also provides a space to critically consider the mental and emotional impacts of the work

> It's just about, once again, having that level of awareness of yourself – so if you've given yourself the time to think about it – then when [something] does happen again you don't get caught up in the moment … realising what's triggering you or what – you know how to handle the situation (Jess).

Understanding that the work is challenging, and demanding, and uncertain and unpredictable, is key to accepting also that as a practitioner working with other beings, who are usually vulnerable and often in a state of conflict or distress, carries a responsibility to be aware of the impact of one's presence, interactions and actions. In presenting as a professional the expectation of reliability and predictability is held to a higher standard than would be expected in informal day-to-day engagement.

> I've learned that it works much better when there's a high level of self-awareness and vigilance around when and where the boundaries are … I don't just mean like crossing over and into unethical or inappropriate practice … what you've experienced and where you've been … the awareness of your emotional status, not just the way your think you are, but what you're projecting (Jon).

The challenges of the work are numerous, and often unpredictable in the early years of practice, yet consistent in the regularity of their presentation. In order to remain in practice it appears vital that youth workers understand the importance of self-care - which is not necessarily to be considered only as a response to accumulation of stress from the work or particular events, but perhaps more importantly, implementing self-care through preparation may well serve and sustain practitioners more effectively

> I think that's a very important part of life if you are working with young people … that you need to make sure that you have your head less loaded - that's a very important part of the job (Gary).

Nathan and Gary both made mention of caring for self in relation to being mindful of their current capacity or practice desires when considering future practice contexts or settings. Nathan noted that at this point in time his focus and priority would be around preserving self, though this was not a fixed position

> I probably wouldn't go back and work with the [Crisis Service] in the same way that I worked then doing outreach because I just feel like: You know what? Do I really want quite that level of stress and trauma around? I mean people talk about self-care and things like that, and there might be a point in time where I'll be like: You know what, they're doing that kind of thing again … (Nathan).

Anton's opportunity to reflect and critically assess his future direction occurred when he found himself again at a crossroads after self-exiting from a role that presented ethical dilemmas that he was not prepared to compromise his practice for, or ignore. Rather than leap into a new available position Anton decided to take only casual work for a period of time whilst he "had another sabbatical" as he decided to "have another evaluation"

> "Where do I want to be?" "What do I want to do next?" And I thought about the main things that I liked … working with groups of young people and workers – particularly mentoring workers … I'd rather be in a role where I can engage in a team effort with other workers, and younger workers, and give them some benefit of expertise - but also being enlivened by their freshness (Anton).

Sustaining self and sustaining practice in the field of youth work requires awareness on the part of individual practitioners of their strengths, those aspects of the work that challenges them, and the nature of their affinity with the work. Through practice experience youth workers come to understand the need to identify the challenging and disorienting aspects of their practice, and learn to develop strategies that serve their personal and professional selves with a view to longevity in the field.

Wellbeing

> Self-care – it's the biggest thing. As much as we don't realise how important it is at the start, I think it's the absolute biggest thing, and to just see the warning signs when you realise you're not coping – to reach out for some support (Melinda).

Accessing supports and resources to sustain practice in the workplace; responsibly managing self within practice; and attending to personal care to support the self, form the three pillars for sustaining self and sustaining practice. Self-care outside of the work place, away from the working environment, is required to maintain a sense of personal self away from practice – to acknowledge and engage in life away from the work, to remember that the work can be confined to the work space. As earlier described, youth workers can find themselves caught up in the work, mentally remaining attached and concerned beyond the closed doors at the end of the day. Whilst challenges are to be expected as part of the day-to-day work, crisis and collapse can be avoided. However, it is experience and time in the field that teaches youth workers that there is value in caring for self, and that their practice benefits from their attention to themselves.

> The other thing I've become aware of, and I'm trying to be better and better at is self-care, and about managing accumulated stresses … there's such an ongoing challenge. It's not that I feel like I'm going to have a breakdown now, but I wish it was just a cruisier job! (Jon).

The mental and emotional challenges can be draining and deplete physical energy – hence the danger of exhaustion and collapse. In seeking that separation and balance, some develop rituals or habits that mentally signal and encourage a shift from the professional space to the personal space.

> I'll go home and let go of things and do the things I need to do … like having a shower, washing the energy away; good food, friends, just relaxation ... and I think it's really important to have a life outside of your work. I see a lot of people who I feel sometimes that they've got too much percentage of their energy in their work and they don't have much identity outside their life (Jess).

Each must take care to engage in the world outside of work – maintaining social and familial connections, setting aside time to engage in recreation and creativity, and allowing the personal self the space to simply be.

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> I've never really done a lot of self-care. Now I regularly – the first thing
> when I get home is sit down for half an hour … I don't want to think about
> [work] and try to distract my mind. Then I get on my treadmill and just
> run for about half an hour to forty minutes and put the music on and the
> world doesn't exist … (Melinda).

Gary acknowledged that he had likely passed the point where he should already have assessed where he was currently at and taken some time out to recuperate, and he was well aware of the need to not 'plough on through' again as he had previously.   Gary was committed to a plan to take some leave to rejuvenate away from practice and the practice environment and reset the balance to restore his physical, mental and emotional equilibrium in order to sustain his long-term practice

> I've been working pretty hard for the last two years … I think I have been a
> bit overloaded but I just put a lot of energy into it - that's a very important
> part of my work … So I am taking a step back – taking some time for
> myself – so at the moment for me it's about taking time with my family… I
> think it's more about having space, zoning out for a while … having some
> time to myself (Gary).

Following his collapse and departure from his first role of four years, Jon was utterly depleted and unable to consider further work in the field at that time. Mentally and emotionally shattered he

> … went off to the middle of nowhere … it felt like the wilderness. It was
> certainly like the social and emotional wilderness because I was rebuilding
> (Jon).

Taking a job that was less demanding and less involved, which he described as

> … totally removed; totally like mind-numbing unsatisfying, but it's like
> bland soup when you're sick … the type of job that gave you an income,
> but it didn't freak me out too much … (Jon)

he allowed himself time to recover from the accumulation of stress and the trauma that resulted from the throes of events that led to, and included, his "unplanned departure". Whilst there was no particular plan, (the escape was a matter of survival), eventually Jon's desire to work within the community - his sense of vocation - re-surfaced after a good period of time away from the field

> … after a year away, I just thought … I got drawn towards wanting to do
> something again, and that's when I ended up with an appointment with [his
> current Youth Service] … and I've been here ever since (Jon).

Although Jon's year long sabbatical was not necessarily part of a planned strategy to sustain himself and his practice, sustain his longer-term practice it did. The recovery that Jon made over the year enabled his return to the field as a rested, somewhat restored, and a more aware and experienced practitioner as a result of his prior practice experiences, and the period of reflection that contributed to his recovery.

Summary

This chapter identified and described the organisational structures that strengthen and sustain youth workers as they learn and develop their practice by promoting the sharing of knowledge within the workplace, and providing support for individual practice. Youth workers described the importance of learning from practice experiences - to take professional responsibility by accessing resources and adopting strategies to care for themselves in the course of their work. Just as importantly, youth workers spoke of the need to step away entirely and separate self from the environment of work – to be mindful of caring for self at a personal level; to put some distance between the challenges and demands of the work so that they may actively participate in their own private worlds – outside the field of practice.

The following three chapters present the interpretation of the findings of the study providing a deeper level of analysis of the lived experience for youth workers in terms of their relationship with place and space as they enter the field and engage in practice. The final chapter turns to the 'becoming' of youth workers, and a view to future horizons.

CHAPTER EIGHT: NAVIGATING PLACE

> In interpreting place as synergistic relationality, one can say that each person and group are first of all a nexus of human and environmental relationships, including the lived experiences, situations and meanings that the person or group encounters in relation to the place in which they find themselves (Seamon, 2015, p. 22).

Introduction

The lived experience begins with our existence, our being, our physical presence in the world. Our corporeal nature, this existence in human bodies, enables our 'being-in-the-world' (Heidegger, 1962) as physical beings. We navigate, interpret, make meaning of and understand our world, orienting to the physical realm, through the senses. Our physical capacity allows us to experience and navigate and interact with the world and interpret our experiences through our senses.

Within the physical realm we live and move within, there are places to which different meanings are given. In different places we exist and act within spaces through which meaning is made of our experiences. Tuan (1977) distinguishes between places as 'public symbols' "that yield their meaning to the eye" (p. 412) and places as 'fields of care' (Wild, 1963, p.47). Unlike public symbols that command one's view, Tuan (1977) describes 'fields of care' such as neighbourhoods, towns, homes or marketplaces as "networks of interpersonal concern" (p. 416) "that are known only after prolonged experience" (p. 412) – places where human intentions, experiences and actions occur.

Space itself is abstract (Tuan, 1977) and is constituted by physical, or conceived space; mental, or perceived space; and relational, social space – lived space (Lefebvre, 1974/1991; Soja, 1996, Watkins, 2005). "According to Heidegger, the notion of physical space requires a lived sense of space" (Wilde, 2013, p. 17) and descriptions of space depend on "already having a lived embodied understanding of the world" with "lived experiences of spatiality" (Wilde, 2013, p. 17) and suggests that within space all things and all beings are relational.

Our lived experience, our corporeal existence as a "physically present" and relational being (van Manen, 1997, p. 104), interprets and makes meaning of our experiences through the temporal dimensions of past, present and future (Heidegger, 1962). Yet understanding develops not necessarily in a linear fashion (Duchsher, 2008), but evolves as our being, and our understanding of our being, 'becomes' through engagement in the world, through lived experience as we interpret and make meaning of our experiences as past, present and future dimensions unite in the momentary present.

> To acquire a horizon means that one learns to look beyond what is close at hand—not in order to look away from it but to see it better, within a larger whole and in truer proportion. (Gadamer, 1989, 305).

The interpretation that follows presents a deeper analysis of the accounts of the youth workers' lived experiences in three parts. Here, in Chapter Eight, I begin first with the navigation of place – the experiences of youth workers as they come to the field in anticipation, with expectation. As they arrive and orient themselves to place – the context, the people, and the work - they seek to locate and understand themselves and their role, in 'this place' where youth work happens. Chapter Nine explores the negotiation of space – particularly the relational spaces within which youth workers engage as practitioners, and the spaces through which they learn and develop their professional practice. Chapter Ten turns to the 'becoming' - the professional development and transformation of practitioners from intention to practice, through engagement and situated learning experiences; to construct their identities through their professional journeys as they craft their own personal practice.

> Place incarnates the experiences and aspirations of a people. Place is not only a fact to be explained in the broader frame of space, but it is also a reality to be clarified and understood from the perspectives of the people who have given it meaning (Tuan, 1979, p. 387).

Anticipation

The youth workers in this study came to the practice field with a variety of personal and employment backgrounds (Huebner, Walker & McFarland, 2003) and understandings from their past that informed their perceptions of young people and

youth work practice. With a range of educational and professional backgrounds (Walker, 2003; Yohalem & Pittman, 2006) they arrived, each via unique pathways, intentionally or 'accidentally' with varying levels of formal education, skills and competency (Hartje, Evans, Killian & Brown, 2008; Bessant, 2012). Such diversity results in a workforce of individuals with differing levels of preparedness and competency who may, or may not, be qualified and well equipped for the practice of youth work (Hartje et al., 2008).

Those who arrived with specific community service or youth work qualifications, along with the requisite student practice placement experience held provisional understandings and expectations of the work. Alex and Jess's student placement experiences influenced the direction of their careers as the idea of working with young people resonated deeply. They gained a sense of, and could identify with, the role of a youth worker as a result of their time spent in their practice placements. Both came to their formal positions with provisional understandings of what youth work as a practice entailed based upon their experiences of being in places where youth work happened, observing and learning alongside those experienced and engaged in the work. Nathan and Melinda also both worked in casual youth support work roles whilst they completed their studies. As such, they too came to their post-study youth work roles with provisional understandings of the work, further informed and enriched by the additional responsibilities and experiences of their real-world roles in the field.

Those arriving without prior youth work experiences held both real and abstract provisional understandings based upon life experiences or impressions gained from connections with young people or understandings of the work. Perceptions of what work may be is influenced and informed by societal stereotypes, childhood & adolescent experiences, cultural influences, professional training and knowledge gleaned from the organisational selection and orientation processes as individuals enter the field of work (Dean, 1983).

The participants who came to youth work without specific industry qualifications or related youth work specific experience - whilst holding tenuous pre-conceived notions about youth workers, what it is that they do, and their status in the community - arrived without a concrete frame of reference for youth work as a practice. Whilst

Nick had contact with young people in a previous career, the role had been pastoral with both the setting and the young people being consistently predictable, more certain. The level of responsibility for the young people along with any accountability regarding service for young people, was significantly different in nature. Similarly, Jon had been a mentor for young people within his home community. As a pastoral figure his engagement with a range of young people contributed to the development of skills valuable for the role, but like Nick, whilst the care and concern for young people within his community was real, the responsibility for the young people essentially lay elsewhere, and accountability was not necessarily a factor. Gary and Anton's provisional understandings were tenuous at best. Identified by others as having the capacity to engage well with young people, both acknowledged that they came to the field 'blind' so to speak, with limited knowledge or understanding about what the practice of youth work entailed.

The provisional understandings of youth work held by those participants without youth work training or experience stemmed from real-world experiences of engagement with young people, along with general knowledge and understandings about youth work and youth workers. However, they remained some distance from those who had experienced places where youth work happened; who had been able to observe, engage and identify with youth work and youth workers in real-world practice settings. Therefore, the expectations of those 'falling' into the work were vague in comparison to those who undertook specific training and/or education. They held more generalist assumptions and limited knowledge about the practice of youth work compared to those who were trained in community services or youth work; those who had served a period of 'apprenticeship' in situ and were able to visualise themselves in, and identify more definitively with, the role.

Youth work is not a uniform practice that occurs in predictable places. Youth workers coming to the work first needed to come to an understanding of what happens 'in this place'. Anticipation, perception and preparedness formed the basis for their expectations. The first challenges that many youth workers experience will often be borne of these expectations as they step into the reality of the world youth work. They arrive at 'place' as social beings with anticipation and expectation, and a

particular capacity for preparedness. They arrive at this place, to take up the mantle –
to be.

Arrival

> Place is 'constituted through a gathering of elements that are themselves
> mutually defined only through the way in which they are gathered together
> within the place they also constitute' (Malpas, 2006, p.29 in Seamon, 2015,
> p. 19).

Seamon (2015) describes the synergistic relationality of place as defining the identity
and actions of any part by its contextual situation in the larger whole (p. 21). In
simplistic terms – place is to be viewed not in terms of its separate parts, but rather
holistically where the whole depends on the parts but, equally, the parts depend on the
whole (p. 21) in that all parts belong together.

> A place is the compelling focus of a field: it is a small world, the node at
> which activities converge (Tuan, 1977, p. 411).

Into these places – these places already established and dynamic – practitioners
arrived as newcomers with a need to navigate and make sense of their practice
communities, and understand the ways in which the work would be done. It is clear
from the youth worker's accounts of arrival in Chapter 4 that many questions arise as
they come to 'place'. Such questions include:

- What is this place? Identifying the context of the service provision.

- Who are the actors here - in this place? Identifying the organisational structure, the
  community of practice, and the client cohort.

- What happens here - in this place? Identifying the elements of service provision and
  the ways that these are operationalised.

- What is my role here – in this place? Identifying the expectations of a youth work
  practitioner within this context.

- How do I act here – in this place? Identifying the 'rules' and expectations of applied
  practice.

Arriving, intentionally or seemingly accidentally, with anticipation but as yet no
formed identity, expectations of youth work and practice held by initiates are often

proven to be quite different to the reality in the field. As youth workers orient to workplaces it is likely that they will experience 'reality shock' (Kramer, 1974; Gaede, 1978; Dean, 1983; Gordon & Maxey, 2000; Wanzare, 2007) as they find that their pre-entry expectations are challenged by the realities of the environment and the work. Reality shock, also referred to as 'transition shock' (Corcoran, 1981; Duchscher, 2008; 2009; Farrell, 2016), specifically speaks to the experiences of teaching and nursing graduates as they 'transition' from tertiary education to the realities of practice. Reflecting the stages outlined in Moir's (1999) model which represents the journeys of beginning teachers through five phases - anticipation, survival, disillusionment, rejuvenation and reflection - Duchscher (2008) describes the transition for new nursing graduates as a process that

> evolves in a fairly predictable manner from the honeymoon phase, where graduates are excited and exhilarated; through a shocking assault on their professional values that leaves them disoriented and disillusioned; and to the recovery and resolution phases, marked by a return of a sense of balance (p. 442)

whereby "disturbing discrepancies" between their understanding of practice prior to arrival and the reality of practice "leaves new graduates with a sense of groundlessness" (Duchscher, 2009, p. 1104).

Whilst half of the participants in this study arrived via educational and training pathways that prepared and qualified them for work in the human services, half did not and therefore did not arrive with the same pre-conceived notions or strength of pre-formed expectations of what youth work practice might look like. They carried fewer expectations of themselves as practitioners predominantly due to a lack of knowledge, with the understanding that they would be learning the role on-the-job. Nevertheless, it is evident, that they too, experienced reality shock, and to a greater degree in some respects as they arrived with little or no knowledge of the sector, and few understandings of the ways in which youth work services are delivered. They faced a much steeper learning curve as newcomers to the field, compounded by the lack of youth work specific practice skills or knowledge, and the absence of any professional socialisation (Hinshaw, 1976; Ajjawi & Higgs, 2008; Chitty & Black, 2011; Houghton, 2014) into the field.

Sense making

Learning and adjusting to a new place of work involved a experience of disorientation for many at the beginning of their practice journey as they adapted to the service environment, and began to engage with the cohort of young people. Practitioners found themselves in an initial stage of "surprise and sense making" (Louis, 1980; Weick, 1995) as their expectations about the work were challenged – such as Melinda who was under the impression that being a youth worker was going to be a "fun job … hanging out with young people and doing sorts of fun things"; or when their expectations of themselves as practitioners were not met (Louis, 1980) – as reflected in the frustration that Alex experienced as in the early days she wondered whether or not she was having any impression or impact at all in her work with young people.

Youth work, being a practice that occurs in an environment of uncertainty and unpredictability saw practitioners confronted by aspects of the work that were unanticipated (Louis, 1980) such as challenging behaviours, ethical dilemmas, managing one's professional self; or experiencing the death of a young person – as Melinda poignantly shared, there was no expectation or preparing for that.

Louis (1980) describes a further "form of surprise" that comes from the cultural assumptions that newcomers make … when the newcomer relies on cultural assumptions brought from previous settings as operating guides in the new setting, and they fail (p. 238). Practitioners moving from one place to another – to similar or different contexts, or newcomers coming to youth work from other fields, rely on prior experiences and knowledge. Jess, in moving to a new place, whilst rather experienced in youth work found herself taken aback by the resentment directed toward her upon arrival by a youth cohort upset at the loss of their previous youth worker. She could not have foreseen the challenge not having experienced change before, nor the ways of being of a cohort embedded in a very different, territorial context. Nick, who unconsciously expected to find the predictable behaviours of youth and the clients of his past work experience reflected in the young people in his new practice role, discovered that his engagement and practice whilst appropriate and effective in a previous settings, failed to have an impact - in this place. For youth workers moving from one organisation or service to another, the variation between services and contexts, as well as the different locales and cohorts of young people,

prove that whilst the foundations of practice may remain the same, different contexts have the potential to present new or different challenges that impact upon practice.

In navigating place as they arrive to places of practice, youth workers familiarise themselves with the organisational structures of the service, the frameworks that guide service provision and practice, and seek advice from colleagues and experienced practitioners. As youth workers begin to engage with young people in practice – in this place, they gain and build upon experiences from which they can learn.

Summary

Youth workers come to the field through youth work specific education and training or alternative pathways and experience a period of transition as they orient, and navigate the places where youth work happens. Learning their new roles, and adjusting to the realities of the work as they integrate into the practice environment, youth workers begin to establish a sense of belonging, gaining confidence as they begin to explore and build upon their experiences. The next chapter considers the various spaces within which youth workers learn, experience and develop their practice.

CHAPTER NINE: NEGOTIATING SPACE

Introduction

In the previous chapter I discussed the anticipation, expectation and preparedness of individuals as they entered the sector and arrived at places where youth work happens - in 'fields of care' (Tuan, 1977). Recognising these places as established and already dynamic, practitioners arrived as 'newcomers' (Lave & Wenger, 1991) with differing expectations and degrees of preparedness. As they oriented to the organisational and contextual environment they sought to make sense of the reality of the work and the practice community. This chapter explores the negotiation of space – particularly the relational spaces within which youth workers engage as practitioners, and through which they learn and develop their professional practice.

As youth workers came to these 'fields of care' (Tuan, 1977) they entered as novices, or initiates, into a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) whereby

> Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly (Wenger, 2000).

Further, Eckert & McConnell-Ginet (1992) describe communities of practice as a group of people who

> come together around mutual engagement in an endeavor. Ways of doing things, ways of talking, beliefs, values, power relations – in short, practices – emerge in the course of this mutual endeavor. As a social construct, a community of practice is … defined simultaneously by its membership and by the practice in which that membership engages (p. 464).

This definition emphasises the premise that such communities are defined by social engagement. In these places where youth work happens the 'shared concern', or the 'endeavour' in the field of care, is the practice of youth work – a relational practice that places young people and their interests first, and promotes their personal and social development via advocacy, assistance, support and education. The community of practice is constituted by those present and engaged in the endeavour of youth work practice including youth workers, coordinators, team leaders and managers, those with a vested and applied interest in engagement with young people within the

field of care. The field of care more broadly includes the community of practice, associates, the cohort of young people, and all those who enter.

Concepts of space

In returning to Tuan's notion of space as abstract (1977) we recall that space is constituted by

- physical, or conceived space;

- mental, or perceived space; and

- relational, social space – lived space (Lefebvre, 1974/1991; Soja, 1996; Watkins, 2005).

Whilst working with the data, the stories and reflections of youth work practitioners, the concept of space consistently arose through the narratives. When speaking of the physical space youth workers spoke about young people coming "into the space"; providing young people with "a safe place for them to socialise and interact" - a "secure space". Nathan relayed an account of young people discussing their views about a major artwork that was to be created for their youth centre:

> One of the things that the young people felt was important about the space – [is] that because it's got two basketball courts it's often viewed by the rest of the community as the sporting space. Whereas to them it's actually a social space, and they were saying "Look, it's not just a basketball court, and we want to put those images that reflect the wide variety of the things it is to each of us: like space for imagination, space for creativity as such, space for sport, a space for arts, space to listen to music, space to dance and be ourselves rather than just getting basketballs (Nathan).

Whilst the description given by the young people spoke *about* the physical space, what was revealed was the young people's mental perception of the youth-dedicated space. In practice, youth worker's references to mental space included giving young people the "space to be" and "letting them have their experiences and … their inner space". Alex noted this as an important discovery saying that whilst in her course she was taught about communication with open-ended questions, and acting in non-judgmental ways, that there were lots of things that you still needed to learn once you came to the work – "like giving space".

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With the central aspect of youth work practice being the relationship (Rodd & Stewart, 2009) it was not surprising to find that youth workers spoke predominantly about consciously 'creating' relational space – a protected space where conversation can occur, "the most ordinary and most profound of human activities" (Baker, Jensen & Kolb, 2002, p.1). Youth workers made themselves available and opened a space to connect; a space within which they sought to build trust (Spencer, 2006) as they engaged with young people *in* relationship – creating a lived space (Lefebvre, 1991).

> My work is very much about understanding … providing a space, making space for [young people] to talk, make sense … Well let's talk about it, let's make space for this, so what happened? So you start exploring "Oh, ok" … and then from that comes insight (Nick).

Different contexts gave rise to different modes of 'bounded space' yet wherever youth workers were found to be in relationship with young people they sought to create spaces where "conversations of inquiry and explorations [could] create learning opportunities … larger than could be accomplished by any single participant" (Baker, Jensen & Kolb, 2002, p.11). Whilst engagement with young people was planned or specific in some services, often in youth centres the notion of creating space was broader as connections were often unplanned and occurred in more 'everyday' moments.

> The conversations that you can have in here can be quite positive … engaging with young people … just being open to listening to what's going on for them … A lot of it is about just giving them a space to open up if they want to … (Jess).

Whilst conversation is a fundamental learning tool central to youth work practice - the spaces in between - the silences and the simply being, are as significant as the dialogue. Anton spoke of strategically opening up spaces for dialogue as he engaged with young people in various activities

> … it could be anything where the talk's secondary. To me the basketball's secondary. But that's okay, we can lead in those spaces … there something to distract them in between silences … If you don't talk for 10 minutes [it's] because they're absorbing what you've just said, or you're absorbing what they've just said, and deciding what to do with that (Anton).

Thirdspace

Soja (1996) defines this lived space as Thirdspace: the experience of being in the Firstspace (physical space) as mediated through the expectations of the Secondspace (mental). For Soja (1996) Thirdspace is the space within which

> everything comes together … subjectivity and objectivity, the abstract and the concrete, the real and the imagined, the knowable and the unimaginable, the repetitive and the differential, structure and agency, mind and body, consciousness and the unconscious, the disciplined and the transdisciplinary, everyday life and unending history (p. 57).

Thirdspace is where all the spaces combine (Bustin, 2011) to give meaning to the space, to create a lived experience. In exploring the lived experience of youth workers as they learn and develop their practice, this consistent underlying concept of space led me to consider the lived spaces within which youth workers consciously engage in the practice of their own informal education. I describe these relational spaces - the spaces within which youth workers learn and develop their practice - in Figure 9.1 below
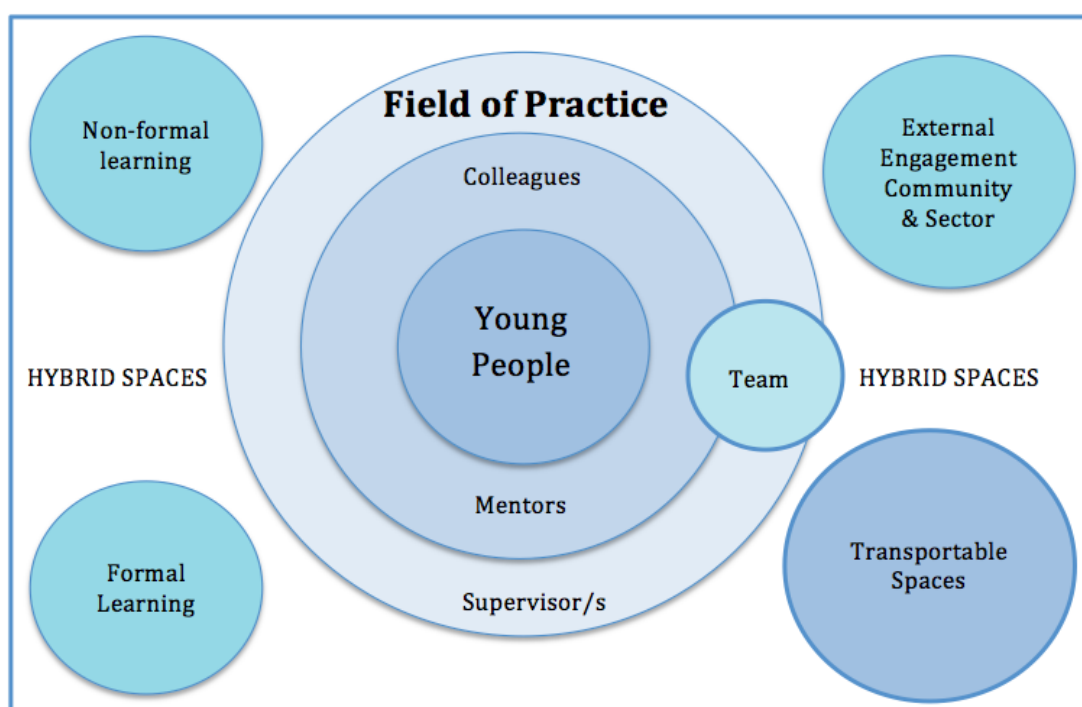

Figure 9.1: Relational spaces for youth work learning and practice development.

Relational spaces

Practitioner participation within three primary categories of learning spaces, contributes to the development of youth work practice:

- **the micro-environment** where interpersonal connection involves engagement in interactions with young people – the practice;

- **the intermediate-environment** where interpersonal connection involves engagement with colleagues, mentors and supervisors - which informs and supports professional practice;

- **the macro-environment** where interpersonal connection involves connections with others - active engagement or participation in external activity that informs or supports the practitioner's practice.

The **micro-environment**, nested within the intermediate-environment and the macro-environment is where the intimate practice of youth work happens. The micro-environment is the space within which the young person is central - the space of engagement, a co-constructed space (Blackburn, 2005) where the relationship and the practice is negotiated between a young person and the youth worker. Youth workers spoke of providing space – a "safe space" where young people "feel safe to be a young person" (Jess), and "making space" for young people "to talk ... to make sense" (Nick) . Similarly with groups of young people, relationships and ways of being and doing are negotiated in terms of how the group functions and acts (Sapin, 2013) when sharing space and place. Jon highlights the importance of his youth service providing

> ... a reasonable amount of unstructured group programs ... a safe place
> for them to socialise and interact, which is a necessary thing; there's
> not a lot of public spaces for young people to do that (Jon).

It is this relational space, where practitioners and young people connect, where practice learning is situated; the space within which youth workers reported that they came to an understanding of their practice; through 'trial and error', through experience, in relationship with young people.

> What it does is it creates an opportunity for individual youth workers
> to get to know the peer groups ... the broader group, and to get to
> know the individuals within that group [which] becomes the pathway
> or a mechanism for us to open the door to advice, support, referral,
> advocacy ... (Jon).

Providing "those spaces for those opportunities" was also noted by Jess who recognised that these spaces opened up the possibilities for engagement with young people "so that you can potentially educate them around issues that are really important to them ... being non-judgemental and just being open to listening to what's going on for them" (Jess).

Nick and Nathan also spoke about learning *from* young people – not only in thinking about different ways in which to engage and to conduct their practice, but both also acknowledged the unexpected personal challenges. "Young people have taught me things about myself that I didn't know I had – my capacity for patience, my capacity for change ..." (Nathan). Practice experience within the micro-environment saw lessons learned by Melinda and Alex in regards to developing professional relationships with young people - particularly in identifying the need for, and establishing, professional "physical, emotional and ethical" boundaries that serve both youth workers and young people alike (Batsleer, 2008, p. 61). Being in relationship with young people also results in an exchange of social and cultural knowledge, that informs youth worker practice in the given context and encourages new ways of thinking about the experiences of other – as individuals and as members of their communities.

The micro-environment is not necessarily a fixed space. Youth worker's accounts speak of connections and experiences outside of youth centres or services where youth workers walk with young people outside the fixed place, to complete tasks, or assist young people to achieve goals - accompanying or engaging with young people in activities in other spaces within the community. Subsequently, the relational space within which the young person and the practitioner engage – the relationship – exists in the space created by the relationship, transported with them from place to place. The relationship is created and constructed as a professional relationship as youth workers are expected to maintain their stance in their engagement in practice, and young people carry their expectations of the same.

The **intermediate-environment** identifies the space where the youth workers in this study reported that they received guidance from colleagues and mentors who were the primary source for support and guidance as they entered the field. This space encompasses the community of practice where youth workers, particular those who came to the field without a community or youth work training background, looked to

role models and practitioners with experience to develop their skills and to draw upon their knowledge. "If you're a young worker, you need to have access to someone who has experience" (Anton). Chapter Five revealed the ways in which youth workers learned through the observation of others in the workplace; sought advice from colleagues, individually and within regular team meeting settings; and applied what was learned or meaningful to them to their own practice. The significant mentoring relationships for the practitioners in this study within the intermediate-environment were those established with their line supervisors or associated service mentors. "The notion of 'supervision' as a supportive and challenging practice is well embedded within youth work" (Millar, 2010, p. 142), however, "this is far from the experience of many youth work practitioners" (Jenkinson, 2009, p. 157). The youth workers in this study had reported a mix of experiences of supervision in the past, but all were now engaged in positive supervision relationships wherein they felt supported and were able to discuss issues and challenges that arose in their practice, using this space to reflect on their practice experiences in order understand and find meaning in past practice experiences and to develop strategies for future professional practice (Jenkinson, 2009; Sapin, 2013) and personal care. The supervision space was also a space for practitioners to discuss and plan their ongoing professional learning and practice development. In drawing upon the expertise of the experienced practitioners and mentors within their communities of practice, youth workers used the knowledge and skills derived from the intermediate-environment to inform and support the application of their practice with young people within the micro-environment.

The micro-environment and the intermediate-environment are nested within the **macro-environment** that is, essentially, the world outside the immediate field of relational practice. The macro-environment includes the spaces described in Chapter Five where youth workers engaged with fellow practitioners, trainers and educators at industry interagency gatherings; structured workshops; and youth work and community services training and conferences conducted for the sector to promote learning and discovery. Such spaces provided opportunities for connecting, networking and socialisation within the broader community of practice – not only beneficial for collegial support and the acquisition of knowledge, but such spaces can promote and support the exchange of ideas or "cross-fertilisation" (Anton) between service providers with a similar remit.

Engagement with external mentors and supervisors provided spaces for dialogue that supported and contributed to youth workers' reflective practice (Krueger, 2005). Participation in formal and non-formal education and training, along with personal efforts to access community service and youth work related reading resources, supported the ongoing learning and development of practitioners through the acquisition of new skills and new knowledge.

Hybrid spaces

Lastly, but certainly not least, in Figure 9.1 I include hybrid spaces - spaces described by Solomon, Boud & Rooney (2006) as those that are "at one and the same time work and socialising spaces where the participants are both working and not working" (p. 5). These are spaces where informal or incidental learning occurs as practitioners engage in conversation or community with other youth workers or associates in the spaces 'in-between' (Solomon, et al., p. 7) - in the workplace, at meetings, inter-agencies, workshops, training and conferences. Hybrid spaces are those spaces aside from planned and structured work - where youth workers unintentionally or purposefully find opportunities to engage informally with other youth workers; where the informal sharing of information and ideas informs, surprises, resonates, stimulates and sometimes generates new ideas, new learning and influences new ways of doing. Solomon et al. (2006) discovered "a richness of learning" (p. 83) occurred within these transitional or non-formal spaces which Smith (1988) describes refers to as "natural societal situations" (p. 126) where conversations in passing occur. Unplanned dialogue may informally explore and shed light upon approaches to practice, or suggest solutions through the experiences of practices shared by others in response to stories or questions that may arise within these incidental conversations.

Summary

This chapter explored the concept of space and the different relational environments that contribute to the learning and development of youth work practice. Youth workers learned their craft in a number of ways with on-the-job experience, in

relation with young people, reported as the primary means for understanding their role and developing their practice (Walker, 2003). Youth workers emphasised that learning results from the relationships that they have with young people. Many stated that it is the young people who teach them (Yohalem, 2003), particularly in regard to effective ways in which to engage – founded upon honesty, trust and demonstrating authenticity. Youth workers developed their practice as they engaged in situated, direct practice experiences with young people whilst being supported and guided in their learning by more experienced practitioners and supervisors.

Practitioners learned within different spaces, directly or indirectly, through observation, shared practice, and informal conversation. Opportunities for learning were provided in individual and team settings where debriefing, consultation and feedback supported reflection on action and encouraged the development of strategies for future practice. Youth workers engaged in various forms of industry related training and professional development courses (Yohalem & Pittman, 2006) that they viewed as relevant to their practice. Youth workers identified the value and benefits of formal and non-formal learning as providing more understanding and meaning upon reflection of past practice, and when applied to future practice. Engagement in learning spaces in the external macro-environment and the intermediate environment of the community of practice supported the ongoing learning and development of youth workers as they practiced, in relationship with young people, in the intimate space of the micro-environment. The next chapter draws together the elements of the journey of 'becoming'.

CHAPTER 10: CRAFTING A PERSONAL PRACTICE

Introduction

The previous two chapters presented interpretations of aspects of the lived experience for youth workers as they entered the youth work field, and learned and developed their practice. Navigating Place described the experience of youth workers as they first came to youth work and oriented to the reality of the work – finding their feet as they came to an understanding of the work, and began to establish a sense of place, a sense of being in place, and becoming a youth worker. Negotiating space described the various environments for learning and development for youth workers with their engagement in relationship with young people central to their learning, and the motivation for the development of their practice. Professional learning and development for youth workers was supported, guided by colleagues and facilitated by mentors, in much the same way that they, as practitioners, supported, guided and facilitated young people's learning through the practice of education. Youth workers further consolidated their practice development through their participation in a variety of formal and non-formal learning activities and programs. This chapter considers the journeys of the participants from their first notions of coming to the field; their pathways of discovery, their encounters through engagement and the challenges they faced; to their view toward future horizons as youth workers share their plans for future practice.

Intention

The literature reflects that individuals are motivated to enter the youth work field for a range of reasons (Walker, 2003, Yohalem, 2003; Hartje, Evans, Killian & Brown, 2008) often based upon a desire and passion to contribute, and be of service, to young people and their development (Baizerman, 1995; Yohalem, 2003; Yohalem & Pittman, 2006, Hartje et al, 2008). Homan's (1986) examination of the concept of vocation as the "quest for authentic existence" describes vocation as "the organising, existential principle of the concept of work" where 'work' is "the production of an enduring object requiring self-investment, skill, craft, and

personal judgment that yields purpose and meaning" (p. 14). Whilst making no claim that all are 'called' to the profession of youth work, and acknowledging that not all those who work within the human services field will necessarily experience the work as meaningful (Beadle & Knight, 2012), for these youth workers, by whichever path they arrived, there existed an explicit or latent 'calling orientation' (Hall & Chandler, 2005) - a pre-disposition for the work that was recognised by self, or other, that drew them to the field. They arrived with an articulated purpose and desire to contribute to the lives with young people; experienced job satisfaction and fulfilment (Heslin, 2005; Dik & Duffy, 2009); and demonstrated an ongoing commitment to the work (Serow, 1994). Each of the participant's journeys were unique – each a lived experience of personal and professional challenge and growth.

Becoming

> Practice is shaped by meaning, knowledge, power and social institutions, as well as "timespace" (Schatzki, 2010 in Loftus, Higgs & Trede, 2011, p.4).

<u>Professional practice</u>

Argyris & Schön (1974) define practice as "a sequence of actions undertaken by a person to serve others, who are considered clients" whereby "each action in the sequence of actions repeats some aspect of other actions in the sequence, but each action is in some way unique" (p. 6). Ewing & Smith (2001) argue that "professional practice is about doing, knowing, being and becoming … about doing things with and for other people within a purposeful, informed, ethical and aesthetic framework" (p. 16). They describe professional practice as "people-centred, purposeful, based on informed action, individual and located in a specific context which is itself embedded in wider historical, socio-political and economic cultures" (p. 16). Professional practice refers to "a particular form of social practice – its scope, culture, norms, knowledge base, code of conduct and set of practices" (Higgs, 2013, p. 84). Upon entering professional practice to 'become' a 'professional' Ronfeldt & Grossman (2008) suggest that novices are required to construct "identities that fit into that world" (p. 41) whereby they "negotiate images of themselves as professionals" as they learn and adapt to the practice environment, and their new roles; and "learn to

negotiate their personal identity with the professional role" (p. 41). Scanlon (2011) describes 'becoming' as "an evolutionary, iterative process through which individuals develop a sense of professional self, a professional identity" (p. 14) which is "multidimensional, and constituted by knowledge, skills and professional performance" (p. 14). It is this 'becoming' that has been one of the key concerns of this study. The research question: How does one learn to 'become' a youth worker? makes explicit the assumption that the 'becoming' is a process ~ a journey that occurs through place, space and time.

Socialisation

> … in assuming new roles, people must not only acquire new skills but also adopt the social norms and rules that govern how they should conduct themselves (Ibarra, 1999, p. 764).

The professional socialisation of practitioners, in traditional professions, usually begins in the pre-service period of scholarship at university accompanied by a structured introduction to the field of practice via student placement or internship experiences. "Socialisation, or acculturation into a cultural practice is fundamental to becoming a professional" (Scanlon, 2011, p. 15) as a process that contributes to the development of students' identity as practitioners. The process involves the student learning the values, attitudes and beliefs of a profession (Richardson, 1999) through interaction in real world practice settings as they come to understand and internalise "the shared meanings, symbols and customs that make up the culture [that] distinguishes it from other professions" (Davey & Bredemeyer, 2011, p. 203). The challenge for youth work as a profession in Australia is understanding that many individuals coming to youth work will not have experienced a pre-service process of socialisation and enculturation to the field. Youth workers with youth work specific degrees will have experienced a full three-year socialisation process; those arriving with youth work specific Diplomas and Certificates will have a partial experience in comparison; and those with closely associated qualifications in related human services studies such as social work or community services will arrive having experienced a similar, but not specific, socialisation to the field of youth work. For those coming to the work as 'outsiders' the socialisation process largely begins upon

arrival to the field intensifying the experience particularly for newcomers as they navigate to place. The lack of any notion of familiarity, or pre-entry socialised orientation to the field, raises implications for youth work program managers and agencies for the induction and transition into practice for these individuals in particular as they arrive with no social membership, positioned beyond the edge of the periphery as they come to the community of practice. For the 'accidental' arrivals in this study having access to co-workers, mentors and supervisors was crucial as they entered the field, as they relied upon others to "acquire information about the important content domains of the setting" (Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1993) and looked to role models for support and guidance as they took their first steps in negotiating the space and practice of youth work

Knowledge

> The different knowledges upon which we draw in our practice constitute only one aspect of the development of professional expertise. It is the ways in which we use out knowledge and understanding that contribute to our development of expertise (Higgs, Titchen & Neville, 2001, p. 8).

Higgs, Titchen & Neville (2001) describe the "different knowledges" that inform practitioner's ways of 'knowing' and 'doing' (p. 5).

Knowledge for practice draws upon provisional knowledge; knowledge that is 'formal and explicit'. Provisional knowledge is understood to be that knowledge acquired through formal and structured institutional education; knowledge that is theoretical that provides a basis for understanding the social, cultural and political practices which one engages in as a professional. This study has shown that youth workers in Australia come to youth work via many different pathways, with widely varying levels of provisional knowledge related to a range of fields. None of the participants in this study arrived with a youth work specific degree, and there can not be, for some time I imagine, any assumption that newcomers will arrive with consistent and comparable levels of provisional knowledge as they come to the field. However, a number of participants arrived with different levels of provisional youth work knowledge, while others carried with them provisional knowledge from other

disciplines which served them in some manner, and was of value to the field that they chose to remain within.

Practitioners come to youth work with personal knowledge that is 'tacit and embedded' as a part of one's being; knowledge that practitioner's draw upon, often unknowingly, acquired through life experiences, and constructed through everyday participation in social and cultural environments. The youth workers in this study brought to their practice a wonderful array of unique skills and personal knowledge, in addition to practice knowledge learned as a result of their participation in previous places. Each were able to identify the skills, knowledge and understandings that they believed would aid in contributing to a community of practice with aims to engage and support young people in positive ways. Jon's community leadership experiences and skills were in fact what led to his coming to the field. His knowledge of community, and his experiences with young people in the community, provided a particular level of preparedness for the field. For Gary, he spoke of coming from a place of family stability and security and general contentment that he wished to share with young people, along with his passion for health and sport and active engagement in the world. Melinda came with experiences of her own challenges as a young person – knowledge that she believed was valuable and provided her with a particular insight into the worlds of the young people with whom she worked. Nathan, too, identified his background as positioning himself with a unique view that would be of value in the world of youth work. Nick brought with him a rich history of care and concern for others, and a specialist in his new field brought much knowledge and understanding to his work. Alex's social and cultural experiences were valuable for the context that she found herself working in, and Jess and Anton brought their creative selves to the work and thrived in sharing their passion for working with groups of young people, and instigating projects that may never have otherwise been dreamed of or developed. Their ways of being encompassed broader interpretations of ways of doing which they used to drive their work engaging young people in different ways.

Professional craft knowledge, 'tacit and embedded' in practice; this knowledge - gained through practice experience and immersion in the practice community that leads to 'specific knowledge' in relation to individual clients, the youth cohort, or the

social and cultural community of the young people who access youth programs and services. Nathan spoke of practice wisdom as that formed and constructed through time, through experience but difficult to define. Practice knowledge is the knowledge at the centre of this exploration of the lived experiences of youth workers as they learned and developed their practice. It is the knowledge that those youth workers with expertise draw upon, intuitively, in their engagement with young people in an environment of unpredictability and uncertain terrain. It is the knowledge derived from the lived experience within communities of practice.

Identity

> "The concept of practice recognises that the acquisition of knowledge or skill is part of the construction of an identity of a person" (Miller & Goodnow, 1995, p. 9).

Markus & Nurius (1986) introduced the notion of "possible selves" as part of the professional identity construction process that is part and parcel of the practitioners' learning and development journey. As newcomers are introduced to a field through education and training, and socialised as they become members of a profession, they look for "possible selves", those

> ... ideal selves that we would very much like to become. They are also the selves we could become, and the selves we are afraid of becoming (Markus & Nurius, 1986, p. 954).

A number of the participants in this study made mention of role models and mentors who left impressions on their lives – people who could very much be considered for these possible selves. Gary and Jon referred to role models and mentors who had been in their lives when they were young men, through family, community and university experiences – those who influenced or inspired them; whose legacy guided their ways of being as they interacted with young people when they came to practice. Melinda was grateful for the support and assistance that she had received as a young person and aspired to become a youth worker so that she could 'give back' - her own youth worker having been her primary role model. For Jess, there was a particular instructor in one of her courses who inspired her, along with other 'heroes' who tread the earth, whose kindness and care she aspires to replicate and infuse into her daily

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practices. And Anton spoke warmly, with gratitude and regard, for his first mentor in the field with whom he worked for several years – which no doubt may be a significant factor to account for Anton's longevity in the field.

As newcomers come to place and engage in practice, Ibarra (1999) suggests that as practitioners adjust to their roles during their transition into the field that they experiment with "provisional selves" as they undergo an identity adaptation process – potentially rejecting one or several notions held in relation to possible selves as they engage in the reality of practice within the contexts of particular places and spaces that they find themselves. The youth workers in this study spoke of testing out ways of doing and being as they engaged in their early years in the field; discovering the need to adjust ways of practice, particularly as a result of challenges that they faced. Numerous potential identities may be considered as practitioners observe other professionals, and appropriate and dismiss elements of such provisional selves through an iterative process as they craft for themselves their own professional identity, described by Ibarra (1999) as a

> relatively stable and enduring constellation of attributes, beliefs, values, motives, and experiences in terms of which people define themselves in a professional role (pp. 764-765).

As youth workers crafted professional ways of doing and being, as active participants in their communities of practice - with support and guidance, and through reflection upon their practice experiences, they constructed professional identities in relation to these communities (Wenger, 1999) developing approaches and engaging in actions that resonated with their personal and professional philosophies and beliefs, informed by practice experiences and outcomes.

Towards mastery

> Learning to become professionals entails integrating what aspiring professionals know and can do with who they are (becoming), including the challenges, risk, commitment and resistance that are involved (Dall'Alba, 2009: 43).

My inclination had always been to consider the learning journeys of youth workers first through the lens of Benner's Novice to Expert model (1982), developed from the Dreyfus Model of Skill Acquisition (1980). From there I had planned to turn to Lave's situated theory of practice (Lave, 1988) further developed into a model of situated learning (Lave, 1991) that proposes that learning takes place through legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991) within communities of practice (Wenger, 1998; 2007). Each of these approaches stem from models of apprenticeship whereby newcomers learn in situ with the guidance and support of an instructor or mentor (Vygotsky, 1962; Benner, 1984; Dreyfus; 2004) as they engage in practice and begin the process of learning through situational aspects of practice experiences. Benner's stages of clinical competence for nursing practice (1982;1984) provides a relevant parallel for considering stages of 'novice to expert' progression in youth work practice. This model as adapted to nursing clinical practice describes the acquisition of skills and the building of competency, with the development of practice knowledge from pre-entry stage to the level of 'expert' or 'highly proficient' purportedly achieved after a period of five years or more in the same area of practice.

However, whilst Benner's model describes the development of knowledge and maps the cognitive and analytical progression as knowledge is constructed and applied in the practice context of the field of health, having now reached the end of this research journey it becomes apparent that this model does not account as well for the totality of ways in which youth workers learn and develop their practice as first believed. Where the traditional apprenticeship model prescribes the presence of an 'expert' at hand during the early learning stages of practice, Lave & Wenger's studies of apprenticeship revealed:

> ... a more complex set of social relationships through which learning takes place mostly with journeymen and more advanced apprentices where learning in a community is not limited to novices. The practice of a community is dynamic, and involves learning on the part of everyone (Wenger, 2007, p. 3)

in which, learning is situated as "a social practice in the lived-in world" (Lave, 1991, p. 67), and more fully resonates with the lived experiences of the participants in this study.

As presented throughout previous chapters, youth work was demonstrated to be a relational practice where continuous learning occurred through youth workers' engagement with young people. Practitioners constructed and developed their knowledge through their practice experiences supported by the "shared repertoire of resources: experiences, stories, tools, ways of addressing recurring problems" (Wenger, 2007, p. 2) in concert with members of their community of practice. Learning was situated whereby "learning, thinking, and knowing are relations among people engaged in activity in, with, and arising from the socialIy and culturally structured world" (Lave, 1991, p. 67) as practitioners learned through real world practice experiences influenced and informed by the social and cultural values and norms of their communities of practice.

The youth workers' membership of their communities of practice saw them first orienting to practice through a period of transition, observing others, and turning to colleagues with expertise for guidance and advice. Throughout their journeys they accessed resources for learning and regularly reflected upon their practice experiences with the guidance of mentors and supervisors – learning from challenges and developing their everyday practice. As their journeys progressed, as they came to an understanding of the nuances and complexities of the work, their experiences and reflections shaped their professional identities and in the process gave "structure and meaning to knowledgeable skill" (Lave, 1991, p. 74).

The average practice experience of the participants of this study was eight years of face-to-face engagement with young people. Ranging from four years to more than fifteen years as individuals, in total the cohort of youth workers in this study held between them at least 63 years of practice experience in youth work. All of the participants in this study were at the very least proficient, most having achieved a considerable level of mastery of their craft.

Future Horizons

> Our deepest calling is to grow into our own authentic selfhood, whether or
> not it conforms to some image of who we ought to be (Palmer, 2000, p.
> 16).

And so it is that we leave our participants, as they continue their practice journeys, but not without first discovering their visions for their future selves.

Jess was keen to learn new skills as manager of the youth centre whilst maintaining engagement with young people. She spoke passionately about her group and project work. As a natural creative she has visions for projects in the broader youth community and is quite particular about developing activities for the inclusion of all youth within the urban space – in art spaces, and theatre spaces, and music spaces – where young people are not often easily afforded access or entry. She would like to continue to develop her project and management skills collaborating with the private sector and other various stakeholders within the arts community.

Nathan appears comfortable within his current position - his contentment is obvious. He enjoys being in the space where he finds himself now – being beside young people engaged in activity as they explore, working in and with the teachable moments. Nathan is aware not just of the young people with whom he works, but he is mindful of the learning journeys and the potential moments for learning for those who have come to the work after him. He enjoys being an 'elder' and will perhaps remain at the youth centre quietly for some time before deciding to step out and move toward the international experience of youth work practice that interests him. The social pedagogical frameworks of youth work in Germany are calling … he may well take the leap.

Alex has enjoyed steering the management role for the most part whilst she has been acting-up in the position, but she misses having a full client list; being away from young people is definitely not something desires for much longer. Alex really enjoyed her recent Graduate Diploma studies, and completing further training and education in counselling and psychology is important to her. Alex is keen to continue her studies and has plans to complete a Masters program, but she is finding that life is too busy for now. She hopes that she won't have to defer for too long.

Jon is feeling the aches and pains and the emotional stress of the work and acknowledges out loud that it really is harder and becoming more tiring … not beyond challenging, just so demanding. Nevertheless, Jon is keen to get a youth work specific qualification and he is hopeful that he may be able to achieve that through

TAFE on the back of his years of practice via RPL. Jon has discovered that he would very much like to teach youth work studies. He shared that he was recently invited to present classes at TAFE and he really, really enjoyed sharing and engaging with new eager and keen students who were wanting so much to learn as they prepare to work within the community services field. He found it to be not only refreshing, but enlivening and stimulating.

Gary is most definitely keen to continue with his coordination / management role – though I suspect if the role was located in a different context that took him away from direct contact with young people that he would re-consider. Gary is happy to remain where he is for now. He is really enjoying the challenge of mentoring and supervising staff. He is also keen to engage and work more deeply with the local community - it seems that the program may be broadening its scope for service delivery and community inclusion.

Nick is totally committed and engaged - deep into his new processes and practice frameworks he is keen to stay where he is for now to further develop and strengthen his engagement and the relationships developed with young people, and for some - their families. He expresses his appreciation for the support that he receives from the organisation to pursue his current practice methods and interests. Nick is happy with workplace conditions, very much appreciating the support and access to external supervision, and seems committed to staying with this service for some time.

Melinda is currently re-engaging with face-to-face practice as she seeks to re-establish a balance, restore and recover, and find her new equilibrium before stepping out further. She plans on "staying for quite a while" with her current youth program. She says that makes her feel "positive to be here" and she enjoys the "constant challenge … everything's different every day". Whilst she can't foresee herself "going anywhere soon", with a view to supporting her current practice, as well as longer-term considerations, she has enrolled to study via distance education to study for a degree in psychology. She would like to "enhance her skills" to enable her to have "more of an understanding … to be more equipped" to work with young people. Her particular concern is about her capacity to counsel or advise young people who may be experiencing mental health issues, recognising that further study and qualifications will strengthen her practice and give her more confidence in the role of

'accidental counsellor'. In the meantime, she is very connected with the young people and their families within the community where she works for now, but recognising that after a while "we fall into a comfort zone" so "it's a positive thing - being able to move on."

Anton, who clung to his identity as an artist for fear of losing it, admits that eventually he realised, and accepted, that he WAS a youth worker, and he could still be an artist. Whilst his ultimate goal is to be involved in policy making, particularly in order to create policy informed by practice and the realities of the experiences of young people, Anton was newly engaged in what he would cheerfully define as 'radical' youth work. He's happy developing and running a new youth health program and maintaining his connection with young people – with aims to 'keep it real' so to speak. Just quietly, I believe that if Anton was handed one of those policy roles, in an office, he'd be back in the thick of it with young people at the coalface within a year! Radical youth worker – vive la liberte!

Summary

The findings from this hermeneutic phenomenological study revealed that youth workers came to the field with purpose and intent, yet still struggled to define their role and articulate what it is that they do. However it became clear that the difficulty in arriving at clear definitions lay in the complexity and multi-dimensional nature of the work, and the many contexts within which youth work is delivered. Youth workers placed young people at the centre of their practice and highlighted the centrality of being-in relationship with young people as the foundation for their work. Practitioners learned through their experiences of engagement with young people, with reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action primarily driving their professional learning and development. In the places and spaces where youth work happened, amidst the social and cultural practices of the field of care, practitioners emphasised the significance of others as co-constructors of knowledge and contributors to the development of their expertise.

Youth workers were presented with a range of challenges as they learned and engaged in their practice – each experienced in varying degrees of intensity resulting in disorientation or disruption. This dissociation of sensibility prompted practitioners to determine or formulate a response to address the challenges arising in the course of their work in order to return to a state of equilibrium. Responses ranged from identifying the core of the concern, and reflecting and planning to make adjustments to practice, through to a withdrawal from the field. Youth workers recognised these experiences as learning experiences and adopted strategies to support their future practice in the field. As practitioners who have achieved longevity in a field that experiences difficulty in retaining staff, "losing a significant number of youth workers in the first five years" (Bowie, 2013, p. 82), the youth workers in this study emphasised the importance of recognising and engaging in supportive practices that strengthened their sustainability. Organisational supports and structures significantly contributed to perceived levels of trust, respect, inclusion and belonging, with the provision of effective supervision a significant factor in the success and direction of youth workers' learning and development. Youth workers described the benefits of access and availability to resources that supported their professional practice, and learned through experience to prioritise an increased awareness of, and attendance to, self-care strategies to sustain their personal and professional selves. Youth workers identified and acknowledged their practice strengths and their particular fields of interest as they shared their plans for future endeavours and the continuing story of their professional practice journeys.

Reflections within the literature.

> Youth work is often described and understood in terms of 'experience' –
> from both a practitioner's and young person's perspective. Yet there is a
> lack of phenomenological studies that seek to understand the experiential
> nature of being a youth worker (Spier, 2016, p. 277).

Spier (2016) finds, as I also discovered, that the "one notable exception" (p. 277) is Anderson-Nathe's (2008a) hermeneutic phenomenological investigation of "how youth workers experience moments of not know-ing"; moments when practitioners find themselves to be "simply at a loss for what to do, how to respond, and how to be

helpful to the youth" (p. 1). Anderson-Nathe frames the experience of not know-ing what to do "in relationship to other concepts explored by the social work and therapeutic literature" (2008b, p. 11) such as helplessness, trauma, uncertainty and compassion fatigue, describing experiences that resonate with one of the key themes within the findings from this study in Chapter 6 - Disorientation. He explains that:

> Often, these moments pass by without incident; they present merely a feature of the work and result in no long-standing crisis for the worker. Nevertheless, at other times the same events may be lived quite differently, bringing about panic and vocational questioning (2008b, p. 12).

Such were the findings within the sub-themes of Disorientation within this study where challenges, crossroads, crises and collapse describe the experiences that youth workers faced with varying degrees of intensity – from expected practice learning challenges to challenges that required fuller consideration and a range of responses. Anderson-Nathe (2008b) suggests "a common consequence for failure to respond to these stressful experiences [is] burnout", and that

> When workers cannot effectively process, understand, share, and heal from the wounds they receive from these experiences, they often feel ineffective as helpers, alienated from and exhausted by their work, and frequently leave the field altogether (p. 17).

He challenges the field's "adherence to a standard of supercompetence and reluctance to admit to, or share experiences to the contrary" (p. 19) amid concerns that as youth worker's experiences of not-knowing impact upon their 'purpose', their perceived inability to rise to their 'calling' may be "the core of vocational crisis for youth workers … a crisis of both profession and vocation" (p. 23).

A comparative mixed-methods study conducted by Walker and Larson (2012) investigated one aspect of youth worker expertise: "the ability to appraise and respond to the dilemmas of practice encountered in youth programs" (p. 2) which examined the differentiation between the responses of 38 novice and 43 expert youth work practitioners to prepared vignettes of dilemma situations. They defined dilemmas of practice as:

> Significant challenging situations and problems occurring in daily practice
> that call for decision-making by the practitioner, including whether and

how to respond to the situation in ways consistent with professional obligations and goals (p. 3).

Walker & Larson's study, unsurprisingly, found "distinct differences in how expert and novice youth workers appraised and responded to dilemmas of practice". Experts "generated more considerations and more possible responses" to the vignettes of dilemma situations. Experts were also "more likely to formulate responses that were youth-centered and that addressed multiple considerations" (p. 13) supporting the novice to expert stages proposed by Benner (1984), and Lave & Wenger's (1991) situated learning whereby newcomers, move through stages of competency and proficiency to mastery. These findings are reflected in the descriptions provided by the participants in this study as they compared their different ways of 'doing' from when they first engaged in youth work – reacting and responding in the short-term to immediate demands and concerns, to ways of 'doing' beyond those early experiences with a broader view to professional practice with better understandings of context and the social development of young people, and the varied potential outcomes for different situations. As practitioners progressed towards mastery they developed holistic and intuitive understandings of dilemma situations through experiential learning and reflection; more able to engage in a practice of reflexivity (Gormally & Coburn, 2014; Emslie, 2016). Walker & Larson's study also reached similar conclusions to the findings within the themes of disorientation and developing practice in this study whereby expert practitioners had a "greater tendency to convert challenging situations into youth-centered learning experiences". They suggest that this reflected the ability of experienced practitioners to focus upon the "skills to achieve the fundamental aims of youth work (p. 17), acknowledging that whilst practitioners were challenged and at times in a state of not-knowing, they maintained a broader view of the aims of youth work and were able to turn challenges into teachable moments.

Implications for youth work practice

As with many studies situated within the qualitative paradigm this study is limited by the number of research participants, the focused region from which participants were

drawn for the study, and the limitation of contexts within which the participants of this study had learned and developed their practice. This study describes the lived experience of eight youth workers from a large metropolitan city in Australia. These youth workers were experienced practitioners with longevity in the field. Most of the participants' experiences were located in urban contexts and may not reflect the experiences of youth workers located in rural and regional areas who may find themselves engaged in the work as sole practitioners or providers of programs and services for youth. The youth workers in this study had experience across a variety of contexts, but their experiences may not reflect the experiences of youth workers practicing in other contexts. Giving due consideration to the limitations of the study, a claim, nevertheless, may be made for a contribution to the field of new knowledge and understandings in relation to the lived experiences of youth work practitioners within the Australian context. Whilst the findings may resonate with the lived experiences of youth workers in other places, no claims are made as to whether the study holds true in all contexts. The findings for this study represent only the youth work participants in this study, within the contexts that are described in the research.

Transition and the early years

Youth workers come to the field from a variety of backgrounds. Some arrive with formal youth work specific education and training. Others arrive with qualifications from associated fields, and there were those who come to youth work with relatable experience, skills and knowledge that are applicable to practice. Regardless of background and qualification, youth workers will undergo a period of orientation as they adjust to professional practice and discover their place in the field as they come to understand the nature of the role in the context within which they find themselves.

Organisations providing youth work services and programs need to play a active role in supporting novice youth workers as they come to practice with an induction that includes assisting practitioners to assess their real and assumed preparedness as they enter the field. Identifying the skills and knowledge that youth workers bring to the work, through education and training, previous employment and life experiences, would assist in tailoring personal learning and development plans that support and

strengthen the capacity of new youth workers. Regular learning and development reviews, particularly during the early years of practice, would serve as a valuable tool for reflection for practitioners to identify individual training and support needs in line with their current and anticipated practice experiences and requirements.

Equally important, as youth workers begin to engage in professional practice, is an awareness of the potential for new youth workers to experience reality shock as they transition or adjust to the responsibilities of the role, and the realities of practice. Preparing new youth workers, and ensuring that structures are in place particularly during the first few months of orientation, may better support their practice readiness for the complexity of the work and the challenges that they may face.

Learning and development

> … it is ongoing deliberate practice with feedback that appears to matter the most in developing and maintaining expertise (Walker & Walker, 2012, p. 44).

Youth workers identified the guidance and support of colleagues, mentors and supervisors as significant to the learning and development of their daily practice, particularly during the early years as they experienced a diverse range of situations in their engagement with young people. Industry training was important for many with the provision of specifically targeted training for different aspects and issues relating to youth work practice that supported the development of practitioner skills. Association with the wider youth work network through local and regional inter-agencies was reported as beneficial, however there are often difficulties in securing release from practice responsibilities.   Youth work seminars, workshops and conferences are conducted locally and interstate – however, the lack of availability of time for youth workers proves again to be the primary barrier for access, along with the lack of available funding to support practitioners' attendance at larger, more costly, conferences.

Youth work service providers can support the ongoing learning and development of practitioners by ensuring that regular access is available for novice youth workers to more experienced youth workers for mentoring and support opportunities. The

provision of regular, quality supervision is essential to youth worker practice development. Whilst line supervision is usually provided as a matter of course, consideration could be given for access to external supervision, or the provision of occasional team supervision sessions to promote new perspectives and approaches for practice.

Learning and development planning with youth workers should assist practitioners to identify aspects of practice that they wish to further develop, along with regular reviews of training and workshop calendars that may encourage youth workers to suitably structure their training throughout the year. Organisations, too, could be mindful of specific available training pertinent to the particular context of their services and programs and ensure that early access to such training is made available.

Program arrangements for regular release from practice responsibilities would enable youth workers to attend regular training and plan for industry networking meetings. Whilst program funding usually makes allowances for practitioners' training costs within their budgets, supporting youth workers to attend conferences and specialised training, would provide additional networking opportunities for youth workers. The benefits are not necessarily limited solely to individual practitioners, but may benefit the community of practice through the sharing and application of knowledge and ideas.

Recommendations for future research

The findings of this study provide insights into the lived experiences of youth workers as they enter the field and learn and develop their practice. The limited number of studies exploring the practice of youth work, the practice experiences of youth workers, and the learning and practice development of youth workers clearly necessitates the requirement for further research. The possibilities for further research relating to youth work practice are too numerous to share, instead I focus upon four key issues arising from this study that, in my mind, warrant further investigation in light of their significance for youth workers who come to the field with an intention to practice and participate in the lives of young people.

Recommendations stemming from this study include further investigation of a number of aspects of the lived experiences of youth workers: -

- **Reality shock - the experiences of first year practitioners**

- **Youth workers' experiences of disorientation**

- **Situated learning and practice development in youth work**

and, considering the significance of supervision in supporting the learning and development of youth workers in practice:-

- **The quality of supervision in the field of youth work**

Reality shock and practice challenges potentially give rise to the departure of youth workers from the field in greater numbers than perhaps need be. Further research with a significant number of youth workers in a variety of locations and settings would provide insight into the prevalence of reality shock for those entering the field.

Further investigation into the nature and impact of practice challenges experienced by youth workers would reveal the ways in which youth workers perceive, address and manage workplace stress, and contribute to an understanding of issues of staff retention and loss for the industry.

The importance of working in spaces with experienced practitioners was central to the early practice learning experiences of novice youth workers. Research examining the learning experiences of youth workers in communities of practice would provide insight into the ways in which knowledge is shared and professional identities are constructed.

The youth workers in this study had all experienced, or were currently experiencing, good quality supervision that they felt was beneficial and supported their practice and themselves. However, it is well known that 'good' supervision is not necessarily a norm, at times completely missing from the sphere of practice entirely. With supervision reported as essential to the practice wellbeing and professional development of the participants in this study, and the implications of the absence of the same being quite significant, this would perhaps be the most important area of investigation for current youth workers, and the field.

Conclusion

I began this journey as a researching practitioner ten years ago with a determination to provide a space for the voices of youth workers to be heard, and to reveal the lived experiences of youth workers as they learned and developed their practice in order to contribute to the growing body of knowledge for this emerging profession. Research that articulates and promotes practice engagement and activity with young people is of great import, but so too must we shine a light upon those who engage in the practice of youth work with young people. Foundations for ethical practice; professional practice models and frameworks grounded in both theory and practice knowledge; and the professional learning, development and support of youth work practitioners should continue to be areas of research concern for the field. It is not enough that we advocate for young people and their place in the world and seek to ensure that there are places and spaces for young people to connect with each other; to access assistance and support; and to engage in activities that promote and encourage their personal and social development. If our primary aim and purpose is to ensure best practice in our engagement with young people in order to maximise current and potential outcomes, then it is of equal import that we recognise the value in understanding the qualities, strengths and practices of those who walk beside them.

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The truth and significance of performance, the performance of the word, of the act, or the image, is to be found in the way in which it sets itself out into the world, in its concrete and singular fragility, and yet in so doing illuminates the world itself. This is the only transcendence of which we are capable. It is not the transcendence that brings about world transformation, but rather like the small flicker of light which suddenly shows us who and what we are, which illuminates what is around us and then dies out. Performance is not a primarily temporal phenomenon, but is rather itself a working out of a certain timespace, a timespace created by the performance itself … in which the performance is itself brought forth. Only in the timespace of performance, the timespace of event that is also the happening of place ~ is place and world brought forth, and the possibility of transcendence enabled. There is no transcendence that is possible in temporality alone. Temporality simply moves us ever forward. Genuine transcendence means not a going beyond where we already find ourselves, but is found instead in the opening up of the here and now. This is also why one might say that the transcendence of the eternal present is not an opening up into time or space alone, but an opening up of timespace in the place of our own possibility (Malpas, 2013, p. 14).

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APPENDIX A

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Becoming a Youth Worker: Developing Practice

My name is Lisa Windon and I am writing to you on behalf of The University of Sydney. I am conducting a research project that aims to explore the experiences of youth work practitioners and the ways in which they develop their own practice. I am particularly interested in how youth workers learn to do what it is that they do. The project is being conducted under the supervision of Dr Lesley Scanlon as part of a Doctor of Education degree at the University of Sydney.

I would like to invite youth workers from XXXXXX Youth Program to take part in the project.

What does participation in the research project involve?
I seek access to youth workers who will be invited to participate in a one and a half hour semi-structured interview asking them about their experiences of becoming a youth work practitioner. Participating youth workers will be invited to participate in a follow-up interview to provide feedback on the findings of the research.

I will keep the Program's involvement in the administration of the research procedures to a minimum. I will ensure that the interview session is conducted at a mutually agreed time between myself and the youth worker so as to minimise disruption to the Program.

To what extent is participation voluntary, and what are the implications of withdrawing that participation?
Participation in this research project is entirely voluntary. If any participant decides to participate and then later changes their mind, they are able to withdraw their participation at any time. There will be no consequences relating to any decision by an individual or the Program regarding participation other than those already described in this letter. Decisions made will not affect the relationship with the research team or the University of Sydney.

What will happen to the information collected, and is privacy and confidentiality assured?
Information that identifies anyone will be removed from the data collected. The data is then stored securely in a locked filing cabinet at the University of Sydney Faculty of Education and Social Work and can only be accessed by the researcher and supervisor. The data will be stored for a minimum period of 7 years, after which it will be destroyed. This will be achieved by the shredding of documents and erasing of interview recordings.

"Becoming a youth worker: Developing practice".   Site Manager Consent Form 2011

The identity of participants and the Program will not be disclosed at any time except in circumstances where the research team is legally required to disclose that information.

Participant privacy, and the confidentiality of information disclosed by participants, is assured at all other times.

The data will be used only for this project, and associated conference presentation and journal articles, and will not be used in any extended or future research without first obtaining explicit written consent from participants.

A summary of the research findings will be made available to the participants.

Is this research approved?
The research will be submitted for approval to The University of Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee prior to the commencement of the project, and will only proceed upon receipt of such approval.

Who do I contact if I wish to discuss the project further?
If you would like to discuss any aspect of this study with a member of the research team, please contact me on the number provided below. Any person with concerns or complaints about the conduct of a research study can contact the Deputy Manager, Human Ethics Administration, University of Sydney on (02) 8627 8176 (Telephone); (02) 8627 7177 (Facsimile) or human.ethics@usyd.edu.au (Email).

How do I indicate my willingness for XXXXXX Youth Program to be involved?
If you have had all questions about the project answered to your satisfaction, and are willing for XXXXXX Youth Program to participate, please complete the **Consent Form** on the following page.

This information letter is for you to keep.

Lisa Windon
Doctoral Candidate
Room A35.431
University of Sydney NSW 2006
AUSTRALIA

Telephone: XXXX XXX XXX
Email: lwin1341@uni.sydney.edu.au
Web: www.usyd.edu.au/

"Becoming a youth worker: Developing practice".   Site Manager Consent Form 2011

Faculty of Education & Social Work

Dr. Lesley Scanlon
Senior Lecturer in Education
Doctor of Education Programme Director
MTeach Programme Director

Room 431
Building A35
The University of Sydney
NSW 2006 AUSTRALIA
Telephone: +61 2 9351 6380
Facsimile: +61 2 93514768

lesley.scanlon@sydney.edu.au

Consent Form

- I have read this document and understand the aims, procedures, and risks of this project, as described within it.

- For any questions I may have had, I have taken up the invitation to ask those questions, and I am satisfied with the answers I received.

- I am willing for XXXXXX Youth Program to become involved in the research project, as described.

- I understand that participation in the project is entirely voluntarily.

- I understand that XXXXXX Youth Program is free to withdraw its participation at any time, without affecting the relationship with the research team or The University of Sydney. Data can be withdrawn from the study up until December 2012.

- I understand that this research may be reported in a thesis, conference presentations and journal articles as part of the requirements for a Doctorate of Education provided that the participants or the Programs are not identified in any way.

- I understand that XXXXXX Youth Program will be provided with a copy of the findings from this research upon its completion.

Name of Site Manager (printed):

Program Name / Location:

Signature:

Date: /   /

"Becoming a youth worker: Developing practice".   Site Manager Consent Form 2011

APPENDIX B

THE UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY

RESEARCH INTEGRITY
Human Research Ethics Committee
Web: http://sydney.edu.au/ethics/
Email: ro.humanethics@sydney.edu.au

Address for all correspondence:
Level 6, Jane Foss Russell Building - G02
The University of Sydney
NSW 2006 AUSTRALIA

IM/PE

3 November 2011

Dr Lesley Scanlon
Faculty of Education and Social Work
Education Building - A35
The University of Sydney
Lesley.scanlon@sydney.edu.au

Dear Dr Scanlon

Thank you for your correspondence received 2 November 2011 addressing comments made to you by the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). On 2 November 2011 the Chair of the HREC considered this information and approved the protocol entitled **"Professional youth work: an investigation of how youth workers learn and develop their practice and the meaning that they make of their professional experiences".**

Details of the approval are as follows:

Protocol No.:   **14120**

Approval Date: **2 November 2011**

First Annual Report Due: **30 November 2012**

Authorised Personnel: **Dr Lesley Scanlon**
                             Ms Lisa Windon

Documents Approved:

Document	Version Number	Date
Participant Information Statement	2	Oct 2011
Participant Consent Form	2	Oct 2011
Advertising Flyer	2	Oct 2011
Interview Questions	1	Submitted 22 Aug 2011

HREC approval is valid for four (4) years from the approval date stated in this letter and is granted pending the following conditions being met:

Special Condition of Approval

Please forward letters of support from all participating organisations prior to research commencing.

Condition/s of Approval

- Continuing compliance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans.

- Provision of an annual report on this research to the Human Research Ethics Committee from the approval date and at the completion of the study. Failure to submit reports will result in withdrawal of ethics approval for the project.

- All serious and unexpected adverse events should be reported to the HREC within 72 hours.

- All unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project should be reported to the HREC as soon as possible.

- Any changes to the protocol including changes to research personnel must be approved by the HREC by submitting a Modification Form before the research project can proceed.

Chief Investigator / Supervisor's responsibilities:

1. You must retain copies of all signed Consent Forms (if applicable) and provide these to the HREC on request.

2. It is your responsibility to provide a copy of this letter to any internal/external granting agencies if requested.

Please do not hesitate to contact Research Integrity (Human Ethics) should you require further information or clarification.

Yours sincerely

Associate Professor Ian Maxwell
Chair
Human Research Ethics Committee

cc: Lisa Windon   lwin1341@uni.sydney.edu.au

> **This HREC is constituted and operates in accordance with the National Health and Medical Research Council's (NHMRC) National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007), NHMRC and Universities Australia Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research (2007) and the CPMP/ICH Note for Guidance on Good Clinical Practice.**

APPENDIX C

A'Research'Study:"Youth"work"practice"
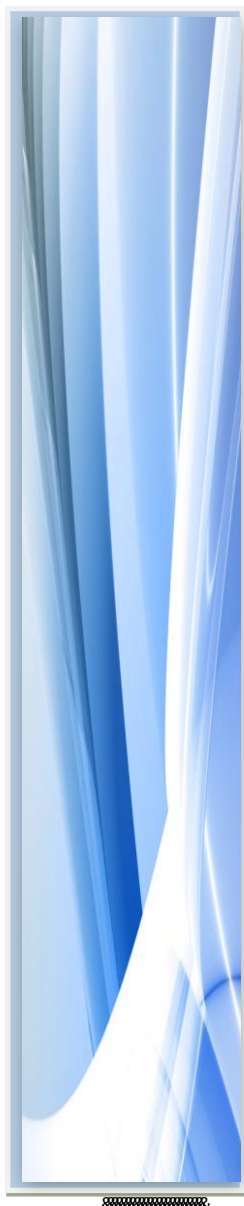
Researchers at the University of Sydney want to find out how Youth Workers learn to do what it is that they do.

This research study is for Youth Workers practicing in NSW.

Research is always voluntary!

Would the study be a good fit for me?

This study might be a good fit for you if:

· You are currently working as a Youth Worker in NSW
· You are interested in personal development
· You would like to contribute to the knowledge base
  for youth work practice in Australia

What would happen if I took part in the study?

If you decide to take part in the Research study, you would:

· Take part in a confidential interview at your workplace
· Be invited to take part in a follow up interview

There may be possible benefits if you take part in the study.

· Reflecting on your own practice may contribute to your personal development

· You would receive a report about the findings of the Research

· You would learn about the experiences of other Youth Workers

**To take part in this Youth Work practice research study
or for more information, please contact**

**Lisa Windon – XXXX XXX XXX
lwin1341@uni.sydney.edu.au**

The Principal Researcher for this study is Dr. Lesley Scanlon at the Faculty of Education and Social Work at the University of Sydney (lesley.scanlon@sydney.edu.au)

Becoming)a)Youth)Worker:)Developing)Practice).)Version)2:)October)2011)

APPENDIX D

Faculty of Education and Social Work

DR LESLEY SCANLON
Chief Investigator
Senior Lecturer
Teaching and Learning Coordinator,
Professional Doctorates

Room 431
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NSW 2006 AUSTRALIA
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Email: lesley.scanlon@sydney.edu.au
Web: http://www.sydney.edu.au/

Becoming a Youth Worker: Developing Practice

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION STATEMENT

(1)   What is the study about?

You are invited to participate in a study that explores the experiences of youth work practitioners and the ways in which they develop their practice with particular interest in how youth workers learn to do what it is that they do.

(2)   Who is carrying out the study?

The study is being conducted by Lisa Windon and will form the basis for the degree of Doctor of Education at The University of Sydney under the supervision of Dr Lesley Scanlon, Teaching and Learning Coordinator, Professional Doctorates in the Faculty of Education.

(3)   What does the study involve?

You are invited to participate in a semi-structured interview, which will take approximately one hour. I plan to conduct this interview at your workplace. Interviews will be audio-recorded for transcription purposes. If you agree, you will be invited to participate in a follow-up interview of approximately 45 minutes, to further explore issues raised in your first interview, at a time convenient to you.

(4)   Can I withdraw from the study?

Being in this study is completely voluntary - you are not under any obligation to consent and - if you do consent - you can withdraw at any time without affecting your relationship with The University of Sydney.

You may stop the interview at any time if you do not wish to continue, the audio recording will be erased and the information provided will not be included in the study.

(5)   Will anyone else know the results?

All aspects of the study, including results, will be strictly confidential and only the researchers will have access to information on participants. A report of the study may be submitted for publication, but individual participants will not be identifiable in such a report.

(6)   What if I require further information about the study or my involvement in it?

When you have read this information, Lisa Windon is available to discuss it with you further and answer any questions you may have. If you would like to know more at any stage, please feel free to contact Lisa Windon: lwin1341@uni.sydney.edu.au or XXXX XXX XXX

(7)   What if I have a complaint or any concerns?

Any person with concerns or complaints about the conduct of a research study can contact The Manager, Human Ethics Administration, University of Sydney on +61 2 8627 8176 (Telephone); +61 2 8627 8177 (Facsimile) or ro.humanethics@sydney.edu.au (Email).

This information sheet is for you to keep

APPENDIX E

ABN 15 211 513 464

DR LESLEY SCANLON
Chief Investigator
Senior Lecturer
Teaching and Learning Coordinator,
Professional Doctorates

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Telephone: +61 2 9351 6380
Facsimile: +61 2 93514768
Email: lesley.scanlon@sydney.edu.au
Web: http://www.sydney.edu.au/

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

I, ...[PRINT NAME], give consent to my participation in the research project

TITLE: **Becoming a Youth Worker: Developing Practice**

In giving my consent I acknowledge that:

1.   The procedures required for the project and the time involved have been explained to me, and any questions I have about the project have been answered to my satisfaction.

2.   I have read the Participant Information Statement and have been given the opportunity to discuss the information and my involvement in the project with the researcher/s.

3.   I understand that being in this study is completely voluntary – I am not under any obligation to consent.

4.   I understand that my involvement is strictly confidential. I understand that any research data gathered from the results of the study may be published however no information about me will be used in any way that is identifiable.

5.   I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time, without affecting my relationship with the researcher(s) or the University of Sydney now or in the future.

6.   I understand that I can stop the interview at any time if I do not wish to continue, the audio-recording will be erased and the information provided will not be included in the study.

7.   I consent to:

   · Audio-recording   YES   🖉   NO   🖉
   · Receiving Feedback   YES   🖉   NO   🖉

   If you answered YES to the "Receiving Feedback" question, please provide your details i.e. mailing address, email address.

   Feedback Option

   Address: _____

   _____

   Email: _____

   ....
   Signature

   ....
   Please PRINT name

   ....
   Date

APPENDIX F

INTERVIEW GUIDE

How did you first get into youth work?

How would you define or describe what a youth worker is?

Can you describe some of the things from the last week that would tell me about the work that you do?

How did you learn to do the things that you describe?

What in your own background and experience have you brought to your work?

What do you feel is the most important thing that you have learned whilst working with young people?

What have young people learned from you?

How have you changed in the way that you work with young people since you first started out as a youth worker?

What challenged you then, and what challenges you now?

Who have you learned from in your time as a youth worker?

***

REVISED: Additional questions.

What recommendations would you make for youth workers coming into the field?

Where do you see yourself heading from here?