



Title: Reclaiming youth work: From evidence-based practice to practice-based evidence.

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**Reclaiming youth work:**

**From evidence-based practice  
to practice-based evidence.**

**Fiona Jane Factor**

A thesis submitted to the University of Bedfordshire in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Professional Doctorate in the Leadership of Children and Young People's Services.

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## Abstract

### **Reclaiming youth work: From evidence- based practice to practice-based evidence**

An abiding criticism of youth work is the inability of its practitioners either to articulate the theoretical basis of their practice or evidence its practical impact (House of Commons, *Services for Young People: Third Report of Session 2010-12*). This study explores whether, and to what extent, youth workers can articulate their practice wisdom in a form that can generate a body of 'practice-based evidence'; sufficiently robust to persuade both those responsible for formulating youth work policy and those commissioning services of its efficacy. It develops a model which aims to assist youth workers in this endeavour, designed to support them in contributing to critical debates about the nature of their practice.

This thesis is based upon a case study undertaken with a large voluntary sector youth organisation in the north of England. A number of research methods were used in the study including the design of an Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) funded knowledge exchange event, the administration of questionnaires to student youth workers at the University of Bedfordshire and semi-structured interviews with practitioners. The study uses Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as the lens through which the findings are derived from the data.

The findings suggest that youth workers are able to conceptualise and articulate their practice wisdom and that the opportunity to engage in knowledge transfer activities is methodologically extremely helpful. It appears that practice-based evidence can be generated via such a process which helps to make explicit the nature of the work and its impact upon young people. On the basis of these findings, the author presents a model describing the key prerequisites for the generation of practice-based evidence in youth work.

However, the current social, political and economic climate in England has meant that the applicability of such a model is entirely dependent upon the political and administrative context in which youth work is practiced. The imposition of tightly demarcated targets and narrowly defined outcomes, together with the individualisation of much service provision for young people requiring case work interventions, has meant that youth work's phronetic intentions have become obscured, and for some organisations, lost. This is against the backdrop of the needs of the young people being targeted by youth services becoming more complex, requiring a more specialist, therapeutic intervention. The author suggests that the time has come for bolder initiatives utilising critical social pedagogy as a threshold concept which, she asserts may allow the profession to embark upon a process of 'reclaiming' its professional roots.

## **Declaration**

I declare that this thesis is my own unaided work. It is being submitted for the degree of Professional Doctorate in the Leadership of Children's and Young People's Services at the University of Bedfordshire.

It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University.

Word count (exclusive of appendices and bibliography): 74,290 words

**Name of candidate: Fiona Jane Factor**

## **Dedication**

This doctoral thesis is dedicated to my Mum who never doubted it was possible and managed to let me get this far despite her very challenging circumstances.

Thanks Mum, I love you.

## **Addendum**

Mum died on 11<sup>th</sup> August 2016. Fortunately, she was alive long enough to know I had passed the viva voce examination on 26<sup>th</sup> July 2016.



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## Abbreviations

<b>CYPS:</b>	Children and Young People's Services
<b>CYI:</b>	Centre for Youth Impact
<b>EBP:</b>	Evidence-Based practice
<b>ESRC:</b>	Economic and Social Research Council
<b>IDYW:</b>	In Defence of Youth Work
<b>IPA:</b>	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
<b>IYSS:</b>	Integrated Youth Support Service
<b>JNC:</b>	Joint Negotiating Committee
<b>KT/E:</b>	Knowledge Transfer/Exchange
<b>NCS:</b>	National Citizen Service
<b>NPM:</b>	New Public Management
<b>NYA:</b>	National Youth Agency
<b>OBPM:</b>	Outcome Based Performance Management
<b>PBE:</b>	Practice-Based Evidence
<b>PBR:</b>	Practice-Based Research
<b>PRU:</b>	Pupil Referral Unit
<b>RBP:</b>	Relational Based Practice
<b>TOC:</b>	Theory of Change
<b>YOT:</b>	Youth Offending Team
<b>YSDF:</b>	Youth Sector Development Fund
<b>YWEG:</b>	Youth Work Evidence Group



# Section 1: Background to the study

## Chapter 1: Introduction and rationale

This thesis describes a process designed to assist youth work professionals to identify, conceptualise, record, articulate, assess and share what is commonly described as their 'practice wisdom'. This is a model designed to generate a body of 'practice-based evidence' in youth work which will begin to fill the evidential vacuum that continues to be youth work's political Achilles Heel. This introductory chapter will not only identify the study's rationale, but give the reader an insight into how the thesis is structured and provide an overview of the different sections included.

It is based on the findings of a case study of a voluntary sector youth organisation, the Brathay Trust, located in the north of England, where a number of activities were developed in order to test whether it was possible to generate such evidence. It uses Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as its framework of analysis; IPA draws from a range of philosophical traditions and contains three strands of theoretical underpinning, phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography (Smith and Osborne 2008).

The case study involved 26 professionals participating in an Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) funded Knowledge Exchange event and eight follow-up interviews, eight months later. Twenty-two youth and community students at the University of Bedfordshire also participated in the research by completing questionnaires on associated themes in order to inform the semi-structured interviews at Brathay. Contact was maintained with the organisation until the end of 2015 in order to determine the on-going relevance of the findings and legacy of the activities undertaken.

### **What is youth work?**

Youth work is not theorised nearly as extensively as for example, social work, and so discussion of youth work is often characterised by vagueness (Pitts 2010). Historically, youth work is characterised by a commitment to association which emphasises the educative power of playing a part in a group; not unlike experiential learning. Two of the UK's leading thinkers on youth work are Tony Jeffs and Mark Smith. Using informal education as the theoretical underpinning of youth work, they define it as

...the process of fostering learning in life as it is lived. A concern with community and conversation; a focus on people as persons rather than objects.

(Jeffer and Smith 2005:11)

It is this understanding that has informed the development of the youth work profession in England for decades and one that I subscribed to when I first became involved as a volunteer and then when I became professionally qualified. Normally the age group associated with this activity is 13-19 years old, although this is subject to variation. Its practitioners claim expertise in making sense of the learning young people experience through this association with them by the method known as 'social education', which exists and is gained outside of the more formal education environment. The prerequisite for this process and indeed the bedrock of this engagement is the youth worker's ability to establish trusting relationships and sustain purposeful contact (Davies and Batsleer 2010).

Furthermore, youth work is predicated on a belief that workers should be approachable and friendly and that at its centre is a 'conversation' with a young person which is said to feed an evolving idea of what might contribute to their well-being and growth (Jeffer and Smith, 1999). However, it is a particular type of conversation; a dialogue characterised by concern, trust, respect, appreciation, affection and hope (Burbules, 1993). Such a conversation is seen to provide a situation in which each individual has an effective equality of chances to take part in dialogue; where dialogue is unconstrained (Smith, 2001). According to Coburn (2011) this reflects Freire's (1972) conceptualisation of education as critical dialogue,

...where over time and through ongoing conversations, people work together to examine problems and create their own meaning and knowledge.

(Coburn 2011:61)

In particular for youth work, the foundation of this intervention has been seen as the development of relationships with young people, '*a professional relationship in which the young person is engaged as the primary client in their social context*'. (Sercombe 2010:27). Further, '*this places youth work in radical distinction to most other forms of engagement with young people*', (p.26). Additionally, the young person's voluntary engagement and participation in this relationship has been a fundamental precept of youth work, although more recently this has been challenged (Ord, 2009). Yet, as Jeffer and Smith (2005) observe, the voluntary principle is a defining feature of youth work, distinguishing it from other

services provided for young people. A further attempt to identify its unique characteristics was made by Nicholls (2012)

Youth workers educate and support young people and amplify their voice. It is the combination of these three intended impacts that makes their work unique. These three threads cannot be unwoven; if they are, it is not youth work.

(Nicholls 2012:11)

Needless to say, the precise nature of the intervention, its context, methods, impact and value, continues to remain obscure to many outside of the practice itself despite its existence for over a century (Davies, 1999a and 1999b). This obscurity is described well by Davies as follows:

Good youth work can be seen as having the same contradictory qualities of great jazz...well prepared and highly disciplined, yet improvised. And while responding sensitively to the signals and prompts of others, it continues to express the worker's own intentions, insights, ideas and feelings – and flair.

(Davies 2010:6)

Youth work is conducted in a range of practice settings originating in the voluntary sector and also the statutory sector, it is this latter setting within the local authority that is more frequently referred to as the '*youth service*' and who over time have had increasing control of the voluntary sector through the provision of grant aid and the wider societal need for the implementation of a range of quality assurance mechanisms across organisations working with children and young people.

### **'Evidence-based practice' (EBP) or 'Practice-based evidence' (PBE)?**

There is no doubt that UK government's claim to act on what science tells them and their fixation with 'best evidence' of 'what works' has become embedded across various professions in recent years (Dodd and Epstein 2009; Sanderson 2003; Trinder 2008). Its roots can be traced to the role of evidence in medicine, both in determining it as a profession with unique knowledge and power and as a way in which interventions can be deemed effective and subsequently standardised (McIntosh 2010). This approach has now been

extended to include those services in which people work with other people, for example, health care, social care and education.

Put simply, EBP is a process which the author believes involves demarcating a problem, which frequently involves re-locating it within the individual sphere by abstracting the behaviours from the wider social field, thereby de-politicising the problem which runs counter to the intentions of youth work. Consequently, EBP will then seek out the most valid research evidence to address the problem, applying it and measuring the results for their efficacy. It therefore appears logical and neutral, predicated on in a positivistic set of assumptions such as randomised control trials (RCT's) and replication (Ferguson 2008). EBP requires that practice should be based upon theories, evidence or knowledge gathered through systematic research and analysed using quantitative measure to establish its validity, reliability and generalizability. These assumptions privilege certain forms of knowledge, affording less credence to other qualitative approaches that some would argue are more appropriate within social science, as Ferguson (2008) observes:

The adoption of EBP can be best understood as a continuation of the long-standing attempt to deal with the ubiquity and ambiguity and uncertainty of social work, yet uncertainty and contingency are at the core of social work practice.

(Ferguson 2008:52)

The use of 'evidence-based intervention' is not new and according to McIntosh (2010:7) '*... it is the correlation between cause and effect that has been sought and illustrated since man first documented his existence*'. I became extremely concerned that the search for the kinds of evidence of 'what works' in youth work favoured by the proponents of EBP was overshadowing its core ethical practice principles and practices. What remained of the role of the 'relationship' and in particular the critical conversation- based, 'dialogical' practice through which youth work had developed for generations and had been described as its very foundation; the essence of its 'practice wisdom'?

According to Dewane (2006), skilled practice involves bringing together all of what one knows and understands through training, education, intervention techniques and the use of 'self' (which includes life experience and belief systems). Practice wisdom is a type of knowledge gained through a process of personal reflection and deliberation, and in this way combines the accumulation of information, assumptions and judgements developed via a

process referred to as 'embodied reasoning' that is not always possible to validate empirically (Chu and Tsui, 2008). Further, O'Sullivan (2005:222) defined practice wisdom as the '*ability to base sound judgements on deep understanding in conditions of uncertainty*'.

## **A crisis for youth work**

It does seem an extraordinary failure that you (the youth sector) cannot make a better fist of explaining the difference that you make.

(Graham Stuart MP, Services for Young People; Third Report of Session 2010-12:39).

This was the damning observation made at the Education Committee in 2011. It sent shockwaves through the sector and much criticism was levelled at the organisations and advocates of the youth work profession, deemed responsible for this 'failure'. I had been involved in youth work practice in a variety of roles since the early eighties, and had borne witness, particularly in the last 20 years to an assault on my profession which appeared relentless and to be gaining pace. This moment, which was no surprise to me, provided the particular catalyst for pursuing my research; I wanted to know whether youth workers could explain the difference they made. As part of the requirement of the Professional Doctorate programme, in September 2011, I submitted an article of publishable quality, outlining my research intentions and proposing that a model of 'practice-based evidence' was needed in order for youth workers to stake their claim in a way that would be robust for policy makers and funders whilst remaining ethical and relational at the point of delivery.

## **The rationale for the research**

Following many years as a member of youth organisations myself, as a senior member undertaking a number of leadership roles, and then subsequently as an adult volunteer, I qualified as a youth and community worker in 1987. I spent the best part of 10 years in a variety of roles within local education authority youth services which included, girls and young women's worker, area-based youth club worker and for most of the time, a detached youth worker, making contact with and supporting those young people who did not access traditional youth work settings like a youth club. Latterly, I became a trainer in the local authority education department, responsible for the professional development needs of youth workers across the area. It was in this role I developed contact with what was then the University of Luton and in 1996 established and taught an employer-led, practice-based,

professional qualifying route for youth workers, approved by the Joint Negotiating Committee (JNC). My involvement with the professional training of youth workers continued until 2004.

Throughout this period, I had retained an interest in research, following on from my undergraduate degree and had furthered my understanding of the changing context of youth work via a number of conference presentations, articles and research reports (see Stenson and Factor, 1994, 1996; Factor and Pitts, 2000; Crimmens at al, 2004).

In *'Reclaiming social work: challenging neo-liberalism and promoting social justice'*, Ferguson (2008) explores the tensions between social work values and a market-driven agenda, and urges the social work profession to develop resistance to managerialism. The Munro Review of Child Protection, Department for Education, (May 2011) identifies the characteristics of 'Reclaiming Social Work' as,

- Encouraging reflective learning and practice
- Improving interaction with families and professionals
- Significantly reducing the burden of administration on practice
- Re-establishing the primary focus of social work on the family

I recognised that there was an overlap with the difficulties being experienced within the youth work sector and wanted to explore the opportunity for *'reclaiming'* youth work. The Education Committee in June 2011 galvanized my energy into pursuing my research interest and passion for the youth work profession. The focus was to explore whether youth workers were able to explain the difference they made to young people and the communities they served, and whether this was possible to do in the current neo-liberal climate of integrated children and young people's services where the identity of, and value placed upon professional specialisms, for example, youth work, were being eroded. In particular, I wanted to know whether it was possible to 'reclaim' youth work practice by making its practice wisdom explicit and whether what I had practised and subsequently taught for years had any place in the current context of service delivery. Therefore, two main questions became relevant as my enquiry unfolded:

1. How is this knowledge generated, captured and shared within the youth work profession?
2. Can it be abstracted and replicated across different contexts?



I wanted to examine the potential for youth workers to articulate their work through a model of 'practice-based evidence', as opposed to 'evidence-based practice'. Would such a model need to embrace the principles enshrined in The Albemarle Report (1960), a government enquiry and the seminal document that laid the foundations of the profession in England, revisited recently through the work of the In Defence of Youth Work campaign (IDYW)? If this was possible, firstly, could it be sufficiently robust and count as evidence to policy makers and funders, and secondly, what conditions or prerequisites would need to be in place to enhance the potential for its generation?

In July 2011, I had been invited to attend a meeting with the Brathay Trust; a voluntary youth organisation based in Cumbria but running youth work projects across the country in six sites. Karen Stuart from the Research Hub at Brathay came to Luton to discuss how the University could help deconstruct the diverse youth work practice being undertaken across the organisation and re-conceptualise it. The outcome of these discussions was the development of a joint funding application to the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) for a Knowledge Exchange event. Whilst considering how to progress my ideas for my doctoral research I discussed the opportunity this development would give both Brathay and myself and concluded with all parties that it was an ideal fit. Consequently, Brathay became my doctoral case study and I became responsible at the University of Bedfordshire for the design and facilitation of the Knowledge Exchange event and associated activities.

I felt there was a need to facilitate the generation of 'practice-based evidence' via theory and dialogue. Most importantly, I wanted to find ways to challenge the current rhetoric for effective youth work practice with young people being 'evidence based' through a narrow and prescribed set of individualised outcomes expected to be achieved by the young person in receipt of an intervention from a youth worker. Rather, I wanted to incorporate practice wisdom and considerations of the contextual nature of both individual and group behaviour. As a result, these questions formed the basis of the design and execution of this study:

1. Can youth workers articulate their practice wisdom?
2. What does youth work 'practice wisdom' say about contemporary youth work practice?
3. What contextual factors affect youth workers' ability to apply their practice wisdom?
4. Can engagement in a Knowledge Exchange help youth workers theorise practice and thereby generate 'practice-based evidence'?

5. What is the wider applicability of the findings of this work?

## **Chapter overview: Section 1: Introduction and background**

### **Chapter 2: The history of the youth work profession and the current policy landscape**

Here I chart the historical development of the youth work profession in England, and the more recent demands made of the youth work profession to demonstrate its effectiveness. This includes the requirement to introduce a number of governance mechanisms as a result of the dominance of New Public Management (NPM) during the time of the New Labour Government (Clarke et al 2000; Nicholls 2012). Finally, it provides evidence of the current scale and dismantling of the youth service across England in particular at this time of austerity driven policy-making.

### **Chapter 3: How do we know what we know and how does this knowledge inform or generate practice wisdom?**

This chapter is an exploration of relevant literature and research which explains how truth and knowledge have been constructed historically and conceptualised within social science traditions. It considers how this informs what might be described as youth work practice wisdom and the process of praxis. Within this analysis I draw upon the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1972) and his concepts of 'habitus', 'social field' and 'capital' to describe the process of praxis and how it may relate to contemporary debates within youth work and the generation of practice wisdom within its historical phronetic traditions.

### **Chapter 4: Evidence-based practice and youth work**

Here a focus is given to evidence-based practice, identifying its development within the broader political backcloth within which it is located. In particular, time is spent describing how the drive for evidence-based policy making and evidence-based practice within the youth work setting has, according to some commentators distorted the traditions of youth work practice.

## **Section 2: The research process**

### **Chapter 5: The case study and research partner**

In this chapter, I introduce the case study, a voluntary youth organisation called the Brathay Trust, based in the north of England. Selected for multiple reasons which will become apparent through the description offered, but in particular, its transformation after receiving considerable income via the Youth Sector Development Fund (YSDF). The challenges it faced within this newly configured organisation provided an extremely relevant context within which to explore the research questions identified above. This study became a partnership between the two of us, discreet in our research activities, yet committed to the same desirable outcome, a sustainable and ethical youth work practice which could generate 'practice-based evidence' to demonstrate the difference it made.

### **Chapter 6: Methodology**

Here I consider the key theoretical perspectives which informed the design and conduct of this study. In particular I explore my intention to develop a 'practice-based' research methodology as this aligns with earlier discussions of 'practice wisdom' and how youth workers can generate 'practice-based evidence'. It also sits most comfortably with my experience as a youth work practitioner who has moved across into the field of research and teaching and my commitment to ensuring that any research I undertake is 'applied' in practice (Bickman and Rog 2008). This ontology is based upon a constructivist-interpretative epistemological position which informs the process accordingly.

### **Chapter 7: The research design**

The place of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) in this research study is discussed here. It considers the fundamental essence of the enquiry and how this was translated into a framework for the fieldwork activities and my role within it. The selection of methods is explored and their links to the foundations of the constructivist-interpretative paradigm are made apparent in my description about the choices made and their usefulness and appropriateness within the context. In particular a focus is given to a model and its potential contribution to the articulation of practice wisdom. It concludes with my reflections on the research process.

## **Chapter 8: Research strategy**

As discussed in the preceding methodology and research design chapters, my intention was to create a collaborative, practice-based research methodology which engaged practitioners in the co-construction of knowledge as frequently theorised within action research literature (Lykes 2001; McNiff, 2013; McIntosh 2010). In this chapter, I explain in detail the methods utilised within the research and the actual conduct of the fieldwork activity. I start by outlining the governance framework in place and the ethical considerations in conducting such work before describing in detail the research activities undertaken and my approach to the analysis of the data.

## **Section 3: Findings and conclusion**

This section contains five chapters of findings which relate directly to the five research questions identified earlier. Findings are presented and illustrated with quotes from the interview transcripts together with content generated at the Knowledge Exchange and other associated activities during the research process. A discussion of the findings is supplemented by current theoretical and research insights through a lens of what this would mean for the profession of youth work moving forward.

### **Chapter 9: Can youth workers articulate their practice wisdom?**

### **Chapter 10: What does youth work 'practice wisdom' say about contemporary youth work practice?**

### **Chapter 11: What contextual factors affect youth workers' ability to apply their practice wisdom?**

### **Chapter 12: Can engagement in a Knowledge Exchange help youth workers' theorise practice and thereby generate 'practice-based evidence'?**

### **Chapter 13: What is the wider applicability of the findings of this work?**

## **Chapter 14: Conclusion**

This final chapter describes the key conditions or prerequisites for the generation of practice-based evidence and describes a model developed to assist in this endeavour. In any other time in the youth work profession's history, this may have been deemed a useful contribution to debates about how youth work can demonstrate the difference it makes to young people's lives. Unfortunately, the timing makes such a contribution less significant as the profession faces what in history will probably be referred to as its most challenging time. Notwithstanding this, the Brathay Trust has successfully navigated a path through the ever-changing climate and retained its commitment to a critical and ethically informed youth work practice. Context therefore does not always trump process.



# Chapter 2: The history of the youth work profession and the current policy landscape

## Pre-state involvement to New Labour

The then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Children and Families, Tim Loughton MP, outlined his thinking on youth services when giving evidence to the Department for Education:

Youth services in this country are one of the most high profile unreformed public services. Many other areas related to children and young people have undergone immense change — much of it for the better — over the past couple of decades. It strikes me that youth services have been left in a bit of a time warp.

(Services for Young People: Third Report of Session 2010-12 Ev.83)

Commentators together with youth workers themselves would challenge Mr Loughton's view having borne witness to the complete reconfiguration of their profession over the last 20 years. The following legislative and policy overview is focussed upon the developments within the youth service in England.

Emerging in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, what we now know as youth work has its origins in what Garland (1985) would describe as the '*crisis of control*', a product of demographic, social and economic changes brought about by rapid urban industrialization. Developed by religious and philanthropic organisations, it targeted poor and refugee communities; its purpose to deter them from criminality, drunkenness and prostitution by offering programmes of outdoor activities, hobbies and sports (Factor and Pitts 2000). This work incorporated certain characteristics which according to Smith (1999) included,

- Attention to the needs, experiences and contribution of young people
- Workers who were able, in the later words of the McNair Report (1944), to be 'a guide, philosopher and friend to young people'
- A focus on relationships, to organise and take part in group activities

- A focus upon reflection and learning
- Voluntary association

For over a century, work with young people flourished without state involvement. During the early part of the twentieth century, this changed with the establishment of the Juvenile Organizing Committees (Board of Education Circular 86, 1921). By the late 1920's the term 'youth work' was being used more commonly. *In the Service of Youth* (Circular 1486, 1939) the beginnings of an organised service to deal with the impact of the war become apparent and the need for more imaginative youth work saw the development of new methods including 'detached' youth work.

By 1944, the Education Act outlined intentions to provide a 'universal' youth service. The purpose of the service was to bring about a new form of education targeted at those whose opportunities were impaired, rather than controlling young people's criminality. Local authorities were allowed rather than required to make 'adequate' provision for all young people; a weakness of the Act being the absence of any defined notion of what 'adequacy' meant. This lack of precision has made the service difficult to protect when cuts to local authority spending were implemented in the subsequent decades.

The task of social reconstruction and policy development in the post war years repositioned the state and made apparent its desire for 'scientific evidence' and the views of 'experts'; the need for an 'evidence-based practice'. It identified gaps in the provision of education, training, health and welfare and designed services accordingly (Factor and Pitts 2000). The end of national service, new found prosperity, the arrival of the 'teenager' and the associated moral panics about youth crime and disorder led the Conservative government of the time to establish a Commission, chaired by Lord Albemarle to determine what the role of the youth service should be in the face of these new and perplexing social phenomena. The subsequent Albemarle Report in 1960, heralded the golden age of youth work.

The Youth Service is at present in a state of acute depression. All over the country and in every part of the Service there are devoted workers. And in some areas the inspiration of exceptional individuals or organisations, or the encouragement of local education authorities, have kept spirits unusually high. But in general we believe it true to say that those who work in the Service feel themselves neglected and held in small regard, both in educational circles and by public opinion generally. We have been told time



and time again that the Youth Service is “dying on its feet” or “out on a limb”... No Service can do its best work in such an atmosphere

(The Albemarle Report 1960: 1)

The above statement made in 1960 would for some have equal resonance now and may indeed echo Tim Loughton’s notion of the service being in a “timewarp”. Smith (1994) argues that the following impacts were directly attributed to the Albemarle Report:

- The number of full-time workers more than doubled in the 10 years that followed publication of the Report
- About half these workers received their training at the National College for the Training of Youth Leaders in Leicester, the emergency college set up as a result of the Albemarle Report
- Central and local government expenditure on the youth service increased substantially
- £28 million was spent between 1960 and 1968 on 3000 building projects
- The Experimental Projects Fund was set up to encourage innovation in the voluntary sector
- The Joint Negotiations Committee (JNC) was established to set terms and conditions for youth workers at the national level

The Report declared that the primary aims of the youth service should be association, training and challenge, *‘To encourage young people to come together into groups of their own choosing is the fundamental task of the Service’* (Albemarle1960: 36). Following Albemarle, the professional focus of the service coalesced around the idea of a universal mode of social education, delivered by a skilled practitioner on the basis of voluntary participation by the young person.

*Youth and Community Work in the 70s* engaged in a review of youth work developments after Albemarle (Davies 1999a). It combined the work of two sub-committees - one chaired by Fairbairn, examined youth work, schooling and further education; the other - chaired by Milson, youth work and the relationship with the 'adult community'. Tensions between the two committees meant that, according to Davies (1999b: 128), the result was *‘a strange document that contradicted itself in places and bore all the hallmarks of political (or administrative) compromise’*. Nonetheless, its legacy gave scope for the service to promote participation, self-determination and political engagement, based upon Etzioni's (1968)

communitarian vision; the authors argued for 'The Active Society'. It continued thus as the economic depression became further embedded.

In 1981 riots took place in major cities across the UK. In the main they took the form of confrontations between the police and large groups of disenfranchised young people, mainly of African–Caribbean descent. Thatcher's Conservative government commissioned the Thompson Report (1982) which acknowledged a radical departure in youth work rooted in the politics of identity. The practice which developed emphasised the 'empowerment' of oppressed young people, as a means of re-engaging marginalized groups. By the mid-eighties, one of the consequences was a growth in the range of innovative practice and an attempt to move away from the universalist social education post-war era which characterised previous work.

The 1980's witnessed swingeing cuts to local authority budgets due to the fiscal crisis and mass unemployment. Whilst the neo-liberal administration of the day appeared to support developments within youth work which aimed to establish 'partnerships' with and 'empower' young 'service users', it was also instrumental in worsening the predicament of the majority of young people through its industrial and fiscal policies. Continued pressure on state funding during the 1980's and 90's due to priorities being re-drawn to social work, criminal justice and education, together with a demographic change in the reduction of the number of young people and attendance at youth centres in decline led to a significant shift from 'open' provision to a more targeted approach to those deemed to be 'at risk' in order to sustain funding streams (Factor and Pitts, 2000; Stenson and Factor, 1994).

My professional working life as a youth and community worker was spent for the most part in local authority youth services located across the South-East England. I qualified in 1987 at a time where youth services had moved away from what had previously been 'universal' provision, accessible to all young people, to a more radical youth work rooted in the politics of identity, mirroring social movements of the time (Keith and Pile 2004).

The focus of my youth work practice during this time was to 'empower' young people in order to re-engage those deemed to be marginalised, indeed much of my work was 'detached', street-based youth work, a method used to engage young people not traditionally associated with youth service provision (Crimmens et al 2004). This shift was also symbolised by separate work with girls and young women and Black young people. Creative and oppositional, of the autonomous tradition, it indicated a coming together of the person-centred with the political, often labelled as Anti-Oppressive and Anti-Discriminatory Practice

(Norton 1987; Taylor 2010). This was reflected in the trade union I belonged to where, as national convenor of the Women's Caucus, I was able to gain an insight into radical youth work practice with groups of girls and young women across England.

Professional debates at the time were characterised by whether youth workers should be focussing on mechanisms of heteronomous social control, (those rules imposed by institutions) rather than a more autonomous driven imperative of social change; it was a time of radical and innovative practice (Nicholls 2012). Meanwhile, voluntary sector providers in the main retained the more traditional role in the provision of 'universal' youth services.

## **New Labour, new youth work and the 'Third Way'**

In 1997 New Labour was elected on a platform to revitalise public services and hand back control to local authorities (Taylor 2000). It re-positioned youth work, placing it at the centre of its policies on vocational training, community safety, youth justice, citizenship and school exclusion.

New Labour embraced 'New Public Management' (NPM); its emphasis on 'what works', 'joined-up solutions' and 'empowerment' fitted with its commitment to a more rational public policy and a 'communitarian' devolution of power to local people (Etzioni 1995). This was reflected across public sector services (Clarke et al 2000). Youth work was no exception; a range of new initiatives and policies were launched designed to tackle social exclusion which impacted upon youth work services by re-shaping how they were to be structured and delivered. These included:

- Every Child Matters, Department for Education and Skills (2003)
- Transforming Youth Work, Department for Education and Employment, (2001)
- Youth Matters, Department for Education and Skills (2005)
- Aiming High for Young People, HM Treasury (2007)

Interestingly, the latter made no mention of youth work, but rather 'positive activities' for young people heralding a profound shift from 'youth services' to 'services for youth'. As a result, these initiatives required the emergence of 'good governance' (de Graaf and Paanakker, 2015; Gazeley, 2014). For the youth service this meant that the centrality of traditional youth work approaches, as described earlier, was diminished; resources were further withdrawn from more 'open' and 'relational' youth work provision in which practice was negotiated with users in a 'needs-led' approach, into time-limited, targeted, prescriptive

and measurable 'outcome-based' interventions (Al- Rodhan and Nayer 2009; Crimmens et al 2004; Poluha and Rosendale 2002). At the same time, Scottish policy documents talked of promoting the 'inclusion' of young people rather than tackling 'exclusion'.

The implications of this policy agenda was profound for both the local authority youth service, voluntary sector partners and the youth workers within it. This included, for example, the imposition of centrally defined targets, new commissioning regimes and competition in the tendering of services alongside the increased targeting of individuals deemed to be 'at risk' who required a 'case management' style intervention. Increased recording and reporting mechanisms in bespoke designed management information systems became the order of the day and the requirement to work within a range of newly created multi agency organisational settings alongside colleagues who had little notion of the 'relationship' premise or voluntary principle on which youth work was based, created significant challenges within the youth work sector (Nicholls 2012). The commitment to and speed of this policy agenda and approach particularly within public services continues apace and can be evidenced through the decision made by both the subsequent Coalition and now Conservative governments who are pursuing the discourse of NPM in its commitment to 'evidence-based' policy making. Additionally, these intentions have gained added momentum as 'austerity' gives rise to further reductions in the money available to both the public and voluntary sector determining decisions about resource allocation becoming even more reliant on 'evidence'.

Through the re-positioning of youth work, described earlier, the role of the youth worker was significantly reconstructed and consigned the youth service to virtual insignificance in order to deliver its politics of the 'Third Way'.

The big idea is that there is no idea. Instead it appears to be used in an eclectic, negative and pragmatic manner. It has been claimed that it is defined like Herbert Morrison's famous definition of socialism, as what a (New) Labour government does. In this sense it is post-ideological and may be best summed up by the New Labour phrase 'what counts is what works'.

(Powell 1999:286)

The notion was premised on a belief that whilst the more prosperous communities of 'middle England' remained politically engaged, it was here that elections would be won or lost. This 'post-ideological' constituency of the political centre wanted government to administer the

state in accordance with the demands of common sense, administrative and technical competence and value for money. Mediated via focus groups and opinion polls, this 'good governance', according to Mair (2000), appeals to this constituency, which is disproportionately older, more prosperous and white. The needs of those who are relatively poor, young and Black therefore became the focus of a range of social policy interventions including criminal justice policy (Smith 1997).

The policy agenda was permeated by the increased focus upon the identification and management of 'risk' (following the high profile abduction and murder of Jamie Bulger, the murder of Victoria Climbié and the findings of the subsequent inquiry<sup>1</sup>). A widening of the identification of those who were responsible for the protection of children and young people became apparent, together with a focus upon risk factors and measuring outcomes. Indeed, the risk factors prevention paradigm (RFPP) remains a dominant discourse in youth justice, exerting a powerful influence over policy and practice in the UK (Haines and Case 2008). The consequences of such an approach were highly significant for both the providers of services to young people and the professionals within it. In their article for the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Issue of Youth and Policy Jeffs and Smith identify the key components which have driven the above initiatives.

- I. Increased centralisation by virtue of centrally defined targets, indicators and the rise of control via commissioning and increased reporting, resulting in less professional freedom
- II. Targeting of young people deemed to be at risk and the stigmatising of particular groups and individuals
- III. Surveillance methods being employed by local authorities and the extended use of databases and the need for youth workers to collect data about the young people with whom they engage
- IV. Accreditation and the pressure to 'deliver' outcomes having re-shaped youth work environments whereby young people view them as more akin to school
- V. Delivery rather than relationship. No longer is the work defined by relationship as increasingly workers are trained as 'managers' as complex processes have been reduced to 'packages' for sale to a range of 'consumers' or providers across the public services.

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<sup>1</sup> *Victoria Climbié Inquiry Report* at [www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200203/cmselect/.../570.pdf](http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200203/cmselect/.../570.pdf)

- VI. Individualisation. As the growing emphasis enshrined in policies focuses on individuals at risk, a need for case management and assessment approaches is required rather than practice based on groups
- VII. In line with other public services, increasing contestability and a heightening of competition between youth work providers is apparent, coupled with the directing and distribution of funding in line with market principles. Often this involves engaging young people in the bidding process
- VIII. Bureaucratization. Professionals have adopted the policies and procedures prioritised by their agency and funders to mitigate the risks of litigation.

(Jefferies and Smith 2008:280-283)

This approach resembled more closely a conservative version of the North American tradition of 'youth development' rather than youth work borne out of notions of preventative strategies, individual deficits and psychological approaches to intervention (Ginwright and James 2002). It was this critique of the youth work sector which informed the development of my research questions as I was keen to discover what remained of the traditional principles of the profession described previously. Meanwhile, the voluntary sector experienced something of a renaissance with the opportunities for new funding streams to support work becoming available, for example through the Youth Sector Development Fund (YSDF)<sup>2</sup>.

## **Joining up and letting go**

Following these developments, a range of new locations or organisational settings and 'joined-up' services evolved in which youth workers began to practice such as, Connexions, Youth Offending Teams (YOTs), Integrated Youth Support Services (IYSS) Pupil Referral Units (PRU's), Children's Trusts, and most recently, the repositioning of youth work practice into 'Early Intervention'. As Watts, commented:

The core of the analysis was the belief that a key cause of the ineffectiveness of current provision was the proliferation of specialist agencies, each dealing with a disconnected part of the young person's life. Accordingly, there was a widely-held view that the agencies needed to be brought more closely

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<sup>2</sup> The Youth Sector Development Fund (YSDF) was established in recognition of both the role that third sector organisations could play in providing services for young people and the challenges they faced in securing sustainable funding. Operating between April 2008 and March 2009 the fund provided £100 million.

together, and that - as part of this process - there was a strong case for each young person to be linked to a key worker who could form a relationship of trust with them, see their problems as a whole, and 'broker' the support of the relevant specialist agencies.

(Watts 2001:168)

Whilst there is a lack of hard evidence that the approach works in this context, it may well be that many partnerships between agencies are not well planned and '*suffer from bureaucratic and funding straightjackets which seem to prevent suitable and sensitive partnerships and "joined-up" solutions*' (Coles 2000: 17) Joined-up working has required a drive amongst youth workers for status and a significant and damaging level of compromise to ensure that they have a seat at the relevant table and professional respect from colleagues with more defined statutory responsibilities (Factor and Pitts 2000). In particular, the constant referral to specialists within the joined-up team lacked any recognition of the importance of the *relationship* between the worker and young person; letting go of one of the fundamentals of the profession. Echoes of Max Weber's 'specialists without spirit' in '*The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism,*' were evident in this practice context

...specialists without spirit, sensualists without heart; this nullity imagines that it has attained a level of civilization never before achieved

(Weber 1904:49).

By the end of the 1990's, following the re-positioning of youth work described earlier, the work expected from local authority youth workers bore no relation to the central guiding principles of the youth work profession enshrined in the Albemarle (1960) and Thompson (1982) reports. Youth work 'practice wisdom' was diluted as it became imbued with a language and discourse drawn from theories of assessment and interventions, most familiar to the profession of social work.

I witnessed these developments from the comfort of academic life, as the course manager of the JNC professional qualifying youth and community programme at what was then, the University of Luton. I was also engaged in a number of research studies both here and across Europe which looked at how youth work methods could be embraced to tackle social exclusion.<sup>3</sup> Teaching students about the historical and ethical foundations of their practice

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<sup>3</sup> Young People: Our Stake in the Future – Hertfordshire County Council/EU 2000

soon became irrelevant for many. Students, and often and more importantly, their sponsoring employers, were more interested in how they measured impact, reported on outcomes and were able to demonstrate 'value for money' to potential commissioners. Indeed, at the University we were able to generate significant income (approximately £1.8million) from the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) in order to deliver training across the region for the new profession of 'Personal Advisor' within the Connexions Service, New Labour's flagship initiative to tackle social exclusion amongst the young.

In 2004 I left the university and entered this new world of youth services by undertaking a number of contracts within the voluntary sector as a freelance consultant. Many were designed to explore the feasibility of expansion, evaluate their services and explore how outcomes measurement could be usefully integrated into day-to-day professional working environments. Alongside this, and to gain a greater insight into the reality of service delivery, I became a 'Quality Mark' Assessor for the National Youth Agency (NYA).<sup>4</sup> This involved visiting youth services across both the statutory and voluntary sectors and assessing their performance against eleven standards, for example, quality assurance mechanisms. Those deemed successful were able to wear their kite mark with pride. Indeed, for some it became a requirement of their commissioners to be in possession of such a badge. At no time were we required to interrogate the nature of the relationships that the youth workers were engaged in with young people. However, many youth workers that I met during these inspections were keen to articulate the positive nature of the relationships they had established with their client group.

## **The legislative framework**

Despite many attempts in its rich history to protect the funding and preserve the stability of the local authority youth service in England, it has never been afforded the statutory basis it has so frequently campaigned for (Davies 1999a and 1999b). Until 2008, there was a statutory duty on local authorities under the Education and Inspections Act 2006 to provide 'services for youth', defined as leisure time activities rather than youth work practice. The duty within the Act stated that, for young people aged 13 to 19 and young people aged 20 to 24 with learning disabilities:

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Step by Step – Hertfordshire County Council/EU 2003

<sup>4</sup> [www.nya.org.uk](http://www.nya.org.uk)



A local education authority in England was required to, secure for qualifying young persons in the authority's area access to:

- (a) Sufficient educational leisure-time activities which are for the improvement of their well-being, and sufficient facilities for such activities; and
- (b) Sufficient recreational leisure-time activities which are for the improvement of their well-being and sufficient facilities for such activities.

(Education and Inspections Act 2006)

What constitutes 'sufficient' was never defined although it has been the subject of much debate in the sector over the last 30 years. The current legislation that supports youth work is described in detail in the Statutory Guidance on Section 507B Education Act 1996 published in March 2008. This statutory guidance sets out the requirements for local authorities to provide youth work in three areas: positive activities, decision making by young people and 14-19 learning. This provision is expected to combine both the statutory and voluntary sector in the delivery of services ensuring a diversity of provision and opportunities for young people. In the current economic climate, as local authorities struggle to meet their statutory obligations to children, young people and their families, inevitably the funding for such services described above is significantly diminished.

## **A renewal of practice?**

It is important to document the rise of evidence-based practice and its impact upon youth work in order to understand the more recent policy and practice context more fully.

Around 85% of young people's waking hours are spent outside formal education, yet each year local authorities spend 55 times more on formal education than they do on providing services for young people outside the school day. We disagree with the Government that public spending of around £350 million a year on youth services in England equates to "large slugs of public money"; rather, we congratulate the sector for its long-standing dexterity in making limited resources go a long way and for continuing to support young people despite reliance on a patchwork of different funds.

(Services for Young People: Third Report of Session 2010-12:5)

In 2009-10 mean spending by local authority youth services per head of the 13-19 population was £77.28, compared to £4,290 per school pupil. As mentioned in the opening chapter, the statutory duty under the Education and Inspections Act 2006 to secure young people's access to sufficient educational and recreational activities, funding of youth services was replaced in 2008. For many within youth work, the period since the election of the Coalition Government in 2010 has been the most painful in recent history. Further cuts, estimated to be somewhere in the region of £259 million since 2010 has decimated youth services in England; many councils have closed what was left of youth provision altogether.

In Defence of Youth Work (IDYW) emerged in 2009 and was a passionate response to the assault on the voluntary tradition of youth work presented by the imposed relationships and prescribed outcomes, favoured by the managerialist tendencies of the New Labour government and subsequently pursued relentlessly by its successors. IDYW identified a commitment to an 'emancipatory and democratic practice' and led a call to action across the profession alongside making alliances with a number of other organisations representing practitioners across different sectors and across Europe and further afield. Davies (2014) urged the sector to campaign for the re-establishment of open access provision.

Additionally, in January 2010, the 'Choose Youth' campaign was launched with a national rally in Solihull which attracted over a 1000 young people, youth workers and voluntary youth sector workers. Choose Youth, is an alliance of over 30 national youth sector organisations and trade unions, brought together to campaign against the cuts to young people's services. In 2013, they published their manifesto, Our Vision for a New Youth Service, calling for the re-establishment of a statutory universal youth service for all 13-21 year olds across England and Wales. Increasingly youth services became outsourced from its local authority location (Watson 2010)

As a result of the 2010 Spending Review, all ring-fenced grants from the Department for Education were abolished, with the exception of the schools budget. From April 2011 all central funding for the youth service was merged into the new Early Intervention Grant worth £2212m in 2011-12 and £2297m in 2012-13. A survey of local authorities by the Heads of Young People's Services in 2011 showed that budget cuts averaged 28%.<sup>5</sup> This position led to significant and disproportionate cuts to the service, ranging from 20% to 100%.

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<sup>5</sup> Confederation of Heads of Young People's Services (CHYPS) 7 February 2011. Available online at: <http://www.chyps.org.uk/news.asp?page=3#listing>

The drive for the '*professionalising*' imperative continued with the launch of the Institute for Youth Work (IYW) in 2013. According to the NYA, this was '*a membership body for youth workers, providing a voice for their views and supporting members to reach the highest professional standards. It will aim to engage all those in the youth sector who work to enable young people to develop holistically and to reach their full potential.*'<sup>6</sup> Controversially, the IYW is now engaged in developing a binding code of ethics, reviewing professional qualifications considering a 'licence to practice', abandoning the traditional army of volunteers engaged in the sector for generations, and prescribing the boundaries of practice in a way deemed neither democratic nor emancipatory.

In February 2014, the findings of a Children and Young People Now survey was published identifying further worrying trends within an already significantly diminished profession.<sup>7</sup> The anonymous online survey, completed by 323 professionals working across the public (215), voluntary (94) and private (11) sectors within children and young people's services, focused on three key topics - training, public perception and professionalism. Asked whether the public understands what youth workers do, 96 per cent of respondents said "No". This view was reinforced by those who, in response to a different question, said the public's perception of youth work is either unfavourable (15 per cent) or neutral (47 per cent). Ruth Gilchrist, UK Youth's education, training and development officer, challenged this perception,

Of course they do - to a certain extent. They may not understand the nuances of the job, just as we know what a nurse is but may not understand what a mental health nurse does. They may not know what group work is, or informal or social education, but they know youth workers work with young people in a wise and productive way and help them grow up.

(Gilchrist in McArdle2014)

Helpfully, 95 per cent of respondents considered youth work to be a profession. This reaffirmed my view that youth workers were still able to articulate their practice wisdom; it was the opportunities to do it and to evidence their impact which appeared to be diminishing at a pace.

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.nya.org.uk/institute-for-youth-work>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.cypnow.co.uk/cyp/analysis/1141923/youth-workers-identity-crisis-amid-public-perceptions>

Youth work is not prescriptive by nature and therefore making it work meaningfully for the diverse population of young people in the UK requires intelligence, commitment, knowledge, on-going training and development, and above all professionalism. The issue of a statutory licence to practice was also explored within the survey to consolidate the professional status of youth work. Inevitably, the issue divides the workforce, with three out of five respondents being in favour of a licence system being developed to accompany a further commitment to the demonstration of outcomes as a result of youth work interventions (McArdle 2014).

For the critics, such an idea is preposterous. By the additional imposition of entry standards to the profession the danger would be the removal of professional judgement and individual responsibility and the exchange of responsibility for legislation (Bauman 1992; Dahlberg and Moss 2005). It was presumed that the standards would be externally imposed, and with no identification at that point of from where they would emerge, objection was unsurprising. Likewise, the introduction of hard evidential requirements may simply serve to reinforce the obsession about proving impact, as seen through the introduction of the Every Child Matters framework in the late 1990's.

As the assault on the youth work profession continued, the campaign for a renewal of youth work practice has gathered pace and IDYW has organised a number of events and established an arena for critical debate and collective action. These include, a website, Facebook page and a programme of story-telling workshops, leading to the publication of *'Youth Work: Stories from Practice'*. Yet despite this, IDYW has recognised the presence of significant and remaining tensions as follows,

Yet for many workers pursuing these principles is shadowed by contradiction and constraint. They struggle to preserve the integrity of their relationships with young people. They find themselves 'ducking and diving', endeavouring to be 'in and against' the behavioural modification implicit in the manufacturing of the Young Foundation's 'emotionally resilient' young person willing to put up with whatever the system throws at them. Workers are pressured to individualise both their own and young people's situations. They are haunted by colleagues, who have embraced willfully or otherwise the pseudo-scientific illusions of the outcomes agenda. Our suspicion and concern

is that the Campaign has come across as failing to understand sufficiently these tensions.<sup>8</sup>

(Taylor 2014)

For the voluntary sector, existing contracts have been terminated or renegotiated leading to tighter margins and also a loss of jobs (Taylor-Gooby,2012). The view advanced by the Coalition Government back in 2010 was that, even after significant increases on public services, many social problems still remain. Part of their answer lay in a larger role for voluntary organisations in the delivery of public services and the encouragement of social enterprise via the Big Society.<sup>9</sup> The means of dealing with these social problems was to involve individuals and communities in local responses by:

- Encouraging people to be more involved in their communities through the promotion of 'mass social action';
- A stronger civil society sector, allowing people to contribute more effectively to locally determined priorities; and
- Ensuring people are better able to shape government policy and delivery, through more transparent decision making and the provision of information.<sup>10</sup>

Opportunities for a return to a more 'needs-led' and open relational practice within a civil society have been highlighted in recent years as state funding becomes increasingly limited; '*a renewal of practice*' (Jefferies and Smith 2008:291). Indeed the commentators suggest that freedom from the noose of local authority funding would allow for a welcome return to the principles of the profession and locate the work once more in its roots in the voluntary sector.

In August 2014, *The Damage*, a report by the trade union UNISON was published.<sup>11</sup> UNISON's research, based on data provided in response to a Freedom of Information request from 168 local authorities across England and Wales, shows that youth services lost at least £60 million of funding between 2012 and 2014.

For Bernard Davies, the impact is described thus:

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<sup>8</sup> [www.indefenceofyouthwork.org.uk](http://www.indefenceofyouthwork.org.uk)

<sup>9</sup> Building the Big Society, Cabinet Office 2010

<sup>10</sup> Launch of the Big Society programme 18 May 2010

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.unison.org.uk/upload/sharepoint/On%20line%20Catalogue/22532.pdf>

...this widespread abandonment of Youth Services, at least across England, has within four years reversed a fifty year commitment to the only state institution which has had an explicit mandate to provide open-access youth work.

(Davies 2014)<sup>12</sup>

If Roberts (2009) is correct in her assertion that the provision of services for young people is the marker of an ethical society, we should be extremely concerned. Latest figures included in the Expenditure by Local Authorities and Schools on Education, Children and Young People's Services report on local authority spending, published by the Department for Education, show that spending on youth services fell by 12 per cent from £712m in 2013/14 to £627m in 2014/15. The £85m fall is slightly less than the £103m cut the previous year.<sup>13</sup>

In Defence of Youth Work (IDYW) claim that the government is in denial about cuts and closures in youth services and is critical of the lack of clarity in their terminology when defining what exactly is the 'youth sector' they refer to. Tony Taylor (IDYW 2014) sums up its intentions thus:

For the moment let's recognize that it includes at its heart a plethora of imposed, referred and targeted outcomes-led practice, most usefully understood as youth social work or youth justice or indeed pastoral care. It is these instrumental forms of work with young people that attract the attention of the less than neutral social researchers of such outfits as Dartington. It is these forms of practice that are up for measurement and up for sale.

(Taylor 2014)

The re-positioning of youth work was explored by Hughes et al (2014) in their article, *'The state of youth work in austerity England – Reclaiming the ability to "care"'*. Here the authors claim that as a result of the increased marketisation of the profession, demoralising cuts, a reduced capacity to voice opinion, and a distinct lack of confidence to challenge the imposed neoliberal order youth workers are no longer able to "care" for young people.

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<sup>12</sup><http://indefenceofyouthwork.com/2014/03/09/in-support-of-the-provisional-statement-of-purpose-campaigning-in-young-peoples-interests/>

<sup>13</sup><http://www.cypnow.co.uk/cyp/news/1155142/council-children-s-centre-funding-cuts-double-in-a-year#sthash.E7wfwTGZ.dpuf>

In the autumn of 2015, the National Council for Voluntary Youth Services (NCVYS), UK Youth and Ambition launched a Youth Sector Collaboration Consultation. It culminated in an invitation-only event entitled, 'Changing the Trajectory – Charting a New Course for Youth Services'; unsurprisingly, representatives from the Institute of Youth Work and trade unions were excluded.

On January 19 2016, it published its findings and proposed actions moving forward; it opens with the following statement, *'Government and the youth sector are united in their aim to improve outcomes for young people'*. This statement is, I believe further evidence of the colonisation of the voluntary sector youth organisations who are now clearly abandoning their historical role of advocating for young people in today's austerity driven policy agenda and rather than campaign on behalf of those young people in need, find it appropriate to join a Government driven consensus on how the sector should look. Nowhere in the paper is a mention of youth work; instead the paper talks of 'non-formal education', 'social development' and 'social action'. Aside from the development of 'agreed outcomes for young people' it also mentions the need to develop 'new business models' across the sector to ensure sustainability, but its claim to lead the youth sector remains somewhat contested, particularly from those dissenting voices excluded from the consultation in the first place.

Also, what this consortia has agreed to support is a number of Government objectives which include the intention to increase National Citizen Service (NCS) participation from 80,000 to 900,000 by 2021 (60% of all 16 year olds), and that 50% of all 10-20 year olds will be involved in social action by 2020, (the example given being working in a team to refurbish a nursing home). Finally, and probably the most concerning, it identifies its crucial role in the creation of a 'Social Development Journey to become the framework for a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Youth Sector' thereby removing any notion of the dialogical nature of the relationship and engagement with young people both individually and in groups, and replacing it with a pre-determined destination predicated on the belief that the teaching of a particular set of life skills 'in a fun way' will be a suitable replacement for the youth work traditions of the past.

In addition, the above has unfolded against the backcloth of a controversial proposal from local government and voluntary sector employers to end the Joint Negotiating Committee (JNC) agreement for youth and community workers. The JNC, which is also referred to as the 'pink book', was established in 1961 and sets out a pay scales and endorses youth and community workers' qualifications, which are approved by the Education and Training Standards committees for England and Wales. Driven by the size of cuts to the number of workers covered by the JNC pay deal, a reduction of 45 per cent between 2008 and 2013,

the case for retaining a separate national bargaining arrangement becomes untenable. Misrecognition has allowed the social field of youth work to be further redrawn.



# Chapter 3: How do we know what we know and how does this help generate practice wisdom in youth work?

Perhaps the first duty of the educator is to truth. This means that we must not teach or embrace something we know or believe to be false. We must search for truth and be open in dialogue to what others have to say.

However, we should not be fearful of confronting falsehood where we find it.

(Jefferies and Smith 2005:95)

This principle has underpinned the practice of youth work for generations and so it is relevant to consider how, what constitutes 'truth' has been historically conceptualised. Discovered through reason and logic in rational discussion, (appealing to logic, not emotion) Socrates favoured truth as the highest value, In this dialectic, rationality was viewed as the proper means for persuasion, the discovery of truth, and the determinant for one's actions (May 2000). I wanted to know whether such a 'truth' existed within youth work, 'practice wisdom', and if so, can those who practice it, articulate it to others?

Practice is about doing as opposed to 'theory' which generates general rules or principles to be applied to practice in order to solve social problems. However, the two are inextricably linked. Revisiting how knowledge (or 'epistemology' 'ἐπιστήμη' = knowledge; and 'λογος' = word / speech - the study of knowledge, of what it means to say you know something, the scope of knowledge), is theorised in social science as relevant in order to inform how practice wisdom is created. How this contrasts to the drive for evidence-based practice and whether there remains a role for the dialogic method in contributing to this practice wisdom in youth work was also helpful in developing this thesis.

The positivist doctrine formulated by Auguste Comte in the 1920's asserts that the only true knowledge is scientific knowledge; that which describes and explains observable phenomena, both physical and social (Comte 1975). However, Comte did regard scientific knowledge as 'relative' not absolute, which would remain unobtainable. This positive knowledge was expected to generate a new scientifically grounded intervention in politics

and social affairs which would lead to the transformation of social life - logical positivism (Bryant 1985).

A significant contribution of the Frankfurt School of critical theory was the debate on a non-positivist epistemology for the social sciences. According to Held (1980), for Horkheimer, traditional theory was obsessed with the accumulation of facts in specialised, isolated fields of study and tended to serve rather than challenge social order. Horkheimer challenged traditional theory's separation of knowledge and action, and values and research, and like Marx believed that theory and knowledge would change society by helping the oppressed to identify and free themselves from oppression. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944, 1997) Adorno and Horkheimer propose that knowledge and reason, rather than bringing freedom and progress had indeed become instruments of domination, controlling not only the natural world, but human beings too (Wiggershaus 1986).

In the 1960s, Habermas took these epistemological debates further in *Knowledge and Human Interests* (1968), by identifying critical knowledge as based on principles that differentiated it either from the natural sciences or the humanities through its orientation to self-reflection and emancipation. Though dissatisfied with Adorno and Horkheimer's idea presented in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Habermas shares the view that, in the form of instrumental rationality, the era of modernity marks a move away from the liberation of enlightenment and toward a new form of enslavement (Outhwaite 1997).

As Habermas argued, in dialogue there is a '*gentle but obstinate, a never silent although seldom redeemed claim to reason*' (Habermas 1979: 3) However distorted our ways of communicating are, there is within their structures a '*stubbornly transcending power*'. He argued for the need for '*ideal speech situations*' in fostering both understanding and a humane collective life. '*[A] humane collective life*', he said, '*depends on vulnerable forms of innovation-bearing, reciprocal and unforcedly egalitarian everyday communication*'. (Habermas 1985:82). It is this dialogue which has been at the centre of youth work practice for generations. '*All truths will be discovered through a rigorous regime of conjecture and refutation*' (Popper 1974:22).

Various models of post-modern theory reject the false binaries of good and bad and attempt to achieve the logos – the unmediated truth about the world (Lyotard 1984). Whilst there is no agreed definition of post-modernism, there is an emphatic rejection of any theories which may explain social phenomena. Post-modern thinkers draw us away from 'truth seeking' and

emphasise flexibility and diversity; this is described by Lyotard (1984) who coined the term 'post-modernism' as follows:

The essence of post-modernism is carefree scepticism about every possible attempt to make sense of history. It anarchically rejects all the 'metanarratives' of progress – whether Marxist or liberal – by reference to which modernity and modernism have identified themselves.

(Lyotard 1984:8)

For post-modernists, truth has no 'objective' quality and what Foucault (1966) calls 'truth claims' are simply instruments for achieving or retaining power. The use of 'truth' as part of a dominating power structure was all too dangerous; instead, he preferred to use 'Regimes of Truth', because like Nietzsche, he believed that truth is a product of the changing 'épistémè' of successive historical epochs. As Foucault states

I would define the 'épistémè' retrospectively as the strategic apparatus which permits of separating out from among all the statements which are possible those that will be acceptable within, I won't say a scientific theory, but a field of scientificity, and which it is possible to say are true or false. The 'épistémè' is the 'apparatus' which makes possible the separation, not of the true from the false, but of what may from what may not be characterised as scientific.

(Foucault 1980:197)

Using the term 'épistémè' in a highly specialised sense in his work 'The Order of Things', (1966), Foucault meant the historical a priori<sup>14</sup> that grounds knowledge and its discourses and thus represents the condition of their possibility, rather than causality within a particular epoch. However, in subsequent writings, (see *Discipline and Punish: the birth of the prison* 1977, and *The Subject and Power* 1982), he qualified this view, making it clear that several 'épistémè' may co-exist and interact at the same time, being parts of disparate power-knowledge systems.

Zygmunt Bauman describes post-modernism's ability to reject and discredit old ideas and narratives when he describes its 'all-deriding, all-eroding, all dissolving destructiveness' Bauman (1992: vii). According to Bauman, post-modernity 'does not seek to substitute one

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<sup>14</sup> A priori knowledge or justification is independent of experience

*truth for another, one life ideal for another ... it braces itself for a life without truths, standards and ideals*, (Bauman 1992: viii, ix). However, such relativism with everything being reduced to an equivalence does not offer new insight to a society where social problems dominate (Cohen 1997) and therefore I would challenge the usefulness of this approach when considering knowledge generation in professional settings which aim to ameliorate difficulties experienced by certain sections of society the practitioners aim to support.

The nature of the work undertaken by an informal educator or youth worker has been shaped by a number of thinkers, theories and methods in the last hundred years. These ideas have been taught to students of youth and community work on professional courses since the establishment of the National College in Leicester in 1961. Praxis, Socratic dialogue and conversation, relationship building, reflection, social education, social group work and notions of emancipatory participation continue to be taught; their place and relevance in current day practice does however remain somewhat obscure. Here a focus is given to praxis.

## **Praxis**

Aristotle believed that the appropriateness of knowledge or 'epistemology' was based upon the purpose or *'telos'* it served. He offered a three-fold classification of such endeavour:

The purpose of a theoretical discipline (*'épistémè'*) is the pursuit of truth through contemplation; its telos is the attainment of knowledge for its own sake. The purpose of the productive sciences (*techne*) is to make something; their telos is the production of some artifact. The practical disciplines (*praxis*) are those sciences which deal with ethical and political life; their telos is practical wisdom and knowledge.

(Carr and Kemmis 1986: 32)

The purpose of the practical was the cultivation of wisdom and knowledge. This involved the making of judgments and human interaction. The form of reasoning associated with the practical sciences is praxis or informed and committed action (Aristotle in Barnes 1976). In this way, human agency and structure are inseparable. Through praxis individuals can either reproduce or subvert social structure. Whilst social life can be seen as more than random individual acts, it is also not merely determined by structural forces. Within praxis, individuals

have the opportunity to ignore, replace, change or reproduce the social structure through its traditions, morals and institutions. It may also refer to practising and applying ideas.

## **'Phronesis'**

For Aristotle, praxis is guided by a moral disposition to act truly and rightly; a concern to further human well-being and the good life. This is what the Greeks called *'phronesis'* and requires an understanding of other people. 'Phronesis' is difficult to translate directly, although the word 'prudence' is most often cited (Irwin, 1999) or 'practical wisdom' or 'practical common-sense' (Flyvbjerg 2001: 56). In this sense, 'phronesis' is essentially ethical. As Irwin points out, Aristotle is arguing that *'prudence is necessary and sufficient for complete virtue of character'*, further, *'someone cannot have it and fail to act correctly'* (Irwin 1999: 345). 'Phronesis' is therefore concerned with action – praxis. Aristotle suggests

Prudence is a state of grasping the truth, involving reason, concerned with action about things that are good or bad for a human being.

(Aristotle 1140b:5-7, in Irwin 1999:89)

For Arendt (1961), 'phronesis' is the ability to judge and have insight. Using it to explain its importance in relation to political thought thus,

The ability to see things not only from one's own point of view but in the perspective of all those who happened to be present; even that judgment may be one of the fundamental abilities of man as a political being in so far as it enables him to orient himself in the realm...the Greeks called this ability 'phronesis'.

(Arendt 1961: 221, in d'Entreves 2008:74).

The obvious parallels between her analysis and the importance of conversation in youth work cannot be overstated (Batsleer, 2008; Jeffs and Smith 2002). *'Phronesis: debate and discussion, and the capacity to enlarge one's perspective, are indeed crucial to the formation of opinions'* (d'Entreves, 2008:75), these are also fundamental tenets of youth work practice according to Kerry Young,

The core purpose of youth work is to engage young people in the process of moral philosophising through which they make sense of themselves and their

world, increasingly integrate their values, actions and identity, and take charge of themselves as empowered human beings'

(Young 2005: 59)

The first to argue for the relevance of 'phronesis' to youth work was Smith (1994:76) who suggested:

Local educators think 'on their feet' ...broadly guided in their thinking by their understanding of what makes for the 'good'; of what makes for human well-being... this mode of thinking comes close to what Aristotle describes as 'prudence or practical wisdom', phronesis.

(Smith 1994:76)

What we begin with is a question or situation. We then start to think about this situation in the light of our understanding of what is good or what makes for human flourishing. We can represent this as follows:

<b>The 'good'</b>	People begin with a situation or question which they consider in relation to what they think makes for human flourishing
<b>Phronesis</b>	They are guided by a moral disposition to act truly and rightly
<b>Praxis</b>	This enables them to engage with the situation as committed thinkers and actors
<b>Interaction</b>	The outcome is a process

(Smith adapted from Grundy 1987:64)

More recently, Ord (2014) also utilizes the term 'phronesis' as a suitable and positive frame of reference for youth work. For Ord, 'phronesis' is context dependent, whereas 'épistémè' and techne are context independent in their search for explanations of actions, behaviour or wider social practices upon which generalisations, laws and predictions can be made.

Given the importance of context, it is therefore the 'particular', that is important within 'phronesis'. For Aristotle, 'phronesis' is concerned about the '*knowledge of particulars, since it is concerned with action and action is about particulars*' (Aristotle 1141b, in Irwin 1999: 92). This is helpfully explained by Ord thus,

If we return then to an application of this thinking to the understanding of youth work we can see how Aristotle's phronetic knowledge resonates with an approach to youth work which is grounded in an appreciation of young people's lived experience. Youth work is rooted in the personal, social and spiritual development of young people which has to be understood in the context of their 'particular' lives and therefore their 'experience'.

(Ord 2014:66)

Practice cannot be lacking theory; it is engaged in a constant process of theory building and testing. Thus, it is in this sense that we can begin to talk about practice as praxis - informed action. As Freire said, '*we find two dimensions, reflection and action, in such radical interaction that if one is sacrificed - even in part - the other immediately suffers*' (Freire 1972: 60). Linking theory and practice is frequently conceptualised in three ways:

1. **Technical rationality** is the epistemology of practice which comes from a positivist perspective, based upon rational or scientific knowledge which is evidence-based (Healy 2005). It is seen as a top-down process whereby researchers test the theories and then practitioners are expected to apply them. This is apparent in the current climate of evidence-based policy making and practice (Fitz-Gibbon 2003; Nutley et al (2002)).
2. **Reflection-in-action** differs from other reflections because it is attributing direct importance to action (Schön, 1987). In reflection-in-action new thinking about some parts of our knowledge-in-action leads to on-the-spot experimenting and to further reflection which influences what we do (Schön, 1987). For Fook (2002), such a reflective approach enables the development of new theory rather than to being 'theory-driven'. Such a view is not without its critics. Healy (2005) points to the fact that by emphasising such intuitive and tacit knowledge, the basis of our knowledge remains implicit and inaccessible to users, funders, policy-makers and researchers. Additionally, in such a context a practitioner's reflection is considered the 'truth', thereby discouraging any critical study of the claims formulated by a practitioner. By focusing on uncertainties and complexities this approach leads practitioners to ignore

those aspects of their work where some degree of certainty is possible and necessary (Mesl 2010).

3. **The reflexive approach** suggests no conflict between theory and practice; practitioners use theory, as well as create theory in practice (Taylor and White 2000). *'This is not about simply applying formal theory, but it could be used as the basis for the formation of knowledge in practice; it remains an on-going negotiation through which the use of theory is constantly constructed through not only practice experience, but context and formal theoretical frameworks'* (Healy, 2005: 94). It is this approach that I believe is central to the development of robust practice-based evidence within youth work.

Praxis is reflexive, it is not simply action based on reflection. It is action which embodies certain qualities. These include a commitment to human well-being, the search for truth, and respect for others. It is the action of people who are free, who are able to act for themselves. Moreover, praxis is always risky. It requires that a person *'makes a wise and prudent practical judgement about how to act in this situation'* Carr and Kemmis (1986: 190). Praxis, however, is creative: it is other-seeking and dialogic (Taylor 1993).

Practice wisdom can be described as the accumulated professional knowledge gained from individual and other's experiences, learning and observation, agency traditions etc. It is both honoured and considered to be fallible and can be tested in the same way that a research-based hypothesis can be; it uses an inductive approach, being formative in its assessment of and impact on practice. In terms of conceptualizing practice wisdom, Scott (1990) described it as *'involving methods that included such things as interpretation, reflexivity and social construction that assist in the development of hypotheses'* (Scott 1990 in Samson 2015:126).

## Habitus

Bourdieu also objects to reductive sociological analysis that tries to account for social life only in terms of structures (objectivism/structuralism) or only in terms of primary experience (subjectivism/phenomenological). Bourdieu therefore developed the key conceptual tools of 'social field' and 'habitus' in order to navigate the structure/agency dichotomy (Lovell, 2007).

According to Loïc Wacquant (2004) the concept of *'habitus'* was used as far back as Aristotle whose notion of *hexis* (state) was translated into *'habitus'* in Medieval times. The concept is also apparent in the work of Max Weber and Edmund Husserl. Its contemporary



usage was introduced by Marcel Mauss in 1934 and later developed by Maurice Merleau-Ponty in 1945 and Pierre Bourdieu in 1972. In his account of 'body techniques' in *Les Techniques du corps*, (1934), Mauss defined '*habitus*' as those aspects of culture that are anchored in the body or daily practices of individuals, groups, societies, and nations.

Bourdieu first adapted the term in 1972. For him, *habitus* includes the totality of learned habits, bodily skills, styles, tastes, and other non-discursive knowledge that might be said to '*go without saying*' for a specific group (Bourdieu 1990:66). In that way these socialised norms or tendencies can be said to operate beneath the level of rational consciousness. '*Habitus*' is,

...the way society becomes deposited in persons in the form of lasting dispositions or trained capacities and structured propensities to think, feel and act in determinant ways, which then guide them.

(Wacquant 2005: 316, in Navarro 2006:16)

Bourdieu (1972) elaborates on the notion of *habitus* by explaining its dependency on history and human memory. For instance, a certain behaviour or belief becomes part of a society's structure when the original purpose of that behaviour or belief can no longer be recalled and becomes socialized into individuals of that culture. In this way power is seen as culturally and symbolically created, and constantly re-legitimised through an interplay of agency and structure.

'*Habitus*' is created through a social, rather than individual process leading to patterns that are enduring and transferrable from one context to another, but that also shift in relation to specific contexts and over time. '*Habitus*' is subjective and '*designates the system of durable and transposable dispositions through which we perceive, judge and act in the world*' (Wacquant, 2006:6). Powell, (2010:73), described *habitus* as 'the individual's '*feel for the game*' or the set of bodily dispositions and mental structures through which we interpret the social world, based on our past experience'.

'*Habitus*' is neither a result of free will, nor determined by structures, but created by a kind of interplay between the two over time: dispositions that are both shaped by past events and structures, and that shape current practices and structures and also, importantly, that condition our very perceptions of these (Bourdieu 1984: 170). Bourdieu has described the *habitus* as '*an art of invention*' to emphasise that '*it implies an active and creative relation to*

*the world*' (Peillon, 1998:221) rather than one that is mechanically determined. In this Bourdieu recognizes both its permeability and its ability to capture continuity and change.

Thus '*habitus*' is created and reproduced unconsciously, '*without any deliberate pursuit of coherence... without any conscious concentration*' (Bourdieu 1974: 170), whereas praxis, I would argue is a deliberate activity. '*Habitus*' 'is not fixed or permanent, and can be changed under unexpected situations or over a long historical period' (Navarro 2006: 16). Bourdieu also suggests that '*types of behaviour can be directed towards certain ends without being consciously directed to these ends or determined by them*' (1990:9-10 cited in Peillon, 1998:222). The concept of habitus was developed '*to account for this paradox*'.

The habitus is the subjective system of expectations and predispositions acquired through past experience. According to Bourdieu, '*habitus*' provides us with '*the most automatic gestures and apparently most insignificant techniques of the body – ways of walking or blowing one's nose*' (Bourdieu, 1979:466), or, put another way, '*an unconscious internalisation of the rules and structures of the social world*' or *the social field into which we are born, representing 'embodied history, internalised as second nature and so forgotten as history*' (Bourdieu, 1990:56 in Behnke and Meuser, 2001:156).

The 'forgetting of history' is what the 'habitus' depends upon and this process is described by Bourdieu as 'misrecognition': that is, in the process of growing up in a social field, we internalise and embody the 'habits' or 'dispositions' that are appropriate to our class, gender and ethnic milieu and then we forget we have learned them in the first place.

'*Misrecognition*' makes the social and political arrangements under which we live appear to be 'natural' rather than historical. 'Misrecognition' is akin to Marxian ideas of '*false consciousness*' (Gaventa 2003: 6), but working at a deeper level that transcends any intent at conscious manipulation by one group or another. Unlike the Marxian view, 'misrecognition' is more of a cultural than an ideological phenomenon, because it

...embodies a set of active social processes that anchor taken-for-granted assumptions into the realm of social life and, crucially, they are born in the midst of culture. All forms of power require legitimacy and culture is the battleground where this conformity is disputed and eventually materialises amongst agents, thus creating social differences and unequal structures.

(Navarro 2006: 19)

Misrecognition is a *'pernicious disposition'* (Schiff, 2009:24) *that enables 'the unconscious operation of the habitus [and] gives social and political life the air of second nature: thus it is 'through misrecognition that history is turned into nature'* (Schiff, 2009:19). Further, it is this turning of history into nature that *'accounts for the possibility of unreflective engagement in everyday life'*. Misrecognition I would argue is being used to re-shape the profession of youth work through the current dominance of the political and policy agenda described in Chapter 2.

According to Schiff, Bourdieu was interested in *'the relationship between our subjective experience of the world (in the form of our 'structured dispositions') and the 'objective structures' of our existence'* (Schiff, 2009:10), the 'social field' in which people manoeuvre and struggle in pursuit of desirable resources.

## **The Social Field**

For Bourdieu, context and environment are key influences on *'habitus'*; it depends upon their *'social field'*. Mainly constituted by the objective and determining social structures of class, gender, and ethnicity, a field is a network, structure or set of relationships which may be intellectual, religious, educational, cultural, etc. (Navarro 2006: 18).

Fields are constructed according to underlying *'nomos'*, the normal rules and forms people take for granted in their day to day activities. Nomos represents order, valid and binding on those who fall under its jurisdiction; thus it is a social construct with ethical dimensions. It is a belief, opinion or point of view; it is a human invention.

Each social field is endowed with its own *'rules, regularities and forms of authority'* and each field *'imposes its own determinations on those who enter or wish to enter it'* (Wacquant, 2006:7-8). These ideas are elaborated at length in Bourdieu's classic study of French society, *Distinction* (1986), in which he shows how the *'social order is progressively inscribed in people's minds'* through *'cultural products'* including systems of education, language, judgements, values, methods of classification and activities of everyday life (Bourdieu 1986: 471).

This leads to an unconscious acceptance of social differences and hierarchies, to *'a sense of one's place'* and to behaviours of self-exclusion (Bourdieu: 1986:141). The social field into which we are born presents us with *'the obligatory conventions, values, discourses, or rules of the game that are the context for social interaction'* (Powell, 2010:73). People often

experience power differently depending upon which field they are in at a given moment (Gaventa 2003: 6)

Bourdieu (1980) accounts for the tensions and contradictions that arise when people encounter and are challenged by different contexts. His theory can be used to explain how people can resist power and domination in one [field] and express complicity in another.

(Moncrieffe 2006: 37)

Moncrieffe (2006) illustrates this in her interview with a Ugandan woman MP who has public authority, but is submissive to her husband when at home. This has been widely observed by feminist activists and researchers, and is another way of saying that women and men are socialised to behave differently in 'public, private and intimate' arenas of power (VeneKlasen and Miller 2002).

## **Social Capital**

More specifically, a field is a social arena of struggle over the acquisition of certain species of capital – capital being whatever is taken as significant for social agents. Structured in terms of domination and hierarchically organised in any given social field different forms of capital (economic, social, cultural and symbolic) are unequally, and hierarchically, distributed amongst members of that field (Peillon, 1998; Wacquant, 2006).

'Economic capital' refers to material wealth; 'social capital' concerns connections to social networks or group membership and, as a result of those connections, having the ability to mobilise people. '*Cultural capital*' refers to educational credentials and other cultural goods. When ownership of these different forms of capital is recognised as legitimate by other members of the field then the owner is in possession of 'symbolic capital' (Peillon, 1998:216).

These forms of capital may be equally important, and can be accumulated and transferred from one arena to another (Navarro 2006). Cultural capital – and the means by which it is created or transferred from other forms of capital – plays a central role in societal power relations, as this '*provides the means for a non-economic form of domination and hierarchy, as classes distinguish themselves through taste*' (Gaventa 2003: 6). The shift from material to cultural and symbolic forms of capital is to a large extent what hides the causes of

inequality. Youth workers have struggled in the last 20 years to achieve such symbolic capital as their professional ethos has been marginalised by other professionals who have claimed hierarchical power in the multi-professional environments described earlier.

Fields are organised both vertically and horizontally. This means that fields are not strictly analogous to classes, and are often autonomous, independent spaces of social play. The field of power is peculiar in that it exists horizontally through all of the fields and the struggles within it control the exchange rate of the forms of cultural, symbolic, or physical capital between the fields themselves. A field is constituted by the relational differences in position of social agents, and the boundaries of a field are demarcated by where its effects end. Different fields can be either autonomous or interrelated (for example the separation of power between judiciary and legislature) and more complex societies are more differentiated societies that have more fields (Gaventa 2003).

Thus the field works like a market in which actors compete for the specific benefits associated to it. This competition defines the objective relationships between participants through factors like the volume of capital they contribute, their trajectories within the field or their ability to adjust to the rules inherent to the field. The extent to which participants are able to make an effective use of the resources they are endowed with is a function of the adaptation of their habitus in this specific field. The adaptation of the habitus has become second nature for youth workers to survive in their professional life, or social field.

According to Melrose (2012), some commentators have argued that the concept of the social field is 'overly deterministic' (see Peillon, 1998; McRobbie, 2004) but while the concepts of 'social field' and 'habitus' might appear to suggest a set of binaries (one of structure and the other of agency) or an overly deterministic approach in fact *'the whole force of Bourdieu's writing is to avoid such an account'* (McRobbie, 2004:104).

It is the relationship between the social field and '*habitus*' that is important because it takes the meeting of mental structures (habitus) and social structures (field) *'to generate practice'* (Wacquant, 2006:8). Following Bourdieu, Wacquant argues that,

To explain any social event or pattern one must inseparably dissect both the social constitution of the agent (Habitus) and the makeup of the particular social universe within which she operates (Field) as well as the particular social conditions in which they come into contact and impinge on each other'

(Wacquant 2006:8)

Conditions for the reproduction of the established social and political order remain constant whilst there is an agreed coming together of social structures and mental structures, but when they collide, we have the conditions for change (Wacquant, 2006).

When these relations of domination that are ordinarily masked by 'misrecognition' are disrupted we have 'moments of crisis' where the organisation of the social and political world is exposed as not 'natural' but historical.

(Schiff, 2009:18)

## **Bourdieu and youth work**

Bourdieu therefore strikes a particular resonance with the practice of youth work and is particularly appealing as he sees a reflexive sociological method as part of the process of change. The habitus is the subjective system of expectations and predispositions acquired through past experience. In this way youth workers have had to constantly compete for symbolic capital and readjust their habitus in order to contribute to and give meaning to the social field in the current policy landscape. Careful analysis as described in Chapter 3 can help to reveal the power relations that have been rendered invisible by 'habitus' and 'misrecognition' (Navarro 2006: 19).

Through such analysis one can see that Bourdieu proposed a 'reflexive sociology' – in which one recognises one's biases, beliefs and assumptions in the act of sense-making – long before reflexivity became fashionable. Self-critical knowledge that discloses the '*sources of power*' and reveals '*the reasons that explain social asymmetries and hierarchies*' can itself become '*a powerful tool to enhance social emancipation*' (Navarro 2006: 15-16). A reflexive approach within the generation of practice wisdom is fundamental.

A final important concept in Bourdieu's understanding of power is that of '*doxa*', which is the combination of both orthodox and heterodox norms and beliefs – the unstated, taken-for-granted assumptions or 'common sense' behind the distinctions we make. '*Doxa*' happens when we 'forget the limits' that have given rise to unequal divisions in society: it is '*an adherence to relations of order which, because they structure inseparably both the real world*

*and the thought world, are accepted as self-evident'* (Bourdieu 1984: 471). Current youth work practice is located in a doxa which is based within a narrative of individual deficits and notions of the market within a neo-liberal context, thereby rendering any notion of emancipatory practice to address inequality, unacceptable or hidden.

Practice wisdom is formed by history and traditions, by the actual context and situation. It is also formed by the actors' knowledge, visions and reflections about how to act professionally, (Bernstein 1971; Freire, 1972). However, postmodern discourses would suggest that the individual does not have any power or the ability to change the world. While Foucault (1980) sees power as *'ubiquitous'* and beyond agency or structure, Bourdieu sees power as culturally and symbolically created. For Foucault, knowledge (discourses) determine how we think and behave, leaving little room for human agency; the very basis of informal education, *'the belief that people can take hold of their lives, can make changes, that they are not helpless in the face of structural forces'* (Smith 1994:119). These tensions have, I would suggest, led to a re-modelling of praxis.

Kemmis and Smith (2008) explore these questions in the context of the initial and continuing professional education of teachers. They present a theory of the development of praxis - morally committed action oriented by tradition - to show the ways praxis is enabled and constrained by the cultural-discursive material and social-political conditions under which professional practice occurs.

Could this be translated to Bourdieu's concepts of 'habitus' and social field? In particular, they introduce the notion of *'practice architectures'* (I would suggest analogous with social field) to show how particular conditions for practice shape the possibilities of praxis. In this way I would suggest that youth workers occupy a particular 'social field' in which their 'habitus' manifests through praxis. Furthermore, professional actions are dependent upon the discourses dominant on the field of practice. Kemmis and Grootenboer (2008) state that:

...organisations, institutions and settings, and the people in them, create practice architectures which prefigure practices, enabling and constraining particular kinds of sayings, doings and relating among people within them, and in relation to others outside them. The way these practice architectures are constructed shapes practice in its cultural-discursive, social-political and material-economic dimensions, giving substance and form to what is and can be actually said and done, by, with and for whom

Theories that belong to the discourse of the social practices of informal education and learning are tested and developed in specific social contexts. It is possible that Bourdieu's tools of habitus, social field and capital provide us with the means to theorise, sociologically, the relationship between structure, culture and individual action, thereby creating new knowledge and providing a lens through which to conceptualise youth work practice.

## Communities of practice

For Lave and Wenger (1991), learning is explored as participation in '*communities of practice*'

Learning is, thus, not seen as the acquisition of knowledge by individuals as much as a process of *social* participation; we participate in a number of these communities in different domains of our lives and the nature of the *situation* impacts significantly on the process. Participation moves from the periphery to the 'centre'.

(Lave and Wenger 1991:43),

Over time, this collective learning results in practices that reflect both the pursuit of our enterprises and associated social relations. In some groups we are core members, in others we are more marginal. These practices belong to a community created over time by the sustained pursuit of a shared enterprise. Wenger (1999) identified three crucial elements in distinguishing a *community of practice* from other groups and communities:

1. *The domain [Habitus]* 'A community of practice is something more than a club of friends or a network of connections between people. It has an identity defined by a shared domain of interest. Membership therefore implies a commitment to the domain, and therefore a shared competence that distinguishes members from other people'.
2. *The community [Social field]* 'In pursuing their interest in their domain, members engage in joint activities and discussions, help each other, and share information. They build relationships that enable them to learn from each other'
3. *The practice [Social capital]* 'Members of a community of practice are practitioners. They develop a shared repertoire of resources: experiences, stories, tools, ways of



addressing recurring problems — in short a shared practice. This takes time and sustained interaction'.

(Wenger 1999: 45)

As newcomers join, they move from '*legitimate peripheral participation*' into '*full participation*' (Lave and Wenger 1991: 37). Learning is not seen as the acquisition of knowledge by individuals so much as a process of *social* participation. The nature of the *situation* impacts significantly on the process.

As Tennant (1997: 73) has pointed out, Lave and Wenger's concept of '*situatedness*' involves people being full participants in the world and in generating meaning. '*For newcomers, the purpose is not to learn from talk as a substitute for legitimate peripheral participation; it is to learn to talk as a key to legitimate peripheral participation*' (Lave and Wenger 1991: 108-9). This orientation has the definite advantage of drawing attention to the need to understand knowledge and learning in context. However, situated learning depends on two claims:

- I. It makes no sense to talk of knowledge that is decontextualized, abstract or general, and
- II. New knowledge and learning are properly conceived as being located in communities of practice

(Tennant 1997: 77).

They do however acknowledge the risk associated with an over-simplification of communities of practice, for example, learning may be acquired outside of such a context, and some communities may contain power relationships which block effective participation. Here it is also obvious to draw comparison with the work of Illich (1975) on learning webs and informal education which, rather than an exploration of local encounters, focussed upon the impact of bureaucratic institutions, in particular, the school. I wondered whether youth workers possessed a shared repertoire as described above and whether their varying contexts meant that the community of practice was no longer a meaningful way to conceptualise the nature of practice wisdom. I believe that communities of practice reflect the interplay between Bourdieu's notion of habitus, social field and social capital and therefore provide a helpful lens through which to conceptualise the current context within

which youth work practice is located. McQueen (2014) suggests that communities of practice can also helpfully bridge the research-practice gap discussed later in this thesis.

Also, Rorty's notion of a *'final vocabulary'* will impact upon practice communities; at some point however deep we explore an element of practice we may come to assumptions which are fundamental to the way people think. A final vocabulary *'is final in the sense that if doubt is cast upon the worth of these words, the user has no non-circular argumentative recourse ... No option but to keep reiterating their faith in 'Christ', 'England', 'professional standards', 'decency', 'kindness', 'the Revolution', 'the church', 'progressive', rigorous', 'creative'*" (Rorty 1989:23). Inevitably, these final vocabularies will vary across, and to a lesser extent within, different societies, cultures, ethnicities, genders, classes etc.

Ledwith (2007) when considering community development work identifies a worrying resistance to praxis, a theory-practice divide which results in *'actionless thought'* on one hand, and *'thoughtless action'* on the other (Johnston in Shaw, 2003:26). For her, a parallel but related process of anti-intellectualism is encouraging uncritical practice.

If we fail to generate theory in action, and move towards a unity of praxis where theory and practice are synthesised, we give way to anti-intellectual times which emphasise 'doing' at the expense of 'thinking'; we react to the symptoms rather than root causes of injustice – and leave the structures of discrimination intact – dividing people through poverty, creating massively different life chances by blaming the victims of an unjust system. This is what I refer to as 'a politics of tokenism'.

(Ledwith 2007:8)

For a community of practice to function it needs to generate and appropriate a shared repertoire of ideas, commitment, participation and memories – a social field. It also needs to develop various resources such as tools, documents, routines, vocabulary and symbols that in some way carry the accumulated knowledge of the community. These are often self-organising systems which can generate a greater understanding of the social context and notions of social capital.

Whereas physical capital refers to physical objects and human capital refers to the properties of individuals, social capital refers to connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness

that arise from them. In that sense social capital is closely related to what some have called 'civic virtue'. The difference is that 'social capital' calls attention to the fact that civic virtue is most powerful when embedded in a sense network of reciprocal social relations. A society of many virtuous but isolated individuals is not necessarily rich in social capital.

(Putnam 2000:19)

For decades, youth workers have been involved with praxis, acts which shape and change the world through relationships. In praxis there can be no prior knowledge of the right means by which we realize the end in a particular situation (Grundy 1987). There is a continual interplay between ends and means. In just the same way there is a continual interplay between thought and action. What this process involves is a round of interpretation, understanding and application. A process we engage in on a day to day basis in our interaction with others. Ledwith (2007:12) promotes the creation of knowledge-in-action based on practical experience. '*Without theory, practice is in danger of being reduced, at best, to a self-help, local activity*'.

What current relevance does praxis offer to advance professional knowledge and understanding when working with vulnerable young people?

Man must prove the truth, i.e. the reality and power, the this-sidedness of his thinking in practice.... All social life is essentially practical. All mysteries which lead theory to mystics, find their rational solution in human practice and in the comprehension of this practice.... The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it.

(Marx 1888 Theses on Feuerbach: II, VII, XI)

If the pursuit of epistemology informs and is informed by research both in the field and in academic circles, the process is dialogical and guided by a commitment to praxis. It can include a range of tasks and methods, for example, conversations, observation and reflection and reviews of literature. In reality however, the absence of a structural perspective together with the danger of social pathologising individual need may deem it to be of little relevance or applicability, as we are reminded by C. Wright-Mills of structure, culture, biography and history.

Do not allow public issues as they are officially formulated, or troubles as they are privately felt, to determine the problems that you take up for study. Above all, do not give up your moral and political autonomy by accepting in somebody else's terms the illiberal practicality of the bureaucratic ethos or the liberal practicality of the moral scatter. Know that many personal troubles cannot be solved merely as troubles, but must be understood in terms of public issues - and in terms of the problems of history making. Know that the human meaning of public issues must be revealed by relating them to personal troubles - and to the problems of the individual life. Know that the problems of social science, when adequately formulated, must include both troubles and issues, both biography and history, and the range of their intricate relations. Within that range the life of the individual and the making of societies occur; and within that range the sociological imagination has its chance to make a difference in the quality of human life in our time.

(Wright-Mills 1959: 226)

Is there a 'truth' in identifying what works with vulnerable young people? Probably not, which is why my research study sought to explore whether practice wisdom is apparent amongst professional youth workers and that a knowledge exchange mechanism can be used to make this wisdom explicit; thereby generating practice-based evidence in line with the research questions below.

1. Can youth workers articulate their practice wisdom?
2. What does youth work 'practice wisdom' say about contemporary youth work practice?
3. What contextual factors affect youth workers' ability to apply their practice wisdom?
4. Can engagement in a Knowledge Exchange help youth workers theorise their practice and thereby generate 'practice-based evidence'?
5. What is the wider applicability of the findings of this work

Notwithstanding the need to explore the nature of knowledge generation in the profession of youth work and whether those within it could articulate what they did, why and how, I was extremely aware of how the environments in which youth workers were operating had changed beyond recognition and whether this meant that such an endeavour would not generate the desired results. .Additionally, I was keen to explore whether it was possible to use a model of 'practice-based evidence' which would be generated directly by the

practitioners themselves and provide a robust evidence base to those critics who believed that youth workers were unable to prove the difference they made to young people's lives or whether the domination of 'evidence-based practice' would diminish the potential of any such model. Was praxis still being undertaken within a phronetic tradition? It was these questions that led me to explore the history and development of the evidence-based movement.

# Chapter 4: Evidence-based practice and youth work

## Evidence-based practice (EBP)

The ‘*evidence-based*’ movement was first apparent in the healthcare profession in the early 1990’s; ‘*evidence-based practice*’ (EBP) was coined as a term by a group at McMaster University in Canada in 1992 and quickly acquired international recognition becoming the new medical orthodoxy (McIntosh 2010). Such evidence is based upon numerical power and statistical significance. The Cochrane Collaboration was established to promote the development of evidence-based medicine and now has centres across the world. It takes all studies conducted in a particular field of inquiry and via a sorting into their replicated methodological approaches, derives statistical significance and probabilities of findings, in order to suggest increasing generalisability.

The “gold standard” for establishing evidence in medicine is the Randomised Control Trial (RCT), and therefore ‘evidence-based’ refers to practices which are based upon scientific or ‘deductive’ research. This means that if the assumptions of the test are met, a causal relationship can be identified therefore ‘evidence-based’ refers to practices which are based upon scientific research, although debates about what may count as scientific research continue (Brendtro and Mitchell 2014). Sackett (1997) ‘Hierarchy of Evidence’ suggests the following as the ‘gold standard’ in order of scientific importance:

1. A: Systematic Reviews  
B: Randomised Control Trials  
C: Experimental Designs
2. A: Cohort Control Studies  
B: Case Control Studies
3. A: Consensus Conference  
B: Expert Opinion  
C: Observational study  
D: Other types of study, e.g. interview-based/local audit  
E: Quasi-experimental; Qualitative Design
4. A: Personal Communication

Evidence-based medicine has been described by Sackett (2001:1) as *'the integration of best research evidence with clinical expertise and patient values'*. Yet McIntosh (2010) identifies a caveat in that this orthodoxy is not one based on 'truth', but rather on constant change as knowledge evolves. Similarly, Canguilhem (1988:11), *'The events of science are linked together in a steadily growing truth. At various moments in the history of thought the past of thought and experience can be seen in a new light'*.

According to Gibbs and Gambrill, (2002), evidence-based practice uses expertise combined with the best empirical evidence based on research findings to inform actions in practice. They describe evidence-based practice as the *'conscientious, explicit and judicious use of current best evidence in making decisions about the care of individuals'* (Gibbs and Gambrill 2002: 453).

However EBP's over-reliance on positivistic conceptions of science that are rooted in the protocols more frequently associated with the natural sciences are not necessarily appropriate for understanding social phenomena in which research subjects have the capacity for reflexivity. Consequently, the major drawback is that there are only a limited number of research approaches which are considered to be sufficiently rigorous. For McIntosh (2010) such an over reliance on positivism in generating 'best evidence' is,

...detrimental to wider notions of learning and understanding, particularly as there are only a limited number of research approaches which are considered to be 'scientifically sound'.

(McIntosh 2010:6)

McIntosh (2010) continues to provide an overview of how medicine has dealt with evidence throughout history and cites two key factors; firstly, the systematic and narrow approach medicine takes to establish new knowledge, ignoring what it means to be human, and secondly, the way such evidence is accessed and understood by those less familiar with how the results are found. He cites the controversy over the 1998 paper written by Wakefield et al, published in the Lancet linking the single vaccine for measles, mumps and rubella to autism which raged unresolved for a number of years as an example of the latter.

The key concepts of evidence-based medicine have found their way into other disciplines and professions since the early 1990's with evidence-based practice being widely adopted in social work, mental health and education (Strauss et al 2005). Yunong and Fengzhi (2009)

suggest that incorporating EBP into social work would encourage the use and value of research in the decision-making processes of practice interventions. They further contend that scientific findings should guide practice decisions and therefore, social workers need a new skill set that includes their knowledge, and use of empirical databases to enhance practice (Yunong and Fengzhi, 2009).

The use of RCT's in social research is problematic and whilst randomisation appears to be a simple method of deducing replicable conclusions, for Goldstein and Robert (2007), the application of the principle of randomisation in RCT's leads to erroneous conclusions devoid of any considerations of the underlying complexity. For Luborsky et al (2002), the danger is that the differences identified in a study when comparing methods may be mere biases; '*the allegiance effect occurs when researchers advocate their methods, whilst the nonallegiance effect is a negative bias against other methods*' (Luborsky et al 2002, cited in Brendtro and Mitchell (2014:6).

Much of the rhetoric of evidence-based practice remains simplistic and is driven by politics and profit; the 'gold standard' remaining the randomised control trial (Fox 2003), and EBP is thereby constrained by its method and through the rigorous use of rigid mechanistic tools.

Much discussion of "Evidence Based Treatment" is little more than economic or political jockeying for a position of superiority in comparison to other approaches. A flood of contradictory publications claim widely different methods to be "evidence-based." Such pseudoscience relies mainly on narrow statistical tests of significance that violates the spirit of science.

(Brendtro and Mitchell 2010:2)

Practitioners are expected to know what they are doing through what is known. Today, this is enshrined legally, for only those qualified are able to diagnose, prescribe and treat. Porter (1996) traces the origins of such to the practising of medicine between competing healers in Greek society. Even back then, healers would form a marketplace, governed by a set of ethical guidelines in which choices of treatment were left to the patients concerned, akin to the way current rhetoric of 'choice' is espoused in government policy. This applies to the wider delivery of care services through the 'care management' process whereby the market is asked to tender to provide the best value for money which is then funded and regulated (McIntosh 2010). The key difference here being that it is no longer the patient choosing their remedy, but the state.



The rational perspective has been elevated from being necessary to being sufficient, even exclusive. This has caused people and entire scholarly disciplines to become blind to context, experience, and intuition, even though these phenomena and ways of being are at least as important and necessary for good results as are analysis, rationality and rules.

(Flyvbjerg 2001: 24)

## **Evidence-based practice – a product of its time?**

Habermas (1973) argues that the modern state's role is to both intervene in the economy in order to maintain the profitability of the capitalist mode of production whilst also retaining legitimacy in the eyes of the general public. According to Pitts (2008), this has become increasingly difficult as the market has failed to meet the needs of the people. Consequently, such economic or political conflicts become displaced into technical/administrative spheres de-politicising any presenting issue. When using the example of rioters, Pitts (2008) contends that the technocrats will devise a solution that involves prosecution, containment, re-education and rehabilitation, whereas when translated into a cultural problem, the riots are represented as the actions of a 'feral underclass' and the government's response is to drive them into low paid employment by benefit cuts; both responses involve removing the rioters to the social margins of society and de-politicising the problem. Habermas (1985) calls this the '*scientification*' of public life, whereby the political imperatives embodied within forms of professional interventions like youth work become side-lined; EBP is an excellent example of the manifestation of such intentions.

For Trinder (2008), its inherent flaws make working within EBP highly problematic. Firstly, she contends that the research quality requires a level of scrutiny in the judgements made which those reading it may not be able to apply. Such a lack of critical appraisal can be evidenced by the furore caused by the MMR/autism research study mentioned earlier (Wakefield et al 1998), which proved methodologically unsafe yet, was embraced as truth by many and now withdrawn by The Lancet.

Secondly, for Trinder (2008) there is a serious concern about the volume of information and research available, making its currency virtually untenable. Practitioners are often required to make rapid judgements about the usefulness of research and the rigour of the methods used. This occurs within a context of the speed at which new information becomes available and accessed, making it difficult to digest, retain and recall.

Trinder and Reynolds (2001) offer a contextual explanation of the rise of EBP as a result of key developments within recent times. Its popularity is not accidental and is reflective of our preoccupation with risk, distrust of science and professional expertise, and concerns with effectiveness, procedures and consumer choice.

## **The risk society**

Firstly, there is the notion of the 'risk society', within which we must accept that there is a fluidity of knowledge, and that we are bombarded with contradictory information, where nothing is absolute. The policy agenda of the early 1990's was permeated by the increased focus upon the identification and management of 'risk'. Trinder cites Beck (1992) when exploring society's heightened awareness and preoccupation with managing risk, culminating in what she describes as an '*age of anxiety*' (Trinder 2001:5). Within this culture of risk management, science has a crucial role to play. By using Giddens (1994), she explains that traditional society had a sense of '*ontological security*' and confidence rooted in its sense of locality, in the kinship system, local community, religion and tradition. Giddens argues that we now live in an age of post-traditional society and uncertainty, characterised by endings and transitions shaped by globalised influences rather than local, social and economic imperatives. As a result of this transformation, we need to have trust in the 'abstract systems' (Giddens in Trinder 2001:6), and therefore expect that the new externally generated risks we face can be assessed and controlled by expert knowledge derived from science, and where necessary, minimised.

However, this confidence in science is not without its limitations; in particular many of the risks we face are indeed generated by the very systems which need our trust and secondly, there are no guarantees that what counts as knowledge now will remain so. For Giddens (1994:90) cited in Trinder and Reynolds (2001:6), paradoxically, this trust is ambivalent, '*governed by specific admixtures of deference and scepticism, comfort and fear*' – a recognition of the limits of expertise. As science moves from its position as a mechanism for social change to one of protection from harm, risk assessment, whilst crucial, remains imperfect (Beck 1992). The methodology of EBP will therefore produce an endlessly revisable body of knowledge rather than claims for big theories or authoritative figures.

So in a period when social science has moved away from positivism to emphasise the fluidity and socially constructed nature of knowledge (Lyotard 1984), why has the EBP movement gained such momentum? Giddens (1991) identifies four potential adaptive reactions when questioning traditional authorities and expert systems:

1. Pragmatic acceptance – this assumes risks cannot be controlled
2. Cynical pessimism – a world weary response to risk characterised by humour and a celebration of the here and now
3. Radical engagement – actions are used rather than rationality to challenge perceived dangers, and finally,
4. Sustained optimism – faith in science and reason.

(Giddens 1991:135-137)

It is this last response which has particular resonance with EBP; a belief that experts can find solutions for problems and a belief that science still offers the long-term security we crave. This paradox outlined above of the context of risk and distrust of experts, and yet still EBP emerges as dominant thinking, can be explained by its demand for more rigorous science to be applied more systematically by professionals.

The response to the critique of science is to place renewed emphasis on science with a constantly revisable and transparent process that excludes uncertainty and, in an age of anxiety, promises security for practitioners, researchers, managers and consumers’.

(Trinder 2001:13)

## **Managerialism, audit culture and de-professionalisation**

Alongside the preoccupation with risk, has been the emergence of ‘New Public Management’ (NPM) across public services (Clarke et al 2000), initially driven by an attempt in the 1970’s to reduce public expenditure, it became embedded during the 1980’s and 90’s. According to Powell (1999), these changes have moved beyond fiscal control into the embedding of neo-liberal ideologies in the political discourses of accountability and performance and economic discourses of value for money – ‘*economy, efficiency and effectiveness*’. (Powell 1999: 43). The term is used to describe a series of reforms which reconfigured the relationship between the public and private sectors, local and central government and professionals and their managers (Newman in Clarke et al 2000).

This is illustrated by the raft of reforms introduced in public services in recent times characterised by the managerialist discourse of responsibility, transparency, efficiency and customer choice (Clarke and Newman 1997). Its supporters would claim that it offers the

solution to limited resources which can rise above the interference of politicians or the arrogance of self-interested professionals in the interests of rational efficient and accountable decision-making. The major impact of these reforms has been on the processes for target setting, regulation and monitoring which are presented as objective and neutral, to support its value for money objectives. In this way it is the procedure which becomes dominant; the practice within that procedure needs to be observable and measurable to be considered robust and not complicated by the messiness and complexity of the real world (McIntosh 2010).

In this way, we lessen our reliance on the experts we distrust and transfer our allegiance to auditable systems. As a result we break up the traditional areas of professional power and create new sites of resistance. For example, managers seek to subsume professional autonomy for organisational efficiency by using a quality agenda, and, at the same time, professionals use the same agenda to defend their professional values and user interests (Clark and Newman 1997).

Reflected across the public services, '*de-professionalisation*' is an inevitable consequence of this shift in culture and function associated with the advent of new public management (NPM) and the audit culture (Pitts 2008) and what Ritzer (1993) referred to as the '*McDonaldization*' of culture and society. Management by externally defined objectives, targets, standardisation and routinisation was exemplified by the introduction for example, of examination and school leagues tables, defined performance targets and standards across healthcare, policing and the justice system (Batchelor and McNeill 2005).

Schmidt (2011) demonstrates that the workplace whether in private or public sector is a battleground for the very identity of the individual, as is university where professionals are trained. He shows that professional work is inherently political, and that professionals are employed to subordinate their own vision and maintain strict '*ideological discipline*'.

The hidden root of much career dissatisfaction, argues Schmidt, is the professional's lack of control over the political component of his or her creative work. Many professionals set out to make a contribution to society and add meaning to their lives. Yet our systems of professional education and employment abusively inculcate an acceptance of politically subordinate roles in which professionals typically do not make a significant difference, undermining the creative potential of individuals, organisations and even democracy.

The impact of the inspection regime and professional standards upon professional practice and client engagement across all sectors cannot be understated. This remains politically contentious despite various changes being made in an attempt to enhance its effectiveness and to appeal to the professionals who have to endure its relentless trawl for evidence of effectiveness through outcomes.

(Rolfe 2000:9).

Evidence-based practice by its very nature is considered to be context free and removes judgement – annexed by risk culture informed by managerialism and where management and research collide, a good example being the title of an influential think tank report from DEMOS, entitled *'Improving children's outcomes depends on systematising evidence-based practice'*, Proof Positive (Little 2010).

## Consumer choice

A significant contribution to the momentum of EBP has been the accompanying focus on delivering the safest and most effective interventions for customers and to enhance consumer choice (Trinder 2001). This accords well with the neo-liberal philosophies of the consumer as a rational agent who can exercise freedom, choice and personal responsibility. As a result, attempts to involve service users in all kinds of consultation processes have become a common feature across public services and to ensure a real voice is heard rather than tokenistic attempts undertaken previously, a priority for practice and research alike (Beresford and Croft 1993, Croft and Beresford, 1992). By providing greater accountability to the consumer in these ways, EBP offers their engagement in what is described as *'best evidence'*. The Cochrane Collaboration regularly involves consumers by providing accessible summaries of evidence designed for those outside the formal discipline of medicine.

However, this initiative is more problematic in its application when attempting to incorporate patient wishes alongside clinical decision-making with regard to evidence and clinical experience; where scientific evidence reigns supreme. The challenge is to make service user voices heard and for Rolfe (2000) this has been managed unhelpfully through the conflation of evidence-based practice and research-based practice as one entity; different skills are needed in the delivery of both in nursing and more generally within the helping

professions. According to McIntosh (2010) this requires us to understand how inquiry should be conducted strategically and how to interpret its findings critically.

In response to some of the challenges of adopting EBP within health, 'evidence-informed public health' has been adopted as a more accurate and realistic description of how decisions are made in public health settings. Armstrong et al (2014) suggest that research evidence is one form of a range of evidence that should be considered in decision making in the context of all other political and organisational factors, such as politics, habits and traditions, pragmatics, resources, values and ethics, see below.



Figure.1. Types of information and evidence used to inform decision-making. (Armstrong et al 2014).

## **'What works?'**

Outcomes-based performance management (OBPM) has come to dominate thinking across social policy in the last 20 years (Perrin 2006). New Labour, the previous Coalition Government and the current Conservative administration have all been committed to rational and pragmatic social policy development and the drawing back of the state in order to reduce the financial deficit. Accompanying the drive for evidence-based policy and practice within the public sector has been an increased focus on 'Payment by Results' (PBR), 'social impact bonds' and 'evidence or outcomes-based funding/commissioning'. This has been translated into commissioning frameworks across health and social care and is reflected in the way contracts are now based upon success determining levels of payment. Payment by results presupposes that any intervention can be measured for its impact in a recipient's life

by using a range of outcomes against which to make such an assessment. This takes earlier concepts of *'what works'* and evidence-based practice and measuring outcomes to a new level of implementation (Rahman and Applebaum 2010).

Payment by results (PBR) is a model whereby a proportion of funding to providers from central or local government is withheld until specified results are evidenced – for example, a reduction in reconviction rates in youth justice.<sup>15</sup> *Breaking the Cycle, The Green Paper on Youth Justice*, (2011) mentioned PBR 82 times in its 95 pages, claiming this process will create competitive markets in youth justice and allow for the development of innovation in incentivising services to reduce reoffending. Critics have argued that the assumptions upon which the framework is based are deeply flawed and that the application of supply and demand principles to reducing re-offending is problematic (Fox and Albertson 2011; NAYJ 2011). It is also at odds with intentions for a greater role for the voluntary sector that will not be able to bear the risks attached to contractual compliance; increasingly large private sector companies win the contracts as smaller voluntary sector providers disappear.

Unsurprisingly, the Department for Education introduced an element of PBR to the Early Intervention Grant in 2014. Whilst it has been acknowledged that such a system is not necessarily suited to the funding of youth services<sup>16</sup>, there is support for a form of social impact bond to be applied at a local level. A social impact bond is a contract with the public sector in which a commitment is made to fund improved outcomes, such as increasing youth employment or reduced offending. If the planned social outcome is realised, the commissioner will repay the investors and in addition, a return for the financial risks they took.

There has also been the accompanying importation of new language across health, education and social welfare, borrowed from different fields and now associated with the identification of effectiveness in social intervention within philanthropy, for example, social return on investment, modelling, theory of change etc. and according to Proscio (2000), these are imported uncritically into the sector and without the theoretical or practical knowledge to assist in their application.

Social impact measures are increasingly being required by commissioners in order to evidence value for their money. Practitioners are also keen to evaluate their interventions in

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<sup>15</sup> See "Breaking the Cycle: Effective Punishment, Rehabilitation and Sentencing of Offenders" Green Paper on Criminal Justice 2010

<sup>16</sup> See 'Services for Young People': Third Report of Session 2010-12

order to further understand the change they want to make and improve the initiative by re-examining methods and activities used. There are a number of reasons why this can be seen as helpful:

1. Such evidence will add to the body of knowledge in the particular field, promote good practice and strengthen the evidence base
2. Projects are more likely to succeed if they use existing evidence of creating change and are clear about the outcomes they are trying to achieve.
3. Demonstrating impact to commissioners is likely to increase the chances of investment and their understanding of both proximal and distal outcomes (Factor 2016).

Indeed the NYA is currently involved in the pilot of such a scheme. In partnership with BWB Impact and Sheffield City Council it has been awarded in excess of £90,000 from the Big Lottery Fund's Commissioning Better Outcomes development fund to help launch a social impact bond designed to provide neighbourhood outreach youth work for 11-14 year olds.

At a time of huge pressure on local authority budgets and young people's services, youth work is needed more than ever. We're determined to find new ways to fund youth work at a neighbourhood level. Our social impact bond aims to bring much needed long-term investment into youth work. We want to create stable funding for delivery organisations, help public service to reduce costs and provide a return for social investors.

(Jon Boagey, National Youth Agency Nov. 2015)

For those organisations that are unable to provide evidence of their impact, they are increasingly vulnerable in the current climate as PBR becomes embedded. For smaller organisations, resourcing more rigorous ways to capture evidence of impact remains challenging.

## **The research-practice gap**

According to Trinder (2001), the emergence of EBP is based on the idea of a research-practice divide which is concerned about the lack of attention given by professionals to research findings and, in essence, is therefore a good idea as it underpins all that should be seen as good professional practice. New knowledge is generated by a few, synthesised via



small groups and then disseminated to large staff groups responsible for frontline delivery (Bergstrom 2008). However, the blame for the gaps between research and practice is frequently explained by the stubbornness of practitioners insisting on remaining loyal to their own practices, their ambitious claims in believing they know their client best and the arrogance of researchers in believing if their work gets published, practitioners will read it (Green 2008).

For decades, questions about how practitioners should become more '*research-minded*' have been discussed particularly in health and social care (Brotherston 1960; Hunt 1987; Smith 1997; Macdonald 1999; Mitchell et al 2010). A plea to research bodies, policy makers and managers of services was made in a British Journal of Social Work paper where Shaw contended,

The core problem is an absence of a methodological imagination, without which the much-extolled 'research-mindedness' is rudderless pragmatism.

(Shaw 2003:4)

Whilst Green (2008) does not point the finger of blame in any one direction, he draws our attention to the proliferation of government agencies and university research centres in the US, (but also witnessed here in the UK) dedicated to closing the gap between research and practice by better translation and dissemination in recent years. He goes on to describe how the scientific '*pipeline*' concept of disseminating evidence from research is flawed in its attempts to get EBP delivered to practitioners as it is a one-way conceptualisation of translation, dissemination and delivery of research findings. He uses Weingarten et al's claim that within medical research '*it takes 17 years to turn 14% of original research to the benefit of patient care*' (Weingarten et al, 2000, cited in Green 2008:i21).

He is also critical of the tendency of systematic reviews, especially in evidence-based medicine and the traditions of the Cochrane Collaboration to exclude studies that do not meet the gold standard of randomised control trials. This means that a large body of potentially useful information for practice is lost; he urges for greater inclusion of such findings (Green 2008).

The government's contribution to the generation of evidence-based policy in public services has been via the establishment of seven independent 'What Works Centres'. Together these centres cover policy areas which receive public spending of more than £200 billion and

consequently, as the neo-liberal agenda continues at a pace, these centres are tasked to enable policy makers, commissioners and practitioners to make evidence-based decisions and to more importantly, provide cost-efficient, services. However, a limitation of RCT's involving human subjects means that there will always be difficulties in such studies, as Cartwright (2007) concludes,

...to draw causal inferences about a target population, which method is best depends case-by-case on what background knowledge we have or come to obtain. There is no gold standard.

(Cartwright 2007:4)

According to Le May et al (1998) the reasons for practitioner's reluctance to base their practice on research findings are complex and require researchers, when trying to increase research utilisation, to be cognisant of this complexity and understand how practitioners think and value research, whilst also considering how they envisage it may help or hinder their practice. They conclude that differing perceptions exist between managers and practitioners of the usefulness of research, its dissemination and utilization which inevitably creates unhelpful constraints. Understandably, there have been multiple attempts to address this divide by using models of what has become known as 'knowledge translation' to understand more about how to encourage professionals to use research evidence in their day-to-day decision-making (Lewig et al 2006; McQueen 2014). It was agreed that this approach would be used to deconstruct the youth work practice being carried out by staff at Brathay and to see whether such processes could generate 'practice-based evidence', a bottom-up approach that includes the voices of service users and practitioners and that would acknowledge the role of context yet provide robust evidence of impact. It also gave the organisation the opportunity to secure funding via the ESRC for a knowledge exchange activity and discover whether some of the methods used within knowledge translation could work in this setting.

## **Evidence-based practice (EBP) and youth work**

The historic and continuing problem of youth work professionals struggling to articulate and evidence the unique contribution their ethical practice made is recognised;

Despite the weight of individual testimonies, we experienced great difficulty in finding objective evidence of the impact of services.... This problem

plagues our investigations and was recognised by many in the youth sector itself as a historic and continuing problem

(Services for Young People: Third Report of Session 2010-12: 30)

There have been attempts to introduce evidence-based approaches into the practice of youth work dating back to 2000. New Labour's introduction of the Connexion Service for young people in 2000 had as one of its eight principles,

Evidence-based practice - ensuring that new interventions are based on rigorous research and evaluation into 'what works'.<sup>17</sup>

The most direct example of this approach was presented by Dr Louise Bamfield, ex-advisor to the Department for Children, Schools and Families in the Blair government. Bamfield advocated the need to provide an evidence base by suggesting the performance of randomised control trials to measure the effectiveness of youth work (Bamfield 2011). This, she argued, could provide sufficiently robust evidence base upon which future resources could be allocated. In addition and unsurprisingly, the Education Committee Report on Services for Young People (House of Commons, 2011) concluded,

We find that many services are unable or unwilling to measure the improvements they make in outcomes for young people. The lack of a common measurement framework across the sector makes it extremely difficult for authorities to decide which services to fund.

(Services for Young People: Third Report of Session 2011-12:75)

The failure of Connexions to evidence its effectiveness and subsequent demise is therefore a cautionary tale. Commentators have suggested that the lack of any conspicuous progress in delivering outcomes for young people is attributable to practice resting in the unconnected experience of thousands of individual practitioners, each re-inventing the wheel and failing to learn from hard scientific evidence about 'what works' (Thomas and Pring 2004).

For a young person, the evidence of an effective intervention will depend on a host of factors, not least those to do with the style, personality and beliefs of the worker and the needs of the particular young person. Opponents of EBP in youth work suggest that all youth

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<sup>17</sup> Reproduced from DfEE (2000) *Connexions*  
[http://www.connexions.gov.uk/chapter\\_6.htm](http://www.connexions.gov.uk/chapter_6.htm)

workers need to develop their own personal practice, dependent on personal knowledge garnered through their own experience; however, the translation of this into a practice wisdom understood by stakeholders continues to exercise the sector and it was these universal characteristics I wanted to make explicit.

The previous government's inquiry<sup>18</sup> also struggled to find objective evidence of the impact of youth work, despite much anecdotal evidence from young people. Research studies of youth work remain few in number<sup>19</sup>. As a result, the Select Committee recommended that a common set of standards was developed and that there would be an outcomes framework across the youth work sector. Such processes focus their attention upon the measurement of outcomes; inherent within such an approach will be a bureaucratisation of practice in order to collect and analyse data (often via the management information system) and prove a particular outcome was achieved; another illustration of the 'scientification' of society (Habermas 1973).

Opponents of this approach argue that hard scientific evidence is not applicable in a youth work or education setting and that knowing that a drug works (in medicine) is entirely different from knowing that a particular intervention works in the life of a young person (Hansen and Crawford 2011). For youth workers this has resulted in a re-designing of their practice in order to measure young people's engagement by the number of achievements/awards gained. Youth work processes have been redrawn into 'packages' that can be 'delivered' to particular groups of young people. Target numbers of such outcomes are a regular feature of commissioning contracts. Inevitably, professional bodies and trade unions have challenged this development as it has led to a significant level of de-professionalisation within the sector as many unqualified youth workers are now employed to 'deliver' these 'packages'. The nature of this work is of course contrary to the relational basis of work with young people.

Unsurprisingly, and since the financial crisis of 2008, the search for evidence of youth work impact continued as policy informed commissioning developed further its strong focus on 'evidence-based practice', now even more a priority within the 'payment by results' mantra (Fox and Albertson 2011). This development is further illustrated by the government's recent commitment to the establishment of the four 'What Works' centres across social policy in

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<sup>18</sup> See 'Services for Young People': Third Report of Session 2010-12

<sup>19</sup> Merton et al (2004) An evaluation of the impact of youth work in England (DfES)

Crimmens et al (2004) Reaching socially excluded young people: the role of street-based youth work (JRF)

crime reduction, local economic growth, early intervention and ageing better<sup>20</sup>. The developments described above, whilst on-going for twenty-odd years, have gained significant pace in the last five.

There is little doubt that good youth services can have a transformational effect on young people's lives and can play a vital role both in supporting vulnerable young people and in enriching the lives of others without particular disadvantage. However, we were frustrated in our efforts to uncover a robust outcome measurement framework, in particular those that would allow services to be compared in order to assess their relative impact. We were alarmed that the Department for Education is expecting local authorities to make spending decisions on the basis of such poor data about what services are being provided, let alone which are effective.

(Services for Young People: Third Report of Session 2010-12:39).

One of the recommendations of the Education Committee of 2011 was to produce a framework to assist in this endeavour which resulted in *The Outcomes Framework for Young People's Services* (Young Foundation, 2012). According to its authors, this Framework fulfils two key functions,

- i. It proposes a model of seven interlinked clusters of social and emotional capabilities that are of value to all young people, supported by a strong evidence-base demonstrating the links to longer term outcomes.
- ii. It sets out a matrix of available tools to measure these capabilities, outlining which capabilities they cover and key criteria such as net cost and the number of users.

(McNeil, Reeder and Rich 2012:4).<sup>21</sup>

What is clearly evident in the above framework is a desire for objectivity, universality, and predictability, the purpose of which links directly and not unsurprisingly into the framework of

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<sup>20</sup> See <https://www.gov.uk/what-works-network> for further detail

<sup>21</sup>See <http://www.youngfoundation.org/publications/reports/an-outcomes-framework-young-peoples-services>

commissioning (Ord 2014). Immediately apparent is the contradictory tension between the need to demonstrate outcomes and the process and importance of context in youth work which the Select Committee did also grasp,

We accept that the outcomes of individual youth work relationships can be hard to quantify and the impact of encounters with young people may take time to become clear and be complex. In that context, it is hard to reject the basic tenet expanded by a range of such representatives and young people themselves, that 'you know good youth work when you see it'

It went on,

However, with a tight spending settlement and an increase in commissioning of youth services at a local level, we also believe it is essential that publicly funded services are able to demonstrate what difference they make to young people.

(Services for Young People: Third Report of Session 2010-12:40).

Consequently, the Department for Education created the Catalyst Consortium tasked with supporting the creation of a *'vigorous and responsive sector, freed up from dependency on grant-based funding and better equipped to operate within a payments-by results environment'*. Led by the National Council for Voluntary Youth Services (NCVYS) – and supported by the National Youth Agency (NYA), Social Enterprise Coalition and The Young Foundation – the consortium identified three key areas of focus:

1. Strengthening the market by developing social finance and social enterprise opportunities as reductions in state funding impact upon the sector.
2. Partnership working through NCVYS to the government and back out to the sector through regular briefings and policy bulletins. In particular, influencing and participating in the Positive for Youth strategy.
3. Skills development led by NYA, leading to the establishment of the Institute for Youth Work (IYW) (see below) and a 'sector skills pathway' including the development of two new level 2 qualifications for the young people's workforce.

## The Centre for Youth Impact (CYI)

IDYW's campaign needed no further evidence of its timely and necessary work, when on 5<sup>th</sup> September 2014 the government announced that The Cabinet Office was providing start-up funding for the 'Centre for Youth Impact' (CYI). The initiative intended to help organisations that work with and for young people to measure and increase the impact of their services. It is led by The National Council for Voluntary Youth Service (NCVYS), Project Oracle, and the Social Research Unit at Dartington, evidencing further the policy context which focusses on outcome measurement as exemplified by the work of such organisations.<sup>22</sup>

The CYI intended to provide overarching support for *'all impact measurement initiatives that are relevant to the youth sector by signposting to existing resources, and providing bespoke, practical help'*. Inevitably, it would build on the work of the Catalyst Consortium, by promoting the Framework of Outcomes for Young People.

Unsurprisingly, following the announcement of the establishment of the CYI, contributions from IDYW followers on Facebook were characterised by anger and dismay. For example, one youth worker exploded, *"there is nothing to assess? Cuts have left nothing – no youth services to assess in both voluntary and statutory!!!"* Ironically, having attended a seminar run by the CYI where I chose to use some of the above to criticise such a development, I was invited to sit on the Centre for Youth Impact's Quality Assurance Panel. One has to assume that I was there by virtue of being a 'critical friend'. This gave me the opportunity to keep abreast of sector developments and thinking and also monitor the on-going contribution made to the debates of youth work impact by Brathay. I was not unaware of the controversy such a development had attracted, for example,

The pursuit of 'evidence of impact' or 'outcomes' is not centrally concerned with the question of 'truth'. Rather it is related directly to the desire to undertake cost-benefit analysis of services and to control and reshape practice according to current political agendas.

(Spence and Wood 2011:9)

In an attempt to counter the initiatives identified above, the value and impact of youth work is to be investigated in a Europe-wide study. Funded by €302,000 from Erasmus Plus, it

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<sup>22</sup> <http://dartington.org.uk/about/>

intends to look at youth work across the UK, France, Finland, Italy and Estonia. Lead researcher Dr Jon Ord, when describing the project to Children and Young People Now said,

It is hoped the project will demonstrate the positive impact youth work has, providing evidence that can be used to “level the playing field of inequalities” across youth work services.

(Ord in Children and Young People Now 08.02.16)

The practice of youth work has been constrained by the need to prioritise administrative tasks demanded by the commissioning environment rather than develop what Hughes et al (2014) call, ‘*relational connections*’ (Hughes et al 2014:2). Their view is supported by the earlier research conducted by Abramovitz and Zelnick in 2010 in which the authors identified that,

...following the reforms in the US, those practitioners whose work required a caring approach faced increasing demands and pressures, and their work became more intense – largely due to an increase in paperwork and performance-related reporting. There was an increased focus on meeting basic needs rather than ‘higher’ psychological and/or emotional needs.

(Abramovitz and Zelnick, 2010 in Hughes et al, 2014:2)

Additionally, the loss of control over their work was cited by Abramovitz and Zelnick as bringing about a distinct loss of time, resources and professional autonomy. More ethical dilemmas were experienced as the youth workers straddled the divide of management expectations and their own value base. For many, they were overwhelmed by a sense of helplessness in their work with the client group and a feeling that their work was no longer valued. Subsequently, Abramovitz and Zelnick (2010) discovered an increasing amount of stress and burnout, coupled with a loss of compassion for their clients.

Alongside this, the discourse of social problems is dominated by a narrative which describes them as a dysfunction of the individual rather than a reflection of wider structural inequality (Giroux 2013). The Coalition Government’s support for this discourse was evident in *Positive for Youth*, which devoted an entire consultation paper to how the adolescent brain develops, (DfE, 2011a) and three paragraphs in *Positive for Youth* itself (Paras 2.19 – 2.21 in Davies 2013:10).



Evidence of this view within current government thinking is found in the National Citizen's Service (NCS) interim evaluation conducted by NatCen in 2012. One of the measures used to assess the *positive* impact of the scheme on participants was the statement: *'If someone is not a success in their own life it's their own fault'* (NatCen, 2012: 37). De St Croix (2012) discovered that there was a slight increase in the number of young people that agreed with this statement after they had participated in NCS and for her, this meant that

...being 'successful' according to the NCS rubric not only required more young people to blame others for their own failures. It also apparently was achievable only through '... individualistic choice-making' supported by a 'compassionate' market and unaffected by political, social and economic inequalities.

(de St Croix 2012: 4, in Davies 2013:11).

The extension of neo-liberal principles and strict adherence to the needs of the competitive marketplace has rendered the role of many organisations that previously challenged the developments described above virtually silent by constraining the trade unions, damaging the independence of the voluntary sector (by making many into social enterprises) and making collective community activism more broadly seem irrelevant or even subversive (Nicholls 2012). Within this rhetoric individualistic values of self-reliance and resilience, personal ambition, freedom of choice – are the ones to which all citizens should uncritically aspire it seems. Was it possible therefore to consider any longer the relevance of a youth work practice wisdom in this climate?

In 'Outcomes are not the enemy', Jenny North describes the use of the term 'outcomes' as having been received by the sector as a top-down, target-driven, performance culture,

...that degrades the relational nature of youth work, and the agency of young people themselves. Alongside the cuts to youth budgets, this culture is blamed for the shrinking space given to youth work across the country,

(North 2015)

Instead, North suggests that outcomes are not the enemy to the youth work sector, and although might prove challenging to youth workers, there needs to be a recognition of the need for a reflective and accountable practice. She recognises that those in the sector who are developing outcome-based approaches must not be positioned as the uncritical

proponents of the Government's agenda, but instead can use their experience to help develop more appropriately informed outcome-based commissioning frameworks and criticise those deemed ineffective or possibly harmful. This was the intention of the work undertaken by Brathay; from having developed new work as a result of the Youth Sector Development Fund (YSDF) and then embarking on a journey to understand the nature of their practice. The challenge for the organisation more recently was to discover whether it had broader applicability to other youth-serving organisations.

# Section two: The research process

## Chapter 5: The case study and research partner

### The Brathay Trust

The Brathay Trust is a registered charity founded by Sir Francis Scott in 1946. It currently works with around 4,000 children and young people each year. Brathay work with some of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged young people across the country, helping them to address difficult issues and to develop the skills, confidence and motivation to make positive choices in their lives. Their personal and social development training programmes can involve both regular group sessions in participants' communities, and/or residential courses at Brathay Hall in Ambleside, Cumbria. The organisational publicity states:

We support young people who are experiencing difficulties in undergoing a transition in their life. Our vision is of autonomous and successful young people flourishing in a just and sustainable world. Our values centre around; respect for the individual, education as a transformative experience, the importance of relationship, and equality. Our work aims to contribute to four key outcomes:

- Reducing offending and anti-social behaviour
- Improving learning, attainment and employability
- Increasing well-being and empowerment for young people in need
- Improving communities: meeting local needs

(Brathay Trust Brochure 2011)

In the spring of 2011, the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) funded a Knowledge Exchange<sup>23</sup> between the University of Bedfordshire and the Brathay Trust.<sup>24</sup> The purpose of the Knowledge Exchange was to create a framework for exploring,

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<sup>23</sup> ESRC Knowledge Exchange : <http://www.esrc.ac.uk/funding-andguidance/collaboration/knowledge-exchange/opportunities>

<sup>24</sup> The Brathay Trust: <http://www.Brathay.org.uk/>

deconstructing and theorising practice interventions with young people from both practitioner and researcher perspectives. It intended to use 'participatory action research' (Carr and Kemmis 1986; Whyte 1991; Winter 1989).

In particular, the focus of the inquiry was designed to articulate 'effective' practice interventions designed to help young people:

- I. Stay safe
- II. Deal with family conflict
- III. Stay free from criminal activity or sexual exploitation
- IV. Maintain mental and physical well-being

My research questions fitted the parameters of the grant and also with the Brathay Trust who themselves were looking to identify their own model of practice having undergone major organisational expansion in the previous two years as a result of a significant new income stream via the Youth Sector Development Fund (YSDF). Numerous conversations were held to make sure that neither I nor Brathay felt that their needs would be compromised. I was of course keen to maintain the integrity of the process as part of my professional doctorate whilst also wanting to make it as helpful to the organisation as possible. At meetings during my engagement, we would regularly review the situation to ensure we remained ethically engaged in the intentions described and did not feel that the priorities of one party were determining the nature of the research process in an unhelpful way.

## **Youth Sector Development Fund (YSDF)**

In April 2009 the Brathay Trust successfully bid for £3.5m funding from the Department of Children, Schools and Families, Youth Sector Development Fund (YSDF) to run a national programme of targeted youth work in six areas of acute social disadvantage. The stated purpose of YSDF was to:

- .. promote and support growth and build capacity within third sector organisations who deliver effective services and activities for young people in England, particularly the most disadvantaged.

(Department for Education 2011)

The YSDF intended that, through a mixture of grant funding and business support, the third sector youth organisations involved in the initiative would be able to sustain and expand their provision and diversify their income streams.

Clearly, social entrepreneurship was a key element in the YSDF initiative and the programme was developed in the period after the crash in 2008 and the birth of austerity politics. As a result of the dramatic cuts to the public purse, local authorities had no choice but to outsource more and more of their services, particularly those which were not statutory, often to the lowest bidder. Brathay positioned itself in this market where an expanding voluntary sector was assuming many of the roles and responsibilities previously discharged by government, and where the corporate world was claiming to recognise its social responsibilities to the 'socially disadvantaged' (Portney 2005).

This expansion allowed the organisation to situate itself in the bigger strategic picture of children's' and young people's services. Brathay's alignment with policy priorities, including Every Child Matters (2003) positioned them with a clear role to play in enhancing the well-being of young people towards social change. However, the launch of the YSDF initiative coincided precisely with the 'credit crunch', the financial crisis of 2008, which called into question the assumptions upon which the initiative was based.

## **Brathay in the Community**

Brathay's YSDF programme was called '*Brathay in the Community*' and it was designed to address the factors that 'blighted the lives of young people in some of the poorest inner city neighbourhoods in the UK; social exclusion, family poverty, unemployment, school exclusion, mental health problems, violent crime, victimization and racism' (extracted from Brathay documentation 2010). By encouraging young people to question their everyday reality, and act together, it intended to bring about change 'for a fair and just future'. In particular, this would be achieved through the development of skills in leadership, trust building, and co-operation, learned in the outdoor environment and transposed back into the urban neighbourhoods from which participants would be drawn. Back in their own neighbourhoods, the interventions would focus upon issues of relationships, peer pressure, and citizenship. The projects also aimed to engage parents and relevant local authority service heads and local politicians in the development of effective responses at the levels of political participation, policy-making, administration and practice.

To support this new endeavour, Brathay in the Community would be informed by relevant, international, research evidence and experiential learning in the areas of outdoor education, community development/community action, 'club' and 'street-based' youth work, residential work and social pedagogy, at the six UK sites where it was established . Further detail on the six sites can be found in Appendix 1.

Brathay's Regional Development Managers were struggling to find any connection between the apparently disparate programmes and initiatives assembled under the banner of Brathay in the Community. Youth workers felt that they needed greater clarity and specificity if they were to operate with confidence in the field. In his analysis of the elements shared by Brathay in the Community projects, Pitts (2010) suggested they had:

- a) Partnerships with agencies already dealing with disadvantaged children and young people
- b) A shared recognition of some problem/area of unmet need which partner agencies were unable to address unaided
- c) Community-based and residential programmes/activities which could complement existing programmes/activities provided by the partner agencies by responding to an unmet need
- d) A commitment to working with the target group before, during and after the residential experience in order to ensure that the informal education/experiential learning gained at Brathay Hall was connected with the work they were doing within/for the partner agencies
- e) A commitment to effecting change in the partner agency/other agencies or services in collaboration with the young people where more effective service provision/delivery was deemed to be necessary.

(Pitts 2010:6)

## **Issues arising from the work of Brathay in the Community**

An analysis at the time indicated that of the 78 completed, current and planned programmes operating in the six regions:

- 38 were concerned with Crime and Justice
- 11 were concerned with Participation and Leadership
- 11 were concerned with 'Looked After' Young People

- 9 were concerned with Augmenting Youth Service provision
- 4 were concerned with Careers
- 5 were concerned with other types of programme.

(Pitts 2010:13)

This significant level of development accords in large part with the original aims of Brathay in the Community. Budgets in the voluntary sector during this period were far healthier than in the non-statutory areas of local authority children and young people's services. Indeed some commentators point to a reconfiguration of state services and state resources which they describe as the '*criminalisation of social policy*' (Rodger, 2008) within a 'social investment state' (Fawcett et al, 2004).

Undoubtedly a level of anxiety was apparent as the success of the Brathay sales team in securing contracts and new income streams in the ever evolving world of commissioning and the opportunities for third sector organisations was thought to be taking staff to new areas of practice which for some, were outside their practice comfort zones. It is unlikely that at the outset, anybody envisaged that Brathay in the Community would emerge as an organisation with such a heavy involvement, and substantial investment, in projects and programmes serving criminal justice and crime reduction agencies.

It became apparent through conversations at Brathay's Research Hub that the pursuit and considerable success in securing new funding streams, alongside the new target-driven nature of the contract culture, had left staff within the organisation questioning its purpose and the very essence of what it was that was required of them as practitioners and indeed what constituted 'The Brathay Way' which appeared on a range of promotional materials. These anxieties had become apparent through supervision, staff training events and team meetings and were being fed back by the Regional Development Managers. There were significant organisational and practice challenges to address which can be described as follows:

1. The amount of pressure young people experienced from other professionals around them to participate in programmes run by Brathay in partnership with a range of criminal justice agencies. Since such participation is not a requirement of their 'order', however, it is also true that young people involved with justice and welfare agencies may feel constrained to comply with the wishes of their supervising

professional. How this challenged the ethical stance on voluntary participation within Brathay was causing some consternation

2. The requisite skills to deliver this new work became another challenge. Training opportunities tended to take place at Brathay Hall, which made them inaccessible to sessional workers from most of the regions. Moreover the training provided at Brathay tended to be generic. Regional Development Managers felt that their most pressing need was for training geared specifically to work with their client groups in their neighbourhoods
3. The location of appropriately trained and equipped staff mainly at Brathay Hall also created significant difficulties in terms of staff deployment and an over-reliance on sessional staff meant that follow-up work with agencies at different times of the day was not always possible.
4. In response to the growing size and significance of the projects and programmes generated by Brathay in the Community, the Brathay Trust underwent a process of restructuring. In essence, an organisation, developed to provide a discrete residential, developmental, experience for a range of client groups, was reconfiguring itself to serve as an administrative, policy and practice resource to the regions.
5. Notwithstanding the development outlined above, because administrative support was located at Brathay Hall, several Regional Development Managers found themselves engaged in a great many routine 'back office' tasks which tended to detract from their project development role.

Despite these challenges, Brathay in the Community was establishing a positive reputation for augmenting statutory social welfare, youth serving and criminal justice provision. According to Pitts (2010), success seems to have been a product of four factors:

1. The willingness and ability of projects to adapt to client need
2. The high quality of the services provided
3. The provision of a unique programme element (residential at Brathay Hall)
4. The possibility of subsidising programmes with YSDF funding.

Working alongside colleagues from Brathay's Research Hub I began to explore the culture of the organisation and how a knowledge exchange process could have resonance for practitioners both professionally and geographically dispersed and give meaning to their diverse practice. Despite there being some inevitable anxieties about managing what could be a potentially difficult and divisive organisational initiative, there appeared an



overwhelming and urgent need to bring staff together to agree what a common 'shared repertoire' might be (Lave and Wenger 1998). The Knowledge Exchange event was to include all departments within the organisation, Children and Young People's Services (CYPS) sales and marketing, human resources and finance in order to ensure the development of a consistent organisational message and set of practice values. As a result, I was able to develop a multi-stage, mixed method approach in the lead up to the two-day Knowledge Exchange held in January 2012. This event would make apparent whether the staff could explain the difference their intervention made in the lives of the young people they were working with through a conceptualisation of practice. In turn, I was interested to discover whether this exercise would be able to enable professionals to generate 'practice-based evidence' and so respond to my research aims.

# Chapter 6: Methodology

For Guba and Lincoln (1994:37) any research activity poses three fundamental questions which the researcher must interrogate:

1. The ontological question – the form and nature of reality: ‘what is there that can be known about?’
2. The epistemological question – ‘what is the relationship between the knower and would-be knower and what can be known?’
3. The methodological question – How can the inquirer go about finding out whatever he or she believes can be known?

When addressing these questions, the researcher must be aware of how their activity is informed by the varying research paradigms (Guba and Lincoln 1994:116). This methodology is designed to facilitate and identify practice wisdom amongst a group of practitioners involved in an ESRC- funded Knowledge Exchange and the subsequent research process designed for the purposes of this doctoral thesis. It is both informed by and for practice and therefore could be defined as ‘practice-based research’, explained by Epstein thus,

The use of research-inspired principles, designs and information gathering techniques within existing forms of practice to answer questions that emerge from practice in ways that inform practice

(Epstein 2009:7)

## A ‘practice-based’ research methodology

The translation of research findings into practice has always been problematic as practitioners and researchers struggle to find mutual territory. Accusations are made by both parties that either the application of findings cannot be translated into practice as research is divorced from the practicalities of service delivery or practitioners are criticized for failing to base actions on research evidence (Derrida 1976; Humphreys and Metcalf 2000; Whitelaw et al 2003). This has been discussed more fully in Chapter 4.

Practice based research seeks to introduce research into practice whilst remaining fully cognisant of the framework of ethics and values within which the practice is located

(contextually nuanced) whereas evidence-based research usually relies on externally generated evidence, usually by other researchers not embedded within the professional context. Practice based research is predicated upon a commitment to improve practice and can usefully counter some of the criticisms of more traditional research approaches discussed earlier. It relies upon and is driven by practice wisdom; based upon shared understanding, values and theoretical constructs apparent within the particular discipline (Crook and Olswang 2015).

Practice-based research uses the same key components of any scientific study: identifying the research question and adopting rigorous methods including collection, reduction and analysis of data that will usefully address the question posed (Crooke and Olswang 2015). For Fox, the objective is to 're-privilege the role of the practitioner in generating useful knowledge, without rejecting the skills and perspectives of the 'academic' researcher' (Fox 2003:83). This is explained in greater detail below.

Firstly, practitioners need to recognise a problem for which the evidence is relevant before research will be seen as applicable in a practice setting (Williamson 1992). If no priority is attached to a particular epistemology, neither research nor practical experience can ever provide a single or universal truth; research and practice should be inextricably linked rather than opposite poles, the research is part of the setting it is exploring and indeed becomes a facet of practice (Derrida 1976). The pursuit of knowledge in this view must therefore be local and contingent, akin to 'situatedness' (Lave and Wenger 1991: 108-9). However, it will inevitably raise difficulties in asking the correct research question without local, detailed knowledge of the setting. The research question needs to involve practitioners in determining its nature and scope and remain relevant as the process unfolds. In my discussions at Brathay, it became apparent there was a significant overlap between the research questions I had identified and the organisational concerns about the disparate nature of the youth work practice being undertaken within the new context of commissioning. I was able to test the validity of and re-visit the nature of the research questions during the different activities undertaken with the practitioners over the period of my involvement.

Also, theory-building must be seen not as an end in itself, but linked to the practical setting in which the research takes place; an ethical and political engagement with practice which makes any theoretical consequences practically relevant over a period of time. Practice-Based Research (PBR) is formative in nature and should allow practitioners to continually examine the nature and effectiveness of the intervention they are making.

An interpretivist epistemological position acknowledges the importance of developing theory as opposed to a more positivistic approach concerned with empiricism and the testing of theory. It requires the researcher to represent participants' perspectives in a way which remains true to their accounts and yet is informed by the researcher's own lens which may place such interpretations into a different contextual framework informed by her own observations or theoretical insights. In this way, she cannot remain 'value-free' as the social world has an impact upon her world view.

In order to ensure a level of consistency in my thinking and credibility in the research process, it made sense to utilise and adopt the same terms and concepts I was attempting to explore with practitioners about their practice in order to make it explicit, in the design of the research methodology; that is, that I used a 'practice-based' approach. This is informed by the 'interpretative paradigm', characterised by its focus on language and the perspectives and meanings of reality that emerge through narrative; within this, several epistemological approaches are possible (Kazi 2003). However, Kazi (2003) also identifies the interpretivist distrust of outcome based approaches and the inevitable limitations in capturing the dimensions of practices under examination.

Action research is the obvious choice of method and must be engaged and political, for example Ramazanoglu (1992) has argued that feminist methodologies are the outcome of power struggles over what it means to 'know' and what counts as valid research. Resisting patriarchy together with the rejection of grand narratives has led to research which is local and engages with the concerns of women and values experience (Gelsthorpe, 1992; Oakley, 1998). I hoped that by reviewing and checking my interpretations with respondents as part of the action research cycle I would be able to counter any subjectivity that occurred whilst acknowledging the inevitable role of interpretation and the importance of exercising reflexivity (Ellis and Flaherty 1992; McKernan and McKernan, 2013)

Finally and most importantly, practice-based research utilises a collaborative approach between the researcher and practitioner. It requires the researcher to recognise that, 'in settings such as education, social work and child welfare, the practitioner *is* the intervention' (Fixsen et al 2009:532). Collaborative practice has characterised my professional working life both in practice and research and remains the case currently.

My involvement in a research project exploring 'gang-associated' sexual violence (Beckett et al 2013) included working alongside a number of young people and practitioners to ensure that research messages were supplemented by young people's voice through the use of

film<sup>25</sup>. The work for Beyond Youth Custody<sup>26</sup> has also included working with young people to ensure resettlement provision and services listen to what the messages from research evidence suggest and what young people leaving custody have told us (Factor 2016). My current contract is to work on a knowledge exchange project in the 'International Centre: Researching child sexual exploitation, violence and trafficking' with the College of Policing designed to improve police responses to young people who are both witnesses and/or victims of child sexual exploitation or other forms of child sexual abuse. My role is to work with young people in this process to identify the issues of concern and co-create a number of outputs which will contribute to the project's intentions of enhancing engagement between the police and young people via a number of knowledge exchange activities. Practice-based research is therefore embedded within my day to day professional activity.

In their article, '*Finding Nexus: connecting youth work and research practices*', Gormally and Coburn (2014) usefully illuminate the connections between youth work and research paradigms. In order to understand the nature of operating in the collaborative way required by PBR, I believe their alignment between these two activities is extremely helpful and reflects what I aim for in my on-going engagement in professional practice. They identify five key elements: '*reflexivity, positionality and bias, insider cultural competence, rapport and trust and power relationships*' (2014: 869). I would assert that all of these guiding principles inform the way I embark on establishing collaborative relationships which can generate 'practice-based evidence'. Practice-based research relies upon practice wisdom They go on to identify the epistemological similarities between youth work and research practices which reflect the ideas explained earlier in this chapter, described by the authors as '*an epistemological alignment with interpretivism, constructivism and constructionism*' (2014:874). They differentiate constructionism as a group endeavour to construct a social reality, whilst constructivism remains a more individualised response to sense-making in the social world.

For my work at Brathay I needed to involve staff in describing their practice and context, ask them to help in identifying the questions which needed exploration. They would be responsible for generating and describing their practice and deciding what they thought of as effective. Importantly, the methods which they used to do this would be designed to illuminate whether it was possible to make explicit their practice wisdom and generate a 'practice-based' evidence which had resonance not only with other practitioners and young

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<sup>25</sup> [www.beds.ac.uk/gasev](http://www.beds.ac.uk/gasev)

<sup>26</sup> [www.beyondyouthcustody.net](http://www.beyondyouthcustody.net)

people, but also to the commissioners who were funding the work. I need to develop a symbiotic partnership with the participants whereby there would be mutual recognition of the contribution and usefulness of the evidence generated by both parties. In this way they would be able to educate me about both the need and limitations of the research process and importantly its validity and real-world applicability. These intentions were set against the organisational backcloth described earlier, and therefore I need to retain an on-going dialogue which remained mindful and respectful of context.

## **Social Constructivism**

From an epistemological standpoint, social constructivism frames ‘the truth’ as culturally and historically specific and that different constructions of ‘the truth’ are also culturally, historically and institutionally situated. Denzin and Lincoln (2003) state that the subject under investigation was not external to those who perceived it, but was constructed and given meaning by them. In this way, there is not one single truth, but indeed multiple interpretations of reality (Creswell 1997). This position informed the epistemological assumptions based upon different interpretations of professional and personal experience and would therefore create an alternative way of constructing knowledge (Allison and Pomeroy 2000). Through interaction and dialectical interchange “between and among” the researcher and respondents as equal, knowledgeable actors in the process, new knowledge will be constructed. For Guba and Lincoln, the purpose of the exchange is to arrive at an agreed construction *‘that is more informed and sophisticated than any of the predecessor constructions’* (Guba and Lincoln 1994:111).

In this way and helpfully for the purposes of this study, constructivism recognises the complex social processes, interactions and understandings that are inevitable in welfare interventions and rather than focus upon outputs and outcome effectiveness, considers the value of the *process* in uncovering numerous stakeholder perspectives (Pawson and Tilley, 1997). This position does however create difficulties for generalisability of findings, problems or solutions and transferability of knowledge from one organisational context to another (Lincoln and Guba, 1985:45). However, as identified above, in such situations where the emphasis is on the generation of practice-based research evidence, internal validity is extremely high.

I pursued the development of a practice-based research methodology informed by my social constructivist position, seeing the social world as constructed through social interaction. Therefore, I accepted that any representations of, for example, ‘practice wisdom’ within the

research were constructed by those respondents. In turn this construction was interpreted by me and the reader (Creswell 1997), thereby creating meaning from practitioner accounts, is of itself also open to interpretation and critique. As a result the research would offer perspectives and evidence from a 'practice-based' standpoint, more relevant for practitioners rather than an 'evidence based' position which would remain abstract and de-contextualised.

Practice-based research relies upon practice wisdom and its role in the development of hypotheses. By embracing 'methodological pluralism', Epstein (2009) suggests a non-hierarchical 'wheel of evidence' in which all forms of research are valued for their strengths as well as their limitations rather than the typical hierarchy which places Randomised Control Trials (RCT's) as the '*gold standard*' of research endeavour with case studies at the bottom.

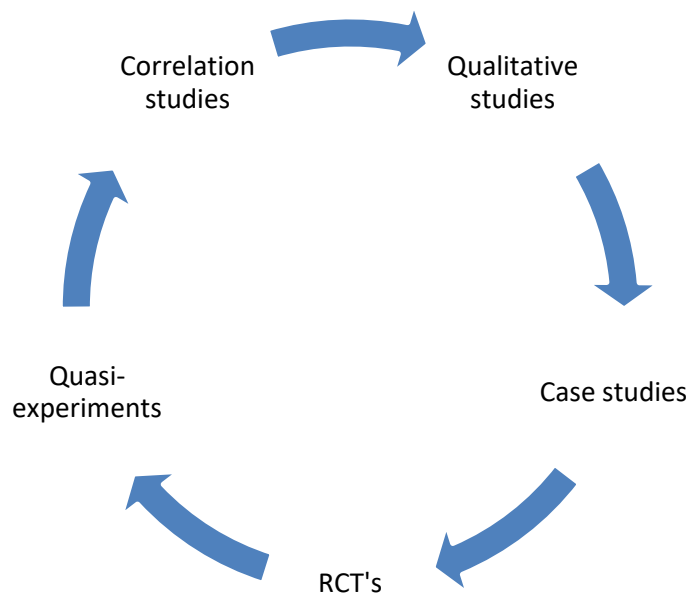


Figure 2: Wheel of evidence (Epstein 2009)

Practice-based research gives the highest priority to maintaining the very integrity of the practice it is choosing to focus upon, and may, on some occasions therefore supersede research priorities (Dodd and Epstein 2012). This had to be constantly balanced against the requirements and regulatory framework of the professional doctoral programme to ensure that I remained sensitive to the organisation giving me access as well as focussed upon my research intentions.

My goal in adopting such an approach was to identify and explore my topic with the intention to inform future practice-decision making. Therefore, PBR begins with practice questions which are informed by practice wisdom and should ultimately have an impact on practice. By working with practitioners to identify the very nature of the intervention they were making with young people they would be able to use this knowledge in their future engagement with others, thereby improving the lives of those they hoped to help. This was complex as many of the practitioners were designing interventions using a variety of theoretical approaches, for example, transactional analysis, neuro-linguistic programming etc. A theory of change model was used to try and extrapolate the foundations of these interventions and experiences and separate them from their a priori theoretical predilections.

## Critical research

This practice-based approach is inevitably supplemented by a commitment to a critical research which highlights the potential of research to empower others both through the process, and the outcomes derived (Trinder 1996). Research has to be critical if it is to reflect the professional ethos prevalent within the welfare professions to create change. As reflective practitioners, youth workers are regularly informed by their own experiences through the lens of 'praxis', resulting in a fine tuning of their practice accordingly. For critical theorists 'reality' takes on meaning through an understanding of the structural shaping brought about by social, political, cultural, economic, gender and ethnic values that thereby generates inequality (Harvey 1990). Brathay's commitment to improving the lives of the young people and communities it served and tackling disadvantage was well established. Staff were clear about the place of these values in their work. However, the rapid expansion brought about by the YSDF income stream had challenged the assumption about the wider organisational commitment to this and the concern from some was that the pursuit of profit was becoming more of a priority.

Brathay staff were acutely aware of the inequality being experienced by the communities they were serving and indeed in many of the sessions held these views were made apparent. Therefore the research act, like the practice of youth work itself, is about power and empowerment, focussing upon the unequal distribution of power between genders, classes, ethnicities, professionals and clients. As Hammersley (1994) states: '*A critical theory wants to explain a social order in such a way that it becomes itself the catalyst which leads to the transformation of this social order*' (Hammersley 1994:33).



## Action research

According to Reason and Bradbury (2001), action research is:

A participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes, grounded in a participatory world view. It seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities.

(Reason and Bradbury 2001:1)

This echoes the role of praxis in generating knowledge as described in chapter 3. Re-positioning action research within a paradigm of praxis itself as opposed to theory-driven research is, for O'Brien (2001), extremely appropriate. He refers to praxis in relation to Aristotle's contrasting of praxis with *Theoria*, where knowledge is derived from practice and practice informed by knowledge.

The history of action research is consistently linked to the work of Kurt Lewin (1951). Since then, a range of different schools have developed within the discipline. For Hart and Bond (1995), action research is characterised by the following criteria:

- I. It is educative
- II. It deals with individuals as members of social groups
- III. It is problem focussed, context specific and future-oriented
- IV. It involves a change intervention
- V. It aims at improvement and involvement
- VI. It involves a cyclical process in which action, research and evaluation are interlinked
- VII. It is founded upon a research relationship in which those involved are participants in the change process.

It is often designed to navigate through a series of stages, often in a cyclical direction of plan, act, observe and reflect (Maclsaac 1995; O'Brien 1998) in a similar fashion to commonly used experiential learning cycles based upon the work of Kolb (1984) in Exeter (2001). Others have chosen to further develop the action research cycle, including Susman

(1983) and Denscombe (2001) to offer a slightly more nuanced version. For Denscombe (2001) the process looks as follows:

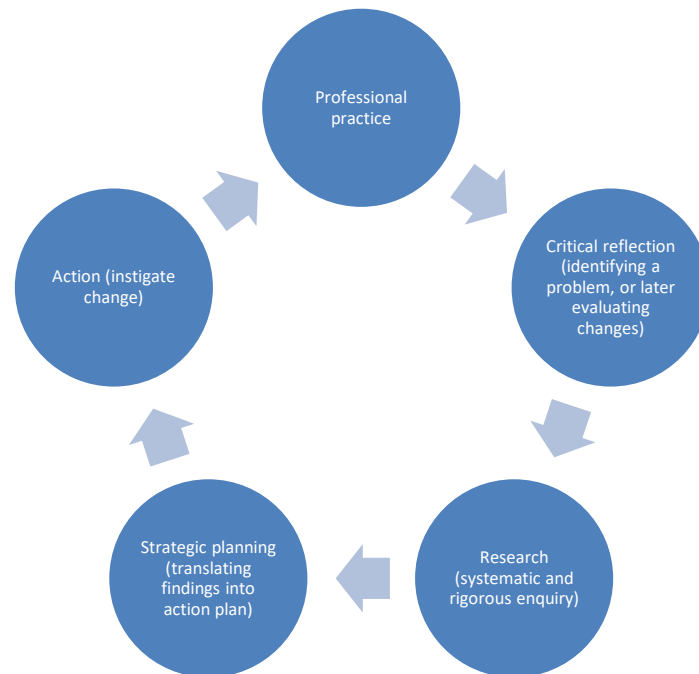


Figure 3: Action research cycle (Denscombe 2001: 126)

The process adopted within this study is more akin to the above than the more traditional cycle offered by Kolb (1984). Reason (1994) cites action research as probably the most widely practised collaborative research approach. Incorporating a double-objective, on the one hand, it aims to produce knowledge and action whilst simultaneously empowering participants through the process of constructing and using their own knowledge. Representing an ideology rather than a methodology per se, action research draws upon many methods as appropriate and determined by each project. Such collaborative approaches were developed as a response to the 'scientific' method, and the quest for a 'new paradigm' for human inquiry (Reason and Rowan 1981). Indeed, such collaborative approaches are of themselves social constructs (Burr 2003).

A way of generating knowledge about a social system, while at the same time attempting to change it.

(Eldon and Chisholm 1993:126)

In order to integrate practice and theory, this process would inevitably involve entering a self-reflective dialogue (Schön 1983) with practitioners informed by research and experience to discover not only whether a particular intervention works, but how and why it works in a particular setting and whether it can be generalised in other areas of practice. It would therefore embrace action research as:

A form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own practices, their understanding of these practices, and the situations in which the practices are carried out.

(Carr and Kemmis 1986: 162).

Positioned on three spectrums of pragmatism, criticality and flexibility (Whitelaw et al, 2003:5), action research can therefore embrace a range of methods in its delivery. This process was pragmatic in as much as it considered theory within the context of practice. This means the practice-based research process starts with where the worker is, the practice reality, for example, existing policies, decision making priorities, ethical guidelines and agency context. It does not necessarily intend to have more than local dissemination although many are deemed of interest to others in similar practice contexts. In this sense it is 'applied' research, the starting point being the practice and an understanding of how the knowledge will be used in practice to enhance service delivery.

The process was also critical in that it was constantly questioning the nature of the practice delivered and how it could be improved and finally, flexible, in that it moved in terms of methods used to reflect a number of considerations. This practice based research process adopted a number of methods which were informed by the three spectrums identified above. The research design evolved as new insights were gathered from the first research activities. Gray (2009) cites that inductive reasoning is where particular observations lead to hypothesising and wider generalisations. This is reflective of what happened at each stage of this research process and outlined in the Chapter 8, Research Strategy.

Additionally, the process was supplemented by a number of what Russell and Ison (2000) call '*critical conversations*' which shift and define research direction (in Humphreys and Metcalfe 2000). These '*critical conversations*' generated an enhanced ownership by all stakeholders and a feeling of power within the research design. Enthusiasm was also an essential ingredient in the research success and crucial to maintaining the process, evidenced by a clear commitment from those involved to improve service delivery for their users. Action research is therefore '*necessarily an action science, which draws on extended epistemologies and continually enquires into the meaning and purpose of our practice*' (Reason and Bradbury 2001:7).

## **Challenges within the methodology**

It is acknowledged, that such an approach does create difficulties for generalisability of findings, problems or solutions and transferability of knowledge from one organisational context to another (Lincoln and Guba, 1985:45). However, as identified above, in such situations where the emphasis is on the generation of practice-based research evidence, internal validity is extremely high (Epstein 2007). As a result, for Brathay, this was seen as a bespoke process in which they were active partners.

Action research in its attempt to improve practice rather than merely generate new knowledge, confronts the relationship between research and practice, and the potential of such processes in creating an environment of '*research mindedness*' amongst practitioners (Elliot in Humphreys and Metcalfe 2000, SCIE 2012). The opportunity to develop research skills is also acknowledged as a valuable part of practitioner engagement in research. However, adequate training, support and supervision must be offered if this is to prove a challenging and stimulating experience for those involved. Fortunately, the Brathay Trust was committed to encouraging its practitioners to become researchers, ably supported through the Research Hub who, at the time of the event had three full time staff members.

The Knowledge Exchange event in partnership with the University of Bedfordshire also meant that practitioners would be engaged in a research process with national and international experts in the fields under consideration, many of whom they had cited in the original funding applications. Therefore, cooperation and engagement from participants, whilst by no means automatic, was highly likely as the intended process offered a new way of reflecting on their youth work practice. It was also possible that the presence of the academic staff might prove intimidating and influence the nature of the discussion unduly.

The limitations of action research include, by definition that there can be no pretence of objectivity due to the intimate involvement of the researcher. Inevitably therefore, accusations of bias will accompany such approaches. However, the ability of the 'non-practitioner researcher' to represent the world of practice is also questionable. Neither practitioner nor researcher can be said to have a 'purist' view and there are undoubtedly many approaches to theorising practice (Robson 1993). Therefore, as far as I am concerned, the domain of theorising practice does not exclusively belong to either researcher or practitioner; indeed, collaborative arrangements between the two can be legitimated ultimately on the social contribution they can each make. For Fook (2000) this is identified through the accountability and transparency of the theorising method, the communicability of the theory to others, and its ability to transfer meanings and transform practice. These mechanisms were embraced within the design process as the practitioners were given feedback at each stage and asked what this meant for their practice and how it should be conceptualised in moving forward.

Reflexivity is therefore an essential foundation in pursuing such an approach with integrity (Taylor and White 2000). Guba and Lincoln (1999) describe constructivist-interpretative as one of the four major interpretive paradigms within qualitative research. They make a case that such endeavour requires a hermeneutic or dialectical approach. Hermeneutics (how we interpret human action) and phenomenology (how people make sense of the world) are at the basis of this type of interpretative, practice-based methodology; my use of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) in this study therefore fitted appropriately.

Critical researchers retain a commitment to use their findings in a way that empowers disadvantaged groups and, where relevant includes them in a participatory process. For Trinder, (1996), the researcher-practitioner is re-cast as an agent of change. However, inevitably, critics would cite the '*value-laden*' nature of the endeavour to render its validity questionable. Within the critical research process, the researcher and researched bring their values to the inquiry which is politically oriented (DeForge and Shaw, 2012), and therefore, according to Guba and Lincoln, the findings can be said to be '*value-mediated*' (Guba and Lincoln 1994:110). However, in my experience as a critical consumer of research, research is not posited as a neutral, fact-finding activity, by its very nature it is unquestionably political (Factor 2002).

Humphreys and Metcalfe (2000) suggest that rather than dissemination after an action research process has been completed, the more identifiable process is one of '*diffusion*' to describe the continuous ripple effect created by the research. Therefore there is no starting

point for the dissemination of findings, but rather a learning process where different issues are addressed in diverse ways. In this way, diffusion can occur from the bottom up rather than being disseminated from the top of an organisation. Consequently, ideas move into action through a non-hierarchical process. This was undoubtedly the case with the Knowledge Exchange research process whereby several practitioners reported themselves adapting their practices in light of new information generated from their direct involvement in the research process.

Any research method aimed at facilitating change may also invite a confrontation of established bureaucracy and therefore an unwillingness to change long-established professional practice. Participants must therefore be committed from the outset of the research design if there is an intention to address the research outcomes positively.

Yet for those of us encultured to unconscious participation the leap to a future reflexive participation is immense; there will be doubt and mistrust, there will be disagreement and conflict, there will be failures as well as success.

(Reason 1994:56)

Practice based research is not without its critics; anything less than 'gold standard' evidence of effectiveness still struggles to secure funding for its implementation, particularly by research academics who prefer larger research grants and indeed to be published in peer-reviewed academic journals. In the same ways as the discussion of practice-based evidence versus evidence-based practice is described in Chapter 4, many of the arguments about the validity of practice-based research are similarly constructed.

Regardless of the tensions and difficulties associated within the development of collaborative 'practice-based' research approaches, there is a compelling case for its retention and further development. My chosen approach is firmly rooted in the belief that approaches to research that involve practitioners alongside researchers working collaboratively ensures a sophisticated practice-based 'lens' which is appropriately nuanced to the context within which it is delivered. It retains a level of professional engagement which is valued by those who are committed to the role of praxis in their professional development, service improvement and the pursuit of a fairer and more equal society. Importantly, it also offers a methodological approach through which practice-based evidence can be generated.

# Chapter 7: The research design

## Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and the Hermeneutic approach

Experience is a contested and complex concept. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) attempts to capture particular experiences as experienced by particular people in particular contexts. It was developed by Jonathan Smith (Smith, Harre and Van Langenhove 1995) and is now widely used in British psychology. Whilst not a psychologist myself IPA can be usefully applied across a range of human and social sciences. Whilst most of the early IPA studies have been developed in the UK, it is now expanding worldwide. IPA draws from a range of philosophical traditions and contains three strands of theoretical underpinning, phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography.

For the purposes of this study I attempted to unpack and deconstruct the concepts explored, for example, 'practice wisdom', through a phenomenological lens. For Husserl, this means urging phenomenologists to go 'back to the things themselves' (1982), here he refers to the experiential content of consciousness. It focusses on the contextual study of phenomena in order to understand the perceived reality of human experience. It aims to explore in detail participants' personal lived experience and how participants make sense of that experience. For Van Manen (2003), the process is described thus,

...through the processes of reflection, writing and re-writing, and thematic analysis, the researcher may describe and interpret the essence and meaning of the lived experience.

(Van Manen 2003: 47)

Within IPA, the purpose of deconstructing experience can be to see it as a unit in the flow of time which is recreated as a narrative thereby creating a 'comprehensive unit' (Smith 2012:2) whose parts are separated by time, but 'linked with a common meaning'. The researcher will therefore attempt to make the connections between the units and identify the common meaning. IPA is non-prescriptive avoiding 'methodolatory' - the glorification of method (Harding, 1987; Honan 2007). Data collection is normally via semi-structured interviews; I conducted eight.

With any endeavour of this nature, retaining the centrality of the respondent's experience and their interpretation of it, whilst not being clouded by the researcher's own location and perspective remains challenging, as described earlier. Martin (1995) recognised such a tension where she considers that she misinterpreted the interviewee's meaning by viewing the narrative through her own (African-American) '*cultural lens*'.

Phenomenological in its approach, IPA concerns itself with individuals' perceptions of events but also recognises the researcher's role in making sense of that experience and is therefore strongly associated with the interpretative or hermeneutic tradition described earlier. Undoubtedly it requires a level of researcher interpretation and insider cultural competence as access to the experience will be mediated through what the respondent shares (Giorgi and Giorgi in Smith: 2007:66).

The qualitative researcher's perspective is perhaps a paradoxical one: it is to be acutely tuned-in to the experiences and meaning systems of others—to indwell—and at the same time to be aware of how one's own biases and preconceptions may be influencing what one is trying to understand.

(Maykut & Morehouse, 1994,:123)

Ezzy (2002:41) defines hermeneutic interpretation as both '*a science and an art*'. Understandings of reality are not only influenced by interpretations but by pre-existing interpretations based upon previous understanding and social and political processes. Theory is developed through an on-going interpretation and re-developed through a hermeneutic circle. Bassett (2004) describes the circle as possessing three core elements:

1. Our critical background which presents us with a way of understanding
2. Pre-understanding as our structure of 'being in the world' i.e. our history and story which is always present, and
3. Co-construction i.e. we are constructed by our world and simultaneously we construct the world from our experience and background.

(Bassett 2004:158)

For the purposes of this study, these tenets fitted appropriately with my desire to develop a practice-based research methodology. I had to be reflexive and open to revise my opinions in light of new information that could be re-interpreted accordingly. For Ezzy (2002:27), this



involves *'an on-going circular process of moving between one's own perspective and the perspective of the other person'*.

For Smith et al (2012), this places the researcher in a *'double hermeneutic'* - trying to make sense of the respondent, trying to make sense of what is happening for them. By using Husserl's (1982) method of *'bracketing'* or putting aside our taken for granted ways of living in the familiar, we can focus on our interpretation of that world. By remaining reflexive and mindful of the hermeneutic circle when engaging in the research process, I hoped to avoid any interference with the data or partiality as a result of it being viewed via my own researcher lens. I was committed to co-constructing knowledge through a multi-method approach.

Within IPA studies, purposive small samples are normal; participants are expected to share certain experiences in common, from a shared perspective, a method sometimes referred to as *'homogeneous sampling'* (Smith et al 2012), and in this approach hopes to allow for the examination of convergence and divergence in detail. Such a sampling strategy is popular in practice-based research and the researcher needs to be aware how the sample has the potential to be biased by the *'available voices'* (Dodd and Epstein 2012:197) that represent the dominant norm. This was apparent in my research as whilst there was no coercion to participate in any of the activities as far as I was aware, there was also no discussion of what might be the repercussions should a staff member choose to withdraw.

## **My role**

My role was neither one of an *'insider'* or *'practitioner'*; I was an outsider, informed by my own professional background as a youth worker, which may have given me more favourable access into the research site. Kvale (1996) suggested that the researcher *'wanders'* along with participants on their journey. For Schwandt (2003) acquiring an insider's perspective of people's actions and their interpretations is key to gaining a true grasp and the meaning attributed to the situation, *'the researcher becomes a listener who encourages the dialogue to continue'* (Harper (1998) in Gauntlett 2007:35).

This dialogic method was also the area I wanted to explore with practitioners – how the relationship with the young people they worked with was developed – was it using such a dialogic method? In order to succeed in this I needed to promote trust with the respondents. For Gillingham (2011:24), this can be achieved by *'articulating democratic norms and values,*

*the importance of everyone having a voice, being listened to carefully, and heard with respect*'.

By engaging practitioners in a process which followed an action research cycle I was able to reflect back findings in between the various stages of data collection to ascertain meanings by allowing respondents to express their own personal truths and what this meant for subsequent stages of the process. It generated a level of learning congruent with Freire's '*co-intentional learning*' (Freire 1970:51). I did this by continually re-negotiating engagement with the participants and sharing my thoughts as the process unfolded (Silverman 2011).

For Toiviainen (2007) I acted as a '*learning interventionist*' by posing questions which allow the participants to engage in expansive learning (Engeström and Sannino 2010), familiar within action research literature to bring about change (Winter and Munn-Giddings 2013). Rather than being seen as making an intervention in an objective scientific way in order to provide a casual explanation, within action research it implies an intervention in a 'natural setting' through the deliberate creation of a number of research events.

If thinking is basically a social activity mediated by tools, and research is no exception, the implication is that we always gain understanding through intervention.

And,

If the objects we study are socio-cultural creations, we do not stand outside them and watch, neither do we just manipulate them, we co-create them.

(Nissen and Langemeyer 2005:189)

## **Data collection tools**

In designing the tools to be used I hoped to enable practitioners to make explicit their practice wisdom and find a way to articulate this via 'practice-based' evidence to academics, policy makers and funders alike. In this way, I intended to find a mechanism through which they would feel comfortable reasserting their professional ethics and ideals which have been hidden or lost and re-engage in an ethical practice borne out of the profession's traditions developed over decades. The data collection tools needed to be 'practice-based' to allow for the dialogic method to work. I wanted to use an element of non-traditional tools in order to

allow for the process of co-construction of knowledge – practice-based evidence, I was looking for.

The more mainstream, traditional research approaches do not always suit the needs and available resources of practitioner research.

(Dadds et al 2001:7)

The aspect of the above which requires significant acknowledgement is that of 'available resources'. This was extremely relevant for the staff at Brathay who were struggling to deliver a range of new projects which had been devised hurriedly as a result of new funding streams (YSDF) and engaged new partners across the country. This significant departure in practice required new measures of impact assessment and outcome measurement as demanded by the new commissioning climate. The Knowledge Exchange offered a timely opportunity to use a variety of methods to deconstruct what the practice looked like, what was working and how the staff could articulate this to their commissioners. The build-up to the event needed to engage participants in a number of timely activities, encapsulate methods whose findings could help inform it and be deemed helpful, interesting and challenging; and not be construed as yet another management-imposed requirement which would generate additional burdensome tasks at a time when work pressure was so great.

In particular, I used creative methods in the workshop to elicit personal reflective responses (see Appendix 2) and a theory of change model for the case studies in an attempt to make explicit the implicit, or '*the unconscious to become conscious*' (McIntosh 2010:73). This enabled a process where the researcher and participant were able to co-construct meaning as evidenced and theorised in much of the literature about action research (Lykes 2001; Martin 2001; McIntosh 2010; McNiff et al 1996). This is achieved through what Moon described '*as a double reflection in the recall interpretation and reconstruction of events*' (Moon 2004:175). Creative tools are, an explicit attempt to, '*...explore new ways of capturing people's expressive reflections on their own lived experiences, and to meaningfully contribute to social understanding*' (Gauntlett 2007:7).

Critics of the use of creative tools would claim them to be so non-naturalistic to bias the research findings (McIntosh and Sobiechowska 2009; Pink 2009). When considering this possible criticism I concluded that all research activities are non-naturalistic (Hughey and Speer 2002). Whether an observer or interviewer in a research setting, an unnatural situation arises which may impact upon the participants' response. Consequently, and for

the epistemological and methodological imperatives within this study, I was unconcerned at the use of creative methods, as Silverman (2011) points out, even interview data is flawed as it only ever offers indirect representations of experiences rather than the experience itself.

## **Bricolage (French for "tinkering")**

In his book *The Savage Mind* (1962, English translation 1966), French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss used '*bricolage*' to describe the characteristic patterns of mythological thought. Mythical thought, according to Lévi-Strauss, attempts to re-use available materials in order to solve new problems.

The term 'bricolage' in educational research has been used to denote the use of multi-perspective research methods. In Kincheloe's (2008) conception of the research bricolage, diverse theoretical traditions are employed in a broader critical and pedagogical context to lay the foundation for a transformative mode of what he calls '*multi-methodological*' inquiry. In this way, such discussions provide the research bricolage with a sophisticated understanding of the complexity of knowledge production and the interrelated complexity of both researcher positionality and phenomena in the world. Whilst I would not be bold enough to suggest that this study could be described as such, I drew upon some of this insight when considering the practice-based research methodology as I was aware of the amount of diverse material that would be generated through the use of different tools and how complex this would be in the analysis phase. It was not a neat and tidy process.

## **Theory of change**

As the process unfolded, it became clear that in order for practitioners to describe and deconstruct their work there was a need to present it in a way that was both consistent and systematic. I was curious to know whether a 'theory of change' model would help in the articulation of their practice wisdom.

Rick Davies, defines a theory of change simply as '*The description of a sequence of events that is expected to lead to a particular desired outcome*'<sup>27</sup> 'Theory of change' is an aspect of programme theory, a long-standing area of evaluation thought, developed from 1960s

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<sup>27</sup> Rick Davies, April 2012: Blog post on the criteria for assessing the evaluability of a theory of change <http://mandenews.blogspot.co.uk/2012/04/criteria-for-assessing-evaluability-of.html>

onwards. Programme theory approaches offer a more explicit focus on the theoretical underpinnings of programmes, clearer articulation of how programme planners view the linkages between inputs and outcomes, and how programmes are intended to work, to improve evaluations and programme performance (Funnell and Rogers 2011).

People are seeing theory of change as new, but it is just about good programme design, good adaptive management and understanding where you fit into the grander scheme of things.

(Gaskell in Vogel 2012:12)

James' review for Comic Relief (2011) highlights, in international development, the current interest in theory of change as an approach represents the convergence of another, equally long-standing strand of development thought. Since the 1960s, informed action for social change and participatory approaches have advocated a conscious reflection on the theories of development, as a basis for social learning and action. The presence of these different traditions that are blended in the current evolution of theory of change approaches may explain why such a wide range of organisations, from large charitable trusts to local community based projects, find it a useful framework within which to locate their practice. 'Theory of change' (TOC) model's current evolution draws on two streams of development and social programming practice; evaluation and informed social action and has been widely embraced by the international development community (Vogel 2012).

Practitioners approach 'theory of change' thinking from different starting points and for different purposes throughout the project cycle. Those from a technical perspective will view a TOC as a tool and methodology to map out the logical sequence of an initiative, from activities through to the changes it seeks to make. Whereas, others see it as a deeper reflective process: a mapping and a dialogue-based analysis of values, worldviews and philosophies of change that make more explicit the underlying assumptions of how and why change might happen as an outcome of a particular intervention. According to Vogel (2012), TOC requires a combination of both approaches. The mapping of a logical sequence is strengthened by critical thinking about the contextual conditions that influence the intervention, the motivations and contributions of stakeholders and other actors, and the different interpretations (assumptions) about how and why that sequence of change might come about (Stern et al, 2012). A more nuanced learning-based definition is offered by Comic Relief,

Theory of change is an on-going process of reflection to explore change and how it happens - and what that means for the part we play in a particular context, sector and/or group of people.

- It locates a programme or project within a wider analysis of how change comes about
- It draws on external learning about development
- It articulates our understanding of change - but also challenges us to explore it further
- It acknowledges the complexity of change: the wider systems and actors that influence it
- It is often presented in diagrammatic form with an accompanying narrative summary.

(James 2011:2)

A TOC defines all building blocks required to bring about a given long-term goal. This set of connected building blocks – interchangeably referred to as outcomes, results, accomplishments, or preconditions is depicted on a map known as a pathway of change/change framework, which is a graphic representation of the change process. Each outcome in the pathway of change is tied to an intervention, revealing the often complex web of activity that is required to bring about change. Like any good planning and evaluation method for social change, it requires participants to be clear on long-term goals, identify measurable indicators of success, and formulate actions to achieve goals.

A TOC would not be complete without an articulation of the assumptions that stakeholders use to explain the change process represented by the change framework. Assumptions explain both the connections between early, intermediate and long term outcomes and the expectations about how and why proposed interventions will bring them about. Often, assumptions are supported by research, strengthening the case to be made about the plausibility of theory and the likelihood that stated goals will be accomplished (Stuart et al 2011).

Theory of change requires practitioners to map what they want to achieve, and what they have got currently. Each service or intervention is mapped into the gap in between to create the theory that underpins the changes that they seek to make. Theory of Change is being

used widely as an explanation of the causal links that tie programme inputs to programme outputs.

It helps circumnavigate the philosophical debates on methodology, especially in evaluation research, by recognising that the most important judges of validity are the stakeholders who are going to use the results.

(Nichols and Crow 2004:24)

Inevitably there is an emerging critique of the growing interest in and demand for TOC. The first criticism is that it is often poorly defined, meaning that it is hard to ascertain its quality. In addition, the term 'theory' is contentious. Other terms like 'change pathway' or 'practice map' may resonate better. One strength of the tool is its ability to capture complexity, but this may also be a weakness, as large elaborate examples can be discouraging for newcomers to TOC, and can look like rigid plans, which are overwhelmingly complex (see Weiss, 1997).

Additionally, and importantly for staff who are already under significant pressure in their day-to-day work environment, mandating a TOC may also turn it from a participatory practice tool with immense potential into an unwelcome bureaucratic imposition (Hughes and Traynor, 2000; Mayne, 2008). I was keen that it was not to be received in this way, and with support from the Research Hub, practitioners developed six TOC case studies in preparation for the Knowledge Exchange event to be held in January 2012. Also, many may be working from their own 'implicit' TOC based upon years of experience and an understanding of the difference their intervention will achieve. Such practitioners also have the ability to identify the empirical basis upon which their intervention is designed, and subsequently articulate it.

In this way it can remain local and contingent. Wigboldus and Brouwers (2011) alert users of TOC to remain flexible, and to see TOC as *'theory of change thinking'* rather than a rigid tool or methodology. Echoes of Pawson and Tilley's (1997) approach to *'realistic evaluation'* are very evident. I would contend that depending upon their application, 'theory of change' models do not have to be purely instrumental in their description of the intervention and can give practitioners a way to unpack what it is they are trying to achieve, rather than being a prescriptive tool designed to address individual deficits..

Therefore it felt that the development of TOC based case studies could allow for a consistency in the approach to the deconstruction of youth work practice in line with the intentions of the Knowledge Exchange which was *'To generate practice-based evidence –*

*knowledge which is local and contingent, research that is constitutive of difference and critical, and builds theory as an adjunct to practice’.*

## **Reflections on the research process**

A number of issues were of interest as the research process unfolded. These were captured in a research diary which helpfully allowed for on-going review and reflection as the process lasted five years.

### **Integrity of the process**

This was an area I was concerned about from the outset. As explained in Chapter 1, the opportunity offered by the Knowledge Exchange to both the Brathay Trust and myself was evident. However, ensuring that there were clear boundaries between the different activities and the responsibilities in order to demonstrate an ethical level of autonomy and ownership was crucial. Helpfully, staff at the Research Hub were aware of this and made sure we were all clear about which process belonged where. Two of the three members of the staff team had recently completed their doctorates so were keen to be helpful and extremely aware of the ethics involved in undertaking this type of endeavour. Consequently, we would regularly review the process to ensure a level of transparency and clarity of communication amongst Brathay staff. This was emphasised in particular at the introduction at the Knowledge Exchange where participants were made aware of the longer term intentions of the work and its purpose. Additionally, they completed consent forms making this explicit. The findings chapters evidence clearly the data captured within my study and how work conducted elsewhere informed the process, for example, Brathay’s organisational skills audit.

### **Data generation and analysis**

The data generated – workshop flipcharts, case studies, questionnaire responses as well as the transcripts from the interviews - meant that analysis was not neat and tidy. For the semi-structured interview transcripts this was more straightforward as my frame of approach was using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). SPSS was used to analyse the questionnaires, but the remaining data – flipcharts and case studies - were trickier. I do not think I necessarily made the most from the workshop flipcharts generated by both the students which are not included to any significant extent in this thesis (although they were deemed confirmatory rather than contradictory to other data), nor those generated at the



practitioner workshop – included here in Appendix 2. Any future study of this nature could find ways to include analysis of all the data generated in multiple formats.

### **Delays in the intended timescale and uncertainty**

The Brathay Trust underwent significant restructuring after the Knowledge Exchange event in January 2012. My intention to engage participants in follow-up interviews became a less smooth process than anticipated as a result. I wanted to remain sensitive to organisational need, but at the same time needed to be reassured that the process would happen in a timely fashion. I decided to trust colleagues to respond to my emails and sent a reminder in June 2012 when I had not heard from them. The response was to request some time for the restructure to be embedded and therefore we agreed to proceed with the follow-up interviews in November 2012. I did discuss with my supervisory team a contingency plan which would be to involve the youth and community work students who had participated in the workshop and completed questionnaires more fully. Fortunately I did not need to; the interviews generated extremely rich data for analysis.

### **New supervisor**

Dr Helen Beckett came on board as my new second supervisor in January 2015. Helen acknowledged that she did not know the field of youth work and would therefore be curious about the nature of the study. Upon first reading of my findings chapters in December 2015, we discussed the potential to extract the information generated about the Knowledge Exchange event into a separate question as the data was offering this as a possibility. As a result, I devised a fifth research question,

*Can engagement in a Knowledge Exchange help practitioners theorise their practice and thereby generate 'practice-based evidence'?*

Having a member of my supervisory team from outside the profession of youth work was extremely valuable. Helen suggested the inclusion of a number of explanatory sentences to challenge my taken for granted assumptions and aid the reader's understanding from the perspective of someone who was not immersed in the youth work sector as myself.

# Chapter 8: Research strategy

## Governance and ethics

The research study was conducted in accordance with the regulations pertaining to the Professional Doctorate in The Leadership of Children's and Young People's Services at the University of Bedfordshire. It was also further regulated through the consent and engagement of the Brathay Trust, the research site. The staff at the Research Hub at Brathay became instrumental in offering advice, support and guidance, remaining supportive to me in pursuit of my research interests, whilst retaining clarity about their organisational requirements.

The collaboration was extremely effective; trust was established early on which allowed for an honest dialogue, characterised by a desire to really understand the nature of what makes for effective work with vulnerable young people. Priority was given consistently to the creation of a meaningful learning experience for all participants which resulted in significant commitment and engagement. This partnership also enabled the design and delivery of a Knowledge Exchange event funded by an ESRC grant as well as an on-going dialogue both within the organisation and spearheaded nationally by Brathay about what constitutes 'evidence' in this work.

The research proposal was designed with the methodological intentions outlined and gave due consideration for all necessary ethical issues which might arise as established within the Social Research Association guidelines (SRA 2005), and the Data Protection Act (1998). The proposal received approval from the University Research Ethics Committee at the University of Bedfordshire. Rightly, the ethical approval process reminded me, the researcher, of the ultimate responsibility I held with regard to the well-being of those with whom I engaged (Wilson 2009).

Inevitably, qualitative research will generate ethical issues and it is not possible to foresee every eventuality before it arises. Ethical research practice is dynamic by its very nature and needs to be monitored throughout the fieldwork and analysis phases. I was committed to ensuring I was reflexive throughout the process to allow for the level of collaborative practice and engagement I desired (Taylor and White 2000; Ezzy 2002) and re-negotiated aspects of the process where necessary. I was also aware that no amount of preparation would guarantee a tidy process; qualitative research requires the researcher to engage with

unpredictability and complexity (Smith et al 2012). This was illustrated by the difficulty of access to conduct the interviews as intended three months later due to organisational upheaval.

Research ethics provide a framework for what could be described as 'morally appropriate behaviour' when conducting research (Dodd and Epstein 2012:132). In particular, such guidelines are essentially constructed to protect the research participant from harm (Bulmer 1982). This study did not involve the direct participation of vulnerable children or adults; instead it focussed on practitioners working within the same organisation, at different levels of seniority, across a number of projects, therefore I was still keen to ensure an appropriate and respectful duty of care to all those involved.

The principles of 'informed consent' lay at the heart of the endeavour; although this term is deemed controversial in its own right. For David et al (2001) merely telling the participants about the research objectives and the associated facts about the process can lead the researcher into the naïve assumption that they are securing 'informed consent'. I did not want to fall into this trap and felt that the practice-based nature of the research methodology required a more nuanced approach.

As Chase (1996:57) states: *'An informed consent form cannot possible capture the dynamic process of interpretation or authorship'*. Instead, I would consider the process as one of 'negotiated consent' (Miller and Bell 2002; Silverman 2011), requiring continual renegotiation at each stage of the process. In this situation, consent is always *'provisional'* (Thompson and Holland 2003: 241).

Information sheets were devised and participants completed consent forms at each stage of the process. They were reminded verbally at the outset of the particular activity, the parameters of the research and how the data would be used. Interview participants were made aware that they had the right to withdraw at any time. However, for those attending the events at Brathay, the practitioner workshop and the Knowledge Exchange, there was a clear expectation from their employer that they would attend and participate, therefore calling into question how free individuals were to opt out of the process and what the repercussions of such a decision might be, remained uncertain. This was acknowledged by me in conversations with the staff and the Research Hub and with participants in the semi-structured interviews. I was of course concerned that the integrity of the process might be compromised by such a situation. Despite this, the data did suggest a level of honesty and in

some cases critical comment about the organisation which suggests that participants felt able to share openly within the environment created despite the constraints of the process.

Additionally, all interview participants were asked at the end of the process whether there was anything they had said that they would rather I disregard, and where mentioned I removed the data. Follow-up sheets provided contact details so should the participant reflect upon the interview and change their mind about the inclusion of certain content, there was an opportunity to advise me accordingly. For those who consented to having their interview recorded, I showed the interviewee how to stop the recorder at any time during the process should they choose; two participants used this option.

Anonymity is all qualitative research can offer; to say something will remain confidential implies that no-one else will see it and this is not the case (Dodd and Epstein 2009). The principles of anonymity can be upheld by the on-going and negotiated consent process and clarity about how the data will be presented in final publications. Brathay were always clear that they wanted to be a full partner in the process and that being open and sharing their experience with others was a priority for them as an organisation. They did not want to be anonymised in any publication. They were also offered the opportunity to review this decision at key points of the process and in the final stages prior to the completion of this thesis. The staff responsible at the Research Hub checked this position with both senior management and some of the original participants in December 2015 and sent an email confirming their position for my records.

Information management is an area where confidentiality should be assured. Computers holding data should be password protected and only those involved in the work, able to access. I was the only one who accessed the interview data.

I was also extremely mindful of the power I held as a researcher within this process and tried to mediate this by designing methods that would be appropriate, creative, engaging and challenging for practitioners, thereby retaining their interest and partnership in the process. Within the relationship between the researcher and the research participant lies an additional level of ethical concern as they engage in an active, intense and sometimes on-going dialogue (Goodman 2001). My relationship with the research participants was developed against a contextual backdrop of organisational change and uncertainty.

I was regularly in touch with the team at the Research Hub in order to remain sensitive to the organisational priorities. As a result, the intention to follow-up on the Knowledge Exchange

within six months was delayed. Important negotiations were underway with funders and commissioners which had diverted staff attention elsewhere and a number of staff had left the organisation. This unpredictable delay (Smith et al 2012) created a level of anxiety as there were times when I thought the process would disintegrate.

However, helpfully, by November 2012 I was able to re-engage eight practitioners in semi-structured interviews designed to reflect upon the process and experience of the Knowledge Exchange some ten months previously. For some, this interview provided a timely opportunity to 'off-load', and I needed to remain sufficiently boundaried in my supportive response whilst nonetheless retaining a clear focus on the topical interview schedule devised.

## **Methods**

The methods used were:

1. Literature review
2. Review of organisational materials, including data from the management information system, meta-analysis of project evaluations from a six month period and results from an internal 'Survey Monkey' undertaken by the Research Hub at Brathay
3. Facilitated practitioner workshop
4. Case study analysis using a theory of change template
5. Questionnaires
6. Notes made during discussions held during the Knowledge Exchange event as a participant observer
7. Semi-structured interviews

This research study was supplemented by the opportunity to check the validity of my research questions through the delivery of a workshop and completion of a questionnaire to youth and community students studying at the University of Bedfordshire in March 2012. This data (22 questionnaires) were then entered via IBM SPSS Statistics version 21, to generate some identifiable themes with regard to 'practice wisdom' in particular.

## **Literature review**

In conventional research, the starting point is normally the literature review in order to formulate the question, or indeed design or select an intervention. However, in my practice-

based methodology this was not such an obviously linear process. I had already been required to write an article of 'publishable' quality in September 2011 as part of the progression requirements with the professional doctorate programme. This had taken a more traditional approach to a literature review. It was extremely important to have a systematic and reproducible process for conducting the literature reviews. Without a systematic approach, I would not be confident that the literature review was complete. Additionally, the five year time frame meant that I would periodically update the literature in order to ensure currency.

I undertook a number of literature searches at different points in the process as described above. The process began with search engines at the University of Bedfordshire; in particular, Discover and also Google/Google Scholar were used to search on key words and terms. For example, *youth work, practice wisdom, praxis, evidence-based practice, practice-based evidence, practice-based research, reflection, reflexivity, theories of change, interpretative phenomenological analysis, knowledge translation, knowledge exchange*.

Search diaries were kept to maintain an efficient record of work undertaken over the period and to also capture any emerging themes that required further exploration or the identification of new sources. Following the initial searches, a 'snowballing' strategy was used. Snowballing is a term used to refer to the retrieval of citations in references and bibliographic sources. It is the process whereby you start with a small number of articles and expand this number with the help of the initial ones. Articles that match a topic or key theme are used to scan some of the most commonly cited research. From these documents, searchers find other keywords, descriptors and themes to use. For the purposes of this study I identified a few article references from experts in my research area and then engaged in a snowballing process using these initial articles.

Evidence-based practice in particular has as its starting point a systematic review of the literature (Roberts and Yaegar 2004); a literature review in a practice-based study has a different purpose and is often not conducted until the problem has been formulated. The evolving and inductive process of such work is differently constructed from a more deductive engagement with theoretical literature. In practice-based research, practitioners are seen as being able to conduct their own research and of undertaking a review of prior literature (Dodd and Epstein 2012). Therefore the practice-based research enquiry is generated from the practice context, not from a gap in the academic literature. In this way, more is expected of the practitioner, who becomes empowered as a legitimate contributor to, and not just consumer of, knowledge.

Once this study was underway, I was able to become more selective about the nature of the searches undertaken and became more aware of their usefulness. For the purposes of this study I had already decided the subject area I wished to explore and had a sense of the likely methodological approach I would use. At one level it felt like a back-to-front process, finding literature to support what I already knew; this however could be perceived as an uncritical engagement with the literature; it did not feel like that. However, this became reassuring and helpful and allowed me to drill down further into some areas that were of particular interest. I returned to the literature on multiple occasions in order to ensure the relevance and currency of the information, particularly when I began to analyse the data and themes began to emerge. The following types of literature were retrieved and drawn upon during the course of the searches undertaken:

- Books
- Peer reviewed journal articles
- Green Papers, Bills, Committee reports, policy documents and consultations
- Grey literature; this includes reports or publications from across both the voluntary and statutory sector, Government reports etc.
- Professional journals

I did not limit my research to the UK although this was my primary focus. I also placed no restrictions on the date of publication as the historical developments of youth work within legislation, policy and practice were pertinent to understanding the current context and climate. Only English language texts were included.

## **Participant overview**

Appendix 5 identifies the participants who engaged in the research study by age, gender and employment sector. The only observations which may contextualise their responses are as follows:

- Unsurprisingly, the age profile of the students is lower,
- Six of the students are employed in the private sector which may indicate their involvement in shorter term or more targeted interventions.

## Fieldwork

### Practitioner Workshop - October 2011

My engagement with Brathay staff began in the autumn of 2011. Initially I used the findings of a desk-based organisational audit conducted internally by Brathay. This exercise was undertaken by the Research Hub and whilst not part of the Knowledge Exchange process per se, did provide a useful starting point. It included identifying staff skills, qualifications and years of experience alongside a meta-analysis of evaluation reports. The conclusion of the meta analysis drew out some of the themes known to the Research Hub from their on-going support of practitioners in the field. This could now be used as evidence to address some the concerns being shared across the organisation, for example,

- I. The need to build theory into programme planning,
- II. To ensure relevant skill sets were deployed appropriately
- III. That evaluation became systematically embedded.

It also highlighted aspects of good practice and some underlying values including the importance of appropriate recruitment of young people and the positive impact of establishing a 'safe space' for young people.

Following my opportunity to review the outcomes of the skills audit and my surprise at the diversity of skills and qualifications amongst the staff team, I pursued the enquiry in a discussion with a member of staff from the Research Hub who described the situation as follows:

So another difference between 9 years ago and now is that 9 years ago we were a training staff who all had the same experience and we all sat in the same place, we also all had a client portfolio so we sold what we delivered or we sold what our colleagues delivered so delivery and sales were absolutely intertwined. Now we're an incredibly diverse team with an amazing range of skills and qualifications.

I designed and delivered a workshop to explore professional lifelines and professional identities (McKimm and Phillips 2009). The session was attended by nine practitioners who were either Regional Development Managers or Senior Youth Workers. All of these



individuals had managerial responsibility for projects that had been recently commissioned and established through the 'Brathay in the Community' aspect of the organisation's work.

An initial exercise was required with the practitioners to identify if there was a 'Brathay' practitioner or a 'Brathay way' and extract commonalities and differences with regard to contextual intelligence, history, culture, professional identities etc. Participants were asked to draw their 'journey' to Brathay with the particular considerations in mind

- Where have you been in your professional life? Why are you here now?
- Who has informed your 'model of practice'?
- What professional 'life worlds' do you inhabit?

This session was designed to reveal values, motivations and to identify models of practice. It identified the varied routes into the work from a diverse group of staff in possession of a number of skills and qualifications all bringing them into the new context at Brathay. Inevitably it was not possible at this stage to extract a common 'Brathay way' which was causing some consternation amongst staff members. Participants were then asked to place themselves at the centre of a piece of flipchart paper and consider the following themes;

- Who are you? Who aren't you?
- What are the biggest ethical dilemmas you experience in your practice?
- Where do you take risks? What is the very edge of your practice?
- What do you tell/hide from your manager?
- Where does your work change from 'therapy' to 'Therapy'?
- Are you part of a 'community of practice', or does your professional community exist elsewhere? If so, where?

There was evidence of a common concern about being a hostage to the new funding regimes and that staff were compromising some of their professional ethics in order to remain contractually compliant. Participants recognised immediately that their colleagues shared their frustrations across projects within Brathay in the Community and a sense of relief was apparent. The workshop went well; it was timely in that it allowed the organisation to reflect upon the recent development and expansion and also a number of themes were identified that informed the subsequent stages of the process. In particular the need to establish whether the diverse practice being undertaken could be conceptualised in a way where common professional intentions and values could be identified. It also gave me a

chance to meet the staff, engage them as 'participants' in the research process and inform my thinking in terms of planning the Knowledge Exchange, scheduled for January 2012. Materials generated from the workshop can be viewed in Appendix 2.

### **Case study development, December 2011-January 2012**

Using the gathered data and the subsequent conceptualisation of the data in discussion with Research Hub staff, six case study templates were developed which linked to the original ESRC criteria which were:

1. Help young people stay safe
2. Help young people deal with family conflict
3. Help young people stay free from criminal activity or sexual exploitation
4. Help young people to maintain mental and physical well-being

They comprised:

- New Beginnings - a new leaving care service for Cumbria
- Kick Start Richard Rose School- for those at risk of exclusion
- Brighter Futures, sexual exploitation project
- Cumbria Participation contract
- Preston Pre-apprenticeship Project
- Family Nurturing Project

Staff teams from each of the projects identified above were asked to identify a case study/practice example they want to share either as a team or individual which encapsulated the themes that characterised their practice. The case studies were presented and a 'theory of change' model was developed during the conversation as described earlier in the Research Design, chapter 7. This was the key mechanism that the event was based upon in the hope it would make explicit a youth work 'practice wisdom' through the deconstruction of practice.

Theory of change is a dynamic, critical thinking process, it makes the initiative clear and transparent - it underpins strategic planning. It is developed in a participatory way over time, following a logical structure that is rigorous and specific, and that can meet a quality test by the stakeholder. The terminology is not important; it is about buying into the critical thinking.

(Clark in Vogel 2012:11)

Further,

A mere perception of reality not followed by critical intervention will not lead to transformation of the objective reality.

(Freire 1972:34)

Like Freire (1972), practitioners drawn from across a wealth of professions have long explored theories of social change, debating what leads to development and how organisations learn and apply theories accordingly. Helping people to acknowledge their beliefs about poverty and how to address it, then reflect and take action is a familiar and empowering cycle. These intentions were reflected across a range of organisational publicity documents published by Brathay. The case studies were written up and presented in the conference packs and sent to the academics due to attend in advance so that they may have time to consider some of the practitioners' questions.

### **Knowledge Exchange Residential 18-20<sup>th</sup> January 2012**

The aim of the Knowledge Exchange event was very clear and linked directly to the intentions of my research, which was to explore whether a knowledge exchange mechanism provided an opportunity for youth workers to make explicit their practice wisdom:

*To generate practice-based evidence – knowledge which is local and contingent, research that is constitutive of difference and critical, and builds theory as an adjunct to practice.*

I was incredibly fortunate to be able to draw upon the expertise of the following esteemed colleagues who had agreed to participate; Professors Jenny Pearce, Margaret Melrose, John Coleman, Tony Jeffs, Margaret Ledwith, John Pitts and Dr Tim Bateman from the Universities of Bedfordshire, Cambridge, Durham and Cumbria. All had significant experience of researching into professional practice interventions in working with vulnerable young people. In addition there were 26 Brathay staff in attendance, drawn from all areas of organisational delivery; however the bulk were frontline practitioners (17).

It was decided that these visiting academics and researchers should be known as ‘visitors’ for the duration of the event. On the first afternoon, the ‘visitors’ experienced the ‘Brathay Way’ – an activity on the whaler boats on Lake Windermere in order to ‘induct’ them to the organisation. There was a follow-up debriefing session with Brathay staff which included ‘theorising’ the experience and considerations of what made the experience ‘effective practice’. I then facilitated the visitors to consider and decide upon what would be helpful to the practitioners attending the following morning and what their approach would look like.

## **Deconstructing practice**

The next morning, the six case studies provided the focus. Each session lasted an hour and a half and involved visitors discussing the work with the project staff. The bulk of the session was dedicated to considering the theory of change tool which was to be completed in part drawn from the information in the case study. Practitioners were asked to complete the tool with regards to the questions of models; practices/approaches and activities - what did you do? Visitors discussed with staff why certain decisions were taken or made and the rationale for those choices. Visitors were able to make observations that a particular model or theory was being used either implicitly or explicitly. The remaining time was used to consider the dilemmas contained within the practice case study, what could be learnt from the experience and how these challenges could be managed or moderated for the future. This process was supplemented by individual reflections on post it notes from both visitors and staff about what this discussion may mean at a personal/project/research or organisational level.

The six completed theory of change models were then presented in a gallery setting and a plenary session was held which reconstructed and theorised the practice, identified common areas of activity and explained and articulated what staff do. A copy of the case studies, together with the reflections recorded during the discussions can be found in Appendix 3.

## **Theorising practice - So what?**

The aim of the plenary session was for staff and visitors to review the gallery of Theory of Change (TOC) models. Staff and visitors were asked to consider if the experience had any resonance for their practice, thinking, or research both now and in the future. Brathay staff were asked to consider the following questions:

- How does their own professional experience articulate with commonly accepted knowledge or ‘evidence’?

- What are they prepared to take away and 'apply' in order to articulate 'effective' practice interventions?
- What organisational support will they need to do this?
- How will this be reviewed and fed back?

For visitors:

1. How do 'experts' or academic researchers deal with such practice evidence?
2. What can legitimise/validate this kind of practice generated evidence?
3. What measures could be used to assess whether the articulation of effective interventions had furthered practice knowledge – e.g. dissemination methods

The event ended with a participant focussed evaluation process. Staff, although exhausted reported feeling more understood, re-invigorated and supported by the wider organisation. There were also a range of initiatives that were taken forward by Brathay to ensure that the legacy from the Knowledge Exchange was not lost. These are described in the Findings and Discussion chapter that follows.

The absence of the Chief Executive Officer at the event had caused consternation amongst Brathay staff. The Knowledge Exchange event coincided with a growing disquiet in the organisation about the longer term sustainability of certain projects in the community that had received short term funding via YSDF and yet despite positive evaluations could no longer be supported. A well-regarded project in South London dealing with gang associated young people became the first casualty of the new funding regime and between her attendance at the workshop session in October 2011 and the event in January 2012, a highly skilled and experienced practitioner together with her team of part time staff, were made redundant.

Rumours of budget cuts and further redundancies circulated as practitioners tried to stay focused on the process. The Chief Executive Officer attended the final plenary to hear from his staff about the positive nature of the time spent together and what they needed to move forward in practice. Further redundancy notices were issued the following week.

As a reflective practitioner the event also allowed me to re-engage with the learning derived from such intensive experiences and consider how this material could be used to further explore 'practice-based evidence' with the practitioners. In particular, this reflexivity allowed me to retain and indeed build upon, the participative and evolving nature of the process thus

far. I was also very mindful of the organisational context and how this may create additional difficulties as I became further embroiled in the hermeneutic circle. I followed up the Knowledge Exchange event with semi structured interviews ten months later in November 2012.

### **Youth and Community Students Workshop - April 2012**

The questionnaire was delivered as part of a workshop which replaced a scheduled lecture and seminar on a research methods unit for final year youth and community students pursuing their professional qualification at the University of Bedfordshire in March 2012. This guaranteed, at some level, attendance and completion of the questionnaire. It gave the students the opportunity to participate in a 'live' research project which required their consent, whilst also fine-tuning their critical reflective skills. Three hours were available for the process which asked the students to identify their 'practice wisdom' and how they accrued their professional knowledge. I started by sharing my research questions, the process undertaken thus far and securing consent. Students were then asked to identify a young person that they had worked with who had proved particularly challenging. The nature of their intervention was explored by addressing the following questions:

1. Why did you choose the intervention you did?
2. What didn't you know about this area of practice/subject?
3. Where did you get your answers?
4. What did you do that worked/didn't work?
5. What were the key elements of the successful intervention?
6. Who knows about this success? What have you told them?
7. Does it agree with, or challenge any theory you have been taught?

This generated an engaging discussion as for the first time the youth workers began to share areas of work that they were unsure about and indeed for some, reveal their mistakes. It allowed for a considered discussion about the applicability of certain interventions across different client groups and contexts.

The questionnaire contained 11 open ended questions and was distributed in the last thirty minutes of the workshop in order to ensure an appropriate time for considered responses. The questions were:

1. How do you know what you know?
2. What values, theory or knowledge informs your practice?
3. How much does context inform practice – what are your contextual clues?
4. How does context impact upon ‘the relationship’?
5. How does knowledge, context or funding inform or limit your practice?
6. How do you know what you don’t know?
7. Is what you do ‘praxis’ – a continual interplay between means and ends – dialogical?
8. How do you evaluate your work?
9. Does your work advance professional knowledge? If so, how?
10. Is your work disseminated for others to learn from? If so, how?
11. Is your works transferability limited? How and why?

Its purpose was to capture how the students would conceptualise and describe the task they had just undertaken. This data was then entered onto IBM SPSS Statistics version 21 for analysis. I was then able to use this data to inform the development of the semi-structured interviews which were due to take place later that year.

### **Semi-structured interviews – November 2012**

Semi-structured interviews are the key data collection method within IPA studies and provide reliable, comparable qualitative data whilst allowing informants the freedom to express their views in their own terms. According to Bernard (1988), such a method is best used when researchers only have one opportunity to conduct the interview; in terms of distance, time, resources and cost this made sense. After significant negotiation, I was able to conduct the eight interviews over a two day period in Cumbria in November 2012. Those who participated included four of the original Regional Development Managers and two of the Senior Youth Workers who attended the first workshop and there were also two youth workers who had been part of the Knowledge Exchange event. These were conducted later than I had intended due to organisational constraints at Brathay, however, this was possibly helpful as the period of 10 months allowed me to capture in greater detail the nature of the subsequent developments and allowed respondents an opportunity for timely reflection. I was fortunate to achieve a level of consistency and constancy through the research process by six participants which gave added value to their reflection on the impact.

The interview is structured like a conversation in which the interviewer may switch the order in which the topics are pursued to ensure the flow remains uninterrupted. The previous work undertaken with the youth and community work students gave me confidence that the

themes I wanted to pursue could be conceptualised by practitioners and articulated accordingly. I was also able to revisit and reflect upon the discussion of the case study and the final plenary session of the Knowledge Exchange which considered some of these themes in order to revisit whether the intended outcomes and subsequent actions had been achieved. I started with some broad topical questions (similar to those on the student questionnaires) but was able to follow topical trajectories in the conversation as they occurred which was an ideal fit within the framework of practice-based research

This method was also helpful for my intended method of analysis, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) which requires 'rich data', a first-person account, which involves the participant in telling their story, speaking freely and reflectively and expressing concerns where they may be apparent (Smith, Flowers and Larkin 2012). The approach benefits from detailed engagement with a small sample, in particular, by exploring the particular topic area from more than one perspective, or at more than one time and from what Smith et al (2012) call,

...the reflective efforts of participants, any overall design or particular data collection strategy which capitalizes on these features is likely to be an effective one.

(Smith et al 2012:4.)

In their review of data collection within IPA studies, Reid, Flowers and Larkin (2005) identify the semi-structured interview as the preferred means to elicit detailed stories, alongside thoughts and feelings from the participants. Each interview lasted between 1.5 – 2 hours. The interviews were then transcribed for coding and analysis within the IPA framework

## **Data analysis**

For Braun and Clarke (2006:16) put simply, qualitative analysis of data involves a six stage process of thematic analysis described as

1. Familiarisation with the data – reading and re-reading transcripts
2. Generation of initial codes
3. Reviewing the codes which may involve merging and sub-dividing where relevant
4. Searching for categories across the data
5. Reviewing the categories



## 6. Defining and naming the categories and creating conceptual clarity

Any qualitative analysis will undoubtedly be a personal process; to remain consistent with my 'practice-based' methodology my analysis was undertaken through the lens of IPA. I wanted to explore lived experience of the participants and make sense of it – a narrative – or as Smith et al (2008:2) would describe, '*a unit in the flow of time – linked with a common meaning*'.

In this way I could ensure that I retained the hermeneutic intentions of inquiry and meaning-making. A good IPA analysis will attempt to balance phenomenological description with insightful interpretation anchored in the participants' accounts. Consequently, analysis in IPA is frequently described as 'bottom-up' in that codes are generated *from* the data rather than applying any codes *to* the data. The analysis begins with a particular experience and slowly works up (bottom up) to a more general categorization or identification of themes. In this way the researcher engages in an interpretative relationship with the transcript and dialogue can remain open-ended between the researcher and participant as themes emerge. In summary, this cyclical process within IPA proceeds through the following iterative stages:

1. First encounter with the text
2. Preliminary themes identified
3. Grouping themes together as clusters
4. Tabulating themes in summary table

(Biggerstaff and Thompson, 2008:11)

Analysis starts with one case and when that task is completed the researcher moves on to the next. As it is only possible to do such detailed analysis on a small number of transcripts I made a decision early on not to use computer based qualitative data analysis software for example, QSR NVivo as I was completely unfamiliar with the software application and it would require a considerable amount of time to learn its application (Bazeley and Jackson, 2013). Also, I felt that I had sufficient experience of analysing data in other research projects to feel confident that I would be able to undertake the task competently. I discussed the pros and cons of my decision with my supervisory team and other colleagues who had both used such software and those that had not as I was concerned that there was an expectation that a doctoral thesis would embrace this technology. I concluded although the use of such software might be helpful in organising data it cannot analyse the data; I agreed with Braun and Clarke (2013) who highlight that manual processes of data coding and devising themes

allows for full immersion in the data. This was exactly what was required of IPA. I did however review this decision on several occasions as the intensity of the IPA process at times felt overwhelming.

When analysing the interview transcripts, I selected one transcript randomly to begin with and undertook close reading and re-reading of the text, making notes of any thoughts, reflections or observations that occurred whilst reading. I attempted to suspend my presuppositions and judgements in order to focus on the data presented. Suspending judgement in this way is known as the practice of 'bracketing' (Husserl 1999:64) and involves the researcher suspending critical capabilities which would implicitly be informed by the researcher's own assumptions and experience. However IPA acknowledges the role of interpretation and recommends that the researcher uses reflexive tools, for example, diaries, in order to reduce any tainting of the data in an unhelpful way.

I adopted the approach offered by Smith and Osborne (2008) which involved annotating the transcript on the left-hand side of the page as interesting or significant issues become apparent. These included comments which attempted to summarise, paraphrase or interpret, as well as areas which appeared contradictory. However it was crucial that I remained unconstrained at this point in identifying areas of interest. The data set produced well over 40 codes

IPA analysis involves an iterative process as the researcher can move back and forth through different ways of thinking about the data which allows for her to engage in the hermeneutic intentions outlined earlier to make sense of what is presented. The right-hand column then became the area to document emerging themes or codes which can be extracted from the narrative. This eventually allows for the identification of themes which emerge that are of importance to the participant in what they have said and could be thoughts or feelings they convey. My process of interpretation began with descriptive comments and then moved into annotating the transcripts with conceptual comments as emergent themes became evident whilst retaining the richness or complexity of the data. By doing this I was able to identify discrete chunks of the transcript and break up the narrative flow of the transcript which at some level felt uncomfortable as these chunks become fragmented into themes and the data was reorganized.

Subsequently these emergent themes capture not only the participant's words, but also the researcher's interpretation and reflected my understanding of what was being said by bringing together description and interpretation.

Not all emergent themes might necessarily be included in an IPA analysis; it is often dependent upon the research question being explored. Helpfully there was an apparent synergy between my identification of the emergent themes and research questions which meant that I was able to choose which chunks of transcript were to be used for supporting my findings from across the entire set. By using abstraction, I was able to identify patterns across the emergent themes to uncover my 'superordinate' theme. This involved clustering chunks of transcript together

Occasionally I encountered material that did not fit the emerging picture and were at odds with the other participants' views. Once I had checked back earlier transcripts in case I had missed anything, I was able to posit this as a contrasting theme. For example, one participant did not see reflection being present via his supervisory experience whereas others did. Out of respect for the interview participants I also wanted to ensure that all voices within the research were represented, so tried to include quotes from across the data set in order to avoid the exclusive use of what Ritchie et al (2014) refer to as '*colourful accounts*'.

Once this process had been completed, I was able to begin to group the codes into 'superordinate themes' which were reflective across the data set; there were 14. These are summarised in the table below:

**Figure 4: Superordinate themes**

Theme		Interview	Case study
1	The centrality of the relationship in practice	√	√
2	The impact of short term contracts, and staff changes upon sharing new knowledge	√	√
3	Commissioning and funding environment impacting on how youth work takes place	√	√
4	Supervision and reflective practice being valued	√	√
5	Professional development opportunities being offered	√	√
6	Voluntary engagement and whether this impacts upon the quality of the relationship	√	√
7	The dynamics of partnership working	√	√
8	The need for Outcomes/evidence generation	√	√
9	Practice environments/contexts being different and requiring new ways of working	√	√
10	Practice wisdom/learning	√	√
11	The role of Praxis / theory building	√	√

12	Values and ethics being evident for example, participation	√	√
13	Recognition of the increasingly complex needs of young people	√	√
14	Practice boundaries and skills - whether staff were equipped to offer the right support	√	√

I also kept a theme diary to record how data related to the superordinate theme and all of this analysis was transferred to a Microsoft Word document so that data and relevant evidence or quotes could be easily located. I was then able to link these themes back to the original research questions so that an ordering of data could become apparent.

Immediate claims are inevitably limited by the small, often homogenous sample size, however theoretical generalisations were considered by my assessment of the evidence in relation to my own professional knowledge. In this way I was able to link these themes which became apparent from the semi-structured interviews and the case study material, back into my research questions. For Smith, idiography within IPA '*does not eschew generalizations but rather prescribes a different way of establishing those generalizations*'. (Smith, 2012:29). I also wanted to retain the individual's voice and meaning so included quotes to illustrate my interpretation of the data in the findings section.

IPA is also inductive which allows for flexibility in the range of techniques used during analysis. For Smith whilst acknowledging that induction is a long standing hallmark of qualitative research methodology across the board, whereby inductive reasoning, by its very nature, is more open-ended and exploratory, especially at the beginning, within IPA, '*the inductive stance is foregrounded*' (Smith, 2004:43). The case study material was re-visited after the interviews in order to extract evidence from eight months earlier and to further supplement my analysis.

# Section 3: Findings and discussion

Following the interrogation of the interview transcripts using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), the review of the case studies deconstructed at the Knowledge Exchange and the processing of the youth work students' questionnaires via SPSS, a number of thematic findings became evident. Quotes from the qualitative interviews are used to illustrate identified or common themes that became apparent through this analysis. Supplementary data is drawn from the case study material created at the Knowledge Exchange and included in text boxes. Furthermore, evidence from the SPSS analysis of the questionnaires completed by youth work students is used to underpin these findings. The findings are organised and discussed under the five headings of the research questions:

1. Can youth workers articulate their practice wisdom?
2. What does youth work 'practice wisdom' say about contemporary youth work practice?
3. What contextual factors affect youth workers' ability to apply their practice wisdom?
4. Can engagement in a Knowledge Exchange help youth workers theorise their practice and generate 'practice-based evidence'?
5. What is the wider applicability of the findings of this work?

# Chapter 9: Can youth workers articulate their practice wisdom?

My intention was to identify mechanisms through which youth workers could 'reclaim' their practice. In order to do this, I needed to test whether they could articulate their practice wisdom and whether the processes associated with the generation of practice wisdom were still apparent, helpful and evident within the profession.

Practice wisdom is the accumulated experience of what has been effective in practice, it involves knowledge of what is good or bad, not only theoretical knowledge, but additionally, the ability to act on such knowledge. As discussed earlier, practice wisdom therefore attempts to translate both theoretical and empirical knowledge into what is known from practice experience to inform current and future professional behaviour (Klein and Bloom 1995). According to Lacewing (2010), this capacity requires the following

1. a general conception of what is good or bad (which for Aristotle, relates to the conditions for human flourishing)
2. the ability to perceive, in light of that general conception, what is required in terms of, choice, and action in a particular situation;
3. the ability to deliberate well and
4. the ability to act on that deliberation.

(Lacewing 2010:264)

Professional educators attempt to imbue students with this skillset across a range of professional training programmes in health, education, social and youth work via experiential learning opportunities, reflective methods and the employment of a range of practice tools, for example, practice diaries, peer-learning sets, supervision etc. It also requires experience of life and working towards being someone who wants to make a positive contribution to others' lives.

Local educators think 'on their feet' ...broadly guided in their thinking by their understanding of what makes for the 'good'; of what makes for human well-being... this mode of thinking comes close to what Aristotle describes as 'phronesis', 'prudence' or 'practical wisdom'

Such descriptions frequently suggest an 'anti-intellectualism' within the professional discourse of youth work. This has only contributed to the suggestions that the profession remains 'theory less' and that youth workers cannot articulate a 'practice wisdom'. Whilst such a view would not be derisory about the role of education, for example in empowering the poor, in public discourse, anti-intellectuals are frequently perceived and publicly presented as champions of the common people, against political and academic elitism.

From the start of my engagement with the professional staff at Brathay in the Spring of 2011, I had always been impressed by what I would consider to be a desire for professional excellence and a sense that despite there being a number of different professionals bringing their skill sets to bear, there remained an over-arching commitment to the development of effective relationships designed to improve the lives of vulnerable young people and the communities Brathay served. However, whether or not this was sufficient evidence of what makes for 'the good', phronesis, remained uncertain at the outset, although one interviewee identified how the Research Hub had attempted to incorporate such values into the evolving and hopefully, underpinning model of youth development (See Appendix 6).

The newness of people is a really good thing because that allows me to lay down clarity as to where we're trying to go. The lovely thing about what the Research Hub have been doing is that they've made a direct link to social justice with our youth development model and that's wonderfully motivating for all youth workers, they love it, they love to be able to say 'Cos I'm doing that, that's what I'm doing', and you can appeal to that slightly militant, maverick side of lots of youth workers by labouring on that and being able to say and show the progression of what you're doing does lead to that.

*Participant D*

Brathay could be described as a 'learning organisation' whose meaning, whilst according to Lassey (1998) remains elusive, has been defined by Malhotra (1996) as an, '*organisation with an ingrained philosophy for anticipating, reacting and responding to change, complexity and uncertainty*' (Malhotra 1996 in Lassey 1998:4). This was apparent in its desire to engage with the University through the Knowledge Exchange and undertake what might be construed by some as a risky process in attempting to share practice wisdom and develop and make explicit a common understanding of the purpose of their work.



I was keen to know if the experienced group of practitioners at Brathay could articulate a practice wisdom which would have broader application and resonance across the disparate settings and roles in which they were operating and whether the nature of the questions I asked would allow for this particular conceptualisation. I was also interested to know whether youth work students would recognise or understand the term and offer an interpretation of what this meant for them in their day to day work. I was unsure what such evidence would look like or if it would possess a level of coherence required for this research study. Finally, if practitioners were able to identify the components of their practice wisdom, would this mean that generating practice-based evidence would not be difficult if the right mechanisms were in place and the organisational context allowed for it? (Simons et al 2003, Thomas et al 2006).

The findings suggested that the practice wisdom evidenced by Brathay staff combines three related themes through which a set of professional ethics and practice intentions become apparent. These are:

1. The creation of cultures of participation and access and a shared commitment to the values which underpin these
2. A commitment to learning from experience through reflection, enabling staff to theorise their practice
3. A commitment to the development of practice through praxis.

The following sections offer evidence of how the findings support my interpretation of the core characteristics of Brathay's practice wisdom.

## **1. The creation of cultures of participation and access**

I think one of the core values for me is about the voluntary nature of youth work so the young person they choose whether they are going to participate or not. *Participant A*

As discussed earlier, the sustainability of this principle of free association which has characterised youth work relationships for generations has been discussed at length in debates about the future of the work (Jefferies and Smith 2008; Ord 2009). Currently, there remains little 'open' or 'universal' provision as severe budget reductions has meant that what does exist of local authority youth services is provided via commissioning, by a shrinking voluntary sector. The remainder of the youth service workforce is, in the main, located within

targeted provision. I wondered whether this had meant that retaining this principle was no longer an essential foundation of the relationships with young people and how youth workers managed this, in particular, participative practice was explored.

Participant A, (whose role was to manage a participation contract across the local authority area) felt that there was a danger that his practice could be compromised without the principle of free association in place. Whilst he acknowledged it was not impossible to work effectively with young people who were being required to participate as part of, for example, a community order or penalty, his desire to retain freedom of association in order to maximise the potential of the engagement was made clear.

How do you maintain the integrity of your practice when you know that there is some other reason why they're there. Young people in touch with different services often have to 'play the game'. Hopefully, I have a good enough relationship with the young people to know when this is the case and then try and make it more meaningful.

Only two of the youth work students that completed the questionnaire mentioned that 'voluntary engagement' had a direct bearing on practice, yet the requirement to attend a project was seen by others to have a direct impact on the nature of the relationship they developed. This could be explained by the students' more recent entry to the profession and the context of their practice being located in more targeted, time-prescribed, and less universal settings. However, the concepts of freedom and empowerment derived from the wider educational and political intentions of youth work were evident amongst Brathay staff:

I would say it's kind of like emancipation, because freeing them to understand their potential and how they can actually influence things. They've got a voice already, they just don't always recognise that voice and they don't necessarily know how to articulate it or use it. *Participant C*

And,

I was reading an article not so long ago which was in Youth and Policy and it was the dilemma of, it followed on from the riots, here we are in a democratic society and we lock up all these young people that have gone out on the streets and yet in other countries we're promoting it and we're saying that's freedom of speech and yet in Britain we're saying if you want a voice

you've got to go down our formal structures and for many young people that totally disempowers them because they can't do that. *Participant D*

Notwithstanding the changing context of practice delivery, staff still recognised the importance of retaining the centrality of young people's voices in their practice whilst also recognising that this was not necessarily an outcome sought by the commissioner. This example evidences the ability to conceptualise the work in a slightly different way to achieve a similar outcome:

So a lot of the work I've done over the last 10 years was about different ways of creating a 'culture dissipation' [sharing alternative views on the participation of young people] and how you bring about that change so we tried different models back then but the constraints of the contract prevent you from doing that cultural shift so the only thing that we can really realistically do is about empowering these young people or freeing them up so that they can be the change makers, they can say 'I'm sorry this isn't good enough, we do have a right to have a voice'. *Participant A*

There was evidence of a desire by all participants in the research process to ensure that the young person's voice was heard by those providing services and that the services remained relevant and therefore accessible. Coupled with this was a commitment to full consultation with the young person concerned about their needs and aspirations. This included all 22 of the youth and community work students. For those working alongside young people in newly formed multi-agency partnerships where participation of this nature is not historically valued, retaining the centrality of this principle in practice was proving exceptionally challenging. The need to retain a realistic relationship with the young people about the limitations associated with becoming involved in projects was identified by several interviewees, three examples are cited here:

We could talk about in terms of participation practice in terms of Hart's Ladder, I'm not a fan of it because I think what that does is it sets an aspiration to reach the top rung and I'm very much into a revision of that which is about 'circles of influence'. It's saying actually when we involve young people we need to involve them in real decisions and they need to understand the parameters of what they are getting involved in so sometimes we raise their aspiration and it's never going to be achieved. It's like sitting on panel for a headmaster, the young people are never going to get the final

say on that so they are set up to fail so I think it's about real decisions and about a model which is appropriate for where they are on that piece of work.

*Participant B*

Further,

Things like we went through a massive process on the response to the tender around participation and what was feasible and what wasn't. We were able to take all our learning from the first 3 years and say 'Well this way of doing things worked and this way really didn't so we are going to do it in this way'. It doesn't necessarily mean that the young people have any greater power or say over it than they did before but it feels like more of a subversive role to kind of do things, translate things for the young people so that they have got more of say, we're the middle man for the young people so they want something to happen, we support them to do that and we try and smooth the barriers for them when they hit them because they hit them all the time because the Council is the Council. *Participant C*

And,

I don't have a particular issue with youth councils being adult initiated and young people being 'empowered' to take that over. I think certainly with some of the commissioning people they wouldn't engage with the top five rungs of Herts ladder anyway, they are just bothered about tokenism and manipulation but I think the concept of young people having a voice is a very important concept for society and therefore it's OK but it's how you work with those young people so that they don't become tokenised and they don't become manipulated. *Participant A*

This is further evidence of youth workers having to continually juggle the ethical foundations of their work with the realities of commissioned practice, where the priorities of working in this way may be deemed to be of less value than achieving the desired outcomes for the young people. Alongside this, one of the key elements in furthering a young person's willingness to engage has been the recognition that workers must treat each participant as an individual whose needs, whilst shared by others, may require an individualised response. This approach to the work was helpfully described thus:

I suppose the fundamental one I hold dear is that you need to, I don't know if this is a theory, but that there's no point in starting where you want to start

from in terms of development it's got to start from where that young person is and that is different for each one. And so it's like within a teaching set-up, it's about really excellent differentiation, you can't just force them all into this sort of trough of delivery and expect them all to do the same thing and understand the same thing at the same time, it just doesn't work like that. And it feels more right to start where they are and have almost like masses of personalised little programmes running within one bigger programme.

*Participant D*

Undoubtedly, the language of 'to start where they are' remains unclear; no one described the precise nature of identifying such a starting point, through some kind of needs analysis, although there was a reference to referral paperwork not being the most helpful; once more it appeared to be intuitive.

Half the time we don't know who we're getting. When you read most of the paperwork it bears no relation to the guy sat in front of you. You start thinking it's about one thing and then after a few weeks you find out the issue is completely different but no one's bothered to find it out. *Participant B*

The skill of being able to offer individualised support has been one that has become increasingly required as youth workers have, over the last ten years, become more frequently involved in managing individual caseloads. The shift away from group work practice has been regretful for many in the field who saw the power and potential of working with groups in an educative framework. Within newly constructed client groups, where individuals are likely to have complex needs, the ability to do both individual and group work is highly valued, particularly by other professionals, who may not have the time to establish the relationships required, such as social workers.

## **2. A commitment to learning from experience through reflection, enabling youth workers to theorise their practice**

I think there's an awful lot that I don't know. Of course, I'm eager to improve all the time, I want to be exceptional at what I do and, of course, I can glean all sorts from people who've got far greater experience than me, working in all sorts of different contexts as facilitators. And when I say facilitators I guess I lump together coaching facilitation, youth work, and

developmental work, all within the same sort of bracket really. I'm hungry to learn. *Participant B*

In her study of how social workers can co-create knowledge in practice with the families with whom they work, Mesl (2010) cites Schön (1987, 1991) who draws from the assumption that competent practitioners usually know more than they can tell. I would assert this to be the same issue for youth workers who need to find mechanisms to explain the difference their work makes not only to funders, researchers and policy makers, but also to the very people they aim to serve, young people. They also need to develop a shared professional language that like social work explain what they do and why. Only then, I believe can we genuinely begin to co-create new knowledge by giving explicit definitions and explanations of the practice of youth work.

Theories of action need to underpin any notion of theory and practice becoming usefully integrated. In particular, two concepts: the '*espoused*' theory and the '*theory-in-use*' are helpful frameworks (Argyris and Schön, 1974). An '*espoused*' theory of action is the response when people are asked how they would respond or what they would do in a certain situation. For example, many youth workers would talk about the centrality of the relationship with a young person as their espoused theory in action which they value enormously and therefore, their actions would be to develop these relationships further and enhance the potential for their learning.

On the other hand, and according to Mesl (2010), the theory-in-use actually guides an individual's actions and forms their behavioural world. It may or may not be in accordance with their espoused theory and cannot be described necessarily by asking an individual about it; it is evident through observation of practice. I was curious to know how youth workers integrated their theory into practice and whether they could articulate this. I was of course limited to the identification of '*espoused*' theories as I was not able to test these theories of action in practice.

Helpfully, interviewees could identify recent experiences of professional development that they had used to enhance their practice. Staff at Brathay also applauded the work of the Research Hub in bringing new information and research to their attention.

And lots of programmes I work on may have a coaching element which is a one-to-one conversation between myself and a young person or some of the other groups that I work with who may be older. So yes my main area of

learning would be in that region at the moment. I get updates from XXX [Research Hub] about best practice, generally have an interest in I guess personal development really so some of things that I might choose to read would be not specifically related to youth work in youth work practice but sort of underpinning in some way. *Participant B*

Youth work students were able to identify a number of theories they used in the design and execution of their practice interventions. Again this is not surprising as they are currently in a learning environment where there is an expectation that they will understand the application of such theories to their practice contexts. Thompson's (1997) Personal, Cultural, Societal (PCS) model of discrimination was cited by 12 out of the 22 respondents. A range of other theories or models were named, for example, Maslow (1968), cited by eight, Egan (2002) cited by five, Kolb (1984), by seven and Johari window, (1955 named after, and developed by, Joe Luft and Harry Ingram in Yalom, 1995: 490) by six.

The Research Hub staff at Brathay were also helpful in underpinning the model of youth development with a number of theoretical frameworks:

You know those are great labels for us to understand but we wanted to link in the theories so that we didn't have all these random eclectic theories knocking around but also so that we really understood the foundations of where it was coming from and then it was really important to link that to practice so people could understand that's what I do to try and make that bit happen and that was really hard and so many of the models and theories and bits of practice could fit in all of them. *Participant G*

Brathay staff would cite a number of contextual practice interventions which were underpinned by theory, for example, staff from New Beginnings talked about 'unconditional positive regard' (Rogers 1951) and Maslow's 'hierarchy of needs' (1943), the outdoor education staff talked more about action learning, Kolb (1984) and wider principles of experiential learning and the use of metaphor, and the participation staff, Hart's Ladder and circles of influence (2013).

I suppose in terms of model my baseline would be something like Maslow's hierarchy which is looking at straight away what are the needs of this young person, so again the tension between what we need to achieve as an outcome and a young person might be struggling and homeless so working

with a social worker to try and help support them into some accommodated housing or whatever else. That's the now and that's looking at those needs across of shelter, food, warmth, blah, blah, blah and it's dealing with those bits. In terms of the theories and models I suppose that we use more through Brathay, or have done since I've been here, I think things like experiential learning and 'comfort stretch panic' are really useful tools within my practice. *Participant C*

These responses challenge the view that youth work remains devoid of any theoretical underpinning. Theoretical knowledge, coupled with an ability to act upon it in pursuit of the 'good' reflects a key element of generating practice wisdom. The following quote resonates with Aristotle's conceptualisation of practice wisdom encompassing the ability to know how to act with regard to the things that are 'good', phronesis (Irwin 1999):

Yes, so books I've been reading recently, for example, would be 'Spirit of Adventure' by Colin Waltlock who comes from an outdoors developmental background, he talks a lot about virtues such as wisdom, truth, honesty, integrity and their applications to that in the outdoors. It's informed me an awful lot about the value of the work that I do and the power it can have in the outdoors. *Participant B*

The ability to be flexible and considered when talking about the choice or use of a theoretical base in his work was explained by a staff member as follows:

I wouldn't say there's anything I'm wedded to in terms of theory. I have quite a cynical outlook in terms of things like NLP, I think it can be used when it's done well or when a practitioner has gone through the training and then is able to use the skills, techniques well I think that's fine, no issues with it all, I think there's nothing worse than when it's done badly and young people see that instantly. So I think there's bits that I cherry pick from a variety I suppose. *Participant C*

This eclectic approach is I think, common. Traditionally youth workers have talked about their 'toolkit' containing a variety of strategies and skills which they can use to engage young people in the process of youth work.

Outdoor education has been a longstanding feature of the work undertaken by Brathay. As a result, most young people that are engaged with Brathay projects will have the opportunity to



attend a residential experience at Brathay Hall on the banks of Lake Windermere. Considerable energy had been spent amongst the staff team discussing the value of this experience for those young people coming from very different backgrounds. The problem (and its solution), was described as follows,

Where we were heading was becoming an activity centre that didn't have the space and creativity around reviewing so at its worst we were doing activity 'How was that? Great, good, right next thing', activity 'Great, good', and at the end of it 'Oh I wonder what outcomes they might have reached, hmm I'll tick that box', I mean that's how bad it was getting. And now more ground rules have been set about actually there's set significant time in every day for reviewing with a young person, getting them to understand their journey. It's no good us saying what outcomes they've reached if they can't tell us what outcomes they've reached. So that's where I'm heading, it's got to be.

*Participant D*

The skill set of the outdoor education team is not only evidenced through the possession of relevant qualifications in this field, but also a desire to make connections for young people through the use of a range of tools. In this way the outcome is not the focus and within the youth work practice the process always takes centre stage when reflecting upon the learning derived from the experience. By using 'metaphor', this worker describes the importance of reflection and review with the young people:

I think another thing as well is what I've come to really recognise is this metaphor thing, yes the way I see the job I do is I work in metaphor because it's not real life but it's like real life. You know going out in the hills can conjure up all the same emotions as dealing with difficulties at home with the family or peer pressure or issues at school or whatever it is so that's the way I tend to view it. However, the value of metaphor also comes from having had experience and experiences in which to give the metaphor context and so what I've learnt is that it's really important with young people who have limited experience to close the gap, to really make that line of sight very short between how that metaphorical experience actually relates to real life. And in some ways it's actually about reviewing that activity for that activity or in the light of that activity and saying 'So we went rock climbing, what happened when we were rock climbing? How did you feel when you were

rock climbing?’ And then it’s not abstract, it’s really connected, and then saying ‘OK so how does this relate to being back at home? It just shortens that line of sight for them. *Participant B*

The ability to theorise practice and value the role of reflection in continuing professional development opportunities was clearly identified when discussing the residential component of the opportunities on offer to young people,

So it feels like from a residential point of view I’ve a handle on I’m getting there, I’m on a journey to understanding what we are actually doing and what effect that actually has on young people and whether that is the right or the wrong thing to be doing and what we do to turn the ship if need be to a different place. It’s back to reflective practice. *Participant E*

When asked how they were able to identify gaps in their knowledge and how they addressed these, as expected, the youth work students were able to identify a range of learning processes that could be utilised, talking to their practice tutor, supervisor on placement, lecturers and other students; ‘reflective practice’ was identified by 15 out of the 22 respondents. For Brathay it was described thus:

It starts off with kind of an audit of people’s knowledge to start with, it’s hand in hand with what people are actually writing on IYSS and explaining their practice which we didn’t have before so we couldn’t see what their thinking was and now we can. That with the observations and making sure that’s something that’s rolled out so that we know what’s actually being delivered and understand where people’s gaps of knowledge are and then the one-to-one supervisions to really focus on people’s individual skills and where they need to grow and where they need to share their knowledge. *Participant D*

My analysis and interpretation of the transcripts made apparent how crucial the role of reflection and theorising practice was to this group of practitioners, who were drawn from a variety of different professional disciplines. This reflection was not purely for their own professional development, but to equip young people with the skill set to also become agents in their own lives. This links well to the next area of practice wisdom, the lens of ‘praxis’.

### 3. A commitment to the development of practice through praxis

As mentioned much earlier in this thesis, Litchfield (1999:62) described practice wisdom itself as *'a process of practice and reflexive development of theory within it; a form of praxis'*. Despite being a term closely aligned to the practice of youth and community work, the youth work students were unclear about the term 'praxis'. Once explained that its focus was about challenging traditional hierarchies of power, and giving disempowered groups a voice through the building of community capacity and self-representation (Freire 1972; Popple, 2000), they were more positive in their responses. Fourteen out of the 22 believed they were engaged in praxis as a process. For most, 15, interpreted 'praxis' as linking theory and practice which involved some degree of dialogue, and a commitment to making a positive difference to the young people they worked with via relationships (18).

A number of comments were made in the Brathay case studies which reflect the desire across the organisation for a thoughtful and critical practice which builds theory. These comments included the following:

- TIME TIME TIME to think about what we're doing and why
- Articulating our approach/methodology. Theory ⇔ action
- Self-education, learning space for staff
- Critical spaces – avoid becoming mindless deliverers of top down policy
- Praxis – a thinking and doing approach which builds theory in action
- Need a praxis approach – how do we define what we do, and why we do it?
- We need critical spaces to reflect and bring together theory and practice, to ensure high quality practice, and ensure we're not just replicating the status quo
- NEED to ensure we have time as a team to think
- Importance of generating theory in action – being able to explain why we are doing what we are doing
- How morals/values/ethics/principles affect practice, tensions between this and delivery (constraints of contracts)
- Importance of creating critical spaces in order to stay critical in practice

Following the Knowledge Exchange event the motivation within the Research Hub to build upon the progress made gained momentum. However, staff needed the relevant tools to assist them in unpacking how they conceptualized their interventions. Not only would such progress allow for a return to more structured time for reflection and learning, but, it was

hoped, would also generate the evidence required by commissioners for outcomes and impact.

I definitely see the two coming together because I see like the values example so I see that our role in the Research Hub is to take a load of practice that's going on and the language they're using and what they're actually doing and then take a load of policy and kind of theory and I definitely think those two things have come together in this model. How does this inform theory? *Participant F*

For Mezirow (1978:101), critical reflection is the process where '*learners become critically aware of the cultural and psychological assumptions that influence the way they see themselves, their relationships and the way they pattern their lives*'. It involves an exploration of thoughts, values and beliefs of both the individual and others around her/him in order to further understanding and examine and assess evidence and arguments from alternative viewpoints. From the perspective of youth work education, critical reflection should be built into the curriculum. Lay and McGuire (2010) suggested that this could be supported via the student–teacher experience as co-learners and co-constructors of knowledge. In this way reflective practice has the potential to enrich accountability, ethical practice and hopefully improve service outcomes thereby enhancing the development of practice wisdom (Maclean 2012). For one of the interviewee's the opportunities for learning through reflection, whilst recognised as desirable, were not always achieved.

To a certain degree but I don't think this service has been massively different in terms of not allowing that time for reflection or to consider how you are using theory and embedding it within your practice and then potentially looking back and reflecting more. I don't think we have the time at all and I don't this is distinct to xxxx. I think that has been a lot of my experience in different projects. Again it's where the time is being allowed and it's that working, if we're using experiential learning as a tool for ourselves to look at how we work I'm in the 'Do' phase, that's where I'm at, I'm just constantly in that 'Do'. And I'm trying to do it as well as I can or the way that I think it works, now and again I'll slip into that 'Yeah that didn't work so well, I'll change that, I'll do that differently', but it's not really considered thought reflection, it's a little bit like 'Well that didn't work I'll do it a bit differently next time. *Participant C*

The 'theory of change' approach, used so successfully at the Knowledge Exchange was identified as helpful and subsequently built into the design for the new management information system and became a mechanism for change and reflection by allowing youth workers to identify their motivations:

The whole concept of theory of change has been something that has just been built on and built on and built on in the last year so that... I had a wonderful conversation with one guy who has been working for us for years and years and years and he's a very skilled practitioner and he cannot get his head around the computer side of the IYSS, it just does his head in, so he said 'Well I don't want to course direct anything because I don't want to have to do all this'. I thought ok fair enough, we absolutely desperately needed him to course direct something and so I said 'OK well I will fill it in, and you talk to me on the phone while I do it'. And when we got to the theory of change bit he was like 'What?', you know and I was saying 'Don't worry about that, just tell me why you're doing what you're doing, tell me why you've decided to do this session, that's all I'm asking you for'. And what came out was just gold dust, it was like 'That's why', and I could have written reams and reams for every activity he had planned, he knew exactly why he was doing it and exactly where he was trying to support the young people to get to, it was just perfect, and therefore it was incredibly reassuring to him for me to just go 'It's all there, you don't have to be freaked out by the words Theory of Change attached to anything. *Participant D*

Research Hub staff were aware of the sensitivities that would be required in taking the staff teams along with them on a journey they felt very passionate about.

I think there's a mixture in the delivery staff, I think there's some people that have been doing what they do for a long time and change is quite tricky for them and so we've tried to frame it as we want to learn from them, they've got a lot to offer this shared, collaborative conversation. *Participant G*

The same Research Hub staff were also engaged in undertaking a number of evaluations with staff which alongside the values identified at the Knowledge Exchange were feeding into the model of youth development (see Appendix 6) by identifying theories to underpin the interventions and intended outcomes described.

So like doing a contract at the beginning of a residential, if you do that then you've already ticked that in terms of a theory, you're already using that theory even if you didn't know it which leads to that outcome so it's actually it's a nice process of reassuring practitioners that there is basis behind what they're doing even if they don't know it and so to get them to a place where they're thinking 'Oh well that's ok, I'm not so thick'. *Participant E*

This model was being consulted on and there was an anxiety that everything might be seen as being imposed upon frontline practitioners by the Research Hub. The interviews conducted eight months later suggested the model had been very well received, and, from one of the Regional Development Manager's perspective; these processes were deemed to be extremely helpful:

And so something about this process is about capturing people's knowledge that they've gleaned over the years, that we haven't had any kind of way of doing that before, understanding how thoughtful people actually are in their planning. *Participant C*

And, also from those staff on the frontline,

So I think what it's done is it's reaffirmed in a kind of more academic way what it is that we already do. So it's given me clarity in terms of I understand to a greater extent what it is that we do and where that fits within the broader spectrum or the bigger world of youth work if you like. *Participant B*

Illuminating the 'means', in order to capture the 'ends', in a way that is appropriate and contextually nuanced, was becoming embedded within organisational culture. It had also received 'buy-in' from the overwhelming majority of staff I spoke to; a considerable achievement:

I think we're only part way down that journey and one of the key steps on that journey is getting people to understand that there are theories there that actually, that they're doing, that they're being, that they didn't know that they were doing and being. So they've done a brilliant job, [Research Hub staff], it's excellent, they've done a brilliant thing by they've put in what specific pieces of practice meet those theories and outcomes. *Participant D*

## Conclusion

The very essence of practice wisdom was described by Klein and Bloom (1995) as encompassing the concept of 'experience-driven practice' through a process of inductive scientific knowledge. The multiple sites of knowledge generation evidenced through this research as described by respondents, is akin to that described by Klein and Bloom (1995) when they explain the need to bridge empirical knowledge and professional experience and translate these multiple forms of knowing into professional action. Thus, practice wisdom becomes the outcome of the practitioner's translation of the different systems of knowing.

The findings show a high level of commitment to, and value placed upon, the opportunities offered for self-development amongst all respondents and a desire to do the very best. This commitment is based within what Samson (2015:119) would describe as, combining both *'the art and science'* of such work. Such practice wisdom involves the development of critical thinking and reflection and bridges the more traditional divide between practice and theory. Similarly, Thompson and West (2013) described practice wisdom as a process that captures both values and motivation, whilst also supporting the development of practice skills. The construction of the framework for the practice is based upon numerous sources (Healy 2005). It was clear that youth workers negotiate between institutional context, expert knowledge and the basis of skills as well as the particular frameworks for practice developed from experience; in this way they are almost unconsciously creating their own youth work 'habitus'. The role of this type of reflective practice was embedded within the Brathay model

Once people are at that base level of knowledge around the theories and everyone's fully taken on board all the stuff that we've been developing around there needs to be significant reviews within programmes and there needs to be really good reviews at the end of programmes just with the staff and this should include feedback to each other, it should include significant feedback to the organisation, it should include significant feedback to go in the evaluation of that programme. Once that starts to roll, it's like we're pushing it up hill at the moment but when it goes over the edge and starts to roll then that will be more of an iterative process. *Participant D*

Reflection was seen by respondents as crucial in terms of their professional development, particularly as it was a process regularly used in working directly with young people. The

irony of this not being in place for some Brathay staff members was not lost on the interviewer or indeed the participants themselves. Several Brathay staff commented upon how timely and helpful the follow-up interview to the Knowledge Exchange had been. In all but one of the interviews I had met the individual over a year earlier when I had facilitated a workshop for staff, and had therefore established a level of rapport. In some cases it felt like my role as interviewer had become quasi-supervisor/counsellor and whilst wanting to remain empathetic to the stresses some described, I was keen to maintain the research boundary. When asked about her own professional development, one respondent said,

Through supervision (it's been essential) and reflecting upon myself I think I've learnt diplomacy skills... I think! Sometimes I think I wish because I look more at the guys and listen to where their needs are and if they need this or that or even from practical things like mini bus driving or whatever to maybe something safeguarding or whatever so I've gone from youth worker to manager, I've done a lot of research, I've done a lot of the stuff myself in how do I change myself to differentiate cos I used to be XXX's colleague for a kick off and now I'm his manager. And the thing that I still need to work on, but it's more in my awareness I suppose, is that I kind of look at it as kind of an axis of being a tough, hard but fair, I'm hoping to go on a management course when I find one that suits my management style. *Participant E*

For O'Sullivan (2005) models of experienced practice development are needed if professional educators are to effectively facilitate the growth of practice wisdom. Such models will need to set out a framework of how such factors as disposition towards knowledge, professional education, practice experience and practice contexts influence whether practitioners engage in wise practice. The current context for youth workers may make such practice development less possible. For Batsleer (2010), the need to provide 'safe space' for young people is uncontested, however, this is, she asserts equally necessary for youth workers themselves. Such an opportunity would afford youth workers time for reflection and learning whilst also attempting to offer support, thereby preventing the risk of disillusionment, stress and possible burnout.

Litchfield (1999) related practice wisdom to dialogue and partnership in a participatory process within a paradigm of constructivism (knowledge which is borne out of the coming together of theories, ideas and experience). My analysis of the data suggested that practice wisdom is generated by participants in this study through their recognition of the value of self-development opportunities and commitment to life-long learning. For Brathay, this is



underpinned by the priority placed upon not only individual but organisational learning too in pursuit of their commitment to addressing social inequality it appeared that practitioners from Brathay still retained a level of oppositional and emancipatory practice borne out of more traditional ideas of Freire as the quotes from case studies at the Knowledge Exchange suggest.

- Participation contract is about engaging with the structures of power
- Critical/empathic pedagogy – enabling people to re-understand their lives, see that prior experiences haven't been their own failings but because of unequal power distribution/relationships. Enable them to take control and make choices
- What does 'education' do? Is it our aim to make people happy through our work, or to mobilise their discontent?
- Freire – teach people to question answers, not answer questions
- Emancipatory practices vs. placatory practices
- Raises very practical questions though...what are the implications for our GROUND LEVEL practice? This may be a different kind of YW, preparing people for frustration, defeat ('learning' politics and activism)

I would assert that this commitment was evidence of the intention of Brathay staff to develop their practice wisdom through the lens of praxis.

# Chapter 10: What does youth work 'practice wisdom' say about contemporary youth work practice?

Many youth workers would consider themselves 'craftspeople'. Their craft comprises a discreet set of skills unique to their role and of which they are very proud. In Greek a craftsman is 'demioergos' – a compound word made up of 'public' (demios), and productive (ergon) (Sennett 2009 cited in Nicholls 2012: 107). For the Greeks craftspeople had a civilising influence on society through their skilled production. The notion of social education became a central feature of youth work practice in the 1960's following the Albemarle report. For youth workers, their craft is the promotion of personal and social development through the use of a range of social educational methods.

Nicholls (2012:107) describes youth workers as having 'craft consciousness', a skill that few understand and partly explains the profession's struggle to explain what it does. The moral imperative ('phronesis') urges youth workers to do something good for the community and requires a high degree of emotional intelligence. This work has been identified as social pedagogy; its origins dating back to the pedagogues of Ancient Greece who were differentiated from teachers and had the responsibility to supervise the moral development of their charge rather than their formal learning (Cameron and Moss 2011).

The term was then brought back into use during the middle of the nineteenth century in Germany as a way of describing types of education that did not fit the formal schooling model. By the second half of the twentieth century, a number of European countries had begun to associate the term with social work and notions of social education. This shifted the focus of interventions towards a more holistic and educational approach incorporating a recognition and interest in social groups. According to Smith (2009), there has been a renewal of interest in the term following the growth of more integrated children's and young people's services in Britain over the last 15 years as a means by which to support the professional development of staff in these newly created, multi-professional practice settings, for example, Youth Offending Teams. The emphasis on integrated services has meant that social pedagogy is likely to grow as the need for a shared theoretical underpinning and practice is more apparent (Slovenko and Thompson 2015). Indeed I would contend that such a theoretical framework of social pedagogy could helpfully be used as a

threshold concept in critical debates within the youth work profession (Meyer and Land 2003). This is discussed in more detail in the conclusion.

Social pedagogues consider both individual and group needs, giving consideration to both agency and structure; whereby all educational environments are connected, for example, the family, schools and peer groups. This means that it is underpinned by the acknowledgement of the importance of context and the relationships that are developed within the specific environment. Some of its practitioners translate it as 'community education', for others, particularly in American literature, in more social work terms (Eriksson and Markström 2009). Cameron and Moss (2011) identify social pedagogy as possessing the following elements:

- The exploration of pedagogical methods that can be found in the philosophy of people like Rousseau and Pestalozzi
- Holistic in character – as Pestalozzi says, there is concern with head, heart and hand
- Concerned with fostering sociality both with individuals and in groups
- Based in relationship and care
- Oriented around group and associational life rather than individualised case work.

It is a multi-disciplinary practice, for example, drawing on sociology, psychology and education which embraces the holistic traditions of youth work practice and recognises that formal education is not the only site of learning. Indeed for Coburn (2011) the aim of critical pedagogy is, '*to raise consciousness to a new level that empowers people to build ideas and take responsibility for their actions*' (2011:62). This approach and its phronetic intentions was illustrated when describing the work of the Cumbria Participation Contract,

The key driver for practitioners is values; all youth work is about working with young people to look at their learning and developments, helping them have positive experiences. In this sense, the programme is broadly needs led, and offers young people the opportunity to be involved in a process which naturally up-skills and supports their empowerment, although it's all "value added" development, it's not fundamental to survival. The most important part is citizenship, having an understanding and empathy for other young people and the community at large, which is not generally something teenagers would consider. *Cumbria Participation Contract*

Case study material

## The relationship

Within social pedagogy, the relationship is frequently conceptualised as the key resource within the practice (Slovenko and Thompson 2015). To ensure that this remains ethical and helpful, reflective practice is valued as the key mechanism through which the practice evolves. 'Haltung', translated as ethos, mindset or attitude is the term within social pedagogy to ensure there remains congruence between one's actions and beliefs (Eichsteller and Holtorf 2010). The nature of the relationships established with young people was a recurrent theme in the analysis of the transcripts and, I would contend remains the defining characteristic in contemporary youth work practice.

Relationship-based practice (RBP) is difficult to define (Ruch et al 2010). However, for Wilson et al (2008:3) RBP places an emphasis on, '*the professional relationship as the medium through which the practitioner can engage with and intervene in the complexity of an individual's internal and external worlds*'. The practitioner in this context is self-aware, emotionally intelligent, and concerned with the establishment of environments in which the relationship can flourish. The importance of the development of relationships was also echoed in the Munro Review in 2011, '*the centrality of forming relationships with children and families to understand and help them has become obscured*' (Munro 2011: 8).

When considering the role of the relationship in the sphere of education, two related concepts emerge. Firstly, '*education for relationship*' and secondly, '*education through relationship*'. The former being the main reason for fostering learning, that is, the development of satisfying personal relationships, the latter providing the source of learning through the observation of the relationship between educators and learners. In other words, the quality of the relationship will sustain our curiosity as learners and therefore the capacity to see connections and discover new meanings (Salzberger-Wittenberg et al. 1990).

For Smith (2001), the fundamental purpose of the relationship lies in the fostering of learning either with an individual or group. The development of such relationships is a cornerstone of good youth work practice. It was intended that the nature of the 'relationship' would provide a focus for the examination of interventions with groups of young people in a similar way to an early, yet most significant contribution to this area of inquiry '*Working with Unattached Youth: Problem, approach, method*' Goetschius and Tash (1967).

A relationship is a connection between two people in which some sort of exchange takes place... it may be verbal, emotional, physical or intellectual, and is often all of these.

(Goetschius and Tash 1967: 137)

In the book, the writers make use of a range of methods and data gathering; worker's recordings, notes from supervision and meetings, and participant observation. This is encapsulated via the presentation of a range of case studies accompanied by commentaries from the authors. The Knowledge Exchange intended to adopt a similar process by engaging a range of academic 'experts' to deconstruct a range of case studies to be presented by the practitioners. Whilst not necessarily based on individual stories, it was hoped that the centrality of those relationships and the dialogic method would become explicit.

Carl Rogers argued that, *'The facilitation of significant learning rests upon certain attitudinal qualities that exist in the personal relationship between facilitator and learner'* (Rogers in Kirschenbaum and Henderson (eds.) 1990:305). Obviously, until an individual believes that their feelings and experiences are *'both respected and progressively understood'* (Thorne 1992: 26), they will not be willing to explore them in any depth. Once this feeling is in place, Rogers goes on to describe the core conditions for facilitative helping as, 'congruence' (realness), 'acceptance' and 'empathy'.

I was curious to know whether the youth workers possessed the qualities described above suggested by Rogers as the key to facilitate learning, and whether they were taught these skills in training. This was reflected in the development of the research question about the centrality of the dialogical method within practice. Of course, 'relationship' in this framework must not be seen in a solely individualised context; but retain a sense of the groups' association. For Bernstein, the role is *'to try and try again to foster and nurture those forms of communal life in which dialogue, conversation, phronesis, practical discourse, and judgment are concretely embodied in our everyday practices'* Bernstein (1983:229). However, the new focus on shorter term interventions with young people who may have complex needs makes the development of such relationships more problematic or challenging. Every encounter should be mutually respectful, nobody should be diminished through ANY interaction with us – ask ourselves “What are we delivering, and why?” By delivering this programme on the terms of the partners, are we just playing a part in replicating existing power structures? *Preston Pre-apprenticeship*

Case study material

The centrality and quality of the relationship, together with a reflection of the core themes of congruence, acceptance and empathy (Rogers 1967) was undoubtedly the most consistent thread across the transcripts.

And I think that's the crucial bit for me, it's communication consistently so young people know what my role is, how I can support them and that I will do it to the best of my ability, that I am consistent, if I say I'll do something or say I'll meet them, those nitty gritty bits that will always happen and it's always their choice in that way that what they want to do and what they want to achieve and how they want to do it within reason, we'll review it together and reflect and I will learn and support to the best of my ability again. *Participant C*

And,

And that ultimately I think it's about relational youth work at the end of the day, it's all about the relationships, if they are not formed the young people don't trust and what incentive is there for a young person to get involved in the project anyway? They have to see some benefit. *Participant A*

And,

I suppose thinking about the values; I started off with core values I suppose that I feel are important. I think it comes back to things like we've already talked about like relationships, communication, authenticity, consistency, continuity, all those kind of things that are building blocks I guess. That without those in place I feel that to achieve, or for young people to achieve, anything with my support or the support of any practitioner or professional within their life there's a disconnect unless those building blocks in place. Time to engage, build trust, feel comfortable. *Participant C*

Finally,

With these young people you can't just skim the surface, if you're engaging them and you're building trust with that comes responsibility and it could take months to build that trust up but then you get them on a residential and you can't then just suddenly go 'A sessional worker's going to take you to mentor' or we've had a few situations where on residential, and it's usually on residential because that's usually away from their own environment, that's when you're going to get all their stories and all the heavy stuff. *Participant E*

For one interviewee the lack of recognition on the part of the commissioner about this crucial aspect of the work and the time required, proved frustrating:

There's something lost and I'm not sure we're very good at evidencing how, for example, or even celebrating enough the fact that a young person has engaged with me, we've built a relationship, they'll talk to me about this, that and the other, so even if we've not got to a stage where they're actually going to achieve or do anything that they want to do, the fact that they are engaging and talking and meeting with me on their terms is a real triumph. But I don't think that the funder, and therefore, to a certain degree XXXX [Manager] because she's constrained by what she has to achieve as the manager, I don't feel there's necessarily that room for any celebration or real understanding in a way. *Participant C*

Building positive relationships with young people: there is a tension that the externally set timescales for establishing Youth Councils doesn't allow for the long term building of relationships. All meetings with young people are very task-focussed because there is an expectation that they need to deliver tangible results for their communities. *Cumbria Participation Contract*

Case study material

A 'relational' approach can be interpreted in multiple ways in different fields of practice, for example, it looks quite specific in health care or faith work. Conventionally, within social work and allied professions, it is seen as having relationships with young people which are often predicated upon a set of boundaries, working within a policy and procedural framework and delivering a range of interventions which might address a set of difficulties.

So boundaries, yes. The importance of contracting with people and staff, getting some understanding around how the staff are going to work together, what do we value, what do we have in common in terms of our practice and where we're coming from. How are we to deal with issues that arise, what process do we follow, clarity to the young people around who I am, my style, what I feel's important. *Participant B*

Young people might view these relationships with suspicion as they are frequently required to attend such projects and do not feel they have an opportunity to shape the nature of the relationship; Brendtro and Miller (2012:8) suggest that relationship should always 'trump' technique, allowing a young person to manage emotions, solve problems and build strengths.

Open 'relational' youth work looks different; it evolves from a negotiation with users in a 'needs-led' approach. It must be cognisant of complexity in the dynamics that are present by relating firstly to the experience of youth, whilst also relating to the uniqueness of each young person (Wilson et al 2008); the relational context is '*shaped by the collision of identities, realities and imaginations that merge into complex and ultimately unpredictable outcomes*' (Gharabaghi 2008:31).



## Dialogue and conversation

Part of my enquiry was to establish whether the 'dialogical' method still held a central place within youth work practice; this method being one of the cornerstones of the craft of youth work. In particular, could Practice-based evidence (PBE) be used to legitimise the principles and original premise of youth work practice by articulating and giving validity to its craft? Derived from the Greek *dia* meaning two and *logos* meaning speech, Friere identified thus, '*Dialogue is the encounter between men, mediated by the world, in order to name the world*' (Friere 1972:61).

According to Burbules (1993), it encompasses a number of virtues that include the following: concern, trust, respect, appreciation, affection and hope. Further, '*but at heart a kind of social relation that engages its participants*' (1993:19). Evidence of the role of the dialogical method was less apparent in the analysis undertaken per se, although those who recounted individual stories of young people's journeys had clearly been embracing dialogical methods in order to establish the relationships described above, for example,

We chat about all sorts, but it's a guided encounter in many ways.

*Participant C*

And,

The kind of crucial bits for me and then the kind of outcomes and everything that goes around that is things that I think, yeah great if it all ties up everyone's a winner in this situation, young person is happy, they've got to where they want to get to or they're working towards where they want to get to, the funder or whoever it is, the commissioner, is happy because they are seeing progress in whatever that may be and I've built up a good relationship with that young person that I feel that they're comfortable with me, they'll talk to me about what issues really frustrate or they find difficult and we have an open, honest relationship with whatever the boundaries are in place really because of my professional stance in the relationship. And I think that's the crucial bit for me. *Participant B*

## Conclusion

Despite the growth of 'evidence-based' interventions, the research material frequently ignores the growing evidence that shows interpersonal relationships lie at the core of effective practice, particularly with young people who have specific support needs, (Bateman, Hazel and Wright 2015; Bell et al, 2013; Beckett et al 2013, and Cairns, and Brannen, 2005). Time and time again, case study accounts will recall the young person identifying that what made the significant difference was the consistency of the trusting relationship they had with a particular care-giver. Indeed, for many working with the hardest to reach young people, relationships **are** the intervention, and engagement in the relationship, success (Gharabaghi 2008; Factor 2016).

For all participants, the recognition of the centrality of the relationship with a young person was evident. How this was compromised by context in certain circumstance was a frustration expressed by several interviewees, for example, limiting the time available and therefore reducing the potential to develop trust in a timely fashion. These frustrations are echoed in a number of articles published during this period, but in particular, Bell et al (2013) and Hughes et al (2014). Notwithstanding the contextual conditions which for some may limit the potential of the relationships established, one Brathay staff member accounted for the lack of evidence being generated being directly attributable to the prioritisation of the relationship,

But in terms of the relationships and what we evidence or record, it comes back to capacity I think, in terms of we're flat out trying to meet as many as we can, so the recording does sit right back and the evidencing of what we do, as important as it is, it doesn't happen enough because it's more important to go and meet Joe or Bill or whoever. *Participant C*

# Chapter 11: What contextual factors affect youth workers' ability to apply their practice wisdom?

The shift in commissioning procedures over the time period of working alongside Brathay had made enormous difference to the context, or 'social field' in which practice was undertaken as well as the actual nature of the work. This shift is underpinned by the national picture described in Chapter 2, and can be characterised by four underpinning factors of particular significance which were apparent in the interpretative analysis of the data and the subsequent thematic identification (see Figure 4). They are:

1. The increasingly complex needs of young people
2. The commissioning era
3. The need for outcome measurement, and
4. New forms of practice environments and working methods.

## 1. The increasingly complex needs of young people

A particular theme that became apparent in the data was the recognition that the complexity of the young people's needs was increasing. Evidence of whether this has a direct bearing upon the skills required by staff is explored further in this chapter. Concerns about the potential for staff to be engaged in practice outside of their professional comfort zone were inevitable consequences of Brathay's rapid expansion described earlier in Chapter 5. Additionally, for senior managers, there was a concern about practising at the 'edge' of youth work and what may in some circumstances depart from traditional and commonly understood methodologies.

It's tricky, what's the boundary between youth work and therapeutic intervention? I think the Family Nurturing Programme is interesting because it's so much of a work in progress, what we do next week will not be the same as what we do this week. *Participant H*

And,

So you have to work in that world which is challenging, constantly challenging. So I think those are additional skill sets or additional methods and ways of working that potentially are on top of what your normal kind of youth work and way of working would be. *Participant C*

Boundaries of practice – what we offered compared to what was needed and delivered. In particular, the families had complex needs which were beyond youth work and also required a longer intervention than was funded for. There was little experience or evidence of family work underpinning the intervention – youth work was delivered in a family context. *Family Nurturing Programme*

Case study material

This evidences the need for workers to be able to translate their youth work skill set and make it applicable to those with different needs and located within different settings. Establishing a new 'service' had brought these discussions to the fore when recruiting new staff and trying to identify what was required:

Well I guess from the initial stage it wasn't just about being a youth worker, it was looking at background and what experience you had of working with this particular group of young people because they do come, you know you can say they're vulnerable as are all young people and that's very true to say, but there are some threads of things to do with like they have attachments and boundaries and lots of deep childhood trauma kind of thing. *Participant E*

Concerns having secured the contract became apparent; I was aware of conversations that took place at the Knowledge Exchange about whether or not working with individual young people in a group setting known to have dealt drugs would generate new risks that had not previously been of concern in a youth work setting. Additionally, whether engagement in the service when they were under the influence of illegal substances was appropriate.

Here is the first dilemma – are generic youth work / youth development skills enough to engage with this group of young people? We have worked with individuals in care on courses previously, but only occasionally worked with groups of care leavers specifically. Do we have the expertise to meet the range of needs that individuals have (groups on programmes usually have some generic common need), and can we work with groups of diverse needs? *New Beginnings*

Case study material

This complexity is recognised by those in the work who are engaging with young people with multiple needs and the manager's responsibility to ensure the safety of all. Service managers were keen to suggest that the necessary support structures were in place:

With regular supervision we look at anything and safeguarding things that's always a topic. We have a team meeting, we regularly come together, at least monthly, to look at practice and also within the partnership steering group meetings we look at sharing best practice, that's on every agenda that you see in group meetings. *Participant E*

Inevitably this would not necessarily be a view shared by all frontline staff:

I still feel a little bit disconnected from say the host organisation which you're working directly for. So I work for Brathay but to come for something like today, again you start thinking this is right, this is what we do, but actually I'm kind of doing my work externally to Brathay most of the time, I will link up with XXXX now and again but actually as a whole the organisation doesn't necessarily know what I am doing or how I do it. And I still think there's a disconnect again between theory embedded into practice and practitioners having the luxury of time to come in and go 'This is what we do do, this is how I do work in XXXX, or this is what I do. *Participant C*

When describing a particularly challenging young man, this interviewee described the nature of the work she needed to undertake in order to manage risks for the individual concerned, other users and staff:

It's not even just skills it's the risk responsibility. But I got in touch with professionals concerning him that I knew of, so I knew he'd had a mentor, an unofficial mentor at Children's Services, and a CAMHS worker, kind of hunted

this woman down because she wasn't officially, she'd signed him off ages ago, but I just did a bit of detective work and had to speak with her and got a bit more of a background. So this was something that was brought up at the next meeting like what are we going to do because we want to still keep him engaged but there's only so much, we're not counselors, we're not therapists, and this chap also had all this in the past and he's still repeating patterns. So there's just been a bit more risk assessment going back to the social workers and trying to establish a bit more of what we do in those situations and making sure that. *Participant E*

This experience was not isolated within the New Beginnings team as the material below illustrates,

Practitioners are scared in working with such vulnerable young people. There is a lack of knowledge surrounding the area. We need to be honest about our skill set and the scope of our intervention. *Brighter Futures*

Case study material

The constraints of the new regime of Outcome-Based Performance Management (OBPM) meant that suddenly, staff at Brathay had found themselves working with young people whose complex needs might have previously been addressed elsewhere. Now due to the need to remain contract compliant, there were times when real concern was expressed for both the young people attending as well as the staff supporting them. One project was brave enough to go back to the funder and re-negotiate the terms of the contract as a result of the amount of time it was taking to engage the target group and the inevitability of missing its targets. This approach was welcomed by the funder and additional resources made available for the purpose. The lack of understanding by the sales team, responsible for negotiating the contract, about the length of time such engagement would take, was evident.

## 2. The commissioning era

According to Ofsted, (2011:8):

Commissioning is the process for deciding how to use the total resource available for children, young people and parents and carers in order to improve outcomes in the most efficient, effective, equitable and sustainable

way. Provision can be commissioned from within local authorities as well as from external providers, and can be a mix of the two.

Since the 1980s, governments have increasingly contracted-out non-core services through public procurement. Contracting-out services through public procurement can be seen as a mechanism to delegate the provision of public services, for others it serves to be used as a tool for regulation and control (Holley 2014). A number of guidance documents have been produced by central government to assist local authorities in the process.<sup>28</sup> For youth services, a very clear direction was indicated by the DfE in its evidence to the Education Committee on youth services in 2011,

... we want to stimulate a fundamental shift in the role of local authorities in services for young people to enable a radical re-engineering of provision so more is delivered by voluntary and community organisations, greater private sector involvement leads to greater leverage for public funding, and local authorities themselves become strategic commissioners.

(Services for Young People: Third Report of Session 2010-12:73)

Commissioning had proved successful for the larger organisations in the sector, and like others, Brathay had been the beneficiary of the new era of commissioning services as described earlier in Chapter 5. However, the environment generated a number of significant challenges for staff responsible for contract compliance.

Yes, we have designed a programme that looks effective, will get us the funds and will address a service need, but at the point of design we are now not sure if we can deliver what the young people need – it's far more complex than it first looked. This is a dilemma. *Brighter Futures*

Case study material

The nature of the new commissioning regime meant that the impact upon staff at Brathay was not only in their actual engagement with young people which was in some cases viewed through a different lens by commissioners, but also meant that their own terms and

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<sup>28</sup> Modernising commissioning: increasing the role of charities, social enterprises, mutuals and cooperatives in public service delivery, Cabinet Office, 2010; [www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/resource-library/modernising-commissioning-green-paper](http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/resource-library/modernising-commissioning-green-paper). Joint planning and commissioning framework for children, young people and maternity services, Department for Education, 2006; <http://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/EarlyYearseducationandchildcare/Page9/ecm-joint-framework>

conditions of employment were significantly altered. The impact upon projects appeared to manifest in three key areas which are highlighted below.

Firstly, in order to ensure staff retained an income, coupled with uncertainties about contract renewal, stability and consistency in staffing levels were variable as some sought more permanent contracts when they became available. Secondly, the opportunities to share learning were significantly impaired as staff that had made the necessary contacts and had devised new methods of engagement and interventions at project inception moved on. Whilst the desire to share new learning and practice was apparent, opportunities were diminished.

The problem you've got is because of the nature of the tendering process and the short term contracts all the staff and all the knowledge that gets built moves on because people can't wait around. So the whole structure of the way the County Council does it severely restricts what can be achieved anyway. *Participant A*

And,

And I know at the end of this I haven't necessarily got a job cos I'm contracted to the project, not Brathay so there's all of those things that play constantly on you and you kind of think well after year 2 I'll start thinking well I'm going to have to look for something again which might be a bit more secure. *Participant C*

Finally, staff struggled to manage expectations within the limitations of the contract they were responsible for; this was particularly apparent where the contract stipulated the engagement with a target number of young people during the reporting periods within the 'payment by results' schedule. This created a number of ethical tensions as evidenced in the following case study material,

The 'design vs. delivery' tension is ever-present. We must apply for contracts in order to sustain our work, so we find ourselves committed to delivering work which is on the boundary of our organisational expertise. Practitioners find themselves under immense pressure to deliver against targets which they only have limited understanding of, usually within tight budgets. Results in 'papering over the cracks'. Brathay has thrived on its reputation for excellence, but this could easily be lost through a few badly delivered programmes. *Cumbria Participation contract*



The time-bound nature of the potential engagement with a young person, coupled with the particular project's geographical reach and the subsequent distances travelled meant that staff had to re-draw their own expectations of what could be achieved within the limitations of the contract. The high standards they had previously set for themselves were frequently compromised as the need for contract compliance became a reality and staff had to balance this against client need.

- Need to listen to families as well as the state
- Need to be clear about what we are NOT addressing as well as what we do offer
- Need an initial diagnostic phase. *Brighter Futures*

Case study material

Also, some found they were undertaking the work previously offered by statutory services which were also struggling so 'off-loaded' tasks to the youth work staff further reducing the time available to develop the kind of relationships with both young people and different agencies responsible for their welfare. Combined this meant that ethical tensions were apparent in the ways projects reported or made claims about what they had achieved and for some the nature of the outcomes expected were wholly unrealistic.

The more we get [young people] the better report looks back to the Lottery, if we don't achieve these we might not get the funding, so you can't even then have a funding to build so you know so it's all that kind of juggling I suppose or maintaining the bits that work. As a practitioner you know the bits that work are the relationships, working with young people on a regular basis so they will take on new challenges potentially being supported, but that's the bit that doesn't really have anything in terms of outcomes when you're recording. *Participant C*

*Interviewer: So that's almost like the hidden unsaid, underground level of what's going in terms of what the funders might see.*

Say plants that are growing, you don't see that bit until it comes up.  
*Participant C*

The ethical tensions with regard to reporting were also apparent in the responses given by one manager in particular,

I am utterly in the middle of that on a constant basis because I'm responsible for the financial management of all the contracts, I'm responsible for liaising with the leadership team, and I'm responsible for holding my delivery team together at the same time and the priorities of our leadership team and our delivery team couldn't be more starkly different often and I'm the one that has to be that in between buffer always. *Participant D*

### 3. The need for outcomes measurement

For many who are operating within the new commissioning environment, success is now judged upon the attainment of outcomes. As a result, if managers accept there is a lot about outcomes that they cannot control, they become adept at manipulating data by managing things they can control. These issues are frequently described as technical challenges in methods of data collection that can be overcome (Perrin 1998). For example, for some, particularly in the 'Payment by Results' context, there are accusations of 'cherry-picking' those who are easier to help. Consequently, according to Lowe, (2013), managers will adapt their behaviour to meet the newly constructed targets. Additionally, the impact of OBPM on frontline staff has frequently been cited as the reason for less time being spent with young people developing relationships, and more time collecting data in order to prove effectiveness (Keevers et al 2012). Consequently, OBPM often distorts the priorities and practices of practitioners as the comments below illustrate:

- The programme represented the school goals not the young people's goals
- The school has failed, that's why they are blaming kids and getting us in
- Who are the clients –the young people or the school? *Kick Start*

Case study material

A stark example of how OPBM can translate into delivery targets was illustrated by the following quote:

Well over 3 years we're supposed to have 260 outcomes so obviously to get all those outcomes it means working with 260 young people and getting all of the outcomes out of all of them which you've really got to work with about 400 haven't you of which there's probably only scraping that many in the barrel, in the pot, so to speak. And some of them won't engage and some of them have left care and don't want anything to do with anything to do with children's services so they're in the statistics as well. *Participant E*

New commissioning and reporting mechanisms meant that the desire for measurable impact was a priority.

That's another really tricky one because we have set outcomes from the Big Lottery that we have to meet, they're not ones that we disagree with fundamentally, but equally in order to get the money to carry on working with the young people we've got to get those outcomes at all costs and some of these people they just desperately need just our time, endless time, that we don't have and we have that constant problem of trying to. *Participant D*

Due to some unhelpful experiences identified in the case studies, the organization had been much clearer about the need for integrating client need and evaluative tools alongside targets where possible,

The importance of aligning model of change for young people with the client outcomes and being explicit about why the programme might create change for the school. *Kick Start*

Case study material

And,

The Brathay Research Hub worked with the Project Team to produce an evaluation brief, to ensure that the building blocks of programme evaluation are included in design throughout, e.g. Outcomes, quantitative and qualitative data collection; 'distance travelled' tools etc. *Preston pre-apprenticeship*

Case study material

There are a number of outcomes frameworks already in use with young people<sup>29</sup>, and also some tools which attempt to capture a more quantitative measure of progress, for example, Goodman et al's Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire for adolescents and NPC's Wellbeing Measure (2011). Within such frameworks, a first assessment is used to provide a baseline measure which is repeated at timely intervals during the intervention. Such standardised measures can often focus on deficits and subsequently can pathologise difficulties experienced rather than focussing on the more positive outcomes identified earlier (Smith 1994). They have also been accused of not being accessible to young people that may have literacy or learning difficulties and often employ normative measures<sup>30</sup>.

A more well-known tool is the Outcomes Star which captures the more subjective indicators of progress and is based upon a 'cycle of change' approach. It identifies five key stages which move through 'being stuck', 'accepting help', 'believing', 'learning to reach potential' and finally, 'self-reliance'. It has been reinvented by a range of providers and over twenty versions now exist designed to measure change<sup>31</sup>. Its limitation is that it remains a subjective measure based upon a highly individualised baseline, making aggregation problematic for those keen to have a more robust evidence base. Finding tools which can adequately capture such progress remains somewhat elusive although there is considerable energy being devoted to the endeavour, (see Centre for Youth Impact<sup>32</sup>). How outcomes are conceptualised and applied to practice can also be problematic,

Outcome one at the moment is increase self-esteem, increase emotional resilience and increase practical life skills which are three outcomes in one so we're actually it's like people are saying 'How do you know if you've got outcome one, cos they might have learnt to cook and got a great practical life skill but didn't really say their self-esteem is raised and emotional resilience.

*Participant E*

Whilst there was a general acceptance amongst staff that you had to "*be in the game to play it*" *Participant D*, how such outcomes are measured and reported remained a tension when balancing it alongside the needs of the young person. For many, the issue was about

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<sup>29</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/outcomes-frameworks-a-guide-for-providers-and-commissioners-of-youth-services>

<sup>30</sup> The term *normative assessment* refers to the process of comparing one test-taker to his or her peers.

<sup>31</sup> [www.outcomesstar.org.uk](http://www.outcomesstar.org.uk)

<sup>32</sup> [www.youth-impact.uk](http://www.youth-impact.uk)

relationship building with extremely vulnerable young people, many of whom had been in the system for a number of years.

What we're doing is kind of running with the mess at the moment and just saying OK, how does it look? How does it feel? What is it achieving? What's the impact on the young person's life and their involvement in it? Because there's loads of different ways we could measure it in terms of yeah you've got your outcomes but one of the big ones for us at the moment is can we even get them back five times or more in a year as well as what issues and what's the long term benefit for a young person, where do they go in 5 years' time, has this had an impact on their lives or not? So it's kind of living in this mess while we try and play around with different models and then somehow we need to capture it ready for, whether it would be there for the re-tendering process I don't know. *Participant D*

Further,

If you're being realistic, and as a funder I'm not sure that that's the case, you won't achieve hard, tangible outcomes within the first 6 months and I would even argue that if you were claiming that you have done then actually they should be looked at quite strongly and picked apart really. I would say for a service like this you look over the 3 years you would say you're not going to achieve anything for that first 6 months but that's where the growing bit, again using that metaphor, that's when the underground stuff has happened that's when you start then and through that. *Participant C*

Concerns about making such claims in terms of what had been achieved were mentioned in the previous section. This was coupled with a desire to ensure that practitioners and indeed the organisation more widely did not buy into any unethical practice when reporting on their work by making unsubstantiated claims. The application of outcomes frameworks therefore remains problematic across youth work settings. There are a number of issues in their application firstly, how to define indicators from measuring outcomes that are meaningful but do not distort practice, attribute responsibility where these are shared, and acknowledge the distorting effects of performance management per se and secondly, how to account for unintended consequences (Lowe 2013).

For example, we know that the actual impact of any intervention is determined by the context within which it is received and understood in terms of the complexity of the life it intends to change and therefore it is extremely difficult to begin to understand impact in people's lives (Widdershiven and Sohl 1999). Such an understanding would require the use of both intensive quantitative and qualitative longitudinal research methods (Shalock and Bonham 2003). Instead many use what Smith (1997) calls '*tracer conditions*' or proxy measures which are simpler and cheaper to collect. Whilst such an approach gathers data which can be used for comparative purposes over time, it removes any depth of understanding within context.

Also, how can we attribute an impact to a particular intervention? For any information on outcomes to be robust, it must be able evidence that the intervention caused the outcome (Shalock and Bonham 2003). No service could possibly claim to have complete control over whether or not such an outcome was achieved. The response to such criticism has been to develop new methodologies, hence 'theory of change' or 'logic models' which visually map causal chains of impact. Outcomes are not the result of a linear process; to suggest so is to conceptualise an individual's journey as far too simplistic. This concern and recognition of multiple influences and the subsequent difficulties of attribution was described as follows,

One of my concerns is when we try to measure the progress a young person has journeyed, is whose making the assessment of where they started and where they are actually journeying to and how can you say that the piece of work that you are doing is responsible for that journey that goes on? So I think there's recognition that there's multiple influences in the lives of a young person that can bring about transformation. *Participant B*

And,

I think concerns too strong a word, but I think that unless you have that, then to claim in a way that because you've worked with these young people they now have achieved x, y and z I think it isn't authentic and I think potentially the difficulty for a practitioner is that we have to work towards outcomes, I fully understand that, that's kind of where we are at, but it's ensuring that that is because of relationships you've built up, because trust has been developed over a period of time, and judging everyone as different completely and what they want to achieve is important and not the what the outcomes state that should be achieved. *Participant C*

Research Hub staff at Brathay had recognised that this was an issue for its staff, particularly following the rapid expansion through new funding (YSDF) and subsequent diverse nature of the practice being undertaken. Consequently, they had begun to engage in the debates across the sector more widely and as a result, the Catalyst Consortium Outcomes Framework (2012) had been introduced as a tool that would enable staff to have a shared language to describe the impact of their interventions in the lives of vulnerable young people. For some, this proved a useful mechanism to retain a sense of a '*shared repertoire*' or '*community of practice*' (Lave and Wenger 1991).

...all of those personal development things so confidence and all that sort of stuff. And that is our bread and butter, our day-to-day stuff but bids were coming in and all of those things and the outcomes that people were aiming towards I believe were distal because they were client driven so things like right I want you to reduce offending or I want you to increase attainment and it's like ok I don't think we can promise that but it was getting written into all of our outcomes and aims and I don't think that's right because I don't think we can say we do that. But what we can say we do is we'll support young people to be more motivated or all those things that underpin the distal stuff and I think catalyst names those proximal things and so it gives people somewhere to hang their hat and say 'Yeah actually this is recognised on a national level'. And it's our day-to-day stuff, it's what we do anyway and so it gives them language to use in different contexts I think and that language is a shared language and it's a shared language within the organisation so between sales, leadership, practitioners, we've got a shared language there. *Participant F*

Further,

Catalyst framework's been really good because although there's all this different practice and all this different training that's happened what it does is it actually aligns us in terms of our values and in terms of what is really important to value as a professional working with young people. I think on that level that's been one of the greatest discoveries for me, the bigger picture understanding. *Participant B*

Retaining the centrality of the young person's voice and what remained important within their life was also a concern that the requirement of outcomes had been placed centre stage once

more. For interviewees the need to retain the opportunities for young people to be heard was crucial regardless of the context within which they were operating. Put simply,

There's no point reporting on outcomes if they're not important to the young person concerned. *Participant E*

#### **4. New forms of practice environments and methods of working**

I think the other thing that I've found, and I don't think it's necessarily to do with practice but just with the partners that you choose, making sure that they are fully au fait with what's happening and what isn't and what is needed to start from day one and actually what is their buy-in, not just a lip service buy-in, what actually is it? I'm having most of my time is spent chasing partners and sorting out problems in partnerships. *Participant E*

Partnership working was proving extremely resource-intensive as new relationships needed to be established with a range of new partners in the new projects funded by the YSDF at Brathay.

A considerable amount of practitioners' time is spent on maintaining partnerships and managing the delivery of the contract through planning meetings with Council officers and other youth work providers. *Cumbria Participation Contract*

Case study material

The very nature of the practice for some had changed the actual environment in which the intervention was delivered, for example, from group work into one-to-one support work. Managing a caseload was a new experience for some and also required new relationships to be built with partners from different agency cultures and professional backgrounds who did not necessarily understand the nature of youth work practice and as a result did not necessarily value it. Brathay staff had recognised the tensions this was causing as competing agendas came together.



As a youth work organisation, dedicated to social justice, it is our responsibility to think about ways in which we can influence and educate our partner organisations in order to improve the conditions which lead to disadvantage. At ground level, this means open critical dialogue with partners/officers. *Cumbria Participation Contract*

Case study material

The historical power differentials between providers were also ever-present,

...and the difficulty with that is because we're clearly not a statutory service and always tension between say statutory service, this is what we have to do, we have to tick these boxes, and they can see a charity or a service like ours as being 'Well I don't know what they do really, it's a bit of an add-on, seems to be ok. *Participant A*

And,

The social workers depending on them individually will either be great and will get in touch with me and will be proactive or won't even answer emails or this, that and the other. So you have to work in that world which is challenging, constantly challenging. *Participant C*

This dynamic was also apparent in the way responsibilities were allocated within new multi-agency partnership projects, that had multiple stakeholders, primarily with regard to those that had statutory duties, in this context, access to symbolic capital was often denied youth workers,

This is a partnership programme, but partners are unequal as a result of who controls purse strings. *Preston Pre-apprenticeship*

Case study material

Role boundaries were acknowledged but also the opportunities that partnership working could offer in terms of achieving better experiences or outcomes for young people

So you have to be obviously very flexible which again in youth work you always do but that's the bit of when then the benefits of the partnership

working is apparent. I can't go to a young person and say to him 'You're in a place where foster care has kicked you out or whatever and I'm going to be able to sort it', but I can go and speak to your social worker or I can go and speak to someone. So there is that kind of boundaries in the way that I work and it's that you're not trying to be, and you have to be clear with the young person, I'm not trying to be someone who's going to be able to counsel you or able to support you or sort something out necessarily in the moment, now. Again there are frustrations because you can't. *Participant C*

When describing an experience which involved working directly alongside new partners, in this case school-based staff, these professional tensions become very apparent,

"Oh yeah I felt at the edge of my practice in terms of managing the staff, they displayed less than OK behaviour and were shocking in the way that they spoke to the kids – lots of critical parent. So I had to manage them and the group. I side lined them to some extent, but also had to keep them onside as I needed them on board with the practice to really support me to manage the behaviour when it was really escalating. The staff even tried to get me to 'guilt trip' the group – I wasn't comfortable with that and didn't do it. This was a practice dilemma – keeping the visiting staff on board – they didn't really understand what we did and so easily sabotaged it. They needed to just observe and learn". *Kick start*

Case study material

Newer contracts had also meant that Brathay were delivering projects across a wider geographical area. This combination had led to a 'disconnect' between practice, practitioners and the organisation for three of the participants, described by one as,

Feel a little bit disconnected from say the host organisation which you're working directly for. So I work for Brathay but to come for something like today, again you start thinking this is right, this is what we do, but actually I'm kind of doing my work externally to Brathay most of the time, I will link up with XXXX (line manager) now and again but actually as a whole the organisation doesn't necessarily know what I am doing or how I do it. And I still think there's a disconnect again between theory embedded into practice and practitioners having the luxury of time to come in and go 'This is what we do do, this is how I do work in XXXX [area], or this is what I do. *Participant C*

The increase in lone working, seen by some as a direct result of the target-led nature of the contracts, had meant that the opportunities for learning from colleagues in a team environment, was also reduced.

My mind keeps going back to just being aligned with the staff, aligned in terms of your outcomes, your values and your style and how you're going to do this together and appear to work as a strong team and I think put more time into building that relationship with staff and being really clear about what it is that we expect of each other and how it's going to work, I think it could have benefitted massively from that. *Participant B*

The wider concerns about missed opportunities for professional development to support the new ways of working and then sharing this new learning were also apparent amongst the same three participants,

I think that's the thing, you kind of think where is the personal development working here, what am I actually getting out of this to make me a better practitioner, where's my training that runs alongside the work I'm doing, well there isn't any. *Participant C*

And,

I think there's a lot of new knowledge coming in. but actually what are we doing and why we doing it and how are we doing it and why are we doing it this way? We're not unpacking. *Participant B*

And,

I think we've got the skills base but we're never going to have the capacity because of the constraints, the staff are 17.5 hours a week but 50% of the time's got to be in face-to-face work. The rest of the time is preparing or writing up on IYSS [management information system], it just won't happen. *Participant A*

In current financial and target-driven climate, all the 'nice to haves' (peer reflection, planning time, best practice, observations, things that absolutely should happen) that make you better at what you do, that makes the difference, are squeezed out. *Cumbria Participation Contract* Case study material

## Conclusion

The dominance of OBPM on the sector has been inescapable. In particular, the repositioning of the voluntary sector, previously a critical friend of government and the advocate of those in need, becomes compromised to levels unheard of in its long history. Unsurprisingly, the impact of the above has been the increased marketisation of the profession, demoralising cuts, a reduced capacity to voice opinion, and a distinct lack of confidence to challenge the imposed neoliberal order in order to survive resulting in a further re-configuring of the social field. As a result, according to Davies, (2013), the incorporation of the voluntary sector into these dominant political agendas,

...was evidence of the much wider and often willing, colonisation of the voluntary sector by the state, its ideology and its policy priorities which posed a serious threat to a much prized independence.

(Davies, 2013:14)

This, together with the lack of opportunity for professionals to debate the impact of OBPM on their practice is cited by Hughes et al (2014) as a significant loss to the sector and links with the absence of a significant voice,

Not all parties or all advocates of particular marginalised lived experiences are allowed to sit at the table of official meaning-making.

(Kincheloe and Barry 2004:11, in Hughes et al, 2014:5)

They continue,

Consequently, this silence within strategic policy decision-making results in a diminished understanding of what community and youth work is and thus its value to society is often marginalised. Given providing opportunity for 'voice' is a fundamental tenet of youth work practice (Gormally and Coburn, 2013), it is concerning that the same opportunities are not afforded to practitioners.

(Hughes et al 2014:5)

Brathay staff appeared a highly committed workforce; frequently evidenced by individuals exceeding their hours most weeks. When explored in depth this was conceptualised by several interviewees as a result of the recognition that cuts other services had sustained had

left an impact upon the young people and therefore the youth worker remained the only person to ensure the individual did not fall 'through the net' of service intervention as the local authority retreated to its minimum standard statutory obligations. This "terror" is explained thus,

That all of the support services for young people are so in pieces now across the county, County Council's failed its Ofsted around safeguarding and looked after young people so they're in disarray. They've got another £18million to cut and you think we can't flipping manage now, what are we going to do. So I think my terror about this job is having on my conscience a lack of ability to do something when it's really needed and young people are going to fall through those cracks, young people are properly going to hurt themselves, they're properly going to be destitute as a result of all of this stuff. *Participant D*

When describing the situation faced by the youth service in Newcastle, Bell et al (2013) further characterise the shift as a move away from a stated commitment to equality to one which is characterised as 'fairness'

There is no longer an even partial acknowledgement that those who are suffering most from impact of 'austerity' are well placed to inform what it is they need. The new contract is deliverable for a short time to a targeted few who are merely objects of the process and have no idea even that an intervention is coming their way.

(Bell et al, 2013:91)

The theme of tensions in practice was most apparent amongst Brathay interviewees. Their frustration at the lack of time to do the work required coupled with onerous reporting regimes designed to evidence outcomes or impact was frequently articulated as was the resource-intensive nature of establishing new partnership relationships,

Currently, the programme has met with several unforeseen obstacles, which are being addressed by the project team. Most of these obstacles seem to have arisen as a result of the difficulties of working in partnership, e.g. miscommunication or misunderstanding of aims, process or constraints. These issues are not insurmountable, but the programme's success does rely upon maintaining an effective partnership approach with a shared and

The ways in which contracts had the potential to compromise their ability to develop and engage in fruitful and meaningful relationship building was a reoccurring theme. Reconciling funder's needs for evidence which may be at odds with the young people's priorities remained frustrating. Devising ways to circumvent systems whilst trying to maintain an ethical engagement with young people became embedded as part of day-to-day practice, an adaptation of their youth work 'habitus'.

The focus on targeted interventions rather than the more traditionally oriented process-based practice, together with the drive for measurement and outcomes frameworks rather than relationship building, and the replacement of grant aid by tendering processes has meant that competition in the marketplace rather than 'caring' is the order of the day (Bell et al 2013). Consequently, the opportunities for staff engaged with young people to generate their practice wisdom through the more traditional mechanisms of praxis become diminished as the influence of context trumps what is left of process. Notwithstanding these challenges there was evidence of a commitment in the management team to enable an honest, reflective action-learning process to remain

I'm hoping we'll get to a place where the reviews at the end of programmes will do that, will start saying well we planned to do this but actually we did this, why did we do this and actually shall we change what we're going to do in future as a result or did we get it wrong. *Participant D*

Additionally, when describing the priorities for recruiting staff, a manager described the process thus,

If I had the choice, if I had someone qualified up to the hilt but was a bit kind of you don't warm to them quite the same or somebody that's got experience but maybe hasn't quite, may need to make sure he knows more about this, this and this but clearly has that empathy and compassion, I know who I'd choose cos I think that's easier to teach than that. I'm not saying you couldn't teach that, I've never tried, as you could teach youth work skills and

that's why I'd rather work with somebody to teach somebody, you know go on a First Aid course and go on a Safeguarding, Level 2. But I think he goes the extra mile, he doesn't just, he wouldn't just leave anything and you can tell by the way he talks. *Participant E*

This provides a further insight into the priority still given to the qualities associated with relationship-based practice regardless of context.

# Chapter 12: Can engagement in a Knowledge Exchange help youth workers theorise practice and thereby generate ‘practice-based evidence’?

## Knowledge translation

Decision-making in professional practice settings is rarely linear and is more likely to involve a range of inputs and cyclical, iterative processes and decisions are informed by a spectrum of evidence, rather than research evidence alone.

(Armstrong et al, 2014:526)

There is an assumption that by closing the research-practice gap, there will be an increase in policy and practice effectiveness, both in terms of cost and individual/client outcomes. However, according to Gabbay and May (2004), it is estimated that securing evidence uptake may take up to 10 years if it occurs at all. The Cooksey Review of publicly-funded health research in the UK (Black 2006), highlighted two key gaps, firstly in translating ideas from research into new products and approaches; and secondly, putting those products and approaches into practice. Furthermore, it is now recognised that getting evidence into, or indeed out of, policy and practice is neither a straightforward or linear process and to view it as such may be misleading (Visram et al, 2014).

While there is a recognised need to bridge the disconnect between research and practice, according to Fazey et al (2013), there are signs that the way research is being conducted, facilitated, and funded, and the relationship between science and society is changing. This may be due to the demands for publicly funded research to be accountable by demonstrating its economic and social impact (ESRC, 2009, 2012). Consequently, there appears to be more emphasis on the opportunities to enhance the sharing of knowledge, and the development of innovative mechanisms to encourage researchers to find ways of generating policy- and practice-related ‘impact’ from their research (Phillipson et al., 2012).



Unsurprisingly, there is an increased awareness of the importance of research fields that study the process of research itself, for example, 'implementation science', 'knowledge translation', 'knowledge management' and 'research impact'. For Rushmer et al (2014), these fields are both activities aiming to encourage implementation and practice, and research that aims to understand the processes shaping the sharing and integration of knowledge.

Within this new approach, traditional assumptions of academic researchers as the sole producers of knowledge are replaced by a focus upon the co-production of knowledge between researchers, decision-makers and other beneficiaries of research. Such an approach gives recognition to the value of different forms of knowledge (e.g. local and scientific) and inclusion of diverse voices to find more innovative solutions and ensure research is relevant, valid and practical (Raymond et al., 2010, cited in Fazey, 2013:205). It can include a range of concepts such as co-production, transfer, storage, transformation, integration and translation of knowledge and social learning; each concept has very different implied meanings depending upon context and audience as well as implications for the methods used (Fazey et al., 2013).

The term 'knowledge translation' (KT) is increasingly used to describe the work required to close or bridge these gaps (Dimino 2007). Knowledge translation, transfer and exchange have become commonly used, but the terms are not clearly defined, and often used interchangeably in many areas of health and social care. For example, Bjork et al (2013) create a cyclical model of knowledge translation in nursing education by developing a method to explore the potential of the three sided relationship between researchers, educators and frontline line practitioners, in this case nurses. They recognise that such work is collaborative and resource-intensive and requires organisational support at all levels.

Such models are however recognised as key mechanisms for improving service efficiency (Visram et al 2014). According to Rychetnik, such processes can be defined as the *'adoption of strategies to optimize the uptake and use of research findings to inform evidence based policy and practice'* (Rychetnik et al. 2012 in Armstrong et al 2014:526).

One particular method of knowledge translation is 'knowledge exchange', a broad concept defined as *'a process of generating, sharing, and/or using knowledge through various methods appropriate to the context, purpose, and participants involved'* (Fazey et al., 2013:26) Methods used within knowledge exchange processes are diverse, ranging from simple transfer of information (e.g. presentations), teaching, and management of knowledge,

through to computerised knowledge management systems. Obviously occurring in formal organised, designed and intentional ways, increasingly knowledge exchange can also take place within the context of informal implicit processes (e.g. via social media). In their review of methods designed to promote the implementation of research findings, Bero et al. (1998) conclude that undertaking reviews in the area of knowledge transfer and exchange (KT/E) is complicated by *'the inherent complexity of process and the variability in the methods used and the difficulty of generalizing study findings across various healthcare settings'* (Bero et al. 1998: 468).

For Hofer, (2000), the way knowledge exchange is conducted will be informed by the way knowledge exchange is conceptualised, which in turn is influenced by epistemological beliefs, for example are there knowable facts or is everything in the social world constructed through the subjective lens of experience? Kirschbaum (2008) explains this further by offering the example, where the belief is that if knowledge is something that can be passed onto others it is probably based upon a positivistic epistemology and will therefore be delivered via a more structured and didactic method using a one-way process, for example, teaching (Kirshbaum, 2008). Whereas, those who favour a more subjectivist perspective will believe that knowledge is more dependent upon the individual's perspective or understanding and will acknowledge multiple types of knowledge production, shaped and constructed by experience and background. Consequently, such a view will result in knowledge exchange activities that encourage mutual learning between different stakeholders drawn from traditional research settings as well as practice.

This is evidenced by Visram et al (2014) in their study of how health professionals conceptualised KT/E whereby knowledge exchange was described by participants as,

...involving two-way movement of information between or within groups; essentially, a dialogue between knowledge producers and consumers speaking the same (professional) language. Participants spoke about academic knowledge as a fixed commodity which can be exchanged or transferred, reflecting a common and enduring view of KT/E as predominantly about getting research into practice.-KT/E processes were described as driven by an academic agenda, but the importance of involving end-users was also emphasized in order to ensure that research is relevant and usable in real-world settings.

(Visram et al 2014:501)

Participants in this study gave examples of KT/E taking place within teams or professions, between those who '*speak the same language and are at the same level of knowledge*' (Visram, 2014:499). This involved two-way exchange or information-sharing and, as such, was perceived as less top-down than knowledge transfer. The study went on to show that KT/E processes were often characterised driven by an academic agenda, however there was also an acknowledgement of the importance of involving research-users in order to ensure that research is retains a relevance to the context in which it is expected to impact, thereby remaining usable in real-life practice settings.

## The Knowledge Exchange

The University of Bedfordshire received funding for the Knowledge Exchange from the Economic Social Research Council (ESRC) who define the activity as follows,

Knowledge exchange is a two-way process where social scientists and individuals or organisations share learning, ideas and experiences. We are committed to knowledge exchange and encouraging collaboration between researchers and business, public and civil society. By creating a dialogue between these communities, knowledge exchange helps research to influence policy and practice.<sup>33</sup>

Due to the rapid expansion of services via the YSDF, Brathay as an organisation was so busy '*delivering*' the programmes, assessing their effectiveness had become a much lower priority than previously. The research evidence base was also evolving constantly, making it difficult for practitioners to keep up to date with new research and practice developments. These difficulties were compounded by limited time and competing priorities. As a result, staff from the Research Hub were regularly being drawn into supporting the work by reviewing the latest evidence and sharing it in summary form with their colleagues. "*We were doing the thinking for them*". This awareness triggered a number of internal practice development events which were designed to help the practitioners describe and understand further the work they were undertaking and why they chose certain interventions.

These activities included the delivery of a workshop to Senior Youth Workers (SYW's) and Regional Development Managers (RDM's) within the organisation to explore professional lifelines and professional identities (McKimm and Phillips 2009). The session was attended by nine practitioners; all of whom were in senior/managerial roles and were selected as they

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<sup>33</sup> <http://www.esrc.ac.uk/collaboration/knowledge-exchange/>

would be responsible for shaping the nature of the subsequent knowledge exchange in January 2012 via the creation of a number of case studies with their project teams. The session was well received; participants appeared engaged and enthusiastic and a number of themes were identified that informed the subsequent stages of the process, including the case study development. The collated views can be found in Appendix 2. In consultation with the staff at the Research Hub and those that had participated in the workshop in the autumn of 2011, the aim of the knowledge exchange event was agreed as follows:

To generate practice-based evidence – knowledge which is local and contingent, research that is constitutive of difference and critical, and builds theory as an adjunct to practice.

The investigation of 'effective practice' to help young people was centred on four themes identified in the initial bid to the ESRC. These were:

1. How we help young people stay safe
2. How we help young people deal with family conflict
3. How we help young people stay free from criminal activity or sexual exploitation
4. How we help young people to maintain mental and physical well-being

Subsequently, I met with the Research Hub staff and we designed the framework theory of change model for the projects to complete and present as case studies. To ensure the staff remained engaged and were not intimidated by the task, staff from the Research Hub offered their assistance to teams in the construction of the case studies. It was however acknowledged that event was undoubtedly risky due to a number of organisational and contextual challenges and concerns about the potential for poor practice to be exposed. One member of staff describes the anxiety in the run up to the Knowledge Exchange,

So I think there was a readiness in terms of practitioners feeling safe around us, I think we'd established trust, we weren't going to ask them tricky questions or sometimes we would ask them tricky questions but we'd also help them work out the answers and were there to support them and not undermine them. And we thought and it was experienced as being incredibly valuing. 'Oh my god these people want to come and listen to us' and practitioners couldn't get their head around that people were interested in them and what they did. And I think it was a real strength that we were worried, we had lots of discussions about using cases and will that be alright,

will that expose the people that worked on them and all that sort of stuff but I think it was really necessary to get to real practice rather than just talking about generalities. *Participant F*

According to Visram et al (2014), researching, collating and exchanging knowledge can be mis-construed as a way of gaining or preserving power by different groups and, due to a number of possible constraints, (including conflicting priorities, lack of funding and a limited culture of knowledge-sharing), some stakeholders are excluded from the process. The Knowledge Exchange aimed to avoid this by raising the value of practice-based evidence, practitioners' 'knowing' and allowing for time to derive learning from current practice. It was also hoped that by bringing the sales and delivery teams from across the organisation together, there would be the creation of a mutually beneficial learning environment.

The design and process of the Knowledge Exchange has been outlined in the section on data collection tools in Chapter 5, Research Design. The academics' role (known as 'visitors' for the purposes of the event) was to help the practitioners make sense of their practice by offering a lens through which theoretical underpinning could be made explicit. Staff and visitors had spent their time deconstructing the theory of change case studies which can be found in Appendix 3. At the end of day 1, it was important to capture how the participants viewed the helpfulness of the process and participants were asked to share their thoughts on any areas of new thinking that had occurred during the day. The following statements capture some of the views expressed,

- The importance of preparation with clients on goals, developing mutual understanding and establishing an on-going dialogue.
- Brathay's work creates 'disruptions' and we need to trust that young people have agency to change at any time.
- Being honest and open about our limitations professionally and organisationally. Putting in place support for staff to lower limitations.
- Practice-based evidence has focussed on how the intervention fits the system and is much more thoughtful than evidence-based practice.
- Madness of taking 'contextual' interventions from overseas (e.g. restorative justice from the native Indians) and thinking that it will work here in Liverpool because they have an evidence base.
- The importance of communities of practice.
- We need the space to maintain these discussions and to explore the issues and critical questions.

- The importance of critical space for reflections, questions, and preparation.
- Exploration of values and radical ideas has been valuable asking no go questions like do we really empower young people/ and do we normalise them? Have we been colonised?

These comments reflect a clear view of the need to retain a flexible and contextual fit when describing the practice undertaken and the on-going desire for opportunities to share the learning and continue the critical dialogue started. By day 2, a more focussed response was needed and small groups were asked to consider two particular questions, 'What have you learnt?' and 'How has this helped you articulate your practice?' There were multiple comments about how positive the experience had been, a few stand out as being of particular interest and reflective of the intentions of the event, as well as the wider research enquiry. In response to the first question,

- We don't have enough expertise in specialist subjects.

These and many other comments like them made clear the youth work being practiced had changed and taken some out of their comfort zone as funding and contractual compliance had determined the context and expectations of the work

- We don't know how to share best practice effectively internally.

The lack of opportunity to share the evolving good practice was also indicative of the context within which the Brathay youth workers were operating (see Chapter 11). Their desire to seek support from others and continuing learning through a reflective dialogue in order to remain effective in their practice was also apparent in the analysis of the transcripts. When asked how the knowledge exchange process had helped to articulate their practice, the responses included,

- We work with people 'where they're at now' and value them for it – asset model.
- Working with positives rather than deficits.
- It has updated the language that we use (agency, self- efficacy, locus of control).

The feedback from this session gave rise to an impromptu desire amongst the participants to at least begin to identify their practice values. Energy was raised once more and the group generated a list which can be found in Appendix 4. The acceptance of a set of values which informed practice based upon an asset model was broadly shared. It also allowed

colleagues from the Research Hub to begin to consider how this event would inform their on-going work. There was a palpable sense of relief as the acknowledgement of the diverse types of practice were highlighted. For some, this empowered them further to take risks and share the challenges faced.

- It's confirmed the notion that there is no such thing as 'our' practice – we have a collection of individual practices instead.
- There is no such thing as the 'Brathay Way'

'Visitors' also had the opportunity to reflect back their observations on flipcharts. In no particular order they observed the following:

- Focus on the young people rather than the practice – focus on the lived experiences of the young people. Research them, observe them, work with them, ask them why they are there and why they drop out.
- Reclaim the research process to inform practice – become practitioner researchers, intensely curious about young people and your interventions with them.
- Give yourself some muscle when you develop partnerships.
- Every intervention has a diagnostic phase where Brathay and the client work out the nature of the problem and develop the intervention accordingly – stick to your guns!
- Develop knowledge management not institutional amnesia!
- Play to your strengths with a close link between the interventions developed and your skill base.
- Academics learn from practitioners too.

In their study of public health sector workers in the UK, Visram et al (2014) found that 'knowledge exchange' was described by participants as involving a two-way movement of information between or within groups; essentially, a dialogue between 'knowledge producers' and 'knowledge consumers' speaking the same (professional) language. The authors suggest that it takes a considerable level of consideration to ensure that 'right message gets to the right people', the 'right message' being one which is relevant within a practice context and likely to be received positively.

Academics were perceived by current and former practitioners as having the 'luxury' of being able to engage in research, whereas practitioners are too busy 'doing' public health.

This view was not shared by the youth work staff at the knowledge exchange as a significant element that contributed to the success of the dialogue and the delivery of the 'right message' was the fact that the visitors, whilst of significant academic standing in their own right, had mostly been practitioners in their field at some point. Additionally, several youth workers had read a number of their publications over their years in practice and more recently in the preparation of funding bids. Therefore the challenges of the practice environment were understood and there was an acceptance amongst the youth workers that the visitors could offer a credible insight which would be useful and transferable to practice.

Participants in the same study, (Visram et al 2014), also spoke about academic knowledge as a fixed entity which can be transferred or exchanged in some way. This reflects another common view that activities which fall within a knowledge transfer process are ultimately a mechanism to embed research into practice and as such, are driven by an academic agenda (Cornelissen et al, 2011; Mitton et al 2007). By engaging the participants in the design and creation of the event's focus at the outset, I hoped that the recognition of the process's usefulness would be achieved and that rather than being conceptualised in a way that would signal a divide between knowledge producers and knowledge consumers, the youth workers and visitors would engage in a process of co-creation. The youth work participants were able to offer what they had gained from the event on personal postcards; some of the comments included:

- I learned that the current working environment is not comfortable. Understood why I feel discord with some elements of work. Will take away a more positive attitude on how I can personally try to resolve this in my own practice.
- Reaffirms what we do and why. Also helps to understand why some things feel frustrating and gave some good ideas about how to manage this.
- Useful, interesting, informative and stimulating process. Thought provoking too as to how to influence and support personal practice.
- Effective, fluid, participatory, catalyst, thorough, inspiring, helpful.
- To ensure quality reflective critical time at the end of programmes set up with the staff at the start of programmes and to have clearer expectations of all staff.
- I feel that the closing presentations from our guests renewed my passion and gave me hope and lifted my spirits in relation to continuing to work with young people. It reminded me of the things that I had lost sight of. We need to stop getting bogged



down with talks, theories, frameworks etc. and remember to reclaim our power and professionalism. I feel a new sense of excitement (not dread) about getting to learn about the young people that I will hopefully get to know in the future.

- To be braver. To connect more with young people by getting closer to delivery.
- Learned that what makes us most unsure of ourselves is our very strength - our ability to deliver diverse and contextualised work.
- Reclaim my practice for my own sake and the young people's sake, Brathay's sake and practice's sake, get my passion back
- PBE is concerned with understanding the particular context on the one hand and the specific needs and potential of the families and young people.
- Expand my knowledge base by researching some of the linguistic, philosophical and practice based tools I have come across during the two days.

## Conclusion

The term, 'knowledge exchange', although contested is understood to be a mechanism of knowledge transfer in an attempt to enhance the use of research evidence in decision making within professional practice settings. Questions are inevitably raised regarding what is meant by 'knowledge' and who indeed creates or owns 'it'. Multiple forms of knowledge (i.e. tacit, organisational, and experiential) are recognised within human services, and this view is beginning to be incorporated in relation to methods used to enhance knowledge transfer. In particular, ideas about 'co-creation' and 'co construction' of knowledge have gained credence, together with and a shift towards more cyclical, action research based frameworks (Visram et al 2014).

According to Maureeuw et al (2015), the literature on knowledge exchange still traditionally distinguishes '*knowledge producers*' and '*knowledge users*', whereas the literature on knowledge transfer or innovation systems, including knowledge exchange processes, also takes into account intermediaries and actors responsible for facilitating the exchange of knowledge. This includes all stakeholders within the process and suggests the co-creation of different types of knowledge production. Thus, knowledge producers are actors who literally produce research-based, practice-based, or experience based knowledge that can be shared with others. By engaging the youth worker participants in the Knowledge Exchange from the outset of the planning process, they were cast into the role of knowledge producers and enthusiastically shaped the process. This undoubtedly allowed for a high level of engagement and energy at the event. Glegg and Hoens (2016) talk of a range of intermediaries who link different kinds of knowledge and/or actors; they call these

*'knowledge brokers'*. These are those responsible for preconditions that will facilitate knowledge exchange (e.g., by providing resources, training expertise, learning facilitators) and/or direct what knowledge is being produced. In other words, intermediaries would include funders, policy makers, facilitators etc. In this regard, aside from myself, knowledge brokers also included the ESRC and the staff from the Research Hub at Brathay.

The Knowledge Exchange offered the youth workers a safe space to discuss and debate issues of concern without feeling judged. It also provided an opportunity to rebuild their confidence and *'reclaim'* their practice through engaging collectively in a 'community of practice' (Wenger 1999) away from the day to day challenges within the current practice context in which knowledge was co-created and understanding of effective interventions with young people furthered. On one level, it felt like the culmination of the process; inevitably it became the trigger for a number of other developments which catapulted the organisation into the national arena and at the forefront of the debates about measuring outcomes and demonstrating effectiveness in youth work practice. This is captured in the next section.

# Chapter 13: What is the wider applicability of the findings of this work?

In trying to establish whether practice-based evidence could be useful in articulating and evidencing the effectiveness of youth work interventions with vulnerable groups of young people, how professionals talked about their work and more importantly who got to hear about effective practice elsewhere was of relevance to this enquiry.

Youth work students were asked to consider how they shared and disseminated their experience and whether it advanced professional knowledge. Eighty-seven per cent of the students that responded felt their work was contributing to a growing knowledge base within youth work. When asked how they did this, they cited supervision and sharing past experiences in class as key mechanisms which enabled greater dissemination. There is however a recognition that this notion of dissemination is contained within local learning frameworks and contexts. For Brathay, the following outcomes were achieved as a direct result of the Knowledge Exchange event when I met research Hub staff a few months later:

1. Two practice development days had taken place looking at family work and engaging NEET young people
2. A session on empowerment and agency was planned to unpack the terms that were discussed at the event
3. An evident increase in the volume and quality of the data gathered by the IYSS management information system which previously had created a significant level of resistance. This is evidenced by staff using the theory of change approach to practice sessions which was practised at and facilitated by the Knowledge Exchange
4. A new organisational strategy focussed around the mission of 'social justice'
5. Increased critical dialogue on practice throughout the organisation
6. On-going support and knowledge transfer from the academics to Brathay staff
7. A book proposal to Russell House Publishing on Practice-Based evidence in Youth Work
8. An application to ESRC for further funding for qualitative longitudinal research into the impact of youth work

This is the big picture and like chunking down from it so it was such a powerful thing because people from all different departments were together and it was creating this shared knowledge and they were creating it amongst themselves. And the first thing we started with and what the meta model starts with is values and they were the values that came out of the Knowledge Exchange, that really random session where the practitioners said 'Actually we don't know what our values are and we want to post-it note them down'. So the model kind of works upwards and at the bottom is mission and values and so everything builds from there and we've stated that was your values that you said at the Knowledge Exchange and people are like 'Ah'. *Participant F*

The values referred to above drove the consultation process which led to the Brathay Model of Youth Development which can be found in Appendix 6. The impact of this development was explained during an interview eight months later,

I have more people now going 'Oh that's good, oh yeah I like that', rather than going 'I don't know what I'm doing and I can't, where are we going with this and it's all so disorganised, it doesn't have any structure and no management and nobody seems to know anything when I ask a question, I'm in the dark, I'm on my own', you know which is what we were having last year across the board and the balance for me feels like it's shifted more to a more positive trajectory of motivation. *Participant E*

During the semi-structured interviews eight months later I was able to review the process with staff that had attended. For one, a particular session which occurred looking at Brighter Futures, a project for sexually exploited young people was particularly significant.

I think that the knowledge exchange for that Brighter Futures not only looked after sexually exploited stuff I think that there was a permission that happened there and I think it was from Jenny [Pearce] and Margaret [Melrose]. There was a permission of you've got something here, take hold of this and do it and I definitely and I think XXX and XXX (staff members) really kind of thrived from that. We've got someone who's saying yes and it was a permission giving and I think and it energised us. *Participant F*

The event gave the project a momentum and according to the staff members legitimised its practice allowing it to develop a particular four stage model of intervention which was based on young people's agency rather than a deficit mode, using notions of empowerment and encouraging the young people to become agents of change within their own context.

Additionally, it became apparent through the semi-structured interviews that there had been a significant legacy from the Knowledge Exchange, the evolution of a new way of theorising practice:

On a big picture level the Model of Youth Development that we have now developed was definitely off the back of the Knowledge Exchange so the title of it or the key thing within it, it was called an Assets Model and that's how XXX [staff member] still talks about it and the assets word and concept was what came from the Knowledge Exchange. And I think that was what the 'Profs' saw and reflected back to us and we took it and have used it so the model of youth development, in the middle of it it's a wheel. In the middle we had young people's assets and then there was all the things off of it so what we were saying is this is at the heart of our practice and we were using those words so absolutely that was generated. So we developed a model that has gone through several cycles of what it looks like to what it is now and that is what's coupled up with catalyst and things like that and we've got this meta model of youth development and that answers the question that everybody has been asking for a long time 'What is it that Brathay do?'

*Participant G*

This allowed for a shared language, or 'repertoire', e.g. 'agency', 'assets' that practitioners could use across different contexts within which they were practising. The event led to a real sense of ownership as staff at Brathay went on and developed their own Model of Youth Development which can be found in Appendix 6 and can be described as the method for generating PBE.

Additionally, the opportunity for the sales team to hear about the experience and knowledge held by front line practitioners was deemed to be extremely useful and allowed for the sales team to review and reconsider how they spoke to funders about what Brathay could offer in order to avoid some of the difficulties described earlier in Chapter 2 which were associated with the rapid expansion of Brathay in the Community.

It's really important because I think at Brathay, there's a massive disconnect between sales and delivery and what the practice development day workshop did was bring those people together and that shared language, shared understanding. And so this is how we described it at the workshop, you've got funder, sales or client manager delivery and so what happens is the sales person talks to the funder, they get it set up and then they step out and then there's this massive gap and so what we've tried to do is bring those closer together and so it's just narrowing that gap. So from multiple perspectives I think someone in sales has taken hold of it and used it but can have better conversations with the delivery person as well as better conversations with the funder. *Participant F*

And,

I think about 5 years ago they moved to a situation here where they had sales staff and delivery staff and there were definitely tensions between the two, lots of 'they can't sell that' and 'sales staff don't have youth work experience so what do they know, how could they sell what we're doing' and all that kind of stuff. So it was really helpful to have an opportunity for the sales staff to get alongside practitioners and see what they're dealing with and hear more about what that programme is that sounded so straight-forward and how it turned out in practice. And from their perspective they sometimes feel quite exposed because how do they know what people do have, how do they know what the boundaries of practice are and they don't want to set their colleagues up. It's a great opportunity for them; they really valued hearing about other programmes, real life stuff. *Participant G*

## **Youth work evidence group (YWEG)**

Alongside this, in the months after the Knowledge Exchange, the Research Hub established a Youth Work Evidence Group in the region (YWEG) which brought together a range of providers to share tools for evaluation and evidence generation. This development coincided with the national consultation of the Young Foundation's Catalyst Consortium Outcomes Framework in July of the same year, 2012, six months after the Knowledge Exchange. Increased confidence amongst staff at Brathay led to an engagement with these wider debates that were occurring at a national level. In particular, Brathay were able to become a

critical friend to the Catalyst Consortium by exploring which elements worked for the organisation and also what would need to be adapted in their particular context.

And that's what we're trying to do in the middle is we absolutely understand we need to give quantitative evidence but what we're saying is, this is XXXX (F) expression, 'No stats without stories, and no stories without stats'. And so we really want to give that rounded picture that is as participatory as possible and all of those things and I don't think that's what Catalyst were doing, I think that's where they were going or a part of it but that's what we're bringing. *Participant G*

There was clearly an appetite for this dialogue across the sector, and as a result of their response, the Catalyst Consortium used Brathay as a case study for the application of its outcomes framework.

So I said [to Catalyst] we've got this model of youth development, we've got these outcomes, which at the time weren't catalyst outcomes, we've got all these models, we've got all these theories, we've got sales and delivery and at the moment it doesn't stack up and people still feel a bit confused so the best thing we can do is try and make sense of that in one planning process. And then what was really hard was working out the order because of course we all wanted to put the young person first. And if we were really honest and had hard luck we don't start with the young people ever. So that was really challenging because we all like to describe ourselves as person centred, and focused on the young people. *Participant F*

Additionally, the YWEG expanded south so that there were two regional groups discussing how evidence of effective youth work was captured. In the autumn of 2012 the Research Hub began to consult with the delivery staff on both Catalyst Outcomes Framework and the Model of Youth Development. It is described positively by one interviewee as follows,

So we've recently had a day on the Catalyst Outcomes Framework and that was where our whole theory of youth development was properly presented to our practitioners and they had lots of time, a little bit like our knowledge exchange, they had lots of time to absorb it and question it and ask about what it looks like in practice and develop that understanding. We've also had a group of young people to translate it into young people's words and

understanding so we were waiting for the outcomes, I think they'd done a video and puppets and all sorts of nice things to make that real for them. So that's happening, we're also through our new induction programme we've developed this base level theories in practice we want people to have which is going alongside an audit of where people think they are and then we match up the gaps so that we can fill people in and run development sessions with those people that need it and then when we've got everybody at that level then we'll go to the next level, and then we'll go to the next level and so then there's a proper development cycle going on for our practitioners that they haven't had before so that's brilliant. *Participant D*

A number of initiatives were also underway to encourage a level of buy-in and ownership amongst the staff teams.

We've got new induction processes in place; we've got a massive delivery handbook in place; IYSS is now – do you know about IYSS, it's a youth work database so you do your planning on it and then you do your evaluating on it; all the staff have been trained in theory of change and we have a sense of what our core knowledge base is and what fits on top of that and fits on top of that which we didn't before; we've got observations set up; we've got one-to-ones set up with all of our associate delivery staff who've just been left to deliver and we've no idea what they've been doing and what that's shown me is that there's pockets of fabulous practice and pockets of dire practice but now I've a handle on where that's happening and how to share that learning and how to raise the quality of the actual delivery on the ground.

*Participant D*

In order to disseminate the Model of Youth Work Development, Research Hub staff used technology to further staff engagement with the process.

We thought that it's very outdated and very unfair to always have practice development face-to-face and make people travel and people in outlying centres were always disadvantaged because it always tends to be here (Cumbria). And it's not cost effective either so that was when we started thinking about moving to on-line stuff. We just found some through the



software that was fairly easy to use so when people saw the framework people tended to respond with utter horror 'Oh my god, am I supposed to know all that'. So then I got the levels, I was like right ok let's sift this cos that not reasonable to expect everyone to know that and there were more hard conversations trying to work out what's the Level 1, what's the Level 3. So we're just on the making them really. *Participant G*

In order to make this process more accessible and reassuring for staff, monthly Google 'hangouts' were also established.

People are invited to come and talk about their practice and practice dilemmas and I think that can be a place exactly for what are we doing, what do we know, what do we not know, what are we finding easy, what are we finding hard. *Participant F*

Maintaining the development cycle by feeding this into the management team was crucial as was, the need to maintain the positive links established between the sales and delivery team at the Knowledge Exchange event; consequently, a representative of each attended and fed into the other team's meeting.

We give them the bests and worsts, or the trends and patterns, from the evaluations that we write so rather than everyone having to read every evaluation we do a summary each month which we take to those management meetings and we'll incorporate messages from the practice discussions. And then I was really concerned, I was really very concerned that those Sales and Delivery meetings the horizon is like next week, never forward looking, so I proposed that we had this 6 monthly strategy days. So I said that we will bring all the information that we've picked up from conferences in the last 6 months, all the stuff that we've read or heard or networked and found out about, we'll bring a meta-analysis from all the evaluations from the last 6 months and we want the practitioners and the CIPS team to bring all of their knowledge and experience from practice of what's working and what's not working and where they think we should go next. So then that will give us a 6 month planning horizon and we've asked that out of that Strategy day that the CIPS team will commission us as a research hub to write a lit review, so we'll do two lit reviews for them each year. *Participant F*

This was designed to try and shift the power within the organisation back to practitioners rather than being driven by income streams and contracts which were sometimes deemed to be either unrealistic or unworkable in terms of delivery on the frontline. It was an attempt to operate more strategically and proactively instead of reactively.

Well the idea is, and it's not happening regularly yet, is that once people are at that base level of knowledge around the theories and everyone's fully taken on board all the stuff that we've been developing around there needs to be significant reviews within programmes and there needs to be really good reviews at the end of programmes just with the staff and this should include feedback to each other, it should include significant feedback to the organisation, it should include significant feedback to go in the evaluation of that programme. Once that starts to roll, it's like we're pushing it up hill at the moment but when it goes over the edge and starts to roll then that will be more of an iterative process. And the permanent members of staff that we're bringing in, a big part of their job is to be that conduit of knowledge between the delivery staff and the central core of Brathay so that we can start providing support but also feeding back the information. That's the idea, it's not started yet. *Participant D*

It was clear that the Research Hub staff had seized the opportunity offered by the Knowledge Exchange to both consolidate good practice within the organisation and also offer a level of reassurance to the field by putting in place some shared frameworks that practitioners could recognise to be reflective of their particular practice and context; a community of practice. This agenda also spoke to the wider management priorities within the organisation in terms of income generation and the unfolding national debates on capturing evidence of effective youth work interventions. When I asked whether there was an identifiable '*community of practice*' as a result of these developments, responses included,

More so now than last year definitely so we're less fire-fighting now than we were last year, there's still loads of elements of that but there is more of a sense of where are we trying to get to that has brought in by the leadership team, by my delivery team, and therefore that's starting to feed into what contracts we go for. *Participant D*

And,

Yes in course closure type documents where I can give feedback, opinions, ideas about how the course went, whether we met the outcomes, and with IYSS which XXXX has put in place asks for quite a lot of data in terms of 'Do you think we met the outcomes? How did we meet them? Why did you meet them?' You know all of that stuff. So there's definitely an opportunity for me to say 'Yes I think we achieved this outcome because of blah blah blah', which led to...' *Participant B*

There was a desire from the Research Hub to continue the dialogue across the organisation and to guard against any accusations of complacency.

*Interviewer: So there is a pathway, there is a plan?*

Yeah, but I'm not sure that, it's not robust, in that that relies on practitioners wanting to come to Google hang-out, wanting to talk about stuff, that being passed on, so I'm not sure that we've got it nailed. *Participant G*

Some staff were still unsure how all of this information gathering would make bigger connections outside Brathay

I think it stays within Brathay, I think it probably stays in the Research Hub, i.e., in terms of knowledge sharing amongst other associates, there's just so little of that that goes on. *Participant B*

And,

Again I think the frustration or the challenge for a practitioner as well or for myself it's that undoubtedly since we started we've learnt an awful lot on the job so you learnt how to negotiate more, how to organise meetings better, there's lots of different ways that we've done, working with partners, that kind of work and the way we've developed, there's been massive bits of learning. But you sometimes think 'I'm just running around constantly, I'm doing this, I'm doing that and I'm doing that', in 2 or 3 years' time I'm not sure I'm going to have changed or grown as a practitioner or developed anything necessarily, I'm just going to look back on those 3 years and go

'Phew, that was like whoa, full on, bloody hell, we did achieve some good things but you know. *Participant C*

## Knowledge Exchange legacy - 2013 onwards

Through my own involvement with the Centre for Youth Impact (CYI)<sup>34</sup>, as a member of the Quality Assurance Panel, I have remained informed about Brathay's contribution to the wider national picture. In the summer of 2014, I was able to update the above progress report by meeting up with key staff. The momentum had been maintained and new outcomes from the practice development journey that started 18 months earlier were described.

1. Significantly, the organisation had become an 'Early Adopter' for the Centre for Youth Impact alongside London Youth and the Foyer Federation. For Brathay, this opportunity created an income stream, as well as a national platform to share the learning derived from the seeds sown at the Knowledge Exchange. Research Hub staff came together with Project Oracle<sup>35</sup>, NCYVS<sup>36</sup> and The Social Research Unit at Dartington<sup>37</sup> to devise a training package that would take youth workers through a process from innovation of an idea, to evidencing impact. The training is offered free of charge and offers an opportunity to share learning between peers rather than being imposed centrally as so many previous initiatives have been. Its aim is to develop a shared commitment and engagement in generating practice-based evidence. Participants are trained to develop a theory of change model, identify mechanisms to evidence their expressed need and finally design appropriate outcomes and outputs.
2. Additionally, this involvement allowed for senior representatives of these 'Early Adopters' to sit on the Programme Board of CYI. For Brathay's CEO this provides a platform to ensure 'practice' remains at the heart of such endeavours.
3. The Model of Youth Development was further revised following a review of the evaluations undertaken during the period by an intern.

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<sup>34</sup> <http://www.youth-impact.uk/>

<sup>35</sup> <http://project-oracle.com>

<sup>36</sup> <http://www.ncvys.org.uk>

<sup>37</sup> <http://www.dartington.org.uk/>

4. In the summer of 2014, Brathay held a conference to share the learning from 'New Beginnings', one of the Knowledge Exchange original case studies, a service that provided support to young people in transition from care, custody etc., funded for a two year period. The event, attended by over 150, brought together practitioners and academics from across the country with young people who had been a part of the project to theorise and deconstruct the practice interventions used.

In December 2015, as I wrote this chapter, I had the opportunity to interview a member of staff from the Research Hub for the final time. In light of the current economic context of youth work across the country, I was anxious that she would tell me that Brathay was experiencing great difficulty surviving in the current climate; I was mistaken. In 2015, a number of further developments had taken place:

1. Notwithstanding the contextual challenges identified by some staff members in this research enquiry, New Beginnings was obviously a success and well regarded both locally and nationally, yet was unable to secure funding to move forward. Consequently, the learning had been encapsulated in the design of a number of new projects, for example, 'Tenancy Ready' a project designed to assist care and custody leavers.
2. Karen Stuart and Lucy Maynard from the Research Hub, together with Caroline Rouncefield from the University of Cumbria wrote an accessible and practice based book entitled '*Evaluation Practice for Projects with Young People: A Guide to Creative Research*' published by Sage. This was a compilation of the different methods discovered to capture evidence that had been gathered during the period to assist youth workers engagement in thinking about impact.
3. YWEG continues to expand and embrace new partners nationally.
4. New 'Early Adopters' have been identified by CYI and the current training product has been reviewed and informed by the first rollout. The expansion is intended to disseminate the concepts of generating practice-based evidence to a wider audience
5. The Model of Youth Development has been further refined to address the needs and outcomes for young people who offend, one of Brathay's four strands of practice.
6. A second book is being written – using an empowerment and agency model to address well-being.

Her reflections about the process and legacy of the Knowledge Exchange five years on were both insightful and considered. She explained that the process had allowed the organisation

to develop a shared language, repertoire and evidence base which gave staff confidence to articulate their impact with a range of commissioners and funders; a community of practice. The initial investment and time has paid dividends.

Impact, it really had an impact, we're living it now and reaping the rewards.

As a social enterprise, Brathay has been able to use income from contracts such as NCS (National Citizen Service) to reinvest in other work they are keen to develop. As a result, they have been successful in securing a number of contracts, for example delivering interventions on child sexual exploitation for Police and Crime Commissioners across the region.

Whatever we've done we've made it ours and fit for purpose.

However, she was also mindful of the need to revisit the model and review its usefulness in the generation of practice-based evidence on a regular basis. Next steps include a bid to funders to evaluate a range of services designed to address a particular issue in a consistent and coherent manner, which would then enable a greater sharing of learning and generate practice-based evidence.

## **Conclusion**

Klein Woolthuis et al, (2005), (in Maureeuw et al, 2015:2) cites a number of conditions that can facilitate the effectiveness of sharing learning derived from knowledge transfer processes like the Knowledge Exchange. These are categorised as infrastructural, institutional, interactional and capability conditions. The first, infrastructural includes, for example, the distances between different sites of learning and research centres, often acting nationally, and how these can link with locally-based practitioners. Research Hub staff were able to navigate through the national agenda whilst also ensuring an on-going dialogue was continuing internally. By shrewdly using the model of youth development as a case study, they were able to ensure that those engaged in the national debates included Brathay in their deliberations and therefore they were at the forefront of and contributed to the development of new thinking in the professional arena.

Institutional conditions refer to so-called formal mechanisms that can either hinder or stimulate knowledge transfer activities, for example regulatory frameworks (particularly in health) and funding opportunities for activities and research. By jointly bidding to the ESRC with the University, an academic institution, a number of possible obstacles were overcome,

for example, research ethical frameworks and quality assurance processes. Institutional conditions also refer to the institution's disposition towards knowledge generation and what is acceptable in terms of evidence and the selection of appropriate audiences. Brathay were able to play to both a nationally engaged audience through the YWEG as well as keeping their own staff updated on current thinking in terms of what evidence of impact was being asked for and how the sector was responding.

Interactional conditions address the networks of knowledge producers and the nature of the cooperation between them. Intensive co-operation was established between myself and the staff at the outset of the process in order to generate confidence and engagement in the process. Fortunately, following the event itself, staff from the Research Hub recognised the value of building new networks across the sector to further the debate and retain the momentum; organisational support for their work was on-going as staff combined their responsibility for the internal development and used their national networks as external reference points.

Consequently, capability conditions consider the skills of those responsible to ensure the internalisation of new knowledge and the resources available for the task and can assess the relevance and applicability of the new knowledge for the organisation. Undoubtedly, the staff had the foresight to recognise the timely nature of the contribution they could make on the national picture in helping others to generate practice-based evidence. This was coupled with an openness to explore their practice as a learning organisation and to be the very best they could be when working with young people who needed support.

Undoubtedly the knowledge exchange experience was hugely beneficial for the organisation; indeed its value for staff who attended was described in the last section. Staff at the Research Hub were able to capture the learning and generate significant momentum both internally and externally following the knowledge exchange in their pursuit of practice-based evidence. It consumed most of their working hours and considerable time was spent travelling not only across the region served by Brathay, but wider to engage in the debates that were occurring simultaneously across the sector. There is no doubt that a number of factors contributed to the success of the practice development journey undertaken by Brathay during this time. These were,

1. The successful partnership between the organisation and the University which led to a number of activities which shaped the nature of the knowledge exchange.

2. The organisational commitment to embedding excellent research evidence into practice and to ensure that the organisation was appropriately reflective and achieving excellence for those it worked with.
3. The effective use of theory of change models to help deconstruct the interventions they were using across a range of projects.
4. The success of the actual knowledge exchange event and the energy and momentum created which led to significant level of internal support across departments.
5. An organisational commitment to devote time and resources to building upon the developments and moving it to a new, national level.
6. A highly skilled and committed staff team in the Research Hub who were exceptional at remaining in touch with the bigger picture via academic, policy and practice settings. In particular, their recognition of the difficulty facing front line practitioners and their genuine desire to support them by providing the best evidence and professional development opportunities they could.

There remains an on-going desire to further disseminate the work undertaken to date; Brathay are doing this through the provision of training to other partners associated with the Centre for Youth Impact (CYI). Their wish is to enable others to recognise the value of evidencing their interventions in a way that is neither intimidating nor unnecessarily time-consuming and that possesses the qualities and characteristics that youth workers embrace but have for so long struggled to articulate.

These different developments were seen as a journey of practice development by the organisation which allowed for an on-going dialogue about how capturing the ends (outcomes) and describing the means (methods and theories) used to get there, praxis. In this way the organisation would claim to have generated 'practice-based evidence'. The potential applicability of the success of this process for others I would suggest remains contingent upon similar resources, commitment and skill being available – contextually appropriate. This process is on-going and has been helpful in meeting the needs of a range of stakeholders involved in the work. It is by no means over.



# Chapter 14: Conclusion

There is little doubt that good youth services can have a transformational effect on young people's lives and can play a vital role both in supporting vulnerable young people and in enriching the lives of others without particular disadvantage

(Services for Young People: Third Report of Session 2010-12:75).

The intention here was to advance professional understanding both within youth work and for those responsible for its policy, funding and review. The absence of evidence of how youth workers have a transformational impact on young people's lives had been established (House of Commons 2011) and according to Davies (2010), between 1998 and 2009 the word 'patchy' was frequently used by Ministers when describing the Youth Service. The lack of professional agreement and a quality framework accounts for a number of examples of poor quality management and practice which has obscured the more obvious and highly effective practice which was apparent across the sector at the same time; inevitably such a situation would lead to externally imposed mechanisms (Norris and Pugh in Bright 2015: 90).

A systematic review of the impact of youth work on young people conducted in New Zealand in 2012, (which also drew upon English sources) also concluded that evidence is 'limited and disjointed'. In particular the authors cite a number of contextual reasons that contribute to this lack of evidence of impact. These include the need for more rigour in the design and consistency in terminology in youth work which should be universally applied. The authors also call for *'practice-based research evaluations incorporating rigorous methodologies'* which will *'assist in the development of service and practice in 'quality effectiveness research on youth work'* (Mundy-McPherson et al, 2012: 213).

Whilst evidence-based practice has been criticised for being prescriptive and dislocated from the real world and context (Trinder 2008), practice wisdom and knowledge in youth work has not been made explicit by those who practice the 'craft' and advocate its benefits; frequently it remains hidden, and for some, a mystery. I wanted to explore whether youth workers could articulate their practice wisdom and generate practice-based evidence. The findings that emerged from the enquiry are summarised below:

1. Youth workers involved in this study can articulate their practice wisdom

2. The centrality of and desire for, the relational basis of the work undertaken with young people is still evident.
3. There are a number of contextual factors that affect a youth worker's ability to implement their practice wisdom.
4. Knowledge exchange mechanisms are methodologically useful in generating practice-base evidence
5. The wider applicability of such a model remains questionable in the current social, political and economic climate.

## **Evidence: abstract correctional empiricism versus ethnographic appreciation**

The enquiry led me to conclude that evidence-based practice, does for the most part remain abstract positivistic empiricism; correctional in tone and nature. It claims to theorize thought processes and uncover and abstract universal psychological processes which can then be corrected as it is the behaviour of 'maladjustment'; it believes it can change people. Whereas practice-based evidence is dialectical, empathetic, ethnographic, axiomatic and appreciative (Matza 1982) it involves pathos (Kennedy 1963), an appeal to emotions and communication rather than pathology (diagnosis of disease) – is it contextual and looks for the meanings ascribed to certain situations. However, its conceit is that everything becomes contextual; it is radical, oppositional and anti-intellectual.

Practice-based evidence has been described as information gathered from service users and providers to identify effective interventions and areas for improvement, (Evans et al 2003). It also describes research conducted via research and practice partnerships (McDonald and Viehbeck, 2007), and to innovations that may have emerged from practice (Dunet et al 2008). Leeman and Sandelowski (2012) describe an inclusiveness of evidence that concerns, context, experiences and practices. They would suggest that only qualitative methods are appropriate in order to identify the quality of interventions, and the extent to which they are comprehensive, relevant and accessible. Most research evidence as described earlier regularly excludes these notions on perceptions, practices and contexts.

According to Fox (2003) there are three key propositions for generating practice-based evidence:

1. The pursuit of knowledge should be acknowledged as a local and contingent process.

2. Research activity should be constitutive of difference, questioning the legitimisation and repression of particular aspects of the world, and
3. Theory-building should be seen as an adjunct to practical activity.

(Fox 2003: 81)

Practice-based evidence also requires a level of political engagement via the research process which acknowledges power differentials and is therefore constitutive of difference, rather than aiming to be demonstrative of generalisability, (Brown and Duguid 1991). Whilst internal validity will be high, adopting such an approach is likely to generate low or non-existent external validity.

The relative lack of use of research evidence in youth work practice is uncontested. This has meant that the inability of youth workers to explain the difference they make in young people's lives is obvious. Professionals across the youth work sector want to demonstrate the difference their interventions make to the lives of the young people they work with (Maynard 2015). Consequently, the desire to better understand "What works?" is uncontested.

And that's what we're trying to do in the middle is we absolutely understand we need to give quantitative evidence but what we're saying is, this is [Knowledge Hub staff member] expression, 'No stats without stories, and no stories without stats'. And so we really want to give that rounded picture that is as participatory as possible and all of those things and I don't think that's what catalyst [Catalyst Consortium Outcomes Framework] were doing, I think that's where they were going or a part of it but that's what we're bringing to the table. *Participant G*

There is a huge amount of energy and money being spent in assisting organisations to measure their impact through the generation of relevant evidence. However, we must remember that evidence is never an absolute truth, it is often contingent for a number of reasons and therefore the application of notions of evidence-based practice or evidence-based commissioning will never demonstrate the same outcomes without the necessary caveat of 'context'. As a result, it would be appropriate to consider a more nuanced approach which encompasses the best of what we know and looks to develop our understanding of the interventions we make through 'practice-based evidence' rather than being wedded to other's expectations of 'evidence-based practice'. For Hobbs (2015),

evidence gives us 'confidence', and its starting point has to be ensuring that our data collection methods are fit for purpose. Whilst it is recognised that the more robust such methods can be, the greater the potential for demonstrating impact, regardless of method, its analysis should increase our confidence in what we are doing and why. *'If we want more evidence-based practice, we need more practice-based evidence'*, Green (2008:i23)

## **An evidential tapestry**

Whilst there is no doubt that science can be an important tool for change, when empirically validated programs for challenging behaviour are tested in real world settings, the effect can drop to zero (Brendtro and Mitchell, 2012). For Brendtro and Mitchell (2014:7), their PBE is based upon the notion that *'the currency of caring has been de-valued'*. They cite Smith (2009) who claims that by changing the stigmatizing label of 'children in care' to 'looked-after children' in the UK, human bonds and relationships are replaced by procedures from 'best practice', mechanistic manuals.

*'Clearly the scientific community is in need of feedback'* (Dishion and Kavanagh, 2003: 186) and researchers have much to learn from practitioners. For Brendtro and Mitchell, PBE comes from systematic, on-going feedback on how what they deliver works. Brendtro and Mitchell (2014) set themselves the task of identifying powerful universal truths; their answer lies in a 'consilience' which involves drawing from multiple fields of knowledge. *'Consilience'*, or the "jumping together" of ideas, combines research from the natural sciences and social sciences with wisdom from experience and values. The term has been reclaimed by Wilson (1998) who noted that modern science whilst drowning in data needs some means of identifying priorities. As a result the authors propose twenty evidence-based principles in working with challenging young people, meeting this test for truth. In their view, insights drawn from a range of disciplines can converge around core truths

Using the lens of consilience we are able to draw together important findings on building healthy brains and positive interpersonal cultures so that young people can successfully navigate paths to resilience and responsibility.

(Brendtro and Mitchell 2010:11)

Throughout my practice as a youth worker, I believed that for a young person, the evidence of an effective intervention will depend on a host of factors, not least those to do with the style, personality and beliefs of the worker, the needs of the particular young person and the

relationship they have. Practice-based evidence has a diagnostic phase where the practitioner creates a multi-dimensional domain of learning in consultation with young person. It is led by the understanding of context and is a two-way dialogical process which is flexible and where the practitioner listens and learns – it is this that defines the nature of the relationship.

Practice-based evidence is constrained not by method, as many of these are creative and informative, but by its context; it is tentative in nature, evolves and remains dynamic having the potential to be dialectical which, in turn, will build theory. It can deal with chaos and complexity and is informed by observations of young people with whom practitioners work and the lived experiences of those young people. However, I would not align PBE with qualitative enquiry alone; it also needs to be seen as complimentary to evidence-based practice as only then can we gather the very best evidential tapestry possible. Is it possible to consider that the traditions of EBP could be complemented by a parallel movement located in traditions of participatory action research located in practice? Then it would be possible to generate a critical space in which an intervention is designed and can encourage reflexivity about what we bring – agency and allow for a clearer articulation of what it is youth does and the difference it makes. It is these principles that formed the basis of the model described below.

## **A model for generating practice-based evidence in youth work**

Once the analysis was complete I hoped to be able to identify and conceptualise a model for the generation of practice-based evidence within youth work settings. This I hoped would have wider application and engender debate within both academic and professional communities of practice as well as contribute to and enhance the understanding of the nature of youth work for funders and policy-makers; Maybe I could contribute to the debate in a way that would allow youth workers to ‘reclaim’ their practice and generate evidence that was embedded in the youth work principles promoted by the In Defence of Youth Work Campaign ‘volatile and voluntary, creative and collective – an association and conversation without guarantees’? By Wylie, (2010) I would be accused of being a ‘radical’, resistant to change, in his conceptualisation of youth workers as technocrats, principled pragmatists and radicals; such a position described by Bright (2015:245) as ‘*nostalgic romanticism*’.

Whilst self-explanatory, and potentially helpful in its intentions and content, devising such a model often seemed futile as its relevance and application to current professional discourse and practice for some is rendered meaningless in the current policy and funding climate.

Nonetheless it is worth exploring its generation (if not application), for the purposes of this study and to see whether such a model can have resonance with the phronetic location of the craft of youth work.

Those I interviewed had a clear professional understanding and could critique the conditions under which they were practising; they knew the potential of what youth work could be. It was this that made me re-visit the superordinate themes and the findings chapters to identify how a model could be developed in order to generate practice-based evidence. The description offered below Figure. 5 also identifies the assumptions and theories which underpin these components or prerequisites and is closely aligned with what might be described by some as a social pedagogical approach. Additionally, it considers the activities, enablers and intermediate outcomes that could be apparent in such a conceptualisation.

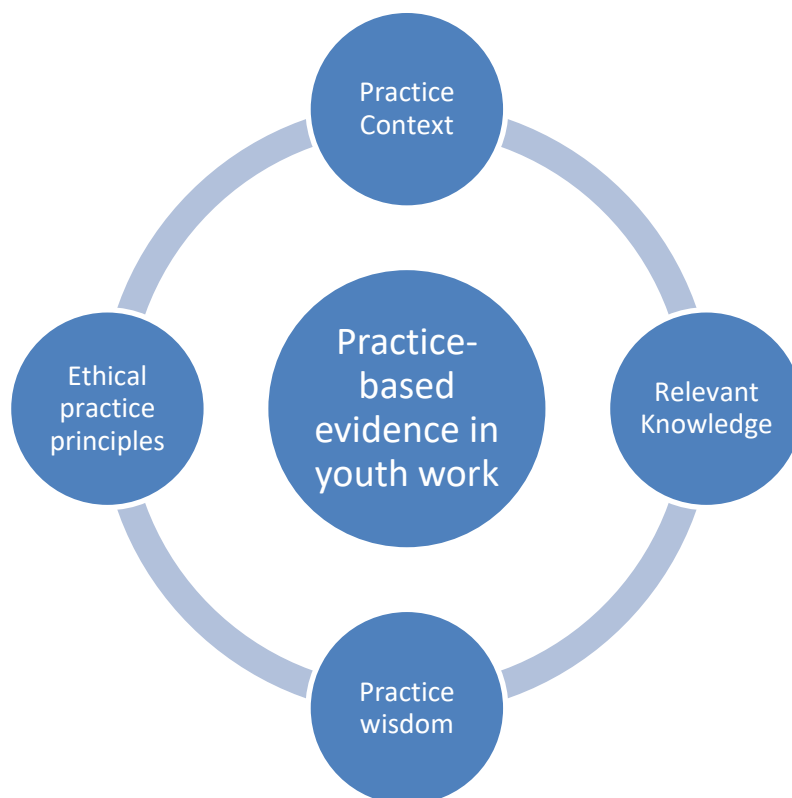


Figure.5: A model for generating practice-based evidence in youth work

The model above (Figure 5) assumes the existence four foundations or prerequisites which I would describe as central to the generation of practice-based evidence in youth work. The radial circle is presented in this way to show how the outer ring of circles contributes to the central idea I will explain these in greater detail by identifying the underlying assumptions,

the associated activities, enablers and outcomes that could be expected within each foundation. They are:

1. Practice wisdom
2. Practice context
3. Relevant knowledge
4. Ethical practice principles

## **1. Practice wisdom**

As discussed in Chapter 9 of this study, interviewees were able to identify their practice wisdom and within this the mechanisms required to enable its illumination were described as being located in appropriate supervisory structures where reflection and action learning were valued. This assumes that there is a commitment to the development of communities of practice and that the activities of critical thinking and reflexivity are valued and encouraged.

In this context, practice wisdom becomes much more than intuitive practice; links are made with criticality and inductive thinking, 'experience-driven practice' (Klein and Bloom 1995). Action research, by enabling stakeholders to articulate their views, by identifying key points of commonality and conflict, by helping to crystallise those views and transform them into a coherent programmes for change, and by exploring options for action, initially with separate groups, but eventually in a dialogue between groups, can begin to build a 'social archive' or 'shared repertoire' of knowledge. This resonates with the observation of Pawson and Tilley (1997) that it is people, the stakeholders, the decisions they make and the commitment they show which determines whether a programme works (or not) and people rather than programmes should be the primary focus of the evaluation.

Kemmis (in Gormally and Coburn 2013:878) usefully explains the concept of '*educational action research*', where practitioners in '*researching praxis from within practice traditions*' are able to transform their practice, their understandings of their practice and the conditions under which their practice is carried out. This in turn will lead to innovative practice and theory-building. As a result, the outcomes are evident as such a process will inevitably give those within the profession a level of confidence and with that comes the ability to articulate the difference they are making to young people's lives.

What would this mean for the future of the profession of youth work and in particular the training and education needs of those who enter the profession? I would contend the role of practice wisdom needs to take centre stage. A pedagogy that supports a curriculum

dedicated to developing both critical reflection and thinking through a process of action learning and which therefore becomes embedded as practice wisdom throughout the profession of youth work. Reflexivity of this nature would enable theory-building and allow practice confidence to grow. It was apparent that at Brathay, practice wisdom was conceptualised and articulated through the lens of praxis which became evident during the analysis of the data. In particular, a commitment by staff to learning from experience through reflection, enabling them to theorise their practice and to engage in a clear exploration of their values and motivation (Thompson and West 2013).

## 2. Practice context

The difficulties described by participants by the changes they had to manage in the current practice context of youth work have been described in Chapter 11. These were,

1. The increasingly complex needs of young people
2. The commissioning era
3. The need for outcome measurement
4. New forms of practice environments and methods of working

When asked whether these new contexts in which staff were being asked to practice resembled previously held understanding of youth work, an interesting observation was made,

I would potentially argue, I mean it's definitely not traditional youth work by any way, and I would argue that because it's a service potentially, there's time boundaries, because the delivery towards certain outcomes that it isn't authentic youth work. *Participant C*

The sector needs to ensure that the context within which the work is being undertaken is given due consideration when deciding whether to pursue a particular funding opportunity. The level of compromise required and agreement with commissioners about intended outcomes are fundamental to this endeavour. The political will to understand the nature and time required to build effective relationships with new partners as well as young people cannot be overstated and the need to offer staff some security in their contract of employment is central to the success of the engagement of the young people the project is designed to reach. This was described in case study material as follows:



Beware 'colonisation' via commissioning i.e. replicating and transmitting the culture and language of the commissioners, including their disempowering structures

*Cumbria Participation Contract*

### **3. Relevant knowledge**

Youth work also requires a new knowledge base which recognises the context within which youth workers practice and indeed makes clear the discreet contribution their practice makes in multi-professional commissioning environments where the work undertaken is frequently with young people experiencing multiple and complex difficulties.

This might mean the introduction of particular subject areas, for example, adolescent mental health, as well as context based skills such as caseload management and partnership working. It assumes a commitment to the on-going professional development of staff which draws upon a range of research and evidence and an informed workforce that can critically engage with the available evidence, whilst retaining the value of the historic traditions on which the profession was established (Jefferies and Smith 2005). In this way the opportunities for the role of knowledge transfer/exchange activities should become embedded alongside a commitment to a resourcing of knowledge brokers who can assist in the development of such theory-building.

### **4. Ethical practice principles**

Measurement, whether in outcomes or other indicators is never a neutral point of view; we have much to learn from service user feedback. The youth work sector needs to address who is setting the standards for measurement of effectiveness? Only then can they reclaim the agenda to ensure that the appropriate evidence is being taken into account, and that this is predicated on the young person being central to the debate. Such a discussion will inevitably consider what 'good' youth work looks like, and how that understanding can become embedded across policy reforms, contract specifications, supply chains, collaborative working relationships, evidence gathering, and, in practice which is predicated upon the foundations identified in the model above, Figure. 5.

This foundation assumes the existence of a set of shared principles which lie at the heart of the ethical practice of youth work (Banks 2010; Sapin 2013). During this process I was able to capture what I believe is an ethical youth work practice framework. It is not necessarily wedded to earlier historic notions of what the work should be, but rather a commitment to and understanding of the value of youth work interventions which is reflective of the real-world climate within which it is located. It includes the following:

- Relational practice is at the heart of the activity
- The connectedness of agency and structure, individual and community is recognised
- A desire to see lives improve and to challenge unfairness and inequality is apparent
- A shared repertoire of language, for example, 'strengths based work' and 'agency' is used rather than language associated with deficit approaches to work with young people
- Participatory practices which engage service users in an honest dialogue are deemed integral to practice
- A recognition of the inter-sectionality and complexity of service-user needs is acknowledged
- The need to evaluate and review practice and consider its impact in order to improve it is unquestioned.
- Theory-building is valued and new knowledge and experience disseminated.

Infrastructure support in terms of effective supervision, time and resources and management information systems which are deemed useful in generating relevant evidence of impact should all be in place to enable the emergence of an ethical practice. Short term commissioning arrangements should be avoided if possible in order to embed the centrality of ethical principles which retain relational practice at its heart. The outcomes associated with this foundation would be the opportunity for professionals to embrace innovation and take risks in their practice in pursuit of 'phronesis'. Better outcomes for service users and redressing inequalities thereby creating social change, would become inevitable by-products.

## **Does context trump process?**

Part of this research study was to consider the wider applicability of its findings for the youth sector and the potential for the model of practice-based evidence to contribute to a 'reclaiming' of professional youth work. As this process came towards its conclusion, the

youth work sector in England was once again engaged in urgent debates about its future generated in the main by the devastating cuts to service provision witnessed in recent years and described in Chapter 2, Policy landscape.

For the last 20 years, the professional identity and value base of youth work has been eroded; (Davies and Merton 2010) it has become 'problem-oriented', individualized, bureauacratized and outcome-focussed, (Crimmens et al 2004; Stenson and Factor, 1996). Additionally, the links between structural changes in the economic and social conditions for young people become ever more invisible. According to Bello (2002), neoliberal globalisation is exacerbating poverty and human suffering; indeed '*Young people, more than any other age group, have been adversely affected by developments relating to globalization*' (DESA, 2005: iii in Hughes et al, 2014:2).

The style of youth work described in the Albemarle Report (1960) was focussed within a 'universal' framework which accepted the generality of young people and focussed its intentions upon their social and political education drawn from the practice of what we would now recognise as social pedagogy. During the 1970's and 80's as poverty within communities became more evident, youth work re-positioned itself to the needs of young people coming from these marginalised communities. From the 1990's onwards, youth workers were targeting those who were deemed to be a threat to the social and political order of the time and efforts were directed to those who posed the most risk.

Naively when this endeavour began it was predicated upon a set of false assumptions. I still believed in the legacy of orthodoxy that everything would get better and society would attempt to eradicate inequality rather increase the polarisation now evident. It assumed we were active participants in a democratic society, deeply committed to professional constructs. The reality is quite different, and as a result, in some areas, youth work has become the last line of defence in attempting to address the complex needs of those young people who need support. In many areas across England the service no longer exists.

Consequently, the work expected from what remains of local authority youth workers bears no relation to the central guiding principles of the youth work profession enshrined in Albemarle (1960) and Thompson (1982) and therefore practice wisdom is diluted as it becomes imbued with a language and discourse drawn from theories of assessment and interventions, most familiar to the profession of social work. This tension was illustrated over ten years ago in *Reaching Socially Excluded Young People*, a study of street based youth work across the country, undertaken in between 2002-2004 for the Joseph Rowntree

Foundation. The conclusion we reached then highlighted the inevitable direction of travel for the profession,

In order to work successfully with the most excluded young people, workers believed that they had to adopt a flexible approach, based on voluntary involvement and responsiveness to the needs of individual young people. However, this was sometimes in tension with the expectations of some funders, who were concerned about single issues, the achievement of quick, quantifiable, results and the capacity of street-based intervention to control young people's behaviour.

(Crimmens et al (2004:78)

Brathay engaged in this new configuration and environment of youth work in a way to survive the context within which it was required to deliver services to young people. They did this whilst also maintaining an ethical and distinct practice by generating practice-based evidence and creating a model of youth development based upon a set of agreed values and ethical practice principles see Appendix 6. Their evidence, and the legacy identified in Chapter 13 suggests a considerable level of success both internally and nationally. The position elsewhere in England is not so positive and the government has recently announced plans to reduce the historical campaigning role of voluntary sector organisations in receipt of taxpayers' monies by the inclusion of an 'anti-lobbying' clause. Charities and commentators<sup>38</sup> have reminded the government that such a move ironically reduces the opportunities for generating evidence-based practice by replacing the 'what works' agenda with an increasingly obvious ideologically-driven policy agenda (Jones, The Guardian 22.02.16).

I would not feel comfortable suggesting therefore that retaining the youth work of old is possible across the diverse contexts of newly commissioned practice environments, but from this case study example, it is possible although dependent upon embedded processes, the availability of resources together with an organisational commitment to social justice in the first instance which allows for the generation of practice-based evidence.

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<sup>38</sup> [www.bmj.com/company/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/UK-anti-lobbying.pdf](http://www.bmj.com/company/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/UK-anti-lobbying.pdf)

## Critical social pedagogy as a threshold concept

Youth work has always occupied a contested professional space; the developments outlined in Chapter 2 signal the most precarious time in its history. Spence (2009) argued in a speech to IDYW in Leeds that the colonization of professional practice had reduced the space for any kind of critical conversation which is the bedrock of informal education and youth work. As I write these final paragraphs, I was made aware of an OfSTED 'good practice' example published in November 2015. The case example is the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead where youth workers have been relocated into social work pods and are improving the engagement of young people and unsurprisingly therefore, having a positive impact on their outcomes. At a simplistic level, further evidence of the colonization of the youth work profession described throughout this thesis, yet described by many as a positive example. However, with greater reflection this could herald a new reframing of the work, conceptualised for some as evidence of collaboration rather than colonization?

It is therefore unsurprising that the different contexts within which youth work practice has been located over the last 20 years has required a significant re-drawing of the nature of skills and types of practice expected from the professionals within it by its commissioners. Whilst it is possible to extract a 'shared repertoire' from an organisation like Brathay who were able to take the time to reflect upon what glued their diverse practice together through the introduction of their Model of Youth Development (Appendix 6), inevitably the diversity nationwide would not easily lend itself to the generation of a shared practice wisdom across the youth work sector; it would be unrealistic to expect so.

Could critical social pedagogy as described in Chapter 10 be seen as a helpful way to understand and articulate the difference youth work makes? Youth work as a critical pedagogy (Coburn 2011) operates in a way that does not easily lend itself to close examination or measurement; therefore the youth work profession need to develop new ways to explain the difference it can make. I would argue that there needs to be a reinvention of the profession which is located in its phronetic traditions and draws more extensively and explicitly upon social pedagogical traditions. Figure. 5, (above) may provide the foundations upon which this can occur by allowing youth workers to articulate the difference they can make via the generation of practice-based evidence.

According to Tony Jeffs, a nationally respected colleague and participant in the Knowledge Exchange, the role of a pedagogical collective as a theoretical framework moving forward could be helpful,

Given the dire position it is currently in, secular youth work might as well strike out and begin seeking out a new language of practice and new paths to follow. After all it has nothing to lose. Both these options require it to face up to the intellectual challenge of unearthing a new role and purpose for youth work; if it does so then innovations relating to practice will inevitably follow in its wake. Form as always should follow function and, in this instance, the imperative is to uncover via collective debate a new function for youth work. My own suspicion is that secular youth work will not be able to secure an independent future and that practitioners must be prepared to become members of a broader pedagogic collective that will include all those other educators operating outside the formal sector.

(Jefferies, 2015:16)

At this stage I recognise that some commentators might believe such a re-conceptualisation may further dilute what is left of the traditional understanding of youth work and whilst I am not suggesting that an uncritical application of the term will help youth work survive, I do believe that the sector needs to explore new ways to describe what it does to its partners and ensure that ethical youth work practice principles gain wider recognition across a number of professional settings working with young people, and in particular, education, a cornerstone of the youth work profession.

I would suggest that critical social pedagogy is considered as a 'threshold concept' for the profession in these troubled times. According to Meyer & Land (2003), a threshold concept is similar to a 'portal, opening up new and previously inaccessible ways of considering, understanding and interpreting the nature of practice. Essentially it is transformative but is not a simple process and involves reflexivity throughout. The transformation of the '*internal view of subject matter, subject landscape or even world view*' (Meyer & Land (2003:1) will occur after grasping a threshold concept and will lead to both an ontological as well as conceptual shift. This could offer youth workers the opportunity to rethink how they operate in their particular discipline and how they perceive, apprehend, or experience a particular phenomenon within that discipline, for example the impact of coercive engagement upon the nature of the relationship they develop with young people.

Whilst what I have referred to earlier as the foundations of the model (Figure 5) could be seen as youth work's core precepts, they would not necessarily lead to a new or different view of practice. A threshold concept differs in that, according to Meyer & Land (2003:4) it is likely to embrace the following characteristics.

1. It is transformative, in that once understood, it signals a significant shift in the perception of the discipline under scrutiny
2. It is probably irreversible in that the acquisition of the threshold concept is unlikely to be forgotten, or will need considerable effort to unlearn.
3. It is integrative in that it is likely to make apparent previously invisible linkages or illuminate the interconnected nature of something
4. Finally and most helpfully I think for those who may be suspicious, it is 'bounded' in that any conceptual space will have what Meyer & Land call 'terminal frontiers' bordering with thresholds into new conceptual areas. These may helpfully serve to demarcate disciplinary areas and define professional territory.

For now, this may to many, seem unrealistic; the current social political and economic context will not easily facilitate such a methodology being embraced. However, it is the absence of such critical debate that has, as many commentators have observed, done the profession a disservice by being unable to articulate the difference it makes to young people's lives. Instead, and for now, the training of youth workers will need to develop a new set of skills which draw from the more specialist areas akin to psychology and psychiatry in order to engage young people who experience multiple difficulties, in ways that they value. My sense is that unless the profession adopts such a bold strategy in the near future, there will be little to 'reclaim'

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# Appendix 1 - Brathay in the Community - The six sites

## **Brathay Bradford**

Brathay Bradford was developed in collaboration with Bradford Youth Offending Team. At the outset, the project had two programmes; the Girls Dance Group and the Scholemoor Group both of which aimed to work with girls aged 13-19 who were involved, or at risk of becoming involved, in 'gang culture' and knife crime, to improve their educational attainment and reduce their risk of offending. As with all the other regions, Brathay Bradford was also tendering for additional contracts.

## **Brathay Cumbria**

At the outset, Brathay Cumbria became a partner in an anti-social behaviour prevention programme with Cumbria Constabulary. This programme aimed to divert young people, identified by the police as being at risk, into positive activities available locally. Like the other Brathay in the Community programmes, this 12 week programme involved a three day residential experience at Brathay Hall. It also included a three day staff training course. At the same time, Brathay Cumbria was providing a three year youth participation programme for the Cumbria Youth Support Service.

## **Brathay Sunderland**

Whereas in the other regions Brathay in the Community was able to build on existing links, Brathay Sunderland started with a 'blank canvass' and the challenge of establishing new partnerships and devising innovative programmes in response to their needs.

## **Brathay Birmingham**

The Kingsbury Group and the Youth Club run by Brathay Birmingham were developed as part of a City United initiative; designed to deliver two 'Bronze' leadership programmes with young people at risk of involvement in gangs and gun and knife crime. The programmes were designed to empower and develop a group of young people to become young

volunteers/peer mentors or youth forum members, in order to add capacity and sustainability to voluntary sector partners.

## **Brathay London**

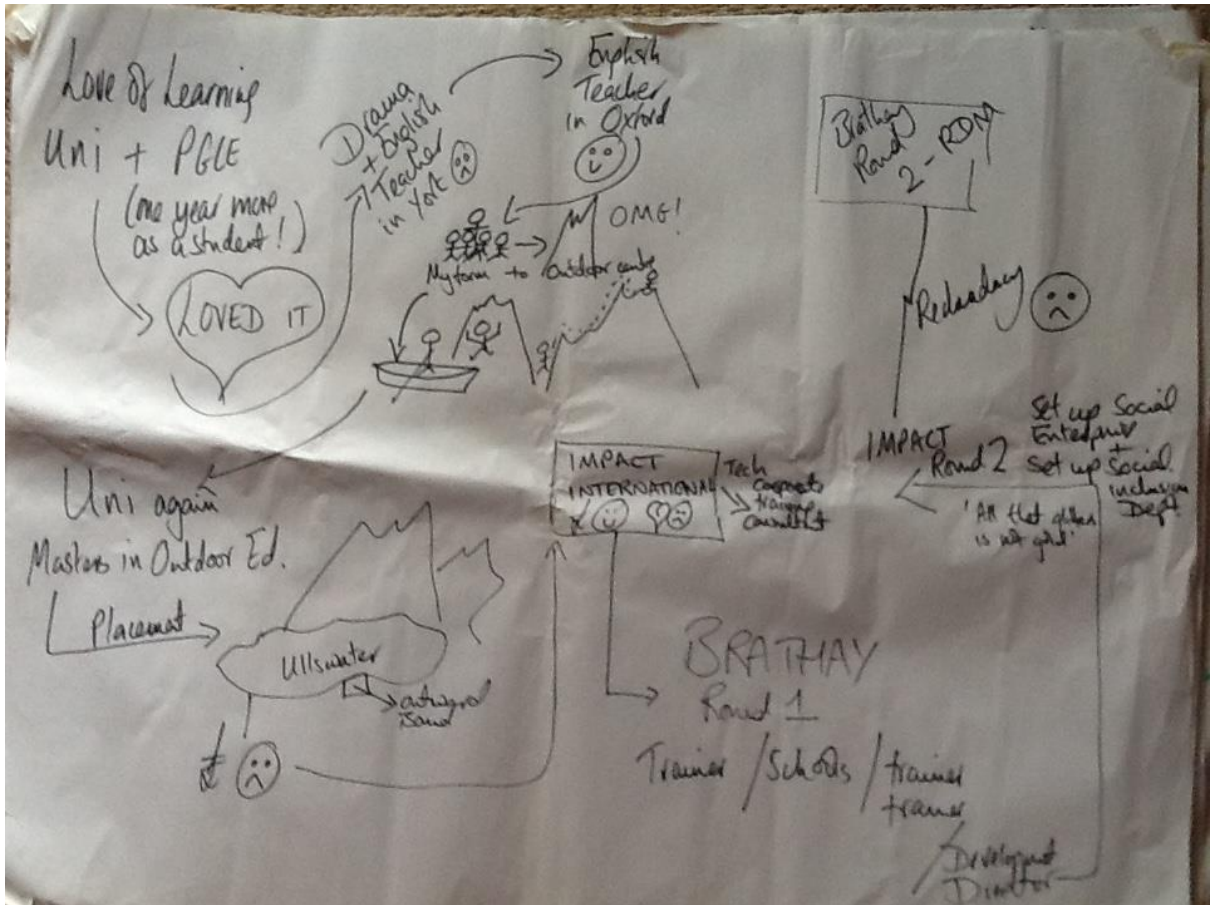
Having previously been involved in gang desistance programmes, workers at Brathay London launched the 2XL programme in Lambeth. 2XL was contracted to deliver eight gang desistance programmes over two years, targeting 240 gang-involved young people. 2XL aimed to reduce levels of weapon use and serious crime amongst these young people by developing their self-awareness and enabling them to make informed decisions about their lives. It also aimed to identify and nurture a core group of young leaders who could progress to an advanced leadership/into work programme. Brathay London also launched a detached youth work programme in Islington with 13 to 19 year olds who were not involved in mainstream youth or educational provision, and the Lambeth Refugee Project for 13-19 year old Sudanese and Eritrean young people. This project aimed to help them assume responsibility for themselves, enhance their social skills and, thereby, their self-esteem, enabling them to become active advocates for themselves and other young refugees in local and national forums.

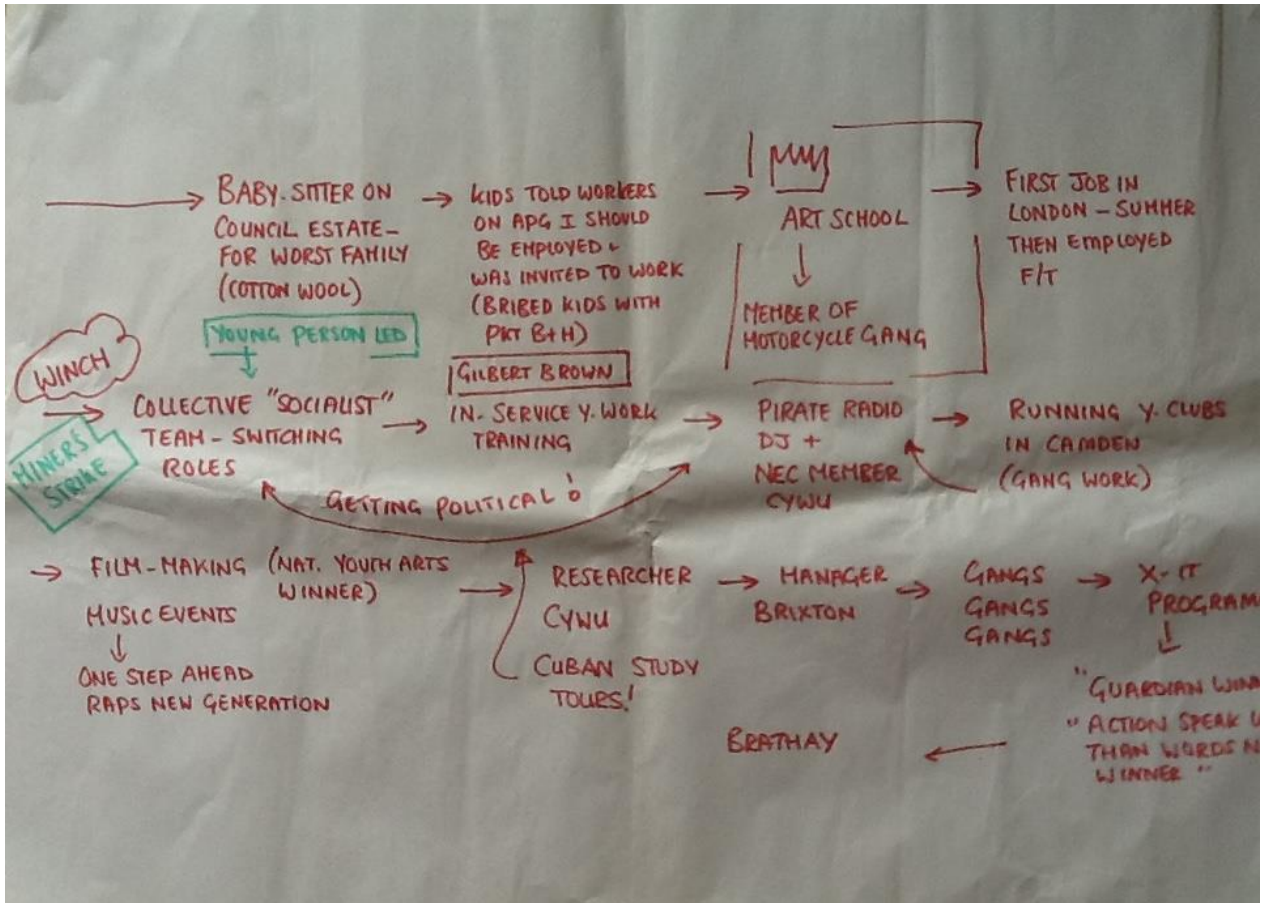
## **Brathay Merseyside**

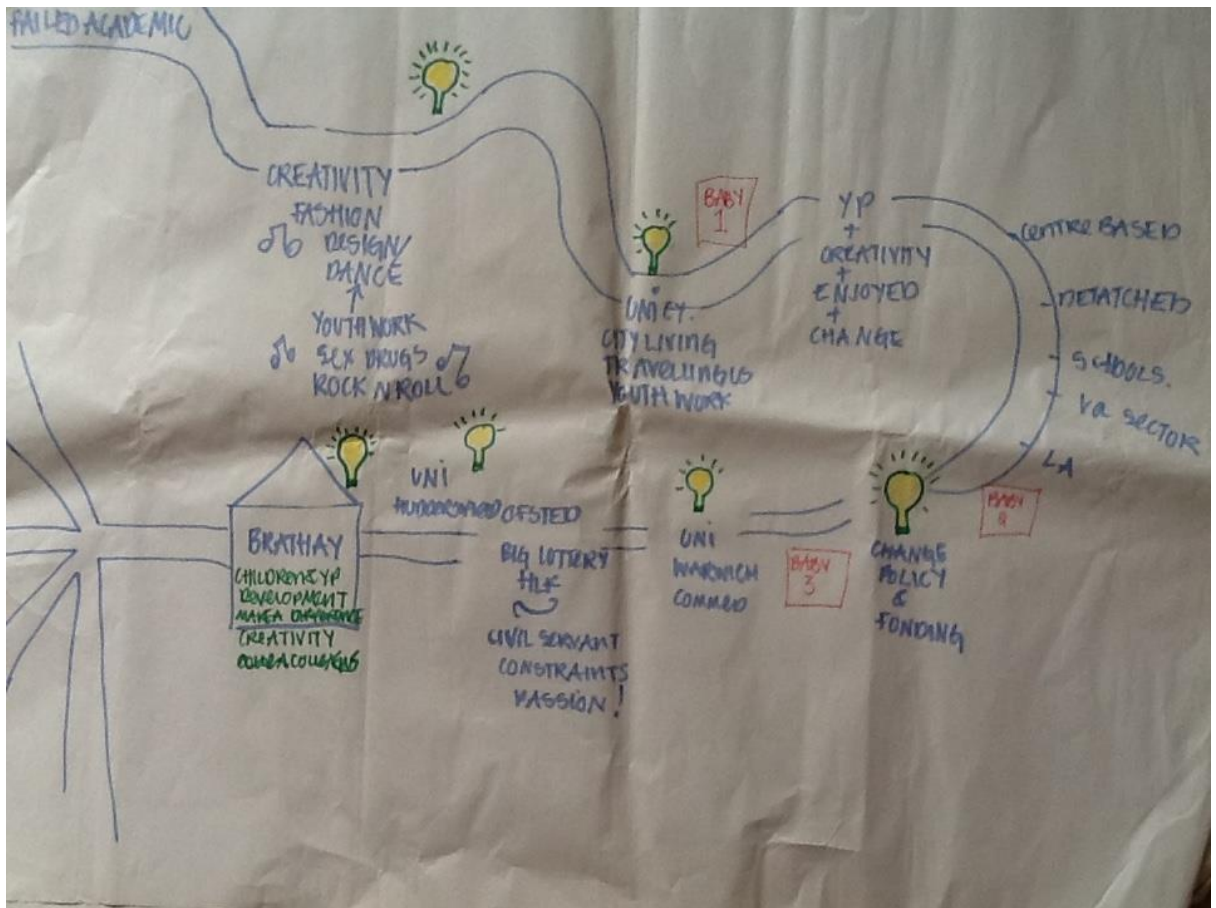
Initially, Brathay Merseyside endeavoured to collaborate with a police led project, designed to prevent youth crime by rewarding their law-abiding behaviour with a residential experience at Brathay Hall. However, the police failed to recruit enough young people on this basis and so Brathay project workers set out to recruit young people from St. Leonards Youth Centre in Bootle. The emphasis of the programme was therefore changed from 'crime prevention' to the provision of out of school opportunities for young people from a disadvantaged area of Merseyside, thereby increasing their self-confidence, self-esteem, and motivation.







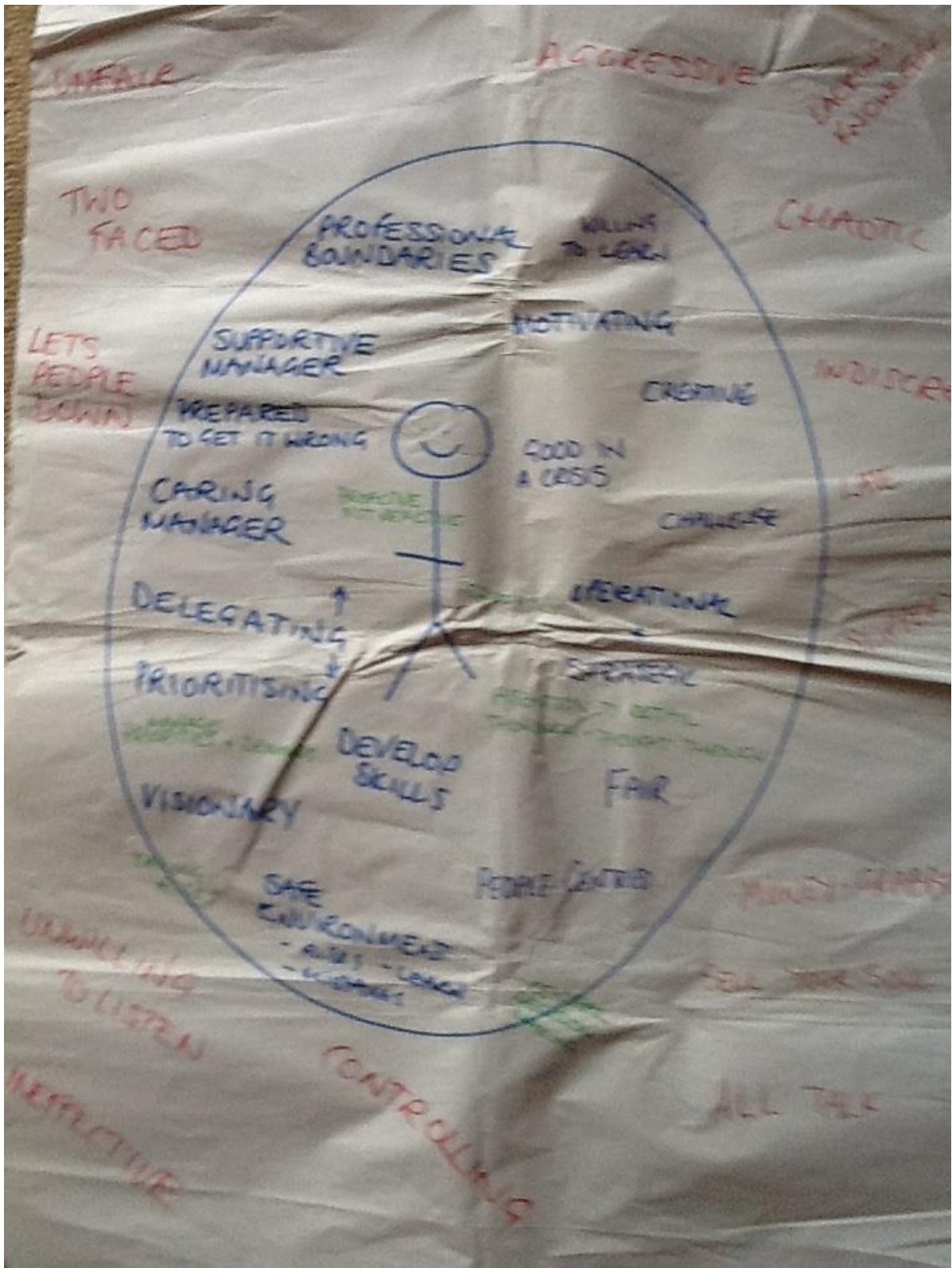




## Exercise 2: Who am I? Who aren't I?

This activity asked participants to describe their professional values and identify what they would see as outside of these boundaries.









The materials from this exercise were collated into the list below:

<b>What characterises my practice?</b>	<b>What I'm not</b>
• Creative x 2	• Controlling
• Humility	• Unwilling to listen
• Needs-led	• Ineffective
• Individuality	• All talk
• Professional boundaries	• Sell your soul
• Willing to learn	• Money grabbing
• Motivating	• Slippery
• Visionary	• Late
• Safe environment – risks/learn/mistakes	• Indiscrete
• Operational and strategic	• Chaotic
• Fair/ethical	• Lacking knowledge
• People centred – unconditional positive regard – congruence	• Aggressive
• Good in a crisis	• Unfair
• Visionary	• Two-faced
• Supportive manager	• Let people down
• Prepared to get it wrong	• Unwilling to listen
• Caring manager	• Judgemental
• Prioritising – manage priorities and demands, busy	• Personal gain
• Proactive not reactive	• Restricted by rules
• Saying 'no'	• Generalise
• Attention to detail – thorough and thought through	• Centre of attention
• Sales – income generator-budget manager	• Telling/dictate
• Passion	• Inconsiderate of people's needs
• Shaping service delivery	• Service-led-one destination fits all
• Creating future leaders	• Knowing best
• Risk taking	• Ignorant – bigotry/stereotypes/lack awareness/partner needs/young people needs
• Distanced from practice	• Colluder with young people, staff or partner agency
<b>What's on the edge?</b>	
• Who pays/economic realities	• Central decision making x 2
• Procedural	• Taking risks x 2
• Autonomy and compliance	• Required amount of organisational contribution





# Appendix 3: Knowledge Exchange case studies

## Case study 1: NEW BEGINNINGS – Jenny Pearce and Tim Bateman

This is a three year service for care leavers (aged 14-25) that offers them a diverse range of opportunities for support from multiple providers. Elements of the service include:

- Residential programmes (using both the outdoors and drama-based work as tools for learning) to provide opportunities for care leavers to explore the challenges of independent living and reflect on the consequences of the choices they make.
- Mentor training for up to 30 community volunteers per year to allow care leavers the opportunity to be matched 1:1 with a mentor. This also includes Peer Mentor training.
- 'My Time' events that offer individual opportunities to do something unique and inspirational
- 'YOUR' days events (either 1 or 2 day) and themed around, Your Life, Your Choices, Your Body and Your Place. These events have been developed to focus on key transition skills, improve practical life skills and raise aspirations. Those already identified include: managing a home, finance, relationships and preparation for work.
- Establish a Research and Advisory Group for the service, made up of a cross section of care leavers in order to empower them to influence and take increasing responsibility for services delivered with the partnership and the wider community.

**Who was the funder?** The programme will be funded by the Big Lottery. There is no client or commissioner.

**Why did they want the programme?** We want to deliver the programme to a) gain income and b) to improve the lives of care leavers.

**What were the needs of the young people, who were they?** The bid is designed to support care leavers aged 14 to 25 across Cumbria. The young people are known to have very diverse experiences – some with complex lives and multiple associated issues, and others with simpler lives and fewer issues. The issues include poor attachments, low self-esteem, alcohol and substance abuse, violence and crime, self-harm, teenage pregnancy,

over sexualised behaviour / exploitation / sex offenders, mental health issues and disabilities. The young people we recruit may have one or many of these needs. There are estimated to be 524 care leavers placed in Cumbria (as of October 2011), within this age range and this programme is targeted to work with 260 of them throughout the 3 years. However, around 228 of these young people over the age of 21 years now have little or no involvement with the leaving care system.

**What was the driver for the project?** The project design was driven by the three categories in which funding was available, youth offending, young carers and care leavers. We were originally going to go for the young offenders but decided not to as there was lots of provision for the first two categories and none for the last. The decision was primarily funding led, but then secondarily needs led as we felt that young care leavers in Cumbria had significant issues and little support.

**What were the outcomes, and how were they agreed?** The outcomes were written in by the bid team –

OUTCOME 1 - Young care leavers will demonstrate improved emotional resilience, self-esteem and practical life skills as a result of active engagement in experiential learning programmes

OUTCOME 2 - Young care leavers will have an increased ability to develop positive relationships, thus increasing their self-confidence and willingness to identify and engage with personal challenges and plan and implement their own solutions.

OUTCOME 3 - Young care leavers will have participated in inspirational and aspirational learning experiences, broadening their horizons, resulting in the raising of aspirations, setting and achieving positive goals for life after care.

OUTCOME 4- Young care leavers will report an increase in their ability to be heard, to participate in and to make a positive contribution to their community.

**What inputs were agreed and why?** There was a short consultation with young people in care, and then the programme was designed by the bid writing team...how were inputs determined? On what principles?

**What methods were used and why?** How were these selected (from recruitment to end of programme)? This is not a programme, it is a service – this is new for Brathay, we designed

this service because we realised that the experiences of these young people are profound and a single 'event' or 'programme' would not meet their needs (e.g. breadth of need or depth of need). A service allows them to drop in and out, take up different parts, and have a length of engagement that would overcome their issues.

There are multiple partners as we wanted to draw on expertise across the county, and because we thought that it would strengthen our bid. The services include: connexions, the Lakes College, My Time and Geese Theatre. Mentoring was written in as it was seen as successful by CCC as these young people need a secure attachment. Networking and peer mentoring was designed to support their social networks and to reduce isolation and loneliness.

**Explain how these methods will be used?** These methods will be used to support young care leavers, give them self-belief, skills, action plans, secure attachments, aspirations etc. so that they can leave care successfully.

**What skills will be used?** Here is the first dilemma – are generic youth work / youth development skills enough to engage with this group of young people? We have worked with individuals in care on courses previously, but only occasionally worked with groups of care leavers specifically. Do we have the expertise to meet the range of needs that individuals have (groups on programmes usually have some generic common need), and can we work with groups of diverse needs?

**What theories are used to inform practice, and why?** We seek to use this opportunity to theorise the programme.

**Are there any ethical issues or practice dilemmas to solve?**

- a) Do we have the skill set to work with these young people?
- b) They are hard to reach, how do we think that we can reach them?
- c) This is a drop in service, but we need to work with them all, so will we coerce them to come on to all aspects of the programmes?
- d) Will the older participants 'teach' the younger ones how to take drugs etc. (as may have occurred on the consultation)?
- e) How many chances do we give young people before they are banned from the service?
- f) Do we work with sex offenders?

g) How do we manage the wide age range without belittling the eldest?

**What do you / young people / client / profession view as effective?** The funder views success as us meeting the multiple outcomes and indicators set in the bid.

**Are there any tensions between design and delivery?** Yes, we have designed a programme that looks effective, will get us the funds and will address a service need, but at the point of design we are now not sure if we can deliver what the young people need – it's far more complex than it first looked. This is a dilemma.

**What questions do you have for the 'visitors' – how can they help you?**

- a) Do we have the skill set to work with these young people?
- b) They are hard to reach, how do we think that we can reach them?
- c) This is a drop in service, but we need to work with them all, so will we coerce them to come on to all aspects of the programmes?
- d) Will the older participants 'teach' the younger ones where to get or how to take drugs etc. (as may have occurred on the consultation)?
- e) How many chances do we give young people before they are banned?
- f) Do we work with sex offenders?
- g) How do we manage the wide age range without belittling the eldest?
- h) How do we manage the design, delivery divide better?

**NEW BEGINNINGS**

<p>Unpacking the case</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The programme was developed in consultation, this gives us confidence</li> <li>• Partnership meetings and user groups and youth steering groups mean that it will change after the contract is agreed.</li> <li>• Check out our worst case scenarios as assumptions – some of the young people are OK!</li> <li>• The themed residentials can be tailored and age specific – we can do that once we know the young people, so plans at this stage are tentative</li> <li>• The centrality of points of transitions needs to be in the planning</li> <li>• Different needs, ages, abilities, support and geography makes this complex</li> <li>• Do we need to differentiate the mentors across these differences?</li> <li>• We can plan for the needs of the young people once we know them; it feels odd because we don't know the needs yet.</li> <li>• View it as a series of mini programmes so that it is less daunting, each planned to individual group needs – young people will tell you what they</li> </ul>
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	<p>want and need</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The business planning process has been useful if frustrating</li> </ul>
<p>Solutions to the issues / questions in the case</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish a contract. If the young people break the contract then they can't come to that part but remain entitled to other parts of the service. Give them all entitlement at the start. This needs aligning across the partners.</li> <li>• Risk assess specific young people – can't do blanket rules.</li> <li>• Access the young people through the family placement officers and leaving care teams and connexions and foster care groups. Not all young people are in the leaving care team, and newsletters to voluntary groups may reach them.</li> <li>• Establish where the support and pressure to attend will come from – carers as a key mechanism.</li> <li>• Chat to the Venture Trust about their programmes.</li> <li>• Beware labelling or identifying these young people as 'in care'</li> <li>• Sex offenders need individual risk assessments and need to notify the police if they are on a residential</li> <li>• Can we use accreditation as a hook to stay engaged?</li> <li>• Staff, mentors and YOUNG PEOPLE need preparation – invest in the early stages</li> <li>• Investigate the costs of this programme vs. the cost of the care service over the last 3 years – bet its VERY good value!</li> <li>• If it goes wrong it means that it is right – we know that behaviour gets more extreme when young people feel secure, we need to be cognisant of this and expect it and not panic when it happens.</li> <li>• YOUNG PEOPLE can sign up and then run when nos. are high enough?</li> <li>• Count all YOUNG PEOPLE who indicate that they are in care and in Cumbria from IYSS to boost nos.</li> <li>• Moral issue – have to continue to work with them, can't stop just because we ticked all the boxes!</li> <li>• Nos. vs. quality in the monitoring...</li> </ul>

Reflections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have an 'ideal' plan but with the ability for adapting it to be individual specific</li> <li>• To engage with other organisations working with and around the key worker – contact foster parents, giving the external support</li> <li>• I feel more overwhelmed!</li> <li>• All inclusive participation with clear boundaries is needed.</li> <li>• Engage with carers</li> <li>• Keep a positive view of the service</li> <li>• We need to be clever with how we word / market this service from the outset</li> <li>• The service should provide automatic entitlement for all care leavers, even if only for certain aspects of the service</li> <li>• Seek out specialists in fields that can provide training for staff and mentors</li> <li>• The training and support given to mentors is key to success</li> <li>• Please negotiate at a senior level in the Lottery – service review / flexibility to embed integrity and confidence in the appropriate service is necessary</li> <li>• Training of mentors and selection of mentors is key</li> <li>• It's a service so we need to always offer something to everyone</li> <li>• Foster parents are key we need more events to engage them</li> <li>• To contact existing agencies i.e. TACT and share ideas with them, request their input and advice and guidance</li> <li>• Are we the tail that was wagged by the dog?</li> <li>• Now I have a much better understanding of why Brathay needs so may staff in the office with so few programme running</li> <li>• XXXX deserves a medal</li> <li>• To aim to provide a service that the young people see the benefit of, that is valued, that is useful in their next steps, and that they want to be a part of.</li> <li>• YOUNG PEOPLE are great at marketing and recruitment</li> <li>• UoC make a video of the service to send out on DVD?</li> </ul>
Actions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Find a way to challenge the funders and / or write in caveats about flexibility</li> <li>2. Be open in asking for help from practitioners, colleagues and org's that work with the client group</li> <li>3. Scale down the programme into bite sized chunks and incorporate support from central Brathay – delegate when possible</li> <li>4. Ensure on-going consultation with the beneficiary group</li> <li>5. Evaluation and programme development on-going</li> </ol>

## **Case study 2: RICHARD ROSE ACADEMY - KICK START PROGRAMME – John Pitts and John Coleman**

**Who was the funder / commissioner / client?** The programme was directly funded by the school as part of their Kick Start Programme.

**Why did they want the programme?** They wanted to improve attainment, behaviour and attendance.

**What were the needs of the young people, who were they?** These were some of the most deprived young people in Cumbria. The school has below national verbal reasoning scores, and the young people selected for this project were behind on their school targets (but were not necessarily low ability per se) and were exhibiting behavioural issues (they disrupted lessons). One for example had issues with their sexuality, another was from a single family situation and they were articulate about the difficulties that these contexts caused for them. They were all year 11 pupils.

**What was the driver for the project?** The driver for the work was risk aversion: the school was at a critical point of nearly being back in special measures, so this was also a performative policy drive, to avoid the risk of being deemed inadequate by Ofsted.

**What were the outcomes, and how were they agreed?** The outcomes were: improved behaviour, attendance and attainment, leading to improved Ofsted grading for the school (and arguably but not explicitly, less stress for the teachers).

**What inputs were agreed and why?** Students were consulted and invited to sign up to the programme with the assumption that there would be a high take up due to the activities appealing to their interests. An activity and daily report system was initiated in school to run June to September, support for the pupils on report was offered by the assistant head teacher. Pupils were removed from lessons to the exclusion unit.

This programme involved an initial two days at Brathay focussed on team building, followed by a three day expedition and commitment for next steps and new pathways.



Course design consisted of:

Introduction to Kick Start Programme - 1 day at Brathay  
 Residential phase - 3 day off site (2 nights in mountain huts)  
 Wrap up day - 1 day at Brathay

Celebration Day - To be held at Brathay at weekend with all 3 groups in attendance with teachers and parents.

The rationale behind this design was to stagger the 4 events in order to allow processing time for participants. Ali A and I decided this was the preferred route in order to support reflection and greater personal change for each participant.

The following table contains some of the techniques, skills, desired outcomes and underpinning theory at each stage of the programme:

	Learning Outcomes	Techniques and Skills Used	Theory and Models	Meta Pattern
Intro Day	Associate with the now Who they are, their lives so far, upcoming challenges and how they feel about these challenges, who they want to be and where they want to get to.	Timelines and personal shields	Pacing Rapport Safe learning environment Trust spiral Logical levels Learning Cycle	Elicit Current Situation and Challenges
Resi Phase	Gain awareness of personal strengths Give and receive feedback Achieve success and reflect on it Greater awareness of themselves and others in group situations Transfer experiences back to school Personal stretch Build positive relationships Discover new behavioral options	Canoe journey, unsupported navigation, mountain walk and scramble, ghyll scramble. Planning and cooking for themselves. Coaching conversations, video diary, metaphor, stories, poems, group reviews, feedback	Stroke theory Johari Window Well-formed outcomes Drama Triangle Ego States Score Model Perceptual Positions Comfort, Stretch, Panic	Challenge  Discover learning (add resources)

Wrap Up Day	Barriers to success Learning from mistakes Reflect on initial challenges Explore desired future Personal Goals for return to School Capture Learning Recommendations for teachers Peer Feedback	Visualisation Pamper Pole Pen race Peer Feedback	Locus of Control Failure vs. Feedback Grow Model State Management Ego States Anchoring Pacing and Leading Future Pacing	Consider challenges in light of new learning  Next Steps (future pace)
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The Celebration Day was intended for all participants, parents and families. This was to showcase the success of the course and learning for each individual. Benefits there for inter family relationships and teacher pupil relationships to see the group in a positive and successful light.

**What methods were used and why?** How were these selected (from recruitment to end of programme)? Young people were identified but then invited to attend – it was not a compulsory programme. The ‘big picture’ was to get the kids to associate with school and personal challenges, then disassociate and have new positive experiences and then re-associate with the school experience with their new learning. The programme drew heavily on NLP (communication triangle, perceptual positions, states, well-formed outcomes, future pacing) and TA (strokes, OK-ness). It also used lots of metaphor – as XXXX says, ‘the whole of our practice is a metaphor’. There was lots of group work and 1:1 coaching every night, captured on video. Each young person was asked what they want in life, what stands in the way and what they could do about that. XXXX had genuine rapport and strong relationships with a number of young people and enforced strong boundaries of what was acceptable / unacceptable behaviour.

**Explain how these methods were used?** These methods were used to enable the young people to mentalise what was going on for them, to give them opportunity to have positive experiences, building self-esteem, to give them opportunity to reflect on their current trajectory and desired trajectory, and make plans to support the aims that they had in life.

**What skills were used?** XXXX is skilled and trained in all of the methods that are mentioned above. He is an experienced, time served associate.

**What theories were used to inform practice, and why?** XXXX used the communication triangle and perceptual positions explicitly with the young people to enable them to understand communication explicitly, and to help them understand other people's perceptions of them. TA and NLP were used implicitly as they are key ways of helping young people to reflect and understand the current situation and plan a new future.

**Were there any ethical issues or practice dilemmas to solve – what were they and how did you tackle them?** In XXXX's own words:

“Oh yeah I felt at the edge of my practice in terms of managing the staff, they displayed less than OK behaviour and were shocking in the way that they spoke to the kids – lots of critical parent. So I had to manage them and the group. I side lined them to some extent, but also had to keep them onside as I needed them on board with the practice to really support me to manage the behaviour when it was really escalating. The staff even tried to get me to 'guilt trip' the group – I wasn't comfortable with that and didn't do it. This was a practice dilemma – keeping the visiting staff on board – they didn't really understand what we did and so easily sabotaged it. They needed to just observe and learn

I was also aware of the tension of stopping them doing an activity as they needed to clear up. There was pressure to take them out ghyll scrambling but I said that we would not go as they needed to tidy the place up and was fine with that, they learned about consequences.

I felt on the edge of practice managing this behaviour too as I was running out of options. I stayed in adult, and was judgement free and rational with them, negotiating, but then used the staff to be critical parents – maybe I need to get more into critical parent, but it feels like a game and a last resort that I don't want to use up”.

**What do you / young people / client / profession view as effective?** Success for me is the impact back in school reported anecdotally over time. Success was reported by the young people in common language: to 'pull my finger out' and 'knuckle down', phrases that must have been often cited at them. Perhaps as a consequence success for them was getting on with work more successfully.

The school wanted improved attendance, attainment and behaviour and to stay out of special measures.

**Was the programme effective from any of these perspectives?** An 'in house' evaluation showed that the programme had been successful in the short term. The teaching staff in the school noted improved; self-awareness, attendance, engagement and behaviour, relationships with staff at the Academy, confidence, self-esteem, application. Impact can be identified from a range of school data; these show the changes to the characteristics of the young people as they progressed through the Kick Start programme, and for the period after the programme. These are shown on the table below:

	PRE INTERVENTION 39 weeks	DURING INTERVENTION 18.5 weeks	POST INTERVENTION 19 weeks	AVERAGE NON PROGRAMME (i.e. the rest of year 10)
Attendance	94%	90.5%	93%	92%
Merits per day	2.5	0.75	25.3	0.79
Demerits per day	0.60	0.37	0.17	0.18

Attendance dropped during the challenging intervention and returned to pre programme levels post programme. Some young people had attendance issues as they had chaotic lives, so attendance could not be affected by the programme alone. After the intervention, 12 young people achieved 100% attendance compared to seven prior to the intervention a 23% increase.

The group achieved less merits during the programme than before (2.5 per day to 0.75 per day). This could in part be attributed to the time that the young people spent out of class due to the several days absence associated with the programme. After the programme merit rates shot up, rising to 25.3 per day. The range of scores is now 0.77 to 1.75 a day showing a significant increase.

School data shows that there was a drop in the demerit rate in the period before the intervention to the period during the intervention. This varied between a 22% and 79% drop. The merit rate post intervention is now close to the average demerit score for the rest of the year group of 0.17 per day as shown above.

There were significantly more incidents recorded for the Kick start group than the rest of year 10 – 515 recorded for the 22 members (0.60 average) compared to 1940 by the 204 pupils in the rest of year 11 (0.24 average). After the Kick start programme, the levels of incidents fell for both groups. The Kick start group average incident rate fell dramatically from 0.60 to 0.37 (a 0.24 improvement), whilst the rest of year 10 incident rate dropped from 0.24 – 0.16 (a 0.8 improvement).

Teachers made comments on the pupils' record cards throughout the programme. During the intervention the comments ranged from 50% - 87% positive, with an average of 74% positive remarks related to attendance, punctuality, effort, attainment and behaviour across a range of lessons. This shows the positive impact on young people during the programme.

Data was also drawn from the comments of the young people. These substantiate the school data on the impact of the programme. The excerpts from review sessions and video clips show that the young people felt more confident, more determined, more positive, had higher aspirations and believed that they could be successful as a result of the expedition programme. This is shown by the following exemplar quotes below:

"It gives people a chance to learn skills they don't really learn in school like team building, trust, responsibility and the well-being of each other".

Brathay helped me to "see the big picture" and that "I can do so much more than I thought".

"Listen, Learn, Live, Laugh"

"Down there you feel so small but up here you feel so big"

"we've been badly behaved at school and then you're doing this for us to show us that it's not all bad but if we can do this then we can behave at school cause this is harder"

"At school you say arghh I can't be bothered doing all this work but then you look back at things like this and say I canoed 5 miles I can easily do a bit of lousy English work. It makes you think, you give up so easily but I could have gotten so far if I could do stuff like this".

**Do you know why it was / wasn't successful?** We suspect, but did not prove that the methods used led to the impact identified above.

**How effective were the community v residential v partner sessions (if there were different young peoples of sessions)?** We do not know how effective in comparison the in school part was – we were not able to evaluate that part, and so it will be difficult to attribute long term changes to either the Brathay or the school programme.

**What did the staff team learn from this?** XXXX said that he learned much about the engagement and management of the visiting staff. He used outdoor journeying (obstacles and challenges) as a metaphor for the challenges young people faced in school. This worked particularly well, as some members of the group had struggled to 'get it' until he used metaphor.

**Were there any tensions between design and delivery?** There were some tensions revolving around travel time during phases 1 and 3 of the programme. As each of these phases consisted of a 1 day visit to Brathay from Carlisle a significant amount of time was eaten up by travel thus reducing useful delivery time. The celebration day also did not go ahead as planned. This was due to poor parental support and low attendance numbers. The fact that it was a Saturday may have had an effect on this so there was a plan to reschedule to a week day evening. This was also met with poor support and so the decision was made to cancel it.

**How is this disseminated internally / externally?** It was disseminated via the in house evaluation.

**What questions do you have for the 'visitors' – how can they help you?**

- How can we better manage visiting staff so that they help not hinder (different values)?
- How do we describe what we do authentically to the external world, and still get the business?

## RICHARD ROSE

<p>Unpacking the case</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Was the school supporting or victimising the young people?</li> <li>• Play was essential but we don't talk about it</li> <li>• High staffing ratios – we don't; talk about</li> <li>• Third space – neutral space – or space where peer pressure is even more intense?</li> <li>• Use of Maslow implicit in our work</li> <li>• Needs to be part of a process a ripple effect as we reach so few of the total school population</li> <li>• We use valuing language and positive regard</li> <li>• We act as nurturing boundaried adults</li> <li>• We provide opportunities for success and failure that are real</li> <li>• Is it OK if we make them robust enough to NOT go to school? The school wants self –efficacious young people who play by their rules...</li> <li>• The programme represented the school goals not the young people goals</li> <li>• The school has failed, that's why they are blaming kids and getting us in</li> <li>• Some young people didn't want to come as they didn't want to be associated with others on the programme...?</li> <li>• Our staff model positive change</li> <li>• YOUNG PEOPLE ARE CENTRAL TO ALL THAT WE DO – CIRCLES MODEL</li> <li>• There are contradictions across the stakeholder groups</li> <li>• We need to articulate the importance of the set up with all participants and staff with schools</li> <li>• Who are the clients –the young people or the school?</li> <li>• When does the person selling involve the person delivering – this needs to be joined up.</li> </ul>
<p>Solutions to the issues / questions in the case</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We need to build relationships with the school so that they go with us on a journey and we can challenge their thinking</li> <li>• We need to acknowledge the difference in our values / ways of working and be explicit about them</li> <li>• Think through ways of getting the communication cascaded through the school</li> <li>• Identify key negotiating moments with the school</li> <li>• Guidance on who should be visiting staff</li> <li>• Celebrate and involving parents – they will struggle to come to school though due to their bad experiences – Brathay as neutral ground?</li> <li>• You don't improve Ofsted by working on one group – you should work on the school!</li> </ul>

## Reflections

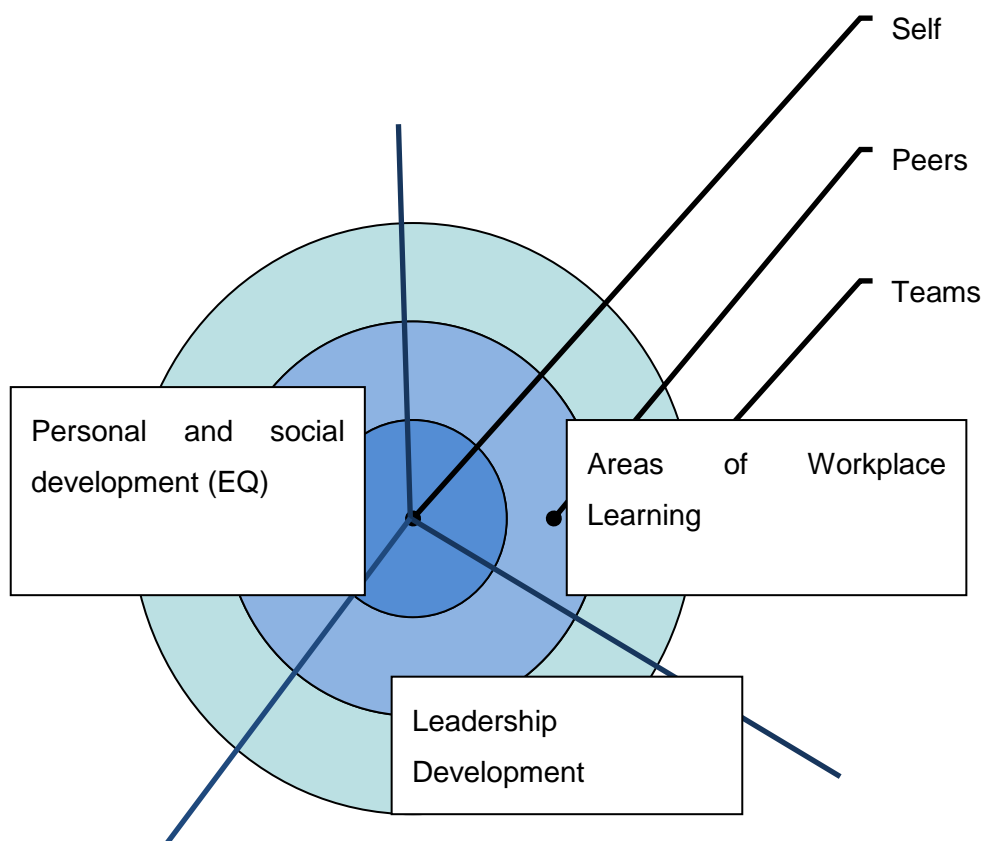
- There is a need for Brathay to pin down their identity, values and beliefs and skills. This to support its staff, clarify its approach to potential clients and share critical information with all its stakeholders. Essentially what is the mythical 'Brathay way'?
- Unpack Brathay's values
- Current tension between business development and client management
- Can we be true to our objectives and meet the clients objectives, is it cost effective, is it easy for the school, how do we address institutional barriers?
- Project set up is key, we need to invest more in this
- How do we manage client relationships from BD to delivery?
- Staff support and training is critical for Brathay staff
- Evaluations used in programme design
- Consider value for money for the client, young people and Brathay
- Visiting staff critical for consistency, transfer and ripple effect
- Map the values and aspirations of all the stakeholders
- Can Brathay work on organisational development in the schools?
- Make sure we really understand the issues before building the programme
- Movement away from bespoke to standard, how does this affect the outcomes and perception of Brathay's work
- Putting a spark in young people, having a ripple effect in schools which could impact on parents too
- Frame the whole system from a corporate psychology perspective
- Can Brathay provide a document or publication outlining programmes for schools and specifying what schools are required to do
- The importance of aligning model of change for young people with the client outcomes and being explicit about why the programme might create change for the school
- What about more attention to the small 'p' politics?
- Recognise the constraints of the school staff on the programme. Inevitably they will be thinking not just about what happens on the resi, but also how they will manage any changes in their relationship with the young people back in school.
- Give the models of change more thought and map them more with practitioners
- The importance of feedback / reflection can't look at behaviour change in the young people if this has not been identified
- Supporting transitions between the residential and community phases for long term change
- Outputs for the staff from the school maybe very different to the outputs for YOUNG PEOPLE
- Use virtual communities as well as face to face



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Look for ways of making the process more economical</li> <li>• Level the playing field between troubled and troubling young people</li> </ul>
<p>Actions</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Set up info – get clear contracts with all stakeholders</li> <li>2. Get guidance on Brathay clearly to the clients – new advert to be developed</li> <li>3. Get insight into processes for visiting staff clearly documented and in use</li> <li>4. Develop a cost effective visiting staff session for schools</li> <li>5. Pitch to benefits to the school</li> <li>6. Being mindful of low numbers, incorporate a cascade of learning to benefit other pupils</li> </ol>

### Case study 3: 'Status Update' Preston Guild Pre-Apprenticeship Programme – Margaret Ledwith, Margaret Melrose and Tony Jeffs

This programme is on-going; recruitment of young people commenced in November 2011, and the programme is scheduled to end in August 2012. The programme was designed in partnership with Preston College during 2011, and was based on Brathay's successful Make a Difference 12 week programme that was delivered during 2010 with 15 young people. The programme was conceived, in part, to build on Brathay's existing highly effective model for supporting apprentices, and incorporates a model of leadership of self, peers and teams, overlaid by personal and social development, and Brathay's 6 areas of workplace learning (linked to personal learning and thinking skills). The programme is managed by a partnership team of Brathay, Preston College, and the PCT.



**Figure 1** The Brathay Trust Apprentice Framework: Stages of Development and Learning Objectives.

Apprenticeships are strongly promoted as a way “to help meet the immediate and future skills needs of sectors and the local and national economy at technician, supervisory and craft levels” (Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2009), and as such attract significant funding to the FE sector. However, this perspective neglects the importance of personal and social development and their contribution to individuals’ self-efficacy. It is this area which the Brathay / Preston College Pre-apprenticeship programme aims to focus on. The programme aimed to engage NEET or at risk young people.

At the time of constructing this case study (December 2011), the first phase of the programme had been carried out (recruitment), and a number of unforeseen problems or tensions have arisen. This programme represents a pilot for Brathay (supporting young people PRIOR to entry onto an apprenticeship programme), it is being delivered in partnership, and a number of ‘live’ dilemmas are currently being addressed.

An innovative marketing campaign was created and personalised ‘Status Update’ invitations sent to 630 young people, drawing contact details on two databases held by Preston College. The College took responsibility for carrying out this campaign, in order to protect young people’s personal information. Young people were invited to attend an ‘Apprentice’ style selection event held at a local nightclub. It had been hoped that 60+ young people would attend, and that 25 could be selected for the programme (over-recruiting to allow for possible non-completers). Unfortunately, only 9 young people attended the recruitment event, and upon initial induction it has emerged that only three of them have the required literacy and numeracy levels for entry onto an apprenticeship (Level 2 literacy and numeracy is a requirement). *Prior to recruitment it was the project team’s understanding that the young people invited to the event would be screened to ensure level 1 ability. In addition, the level 2 requirement for apprentices only became apparent after the recruitment campaign had been carried out.* The delivery team is currently commencing delivery of the programme whilst at the same time continuing to try to engage more participants. There has also begun a process of re-negotiating outcomes with the partnership, as it appears it will no longer be possible for 20 young people to progress directly to an apprenticeship upon completion of this programme.

**Who were the funder / commissioner / client?** The funding for Status Update is from European Social Fund NEET, funding via Lancashire County Council via Preston College.

**Why did they want the programme (big picture)?** They wanted to engage 20 young people who would not normally access or be considered for apprenticeship opportunities onto a 12 month integrated programme of personal growth and change in order to develop the personal skills, behaviours and attitudes required to gain and sustain an apprenticeship or job in 2012.

**What were the needs of the young people, who were they?** Target Audience

- NEET 17 year olds
- o 6 week drop outs (16 years)
- o In College level 1 learner's
- o Not secured apprenticeship
- o Criminal justice
- o LDD
- o Single mothers
- o Care leavers
- o Not attending class

It was intended that the college would recruit the young people predominantly from existing students who are already enrolled at the college, but who are at risk of becoming NEET, and from 'early leavers' i.e. students who had started Autumn term, but stopped attending. These young people were deemed as 'hard to reach' or 'hard to engage' and it was expected that they may have a range of complex personal and social circumstances which contributed to their 'at risk' nature.

**What was the driver for the project (needs / risk / funds)?** There was a dual needs and funds driver for this programme. The college was aware that a particular population of young people was at risk of dropping out of education, and that their current models of support were not adequate to re-engage them. It was also designed as a programme for young people already in vocational learning who may struggle to secure an apprenticeship / job as a result of social skills/confidence/ motivation/ self-belief/ aspirations etc. By supporting them to develop the employability skills they require in order to progress on to an apprenticeship, the college would increase its apprenticeship numbers, which is a current central government priority and as such attracts funding.

**What were the outcomes, and how were they agreed?** Initial objectives for the programme, as described in Brathay's proposal for Preston College, and further refined by the project team, were:

- Source 20 Preston based apprenticeships linking directly into the Preston Guild 2012
- Engage 20 Students who would not normally access or be considered for apprenticeship opportunities onto a 12 month integrated programme of personal growth and change in order to develop the personal skills, behaviours and attitudes required to gain and sustain an apprenticeship in 2012
- Build a sustainable network of trained relevant adults and peers in order to provide support, motivation, advice and guidance to students for the duration of the project and beyond.

The specific outcomes for the young people have not yet been defined explicitly, but will consist of learning outcomes from the BTEC Level 2 in Employability and Enterprise, plus a range of personal and social developmental outcomes.

**What inputs were agreed and why (staff experience, time, resources)?** The staffing of the programme was considered as crucial to its success. Brathay process for recruiting staff delayed the programme by two months. The nature of the young people (disengaged from education, or at risk of disengagement, with multiple complex social and personal needs), required Brathay staff that are highly skilled and experienced, and able to build strong and open trusting relationships with the young people. The young people will be participating in this programme for two days per week, one of which is a 'Brathay day' during which Ann and Pete will deliver accredited modules from BTEC L2 Employability and Enterprise, along with the 'Brathay bit': motivation, commitment, etc.

**What methods were used and why? How were these selected (from recruitment to end of programme)?**

Recruitment - An innovative approach to recruiting disengaged young people was used, which involved a local design team holding focus groups with young people to design a creative personalised recruitment package. Invitations to an 'Apprentice' style recruitment event, held at a local nightclub, were sent to 630 young people, and followed up with phone calls.

College Sessions - At the time of writing this case study, the programme staff were in the process of building their programme and session contents. The approach they are using could be described as a 'Theory of Change' approach. They have two starting points from which to build the programme: the current circumstances and needs of the young people, and the ultimate programme aims. They are then building the programme, session by session, to enable the participants to develop the skills, understanding, and personal attributes and social competences to enable them to progress on to an apprenticeship upon completion of the 'Status Update' programme.

Participants will be expected to attend 2 days per week on-programme, one day of literacy, numeracy and functional skills delivered by college staff, and one day employability and personal development with Brathay staff. The days in college delivered by Brathay practitioners will be structured around delivery of BTEC level 2 Employability Skills, which is a portfolio based qualification.

Residential - The programme, which is to run over 8 months, incorporates five residential at Brathay Hall in Ambleside. In the initial programme proposal, the residential were designed to focus on five different themes, although as the expectations of the programme have changed in the first phase, the project team acknowledges that these may be re-negotiated:

- Residential 1 -Getting to know each other and sharing expectations, building trust and support within the group
- Residential 2- Mentor Mentee Residential
- Residential 3 - Developing Leadership within the Team
- Residential 4 - "You're Hired – Employability through Self-Awareness"
- Residential 5 - An introduction to the concept of The Big Society, developing and nurturing enterprise skills

**What do you / young people / client / profession view as effective?** This is currently a dilemma. It is now not possible to achieve all of the objectives of the programme, based on the emergence of new knowledge regarding the entry requirements for apprenticeships. The programme delivery team is now working up new objectives which it is hoped will not affect the delivery or funding.

**Was there evaluation and if so of what kind?** The Brathay Research Hub worked with the Project Team to produce an evaluation brief, to ensure that the building blocks of programme evaluation are included in design throughout, e.g. Outcomes, quantitative and qualitative data collection; 'distance travelled' tools etc. In addition, the project team have requested that an investigation of the partnership process be incorporated into the final evaluation.

**Do you know why it was / wasn't successful?** Currently, the programme has met with several unforeseen obstacles, which are being addressed by the project team. Most of these obstacles seem to have arisen as a result of the difficulties of working in partnership, e.g. miscommunication or misunderstanding of aims, process or constraints. These issues are not insurmountable, but the programme's success does rely upon maintaining an effective partnership approach with a shared and agreed outcomes / goals.

**What questions do you have for the 'visitors' – how can they help you?**

- How do/should we approach the issue of 'programme design'? Should there be a consistent documented approach across the organisation which helps us build the jigsaw of programme, e.g. recruitment, inputs in terms of sessions and staffing, accredited outcomes, residential and community sessions etc. This is especially problematic when working within a partnership context, which brings external constraints (funding, term times etc.). Sometimes it feels as if the approach is "How much money have you got to spend and what do you want to achieve? We'll make it fit!" Partners prefer bespoke programmes that are designed to meet their needs and the needs of the young people they are engaging these differ considerably depending on which partner Brathay is working with.
- Tensions between policy (prioritising accredited measurable outcomes) and practice (recognition of 'soft outcomes' and small relational and attitudinal changes).
- Elements of this programme (working with partners) have surfaced the enduring difficulty of articulating – concisely yet clearly and powerfully – what it are we doing!
- How do we recruit staff to deliver this kind of 'community programme ' which is a mixture of residential and community delivery with challenging ' urban young people ' . What qualifications/ experience/ person spec?

## PRESTON PRE APPRENTICE PROGRAMME

<p>Unpacking the case</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Programme developed as a result of existing partnership with Preston College, and previous successful 'Make a Difference' programme</li> <li>• This is a partnership programme, but partners are unequal as a result of who controls purse strings</li> <li>• Engagement process not as effective as hoped...college kept 'ownership' of this process, BUT we could have the courage to say we know about engaging hard to reach young people.</li> <li>• College is committed to programme outcomes, funding is not being reduced despite lower numbers</li> <li>• Relationships very important: Brathay staff and young people, Brathay and partner staff (delivery), partnership group members, college staff and students</li> <li>• Need to think about our assumptions about these relationships, how can we 'educate' our partners. We have a responsibility, towards the young people, to influence the existing systems which have let them down.</li> <li>• Every encounter should be mutually respectful, nobody should be diminished through ANY interaction with us – ask ourselves "What are we delivering, and why?" By delivering this programme on the terms of the partners, are we just playing a part in replicating existing power structures?</li> <li>• Elements of the programme – what is the combination of college sessions and resis? Why this mix?</li> <li>• We feel more on 'solid ground' with the residential elements, in terms of articulating our practice and achieving results</li> <li>•</li> </ul>
<p>Solutions to the issues / questions in the case</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NEED better knowledge management, don't need to keep reinventing the wheel</li> <li>• Gender proofing at planning stage</li> <li>• Find what we do well and do it more!</li> <li>• 'Study Circles' to develop greater understanding of partners. Preparation at the beginning of EVERY programme planning stage</li> <li>• 'Critical spaces' dialogue groups which equalise power and generate new ideas</li> <li>• JRF research showed recently that those organisations which "followed the £" failed.</li> </ul>
<p>Reflections</p>	<p>Project:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote female apprentices</li> <li>• Recruitment process – more mindful of needs of young</li> </ul>



	<p>people who the programme is aimed at</p> <p>Organisation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• TIME TIME TIME to think about what we're doing and why</li> <li>• Articulating our approach/methodology. Theory ⇔ action</li> <li>• Self-education, learning space for staff</li> <li>• Critical spaces – avoid becoming mindless deliverers of top down policy</li> <li>• Hold up mirror to your own organisation</li> <li>• Developing and maintaining a core identity</li> <li>• Recording learning and dissemination (or at least make available) to rest of organisation</li> <li>• Challenges presented by current political and economic environment – financial pressures and charity funding streams that practitioners are not equipped to deliver well will result in loss of reputation</li> <li>• Investment in training/skills for staff – professional development skills so that they feel equipped to adequately embark on new ways of work</li> <li>• Say no to contracts that require panic / too much stripping out</li> <li>• Speak truth to the powerful, tell funders the truth</li> <li>• Practical idea: weekly discussion group bring ideas/practice/ enquiries together to find solutions and share knowledge</li> </ul> <p>You</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Think things through more</li> </ul> <p>Youth Work</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NOT compromising practice for funding</li> <li>• Make sure you set out on the right foot</li> <li>• Working with young apprentices to empower them to achieve personal goals</li> <li>• Praxis – a thinking and doing approach which builds theory in action</li> <li>• Better initial preparation regarding client/group/practice</li> </ul>
<p>Actions</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Learn from the recruitment challenges before rolling out the programme again</li> <li>2. Be prepared to challenge agendas being set for you by other parties – we should be equal</li> <li>3. Introduce targeted marketing for young women apprentice opps</li> <li>4. Ensure we have a bank of qualified staff to deliver in FE</li> <li>5. Carefully prepare staff for work in FE sector</li> </ol>

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>6. Write up what happened so that others can learn from it</li><li>7. Seek at least joint control of selection of students and staff</li><li>8. Do not allow managers at Brathay and colleagues to push for expansion unless you are confident there are enough potential apprenticeships for those completing programmes</li></ol>
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## **Case study 4: Cumbria Participation Contract – Margaret Ledwith and Tony Jeffs**

**Who was the funder / commissioner / client?** Brathay was commissioned in 2009 by Cumbria County Council (Children’s Services) to deliver the ‘young people’s participation’ element of its youth work provision. The aim of the contract was to ensure that young people across the county had a say in the services that were designed for them. The winning of this contract coincided with the establishment of Brathay’s regional teams; prior to this we had been a provider of residential, NOT a community youth work organisation. Initially our programme of activities involved a wide range of community-based youth engagement and development, such as peer mentoring, mystery shoppers, young researchers, young inspectors, and managing the Youth Opportunity Fund. However, 18 months into the 3 year contract; it changed substantially to be solely about developing Youth Councils across the 6 areas of Cumbria. The change of focus – from creative community programmes for ensuring effective youth participation to solely youth councils as the mechanism for youth voice – was sudden and driven by the wishes of elected members of the Council, not comprehensively communicated, and came with an associated cut in funding.

**Why did they want the programme (big picture)?** Cumbria Children’s Services contracts out its youth services to a range of youth work providers across the county. Brathay was invited to tender for the participation element of the contract.

**What were the needs of the young people, who were they?** This wasn’t clear to us at the start, because this kind of contract, and ‘participation’ in this sense, and community youth work were all new to us. We set up lots of open groups, but it was really hard to engage young people. We had to re-think our approach to transport and logistics as we learned about the issues that are specific to young people in a rural area. And the programmes we delivered changed and evolved as we grew our experience and expertise in community youth engagement.

As the contract has re-focused solely on Youth Councils, we have found that although we still must - and want to – engage the hardest to reach marginalised young people, it’s difficult to do this directly. The young people who voluntarily get involved with a Youth Council tend to be those who are already motivated and confident. To enable those less able to engage and have a voice would require a longer timescale, and requires the opportunity to build

relationships, give them a stepped journey in order to progress to this bigger goal. This is a constant challenge for practitioners.

In addition, the 6 different geographical areas in which we are working each have different needs. There includes 2 urban areas (Barrow and Carlisle), a relatively affluent area (South Lakes), as well as large rural areas with dispersed population. There is an understanding that we must still try to engage and support as many young people as possible from a variety of backgrounds, especially the hard to reach, but this is proving impossible within the parameters of the Youth Council agenda. A current example is in South Lakes, where the participation worker has been contacted by a mum who is keen for her son, who has OCD, to become involved. This opportunity for supporting his engagement is welcomed by the worker, but the intensity of the support he will require is likely to prove very difficult time-wise.

**What was the driver for the project (needs / risk / funds)?** Drivers for Brathay were numerous. The financial driver of winning the contract may be the primary driver, but the values of participation, and supporting young people's empowerment, mean that it is work which fits within our core aims and ethos. It was also about "writing our line in the sand that we're not just a residential provider". The opportunity arose at the same time as YSDF funding enabled the organisation to establish regional community youth work teams. Prior to this our staff were called 'Development Trainers' and didn't do any community youth work, although our track record of working with the most challenging and disadvantaged young people in a residential setting and achieving great results was impressive.

The key driver for practitioners is values; all youth work is about working with young people to look at their learning and development, helping them has positive experiences. In this sense, the programme is broadly needs led, and offers young people the opportunity to be involved in a process which naturally up-skills and supports their empowerment, although it's all "value added" development, it's not fundamental to survival. The most important part is citizenship, having an understanding and empathy for other young people and the community at large, which is not generally something teenagers would consider.

There is definitely a sense that the driver for the commissioner is the need to put a tick in a box to show that they have participatory practice in general, and Youth Councils in particular (Cumbria is one of the last counties in the UK to establish working Youth Councils). There is a link with emergent 'Big Society' policy. Amongst elected members, council officers and agency partners there exist pockets of authentic commitment to youth voice, through to

evidence of tokenism. This results in a tension between the values driven approach of Brathay practitioners, and the timescales and expectations brought by partners at the County Council.

**What were the outcomes, and how were they agreed?** Initially the targets for the programme were quantitative, and we were required to report on a monthly basis the numbers of young people engaged in different levels:

A = young people 'reached'

B = young people 'participating' in youth work activities

C = young people gaining a recorded outcomes

D = young people gaining an accredited outcome

These were stretching targets; with three members of staff working on the project, and an aim of engaging 600 young people (a target stipulated by the commissioning body) in an operational landscape which was new to Brathay, this was difficult to achieve. As the contract has come to focus on the establishment of Youth Councils, a further tension has arisen between the contract manager at Brathay (whose agenda is meeting the needs of the contract, i.e. to have 6 Youth Councils established across Cumbria by a certain date) and the practitioners (whose agenda is that of the young people involved, i.e. the needs of individuals involved should dictate the pace of evolution, and their views shape the form of the Youth Council and its priorities).

A new outcomes framework has been developed by the commissioning body in the last quarter, in consultation with Brathay and other providers, which is more holistic and based on young people's needs and individual outcomes, and which demonstrates a more realistic appreciation of what authentic participation is.

**What inputs were agreed and why (staff experience, time, resources)?** At the start of the programme, input in terms of staffing and sessions were worked out and negotiated as the contract progressed. Three full time practitioners were employed to cover the 6 regions, which was difficult because of the county's geography. Inputs have been developed through trial and error.

Brathay practitioners work with County Council officers at a delivery level, and there is not a formal route for reflection and feedback. Consequently, we only receive feedback from them when there are perceived problems with our delivery. Officers are accountable to elected members, who have high expectations for the establishment and operation of Youth Councils, without having an understanding of the process of supporting the empowerment of young people as active citizens. Maintaining effective partnerships with officers has become an issue in some areas. This has resulted in practitioners feeling relatively isolated in their delivery.

Other providers across Cumbria are also contracted to deliver a small proportion of participation activity, and so working with them on a sessional basis is necessary, and can add value. However, in a number of areas it has been problematic as a result of historic rivalries or territorialism in the provision of services for young people. This is not the case across the board, but has involved instances of Brathay staff being confronted with hostility in partnership meetings.

A considerable amount of practitioners' time is spent on maintaining partnerships and managing the delivery of the contract through planning meetings with Council officers and other youth work providers. They are often relatively informal, and can involve open negotiation around goals and sessions plans. It is crucial that this happens to make the process work, but there is no space or time dedicated to reflecting on practice. Brathay practitioners feel they are juggling the needs of the organisation, partners, and the young people.

**What methods were used and why? How were these selected (from recruitment to end of programme)?** Building positive relationships with young people: there is a tension that the externally set timescales for establishing Youth Councils doesn't allow for the long term building of relationships. All meetings with young people are very task-focussed because there is an expectation that they need to deliver tangible results for their communities.

Engaging hard-to-reach: involvement in Youth Councils must be youth-led and on a voluntary basis and those young people who put themselves forward for this are already motivated, usually capable and confident. The challenge is enabling them to understand the importance of representing and engaging with other groups of less able or less motivated young people.

Development based on the needs of individuals: their development needs are usually harder skills, such as communication, budgeting, which are easier to deliver but quite distant from the practice and values of youth development work. A lot of your toolkit doesn't get used in this contract. It can feel unsatisfactory at times.

**What skills were used (were the staff experienced enough, were there skills missing, did they take risks by stepping outside the skills base, what did they learn through delivery)?** Management: delivering within the context of commissioned work represented a huge step up in expertise. Project management and partnership working competencies: this programme depends on youth work practitioners also developing sound project management, stakeholder management and partnership working skills. These have not necessarily been an explicit part of the job role, but practitioners have had to step outside their usual practice and juggle the demands of multiple stakeholder expectations, local politics, and working in the boundary space between organisations.

**Were there any ethical issues or practice dilemmas to solve – what were they and how did you tackle them?** We had no policies and procedures for working in the community; these were developed as practice developed, with a few moments of realisation that we'd been putting people at risk for ages! For example, we had no means of knowing where anybody was at any time, and didn't have two people working on sessions.

**Was the programme effective?** Young people – there varied opinions amongst participants. High and consistent attendance rates in some areas suggest satisfaction, plus the soft skills such as confidence, team working, and efficacy are high on their agenda, as is the social capital element. However, in other areas some participants are frustrated that they're not 'doing' more. Generally, young people express a sense of worth and pride through knowing they are representing other young people and making a difference.

Commissioners – their main indicator of success is numbers i.e. are there Youth Councils established, and how many young people are involved. (Involvement and representation can be measured through responses to surveys too). However, in one instance recently a young person had begun to voice their opinions loudly and effectively, and made herself a thorn in the side of the Council. We were asked to intervene in order to manage her better.

**How do you know – was there evaluation and if so of what kind?** Evaluation to date has been relatively informal, although some of the areas have involved young people in designing their own ‘distance travelled’ evaluation tools. Anecdotal feedback from commissioners and partners has been positive, and a number of semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, using Hart’s Ladder of Participation has yielded interesting data about how people view effective participation; people believe that in general there is an authentic support for youth voice, but that there is some distance to go in order to enable young people to begin to have a real impact – as equal partners – on decision making.

**What did the staff team learn from this?** Brathay’s contract manager stated that this contract has represented a huge learning curve for her, for practitioners, and for the organisation as a whole. Our skills in community provision, and in partnership working, have improved immensely. Other organisations are now very keen to work with us, and feedback from the commissioner highlighted that we are an ‘easy’ organisation to work with, especially noting our honesty and openness.

**What could / should / will be done differently as a result?** Brathay has recently submitted a tender for the next two years of this work, in partnership with other Cumbrian providers. Reflecting on the project to date, it is recommended that some explicit exploration of partnership as a process should pre-empt delivery, and should involve providers AND commissioner. Specific youth work practices, such as contracting, could be usefully employed here.

**Were there any tensions between design and delivery?** Yes! It was more a case of deliver then design. The tender was based on guesswork, not on previous experience. We took an innovative approach to designing programmes for engaging young people, and then reflected on what worked and what didn’t. Within the confines of a tight contract with exacting targets, this has resulted in high stress levels for practitioners. And there has been tension between how we work as practitioners, the expectations of stakeholders/commissioners, county officers (who don’t know anything about our contract details, e.g. elected members who want to see numbers, school council).

**What questions do you have for the ‘visitors’ – how can they help you?**

- The ‘design vs. delivery’ tension is ever-present. We must apply for contracts in order to sustain our work, so we find ourselves committed to delivering work which is on the boundary of our organisational expertise. Practitioners find themselves under



immense pressure to deliver against targets which they only have limited understanding of, usually within tight budgets. Results in 'papering over the cracks'. Brathay has thrived on its reputation for excellence, but this could easily be lost through a few badly delivered programmes.

- How do you effectively manage the quality and consistency of associate or sessional workers, who are, for example, employed for only 2.5 days per week to deliver on a busy contract? You buy them in on a sessional basis, but where is the money and capacity for training in this climate? How do I manage quality of people who might only have 2 ½ days per week?
- Philosophical level - there is an inherent problem with delivering a participation contract with targets set by a commissioning body. Activities and targets should be co-constructed involving young people. Hart's participation – tokenism vs. participation.
- In current financial and target-driven climate, all the 'nice to haves' (peer reflection, planning time, best practice, observations, things that absolutely should happen) that make you better at what you do, that makes the difference, are squeezed out.

## CUMBRIA PARTICIPATION CONTRACT

<p>Unpacking the case</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participation contract is about engaging with the structures of power</li> <li>• Critical/empathic pedagogy – enabling people to re-understand their lives, see that prior experiences haven't been their own failings but because of unequal power distribution/relationships. Enable them to take control and make choices</li> <li>• What does 'education' do? Is it our aim to make people happy through our work, or to mobilise their discontent?</li> <li>• Freire – teach people to question answers, not answer questions.</li> <li>• Emancipatory practices vs. placatory practices</li> <li>• Engaging with commissioners critically too, with conversations such as "If this is what you REALLY want to achieve, it must look like this" Being brave enough to state that we are experts.</li> <li>• Beware 'colonisation' via commissioning i.e. replicating and transmitting the culture and language of the commissioners, including their disempowering structures</li> <li>• Consider other Youth Council models, e.g. Devon, Young Mayor</li> <li>• Consider the models...representative vs. participatory democracy, inherent tension between the two. We must work within existing structure, whilst enabling genuine participation</li> </ul>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where does youth work, especially participation, link with community development? Where is the boundary?</li> <li>• Opportunities for becoming part of a wider community/voice, e.g. Occupy campaign, social networking</li> <li>• Radical ideas and conservative practices</li> <li>• Need a praxis approach – how do we define what we do, and why we do it?</li> <li>• Raises very practical questions though...what are the implications for our GROUND LEVEL practice? This may be a different kind of YW, preparing people for frustration, defeat ('learning' politics and activism)</li> <li>• We need critical spaces to reflect and bring together theory and practice, to ensure high quality practice, and ensure we're not just replicating the status quo</li> <li>• Can we use the new consortium to influence real change?</li> <li>• Meet young people in THEIR lives, not in council offices</li> <li>• Partnerships – who do we work with and why? Developmental/learning relationships. Use transformative models, educating young people, educating officers too.</li> </ul>
Solutions to the issues / questions in the case	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As a youth work organisation, dedicated to social justice, it is our responsibility to think about ways in which we can influence and educated our partner organisations in order to improve the conditions which lead to disadvantage. At ground level, this means open critical dialogue with partners/officers.</li> </ul>
Reflections	<p>Project:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In particular with this contract, remember that we must also prepare young people for disappointment as well as success</li> <li>• Teach people to question answers not to answer questions</li> <li>• We can do youth council work differently</li> <li>• Can we use the new consortia to influence real change?</li> <li>• To adapt and use the strapline “we teach young people to question answers and not to answer questions” within this project</li> </ul> <p>Organisation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where are our links to community groups and community campaigns?</li> <li>• Find the time for CRITICAL SPACES to allow reflection</li> <li>• Be bold and make change happen</li> <li>• Staff survival requires careful negotiation of contracts</li> <li>• Ensuring that time is needed (and should be considered</li> </ul>

	<p>crucial) for critical discussion about a programme</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We need critical space...create more opportunity, importance of reflective practice</li> </ul> <p>Youth work:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be able to meet the needs of the young people through the project</li> <li>• Look at and talk about our values and how to match to projects</li> <li>• NEED to ensure we have time as a team to think</li> <li>• Importance of generating theory in action – being able to explain why we are doing what we are doing</li> <li>• How morals/values/ethics/principles affect practice, tensions between this and delivery (constraints of contracts)</li> <li>• Importance of creating critical spaces in order to stay critical in practice</li> <li>• Does everyone share a mutual definition of youth work values?</li> </ul> <p>You:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enriched vocabulary! And thoughts. I like “to teach people to question answers not answer questions”</li> <li>• Ideas on how to integrate theories into practice</li> <li>• Opportunity to ‘revisit’ and unpack theory and to consider how it impacts on your practice</li> </ul>
<p>Actions</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Review the appropriateness of the current model and explore new ones</li> <li>2. Make it radical!</li> <li>3. Understand how important partnership working is and how crucial communication is</li> <li>4. Use the right language in the right context</li> <li>5. Keep going; seek a special Cumbria model one that matches real structure of council (not imagined). Representative, training focussed, with formal links and programme of residential training for YOUNG PEOPLE and key authority staff. Focus on relationship building etc. Work out a careful strategy then negotiate with key LA staff. They will probably buy a chance for success: remember they have no clue as to what you have</li> </ol>

## Case study 5: Family Nurturing Project – John Pitts and John Coleman

**Who was the funder / commissioner / client?** Bradford Family Intervention Project (FIP)

**Why did they want the programme (big picture)?** FIPs provide intensive support to vulnerable families. The FIPs model was based on a number of projects developed by Action for Children and expanded as part of the Government's Respect programme to target families involved in persistent anti-social behaviour, who are at risk of losing their homes. A pilot project to support vulnerable young children has been found to save £280,000 per child over five years at a cost of just £35,000 (Department for Education, 2011). Through multi-agency whole family support plans and assertive working methods combined with the possibility of sanctions, projects help families to address their problems. Accredited parenting programmes are delivered and services (such as health) are brought in and coordinated around the family. FIP's have been aimed at families who display persistent anti-social behaviour, families who are workless and have significant barriers to work, families at risk of homelessness, and families experiencing problems that are significant predictors of youth offending and other poor outcomes (e.g. child behavioural problems, mental ill health, domestic violence, having a parent in prison, prolific parental offending, substance misuse, child neglect).

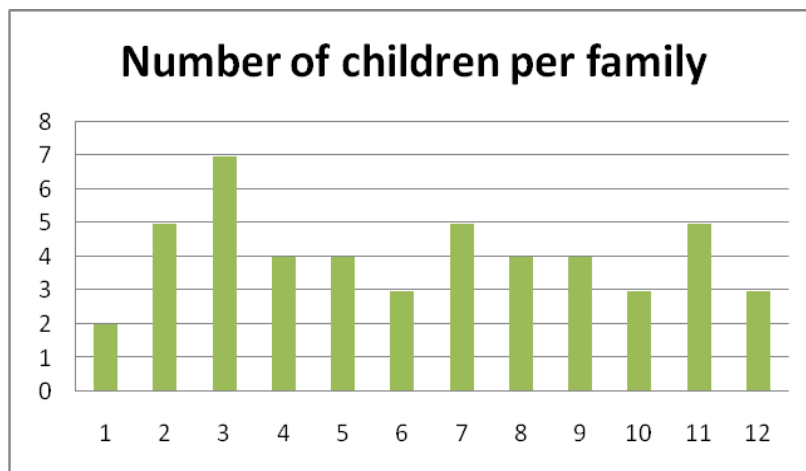
FIPs have been shown to deliver a range of outcomes beyond stopping anti-social behaviour and preventing homelessness. They are effective in improving parenting and children's attendance and attainment at school. Health promotion is also an important part of FIPs work. Physical and emotional health contributes to broader outcomes such as improved learning and achievement and to the long-term prospects of young people as they move into adulthood. These projects are increasingly being referred to as a 'whole family' or 'think family approach'.

Brathay were commissioned by Bradford FIP to work with up to 15 referred families from September 2010 – July 2011. The families were referred by Bradford FIP, often via the Bradford Anti-Social Management Group or the Youth Crime Action Plan Activity. The interventions complemented the work of the FIP as they took a nurturing approach, directly supporting the development of the families through activities that promoted family functioning.

The FIP felt the families were at the point that they needed family time to learn how to be a family and that they had had so many interventions; this was more about ‘their time’. Brathay was seen as an outside agency and “not social workers” and “not going to take kids away or judge you”. Brathay was able to adopt a nurturing and caring role. The project focused on learning different roles within their family and “teaching<sup>39</sup>” parents to be parents again. Able to “show them how<sup>40</sup> to like each other” and deal with conflicts within the family. They may be young parents (still children themselves), or have issues within their own families.

The FIP wanted the focus to be fun and play in order to get parents to be interested in their children’s education, for example, reading them a story rather than putting a DVD on. This was family-led in as much as the family stated what they needed and shaped the intervention.

**What were the needs of the young people, who were they?** Brathay worked with 12 families. 10 of these (83%) were single mothers; 1 had the children’s father living in the family home and 1 had a partner living in the family home. Families deemed as “low risk”.



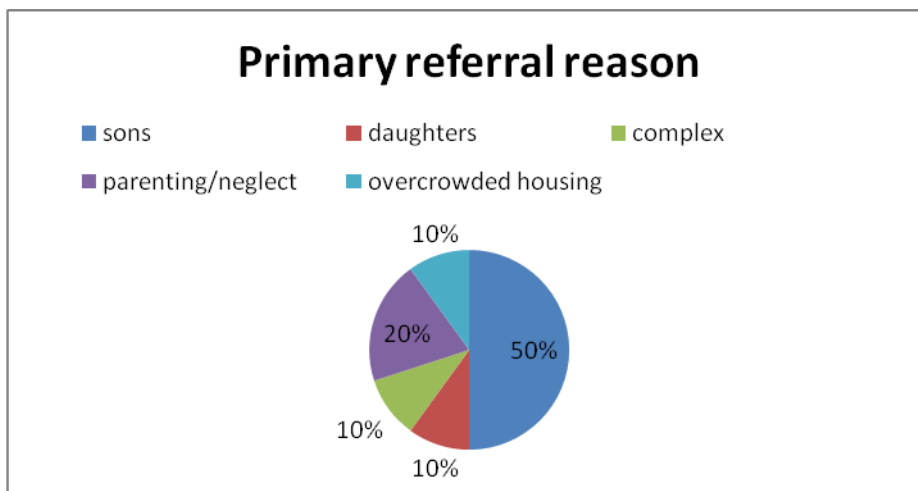
We worked with 49 children within these 12 families. The number of children per family ranged from 2 to 7 with the average number of children per family being 4. This consisted of 25 boys and young men and 24 girls and young women.

Average age of boys was 13 and of girls was 8. Average age of all children was 10.

#### Referral reasons

<sup>39</sup> Youth worker language

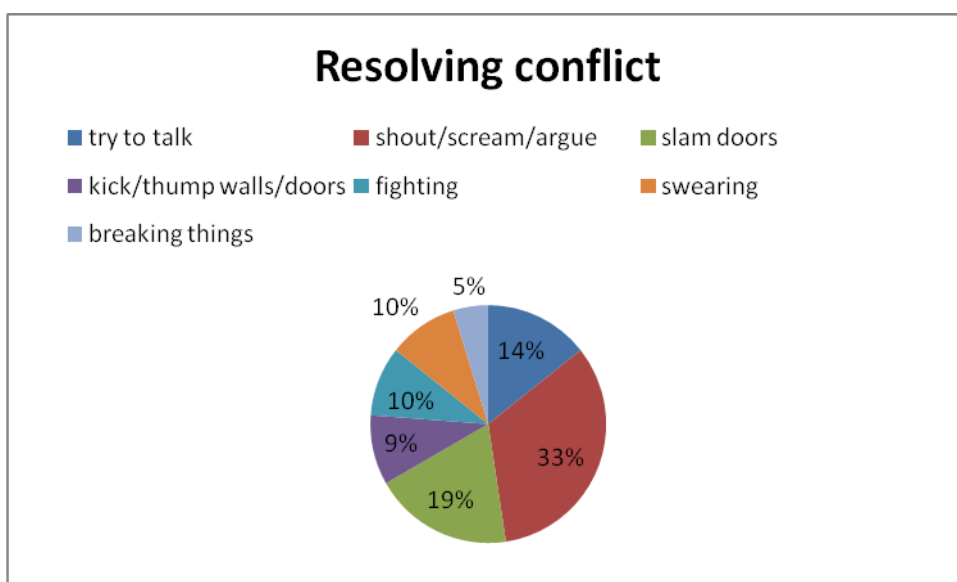
<sup>40</sup> Youth worker language



50% of all referrals were primarily because of the needs of the boys and young men. These included:

- Anti-social behaviour
- Involvement with youth offending
- Poor school attendance

How families said they resolved conflict prior to referral



Family members listed how they try to resolve conflict. Most references were made to shouting, screaming and arguing.

What the families wanted from the programme - The families' desires for the programme fell into two themes:

Do more together as a family	Get on better as a family
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• motivation</li> <li>• have fun</li> <li>• go out</li> <li>• do activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• communicate</li> <li>• respect</li> </ul>

**What was the driver for the project (needs / risk / funds)?** Funding income

**What were the outcomes, and how were they agreed?** To work with the entire family group to:

- Promote emotional literacy and emotional health
- Raise self-esteem and confidence
- Develop communication and social skills
- Support positive ways to resolve conflict
- Support positive attachment and empathy

**What inputs were agreed and why (staff experience, time, resources)?** Brathay Senior Youth Worker, two sessional staff, FIP worker for initial visit to help build relationship;

- An initial meeting and contracting session;
- 4 home based sessions with each family (often ended up doing more);
- 1 'family day out' with each family;
- A 3 day, 2 night residential for two appropriate families (up to 10 people in total) at Brathay Hall;
- Award ceremony with all partners.

**What methods were used and why? How were these selected (from recruitment to end of programme)?** The session plans and evaluations showed a range of activities and interventions working towards each of the aims. These include explicit discussion of events in the family; exploration of feelings; experiences of valuing one another; and coaching on how to communicate more clearly. Experiential learning allowed the families to draw out the key elements of engaging in art together, playing games together, and spending positive

structured time together. They learned how to engage with one another in this positive way and experienced the benefits of increased closeness, trust and attachment. Work towards the outcomes was also achieved through the informal learning, where discussions and debates occurred whilst sessions were taking place such as art activities. The programme clearly nurtured the development of the families involved through unconditional positive regard and practical support (e.g. painting and decorating rooms).

**What skills were used (were the staff experienced enough, were there skills missing, did they take risks by stepping outside the skills base, what did they learn through delivery)?** Youth work approach adopted. Engaging in positive family activities using an informal learning style. Sessional worker support included a counsellor to help have conversations (particularly one-to-one with the mothers). When risk was felt in particular families due to young people's aggressive behaviour, the intervention

**What theories were used to inform practice (if any)? And why?** Project was based on youth work principles rather than knowledge of family intervention work. Youth workers had limited or no experience of family work and theory. Informal learning approach; all family members had the opportunity to gain accreditation;

**What do you / young people / client / profession view as effective?** Greater family functioning and reduced need of FIP and social services, as well as decreased anti-social behaviour and risk of losing housing.

**Was the programme effective from any of these perspectives?** The FNP's proactively and explicitly developed emotional literacy and health, communication and social skills, attachment and empathy and conflict resolution. This was achieved through a range of interventions targeted at the specific needs of each family. Impact data shows that the families progressed in terms of family functioning, doing things together, child-adult relationships and sibling relationships.

**How do you know – was there evaluation and if so of what kind?** Interim and final basic evaluation – data gathered by youth workers and analysed and written up by the Research Hub.



**Do you know why it was / wasn't successful?** The FNP's contained all the elements of successful FIP's (key workers, whole family approach, contracts, sanctions and multi-agency working). Key FNP programmes features were:

- Flexibility of approach
- A different approach to other services (one son was initially reluctant to engage in case we were 'just like all them others')
- Needs-led approach to delivery style, activities, staffing levels and length of provision
- A range of multi professionals to sign post to and to provide further interventions.

**How effective were the community v residential v partner sessions (if there were different young peoples of sessions)?** Partnership worked well. Mainly family sessions. However, the family days out and residential seemed very special to the families who went. This gave them an opportunity to experience something new together as a family and drew them closer together. These were experiences of a new environment which involved sharing in this discovery together, as well as facing challenges together. This formed the basis of addressing the aims of the residential (and thus the project) from a shared perspective, rather than coming to the issues from different and often opposing perspectives. Sharing this experience evoked a deeper connection between siblings:

"Walking up that massive mountain with my brother made me feel really proud, we got some ace photos, and it didn't take us that long, thought it was gunna take forever" (Daughter).

"Being able to spend time with your family, because we're all together, all the time. When you're back at home, you might spend some time together, but you go play with your mates. Being here has made us play more together" (Conversation with elder children).

Mum, similarly commented,

"What we had helped us really bond as a family, but it would have been useful to spend some quality time with the older children, sometimes the younger ones take all my time up, I need to look at this when we get home, and try to give all my children some time, I think this is why J [Son] plays up, because he wants attention".

The residential experience was only open to two families. They also seemed to gain from interacting with other families (days out).

**What did the staff team learn from this?** Complexities and additional needs of working with families. Particularly in residential settings, as a wider breadth of skills are needed by staff. Furthermore, greater logistical needs, such as child gates and safeguarding issues when working with multiple families in residential settings.

**What could / should / will be done differently as a result?** Residential element funded for more families. Weigh up the pros and cons of working with multiple families in residential settings.

**Were there any tensions between design and delivery?** Boundaries of practice – what we offered compared to what was needed and delivered. In particular, the families had complex needs which were beyond youth work and also required a longer intervention than was funded for. There was little experience or evidence of family work underpinning the intervention – youth work was delivered in a family context.

**How is this disseminated internally / externally?** Evaluation report disseminated internally to practitioners working on the course and wider within the team and externally to FIP and local community (through Bradford open day).

**What questions do you have for the ‘visitors’ – how can they help you?** We need to develop a model of practice as there are multiple family projects on the horizon. We need this to be innovative yet within our boundaries of practice. This needs to be based on underpinning family work theory and specific skills needed to be highlighted and, if necessary, training provided.

## FAMILY NURTURING PROJECT

Unpacking the case	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Voluntary</li> <li>• Focus on fun and being a family</li> <li>• Accreditation</li> <li>• Think Family approach</li> <li>• Classic group work but in a family</li> <li>• There was a need for more workers with some families</li> <li>• Some families needed longer than others</li> <li>• Sometimes scared and threatened but what could we do</li> <li>• How do we cope when they come back after programme</li> </ul>
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	<p>has finished?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Different activities for different families – given a menu of options</li> <li>• There was more meaning for those that came on the resi</li> <li>• Brathay did have something unique, because no one else was working with the whole family</li> <li>• Whole family work was important</li> <li>• Brathay have core skills for different groups</li> <li>• Dealing with boundaries of practice</li> </ul>
<p>Solutions to the issues / questions in the case</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professionalisation of ‘help’</li> <li>• Need to listen to families as well as the state</li> <li>• Need to be clear about what we are NOT addressing as well as what we do offer</li> <li>• Need an initial diagnostic phase</li> <li>• Who’s ready? What’s the critical time of intervention?</li> <li>• Residential is “crucial” – parents can share knowledge; children become dependent; re-establish family relationships</li> <li>• Rest-bite</li> <li>• ‘Away’ is so powerful – it is therapeutic in itself</li> <li>• Brathay help look at the family in a different environment (meta-view of self and family)</li> <li>• Exploration of family and roles within it; helping functioning</li> <li>• Enabling</li> <li>• Informal learning – learning how to parent</li> <li>• Brathay facilitate powerful learning experiences</li> <li>• Work at priorities using a group process</li> <li>• Coming together as a family – decorating bedroom is a ‘vehicle’ (similar to an outdoor activity) as it helps explore an issue (experiential). Plus, there is a ‘want’ to decorate and a participate in a shared positive family experience</li> <li>• SPARKING</li> <li>• Positive strengths based – not negative deficits based (not correcting deficits)</li> <li>• Community and resi process – same values, but different process – POWER OF THE RESIDENTIAL</li> <li>• Assets model – strengths based and valuing individuals. THIS SETS US APART</li> <li>• Feeling empowered as a family and within the family</li> <li>• Locus of control is crucial to underpinning this work</li> <li>• Agency</li> <li>• Family as team or Youth work in a family?</li> <li>• What is good quality family work?</li> <li>• Need clear definition of what we bring</li> <li>• Worry surrounding the multiple needs and what our role is and our boundaries of practice</li> <li>• Need to be seen as a help and not a threat (either to the family or to other services)</li> <li>• Need to become part of a professional network around the family and be seen as an equal partner</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fundamental shared understanding – we are an important ‘cog’</li> <li>• We help build bridges between the family and the FIP/other professionals</li> <li>• Effective because we are going in with a different model</li> <li>• WE JUST NEED TO ARTICULATE IT WELL!</li> <li>• This is a big agenda for Brathay moving forward</li> <li>• Need to know the long term impact – SROI, justice re-investment</li> <li>• Need to explore different structure to interventions (e.g. going in once a month for a longer period)</li> <li>• Which areas have how many troubled families</li> <li>• Need criteria for referral</li> <li>• Consistency and fluency in language (between residential and community; internally and externally). THIS WILL GIVE US INCREASED IMPACT AND CREDIBILITY</li> <li>• Residential provision (adding to other services, e.g. Barnardos) vs. community provision (front line service). Can do both but need to articulate it well</li> <li>• How do we think change is happening – skills; values; observations</li> <li>• Need to be understandable and viable so as to sell and participate</li> <li>• Need clarity of how we address partners ‘problems’ or ‘issues’</li> <li>• What training do we need – need to develop an understanding of different schools of thought, e.g. family therapy</li> <li>• Need to include associates – they are a valuable asset</li> <li>• Family Group Conferencing – can we do it? Clashes with voluntary model as has roots in CJS (carries a stigma)</li> <li>• Consider quality vs. quantity</li> <li>• Residentials are expensive what role do they play – JUSTIFY</li> <li>• Is it affective to work with adolescents in a family context?</li> </ul>
Reflections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication, maintaining positive relationships with other agencies – crucial to success. Logistics and detail</li> <li>• Clarity around how we can add value and meet the needs of our clients and stakeholders.</li> <li>• Why are we not sharing our best practice with other professionals?</li> <li>• What is the ‘product’? Lots of variables = difficult to quantify</li> <li>• Need to develop SROI model to help ‘sell’ the product</li> <li>• How can we plan and cost family projects effectively?</li> <li>• What is the scope of our work with families</li> <li>• How can we be clear about appropriate families to work with? Establish criteria.</li> <li>• Do we understand what we mean by ‘family’? – models / cultural impact</li> <li>• What skills do our workers need?</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What can we learn from family therapy?</li> <li>• Is our interest in family work from a youth work perspective?</li> <li>• Who do we stand with?</li> <li>• Need to distinguish between objectives of community based work and residential</li> </ul>
<p>Actions</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Product development – scope, partners, referral criteria, unit costs</li> <li>2. Conversation and investigation of family conferencing SRO and unit costs</li> <li>3. Breakdown and examine parts – in community and in residential</li> <li>4. Understand youth work in a family and the family as a group</li> <li>5. Staff training in family therapy</li> <li>6. Develop our underpinning theory and be explicit about it e.g. locus of control</li> <li>7. Be more flexible on level and duration of work</li> <li>8. Need to update with current policy e.g. Louise Casey</li> <li>9. Review and assessment tool</li> <li>10. Need a risk assessment / diagnostic from the outset</li> <li>11. Feel OK to say NO!</li> <li>12. Development of an asset model of strengths based work vs. working in a deficit world</li> </ol>

## Case study 6: Brighter Futures – Jenny Pearce and Margaret Melrose

**Who was the funder / commissioner / client?** Comic Relief Partnered with Brighter Futures Women's Project (Stoke) to deliver the project as an additional experience for young women they work with.

**Why did they want the programme (big picture)?** Specific issue identified by the funder

**What were the needs of the young people, who were they?** The project originally aimed to work with 32 young women in four groups of eight young women over a two year period from 2006-2008. After the first two groups of eight ran in the first year, the group make up changed to four smaller groups of four young women which ran in the second year. The young women were between the ages of 12 and 18, with an average age of 15. They had varying 'risk factors' (defined by their involvement in the women's service), but commonly they were at risk of being involved, were currently involved, or had been involved in being groomed by an exploiter. Their risk of exploitation was equally varied and included being the daughter of a sex worker or having family members involved in sex work; family instability; being in care; peer influence such as friendships with peers who then pass them on to gangs to be exploited; and through sex for favours (when a young woman will perform a sex act, such as oral sex, in return for somewhere to sleep, a lift home, a cigarette or simply attention). All of these risks were inter-related: family instability had led to some young women being placed in the care system, which can make them more susceptible to negative peer influence. Thus the young women held multiple risk factors. These were also directly associated with related situations such as offending; disengagement from education; drug and alcohol misuse; and mental health issues. The young women showed varying behaviours during the project which were attributed to these chaotic situations. Their behaviours ranged from complete engagement and a desire to be a part of the course; to disruptive behaviour; to absconding from the course. The main disruptions during the course came from arguments between group members and reluctance to engage in challenges. Brighter Futures provided a front line service, support for sexual health and referrals. The Brathay project originally aimed to

- a) enhance self-esteem,
- b) build confidence and resilience and
- c) develop and support positive decision making.

**What was the driver for the project (needs / risk / funds)?** Funding income from Comic Relief, Brathay had no real experience of this issue and no partner at the early stages.

**What were the outcomes, and how were they agreed?** Outcomes changed several times. Initially these outcomes were designed by Brathay based on some basic reading about sexual exploitation, as well as Brathay's experience of residential youth development and a small amount of young women's work. This was without the input of Brighter Futures.

Outcome 1: The participants to stop prostitution [sic] or be supported out of sexual exploitation (80% of participants supported out of sexual exploitation, including exchanging sex for favours).

Outcome 2: The participants to reduce or stop use of drugs (90% reduce drug use or maintain drug free behaviour; 10% stop drug use).

Outcome 3: The participants to have increased self-confidence and self-esteem and to have an action plan on completion of training for continued use and support through the women's projects (100% with improved confidence and self-esteem; 100% with an action plan for education, employment and/or training).

Later, (through the action research process of Lucy's PhD, Lucy and Jill negotiated new outcomes with the funder and partners. These were to "Empower young women to make positive choices through an experiential and therapeutic approach". The outcomes of which were to:

Outcome 1: Raise awareness of self and situation

Outcome 2: To explore self-worth, behaviour and choices

Outcome 3: To take away personal strategies for the future

**What inputs were agreed and why (staff experience, time, resources)?** The partnership brought together Brathay's experience of youth development with Brighter Futures experience of sexual exploitation and their established relationships with the young women. Brathay delivered all the youth development work (community and residential) and were supported by the Brighter Futures staff. Brathay used the funding for the entire course (residential and community based) and Brighter Futures provided staff time and a venue for the community day sessions. The Brathay staff had limited experience of young women's

work and sexual exploitation and the Brighter Futures staff had limited experience of youth development and residential work. Brighter Futures struggled with trying to fit residential work into their working time directive.

**What methods were used and why? How were these selected (from recruitment to end of programme)?** May include: conversation, relationships, activities, multi professional signposting, peer mentoring, managing behaviour and boundaries, consistency in staffing, long term support etc. etc.

Year one (groups 1and2): 8 young women recruited to each group; recruitment based on 'filling spaces'. Many young women dropped out or were asked to leave. 6 out of 16 young women (37.5%) recruited in year one, completed the course.

	Aim	Methods
Day 1 (At local college)	Overview of programme; build rapport; start to build the group	Informal conversations and activities; information about course
Days 2 – 4 (Residential at local college)	Build trust; working together; sharing strengths; positive strokes; stacking up positive experiences; preparing for Brathay residential	Small group tasks; creative work to share; information about residential
Days 5 – 9 (Brathay residential)	Build confidence; have amazing experience; feel capable; explore choices	Group challenges, outdoor activities, creative activities, positive experiences.
Days 10 – 12 (Residential at local college)	Bring back to own environment; action planning and coaching; reducing support	Creative tasks, goal setting activities
Day 13 (At local college)	Celebration of achievements; presentation	Presentation to significant others

The project hoped to prepare the young women for going away, as well as providing longer term support after the residential. Changes were made to the outcomes in year 2 (groups 3-6) (detailed in Question 6 above), as well as to the recruitment and the structure. This resulted in 15 out of 16 young women (93.75%) recruited in year two, completing the course.



It was decided that young women would be selected more carefully based on who the key workers felt were at a point to engage in the course. This may have been at the end of their involvement with the young women's project and they had a reduced risk score; at the beginning; or anywhere in between. Whatever the young women's circumstance, the key workers decided to select a group of young women who were in similar positions to one another. They decided that they would not mix young women who were at different levels of exploitation.

It was decided that it was not feasible to work with eight young women at one time. The often chaotic lifestyles of the participants required a smaller group, which would allow a more person-centred approach. The group size was halved to four and the number of groups doubled to four instead of two for the second year. The course subsequently reduced to nine days which involved a pre-course day at the young women's service in the city; a three day residential at Brathay Hall; a four day residential at Brathay Hall; and a follow-up day back at the young women's project. This removed the pre and post course three day residential held close to the city. It was decided that this was not a suitable location from which to run the course as it was too close to where the young women lived, which brought certain risks. For example, 'boyfriends' of the young women were turning up and there was the potential for men who were grooming young women to readily access more vulnerable young women. These risks were held to outweigh the intended benefit of using a venue closer to home as a stepping stone to support the women out of their local environment, as a step towards coming to Brathay, and then again to support them back towards life in the city, after their trip to Brathay. Furthermore, this structure showed the value both partners held in getting away and the powerfulness of the residential at Brathay Hall.

Similar methods were used in the second year, but these were based more on the process of empowerment that was emerging from Lucy's PhD and in particular developing self-awareness / critical consciousness

Aim	Method
Time away in different environment	Mini-solo experiences
Understanding power and control	Body mapping activity

Appreciation of strengths and developing self-efficacy	Outdoor challenges (individual and group); feedback; reflection; sharing
Practicing being in control and making choices (internal locus of control)	Metaphor; mask work and role play; red flag activity; reflection on personal behaviour
Understanding what they want to change and how they will do this	Coaching and goal setting
Understanding barriers (in particular positive and negative networks)	Networks activity

**Explain how these methods were used?** Above

**What skills were used (were the staff experienced enough, were there skills missing, did they take risks by stepping outside the skills base, what did they learn through delivery)?** Brathay staff were not experienced in young women's work or sexual exploitation at the beginning. We developed a deeper understanding of this work and pushed to better facilitate the therapeutic experiences the young women were having through being away and in a different (natural) environment. This focused the NLP and TA skills set out in the original aims. In particular, we developed the understanding and skills to challenge sex-role stereotyping peoples and sexualisation.

**What theories were used to inform practice (if any)? And why?** Brathay specialise in the use of NLP, TA, and experiential learning. These approaches were drawn upon initially in this project. These were developed through the action research cycles to included empowerment theory and feminism.

**Were there any ethical issues or practice dilemmas to solve – what were they and how did you tackle them?** Multiple ethical issues surrounding disclosure. This caused initial unsettlement of the Brathay staff, but were later agreed to be dealt with by the Brighter Futures staff because of their local knowledge. Dilemma's over boundaries of practice in developing a therapeutic approach. It was decided that the young women were naturally (implicitly) having a therapeutic response to being on the course, being away and the natural environment. We decided to make this more explicit within the course and facilitate these experiences within our capabilities.

**What do you / young people / client / profession view as effective?** The importance of developing self-awareness / critical consciousness for young women to make change for themselves, rather than being told what to do and how to change. The powerful impact residential experiences can have in getting away and initiating self-awareness. The powerful role outdoor activities have in challenging sex-role stereotyping peoples.

**Was the programme effective from any of these perspectives?** Yes

**How do you know – was there evaluation and if so of what kind?** Evaluation and PhD research project

**Do you know why it was / wasn't successful?** The second year was more successful than the first year because of the knowledge and skills developed and the understanding gained of the young women's circumstances and needs (through the action research process)

**How effective were the community v residential v partner sessions (if there were different young peoples of sessions)?** The residential was able to be prepared for and followed up within the community by the Brathay staff. This would have been more effective if there was more community work from Brathay staff before and after. The partners' community work developed as the partnership relationship developed, for example, as Brighter Futures started to understand the skills and methods used in the project, they saw more value in them and facilitated the transfer of learning from residential to community (such as continuing metaphors developed on the residential, or recalling significant moments on the residential to help the young women once back in their community).

**What did the staff team learn from this?** The importance of reflective practice in developing personally as a youth development trainer and developing the programme to meet the needs of the young women. Partnership understanding of different approaches. The significance of empowerment and not being able to rescue or tell young women what to do.

**What could / should / will be done differently as a result?** Future sexual exploitation and young women’s work needs to combine consistent community support with powerful residential experiences. Staff should have a good understanding of sexual exploitation/young women specific issues and needs. Staff should have a good understanding of young women’s empowerment (and disempowerment). Staff should develop specific skills and activities for working with young women.

**Were there any tensions between design and delivery?** Yes – discussed above and addressed through action research process

**How is this disseminated internally / externally?** Evaluation and PhD findings presented internally and externally; sexual exploitation internal practice paper (in draft); empowerment practice paper (in draft); and more recently sexual exploitation training course for 16 Brathay staff.

**What questions do you have for the ‘visitors’ – how can they help you?**

- How do we develop pro-feminist practice without connotations/stigma in a non-feminist organisation?
- How do we inspire practitioners to become deeper reflective practitioners and develop themselves and practice?
- How do we facilitate naturally occurring therapeutic experiences, within our own boundaries of practice?

**BRIGHTER FUTURES SEXUAL EXPLOITATION PROJECT**

Unpacking the case	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Used grooming models and models of empowerment</li> <li>● Immense power in the residential experience</li> <li>● Getting away</li> <li>● Getting them to think critically</li> <li>● Focus on realising choices</li> <li>● We did not make sexual exploitation explicit. But this is</li> </ul>
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	<p>not the language young people would use anyway</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consciousness (positive and negatives) taking control</li> </ul>
<p>Solutions to the issues / questions in the case</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The residential / programme as 'disruption' of norms</li> <li>• Use of sexuality has been normalised and internalised. This needs 'deprogramming'.</li> <li>• Problems with short term finding – parachuting in.</li> <li>• Practitioners are scared in working with such vulnerable young people. There is a lack of knowledge surrounding the area. We need to be honest about our skill set and the scope of our intervention.</li> <li>• There is a lack of time (funding related). Causes problems with short term courses with very vulnerable young people.</li> <li>• We should support the development of new knowledge with partners.</li> <li>• There is not an explicit and collective understanding of practice.</li> <li>• Realise the 'gem' and state it within its constraints.</li> <li>• SPACE – DIFFERENCE – DISRUPTION</li> <li>• Be careful of positioning the young women's as 'victims' – this is a risk with Barnardo's grooming model. Need to be more critical of this model and recognise that some young women have agency. For example young women using their sexuality is agency. There is a need to celebrate this agency and then change our attention to helping them realise there are other choices available to them.</li> <li>• Link to agency and trusting what we do as the spark</li> <li>• Link agency to risk and resilience</li> <li>• Activities as vehicles in</li> <li>• Creating spaces to engage in debate</li> <li>• Do we call it sexual exploitation?</li> <li>• Sexual identity</li> <li>• Constraints on agency</li> <li>• Knowledgeable practitioners</li> <li>• Different factors for young women to young men (young men is more about homophobic bullying (escape))</li> <li>• There are complexities and limitations with specialised groups</li> <li>• What do Brathay bring to the sexual exploitation table? E.g. space.</li> <li>• Small group with excellent outcomes – BUT want longer scale work...?</li> <li>• Partners are crucial in sexual exploitation work (consortiums)</li> <li>• We offer work that has a deeper focus on self-awareness leading to agency. This adds to others services (which they don't have). We can also train them in some of these skills.</li> <li>• Need to know costs if don't intervene (SROI) – Look up Barnardo's work)</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We need a model or a quality framework that we take to partners for a particular way working</li> <li>• Bradford model could be different because of its community placement. Can this be a lead service? Do we have the expertise? Maybe we shouldn't try to be another Barnardo's and should focus on our unique offer...?</li> <li>• What's our methodology?</li> <li>• Need for training professional development for staff</li> </ul>
Reflections	<p>Organisation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pay more attention to staff and practice, instead of increased emphasis on generation of income and business</li> <li>• Understand our own limitations as an organisation and not just chase every cash cow</li> <li>• Know our limitations!</li> <li>• More training in specialised areas</li> <li>• Organisation needs to identify the theory/approach to be delivered – space, reflection, time, trained staff (Jenny)</li> <li>• Is it strictly about the “youth work process”? I think there are overlaps but this isn't what Brathay does/how we work.</li> <li>• Brathay strategic focus: - Question our 4 “strategic themes” for CYOUNG PEOPLES verses positioning the organisations distinctive youth work ‘model’, ‘method’, ‘practice’, etc.</li> <li>• Need for further training</li> <li>• A professional development service needs its own professional development training programme (Jenny)</li> <li>• Brathay is about ‘space’ ‘time’ ‘reflection’ ‘challenge’ ‘awareness’ (Jenny)</li> </ul> <p>Youth work</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff training and support for specialist interventions</li> <li>• Valuing staff skills and support development of specialist skills</li> <li>• The ‘residential’ and space it allows is important for youth work</li> <li>• Quality framework for youth work practice</li> </ul> <p>Project</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have we got new ‘theory of change’ (articulation of what we do)?</li> <li>• Need to reflect on role of Brathay youth worker. ‘In community’ – role in young people's everyday life, or ‘visiting’ young people's world (knowledgeable, objectively).</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The project can use / did use idea of space/time/reflection; Brathay have resources the CSE can use (Jenny)</li> <li>• Although it's specific, lots of transferable points for other groups and approaches to working</li> <li>• Language – how we describe/talk about young people involved in sexual exploitation. Different languages for talking to funders and young people. Developing a language to talk to young people about what they are involved in and why</li> <li>• Needs of different areas/regions and point of entry varies. London's proposal to complement existing organisations and bring innovation with residential element and on-going mentoring from older women role model within the community</li> <li>• How do we decide a required level of expertise (specialist knowledge)</li> <li>• There is a distinct difference between the residential offer and the 'in community' offer. Can we articulate that difference?</li> <li>• Restriction of intervention – skill set; funding</li> </ul> <p>Personal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Isolated youth workers in regions</li> <li>• Need to be brave and honest (and clear) about what we do / what we're able to do and how we work jointly with others to do that.</li> <li>• Do we have the necessary skills to deliver this young people of work?</li> <li>• More questions than answers</li> <li>• Specialist area I'd like to understand more</li> <li>• Would love to be involved in more academic research</li> <li>• Helped me clarify that there is a model/theory/approach to be identified (Jenny)</li> <li>• We need training</li> <li>• Making/creating critical, reflective space</li> <li>• We need to realise our constraints amongst our unique offer</li> </ul>
<p>Actions</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Training for staff – specialist skills for working with these young people</li> <li>2. Don't be afraid of reducing profit margin on programme to sub contract specialised org's to work alongside us to develop quality</li> <li>3. Support and debrief opps for staff working on the front line</li> <li>4. Develop the concept of 'disruption' and 'agency'</li> <li>5. Consistent support for staff across resi and community work</li> <li>6. Links to the national working group in Beds</li> <li>7. Partner with specialist org's and consider a lead partner</li> </ol>

	<p>to evidence a track record of successful work and acknowledge who has what skills</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>8. Recognise the potentially different delivery model</li><li>9. Be critical of what has happened before in the development of our model of working with sexually exploited young people internally and externally e.g. Barnardos</li><li>10. One way of working does not fit all</li><li>11. Accumulation of knowledge / skills from one project to the next</li><li>12. Clear definition of Brathay's offer and limitations in this issue</li><li>13. Consideration of work with young men and the specific differences here</li></ol>
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# Appendix 4: ESRC Knowledge Exchange – Plenary feedback

## End of day one plenary: What has struck you throughout the day?

- The importance of preparation with clients on goals, developing mutual understanding and establishing an on-going dialogue
- Being honest and open about our limitations professionally and organisationally. Putting in place support for staff to lower limitations
- The importance of critical space for reflections, questions, and preparation.
- We sometimes need to say 'no' and not be funding led
- Practice-based evidence has focussed on how the intervention fits the system and is much more thoughtful than evidence-based practice
- Madness of taking 'contextual' interventions from overseas (e.g. restorative justice from the native Indians) and thinking that it will work here in Liverpool because they have an evidence base
- Tensions of moral position and cash
- Organisations that survive say no and maintain their reputations
- Explore CYOUNG PEOPLES and PD synergies
- 'hostage funding' when funders won't release the funds until we have jumped through hoops
- The importance of communities of practice
- Residentials are based on Kolb, being away, isolated, in a new situation with safety and a sense of being valued and important
- Brathay's work creates 'disruptions' and we need to trust that young people have agency to change at any time
- Timing residentials will be different for different groups.
- Really useful and refreshing to have academic perspectives input and to get validation of what we think and feel
- Exploration of values and radical ideas has been valuable asking no go questions like do we really empower young people/ and do we normalise them? Have we been colonised?
- We need the space to maintain these discussions and to explore the issues and critical questions

## Day 2 Plenary. CYPS:

1. What do you know?
  - We don't have enough expertise in specialist subjects
  - Our practice is transferable and can be applied to different clients (mainly due to mixed ability and skills of the staff)
  - There is no strategy for staff development (including associates) currently and we need one. Also there is no audit of staff skills to assist staffing.
  - The empowerment model is a good framework to allow consistency and flexibility in our work
  - We work with people 'where they're at now' and value them for it – asset model. Working with positives rather than deficits.
2. What do you now know you don't know?
  - There is not just one way of working
  - We need to be clearer about what we can or can't offer
  - We need to be clear about what specifically distinguishes us from similar youth providers
  - What actually sets us apart?
  - We don't know how to share best practice effectively internally
3. How has this helped us to articulate our practice?
  - It has updated the language that we use (agency, self-efficacy, locus of control)
  - It may help once all the work has been written up and incorporated into the strands of work table
  - We have agreed to STOP talking about the 'Brathay way', thank god!
  - It hasn't helped everyone – still quite confusing
  - It's confirmed the notion that there is no such thing as 'our' practice – we have a collection of individual practices instead.
4. Moving things forward?
  - Induction – more holistic / appropriate (i.e. values led)
  - More peer observations for new, existing and associate staff
  - On-going practice sharing
  - Review of practice
  - Create a framework for quality youth work provision

- WILL THIS HAPPEN – HOW?
- Repeat these days with the PD team.

**CYPS PRACTICE VALUES:**

- Care for young people
- Inspire young people
- Challenge inequalities
- Treat all young people equally
- Support
- Two way communication
- We don't have all the answers
- Developing personal agency and the asset model
- Quality
- Consultative
- Respectful
- Empathy
- Honest
- Holistic
- Inclusive
- Change orientated
- Non judgemental
- Unconditional positive regard
- Solution based
- Flexible
- Review and evaluate
- Interested in the young people's world
- Focus on the positive
- Volunteerism
- Reflection on practice
- Locus control
- Experiential learning
- Presenting needs
- Potential of all
- Where the young people are at

- Listen
- Empower through creative and challenging activities
- Positive relationships
- Empowerment
- Personal responsibility

Org values:

- Fairness
- Integrity
- Respect
- Assets
- Participation
- Experiential
- Inspire, support, share
- Share ideas externally
- Don't share ideas internally
- Heritage of FCSCCT
- Research
- Practice development
- Sector sharing
- Staff development
- Respect the views of employees

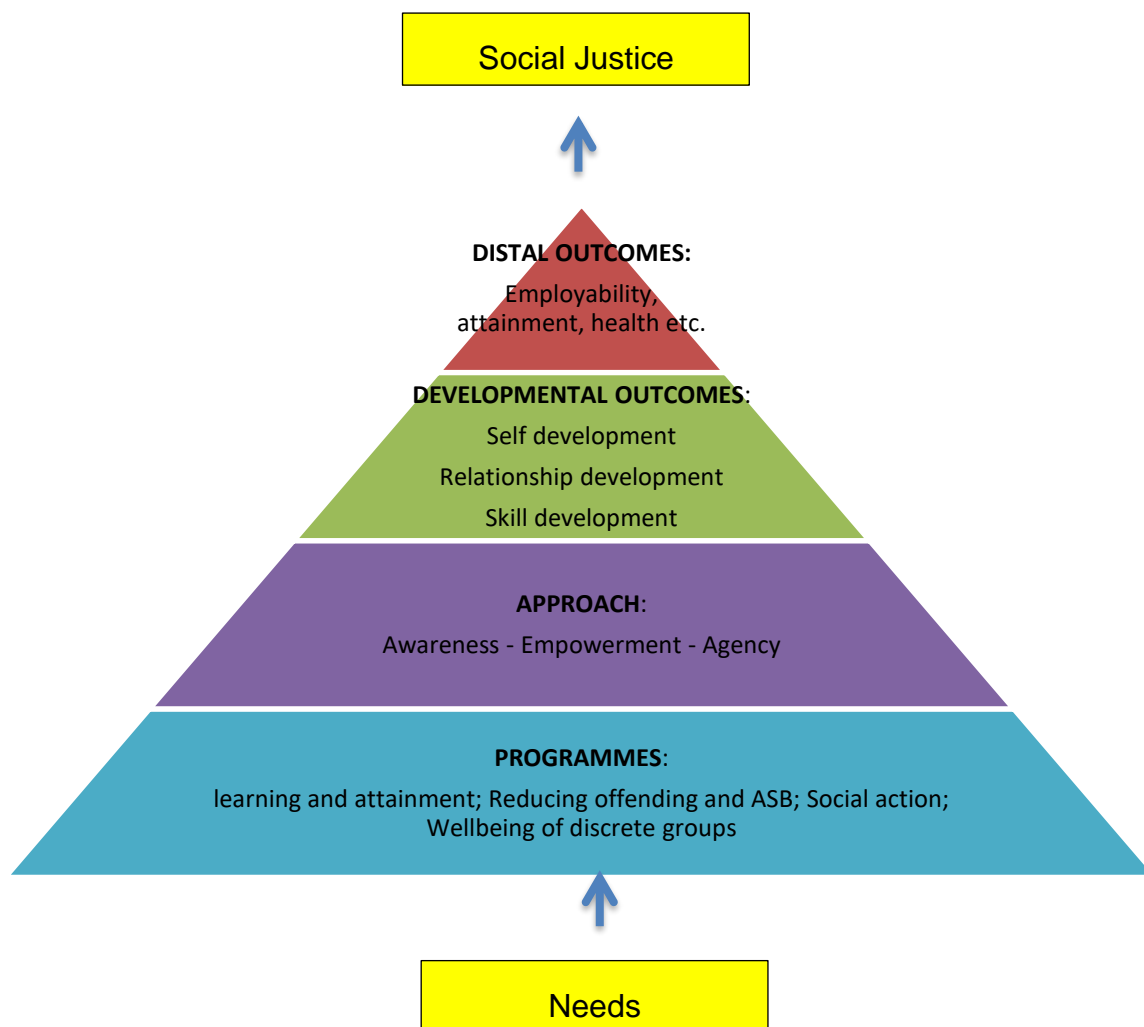
# Appendix 5: Participant overview

KEY: (B) Brathay staff, (V) – visitors, (KB) – knowledge brokers, (UoB) - University of Bedfordshire.

Activity	Gender	Age band						Work setting			Total
	Female	Male	18-25	26-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	Voluntary sector	Local authority	Private – (including HEI)	
Practitioner workshop (B)	2	7	0	0	3	6	0	9	0	0	9
Knowledge Exchange (B)	9	17	4	6	8	6	2	26	0	0	26
Knowledge Exchange (V)	4	3	0	0	0	0	7	0	0	7	7
Knowledge Exchange (KB)	0	4	0	0	2	2	0	3	0	1	4
Interviews (B)	3	5	0	0	1	7	0	8	0	0	8
Y and C students (UoB)	11	11	16	1	3	1	1	13	3	6	22
<b>Totals</b>	55 participants were involved in the research process comprising 26 Brathay staff members, 22 students, 7 academics. All 8 of the interviewees were also involved with and present at the Knowledge Exchange										



# Appendix 6: Brathay's Model of Youth Development 2015

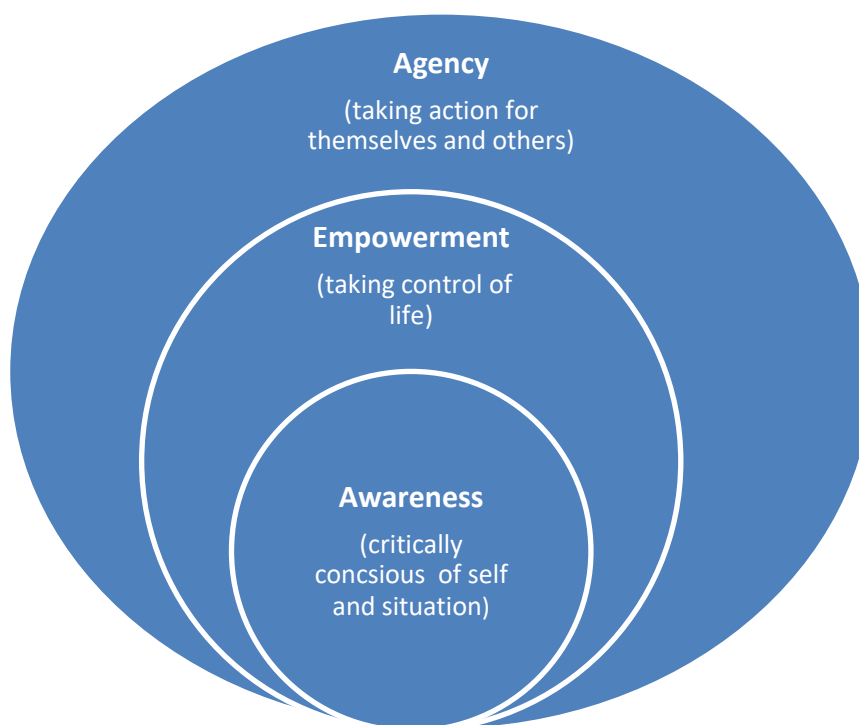


Our work is strengths based and focuses on young people's needs and assets – building on what they can do and where they are at (rather than a deficits approach or what they have been labelled as).

We use a critical framework – that is to say our aim is to enable young people and families to become critically aware of who they are and what the world around them is like. This process develops young people's empowerment as they make realisations of what they want and the skills they need. This develops their agency to take action to make change.



Therefore, this framework supports young people to be aware, to be empowered and to make change.



Within this critical framework we take an experiential approach which is person centred and based on strengths and needs. We facilitate time and space for young people to understand their experiences, consider a variety of concepts, reflect, and test new ways of being. We use a range of settings and activities to stimulate learning and development. These include residential and community settings, employing a heterogeneous range of activities (e.g. outdoor activities, creative activities, challenge, group work and playfulness).

Our work is ultimately towards social justice – the creation of a fair, equitable and just world, by helping young people and families develop their own agency to positively act in this world.

Our programmes fall into four broad areas

**Improving learning, attainment and employability.** Work with young people and families to increase their attainment, attendance and engage them in life-long learning and employment. This contributes to higher levels of attainment, engagement in education and employment in the areas where we work.

**Reducing offending and anti-social behaviour.** Work with young people families to develop their pro-social behaviour, contributing to lower rates of antisocial behaviour and offending in the areas where we work.

**Improved wellbeing (groups with discrete needs).** Work with young people and families with specific needs to increase their well-being and empowerment. These groups of young people typically have specific needs in response to the situations in which they find themselves. They may be sexually exploited, self-harm, alcohol and substance misusers, young carers, looked after young people, etc.

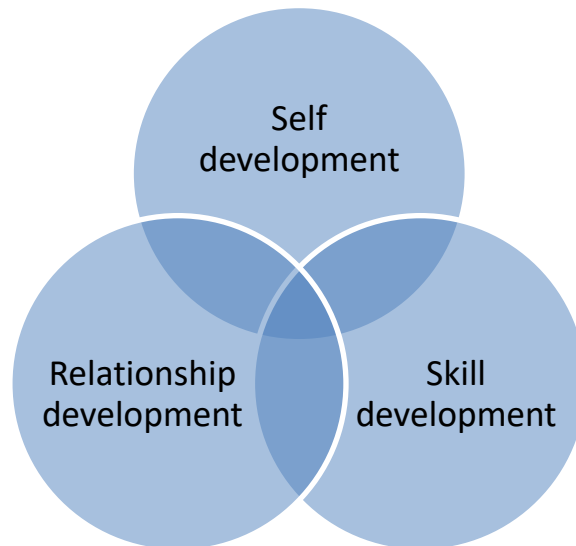
**Social Action.** Work with young people and families to develop their engagement and criticality of communities and society. This participatory work involves young people shaping services, for example as Young Inspectors, Youth Councillors and Young Researchers. This work contributes to community cohesion and service design.

These include the following sub categories of programme:

Type of programme	Subcategory
Learning and attainment	NEET
	E2E
	Attainment
	Aspirations
	Gifted and talented
	Outdoor education
ASB / Offending	At risk of offending

	New offenders
	Persistent offenders
	ASB
	Gangs
Improved wellbeing (groups with discrete needs)	Carers
	SEN / D
	LAC
	CSE
	Women's groups
	Substance abusers
	Self-harmers
Social Action	Community projects
	ALP
	NCS
	Participation
	Leadership

All of these programmes are / can be provided for children, young people and families. We work towards three sets of developmental outcomes; these are linked to the Catalyst Outcomes Framework and the Cabinet Office Skills for Life and Work. They are interconnected as shown.



The outcomes that are contained within each of these clusters are shown below:

Developmental outcome clusters	Contributing outcomes
Self-development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-awareness</li> <li>• Self-efficacy</li> <li>• Self-esteem</li> <li>• Self-confidence</li> <li>• Self-reliance</li> <li>• Self-motivation</li> <li>• Self-disciplined</li> <li>• Self-accepting</li> <li>• Self-regulating</li> <li>• Internal locus of control</li> <li>• Resilient</li> <li>• Determined</li> <li>• Persistent</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emotional intelligence</li> </ul>
Relationship development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Secure attachment</li> <li>• Trust</li> <li>• Relates to peers</li> <li>• Relates to adults</li> <li>• Empathy</li> <li>• Leadership</li> <li>• Conflict resolution</li> <li>• Motivating others</li> <li>• Negotiating</li> <li>• Collaboration</li> </ul>
Skill development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication (listening, speaking, non-verbal, explaining, presenting etc.)</li> <li>• Problem solving</li> <li>• Goal setting</li> <li>• Resource management</li> <li>• Decision making</li> <li>• Organising</li> <li>• Risk assessing</li> <li>• Reflecting and reviewing</li> <li>• Critical thinking (imagination, evaluation, innovation, enterprising, analysing etc.)</li> </ul>

We use a variety of methods to evidence developmental outcomes and how they underpin and contribute to distal outcomes such as employability, health, attainment, functioning families, active citizenship etc.

## **Associated practice development framework. Level One:**

Experiential learning: <http://www.educreations.com/lesson/view/level-one-kolb-and-experiential-learning/3701369/?s=Nptdb9andref=link>

The Trust Spiral: <http://www.educreations.com/lesson/view/trust-spiral/3730997/?s=l5Rjdoandref=link>

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs: <http://www.educreations.com/lesson/view/level-one-maslow-s-hierarchy-of-needs/4048645/?s=rxWhmsandref=link>

Unconditional Positive Regard: <http://www.educreations.com/lesson/view/an-introduction-to-unconditional-positive-regard-l/3730718/?s=p9ov0andref=link>

Comfort stretch Panic: <http://www.educreations.com/lesson/view/level-one-the-comfort-stretch-panic-model/4048887/?s=ZpPI2oandref=link>

Identity Development: <http://www.educreations.com/lesson/view/level-one-identity-development/4048537/?s=Wjye5xandref=link>

Self-Awareness and Critical Consciousness: <http://www.educreations.com/course/lesson/view/level-one-self-awareness-and-critical-consciousnes/9819561/>

Challenge by Choice: <http://www.educreations.com/lesson/view/challenge-by-choice/4048794/?ref=link>

## **Level Two:**

Proximal and Distal: <http://www.educreations.com/lesson/view/08-26-2013-lesson/9786508/?s=p1raWcandref=link>

Honey and Mumford: <http://www.educreations.com/lesson/view/08-26-2013-lesson/9786088/?s=Thjnk1andref=link>

Rapport: <http://www.educreations.com/lesson/view/rapport/9802861/?s=oytPxEandref=link>

The Communication Triangle: <http://www.educreations.com/lesson/view/the-communication-triangle/9510208/?s=EsegPLandref=link>

Attachment Theory: <http://www.educreations.com/lesson/view/the-attachment-theory/9509403/?s=D747kDandref=link>

Self-esteem, Self-efficacy and Self-confidence: <http://www.educreations.com/lesson/view/self-esteem-self-confidence-and-self-efficacy/9803446/?s=ko7XTzandref=link>

Drama Triangle: <http://www.educreations.com/lesson/view/the-drama-triangle/9510575/?s=9YEMeAandref=link>

Team Roles: <http://www.educreations.com/lesson/view/belbin-s-team-roles/9509482/?s=Pv1j3vandref=link>

Feedback: <http://www.educreations.com/lesson/view/feedback/9802231/?s=X84PMTandref=link>

Johari Window: <http://www.educreations.com/lesson/view/the-johari-window/9786215/?s=GI9L7eandref=link>

Limiting Beliefs: <http://www.educreations.com/lesson/view/08-26-2013-lesson/9786355/?s=3NRd5Bandref=link>

4P's: <http://www.educreations.com/lesson/view/the-four-p-s/9511127/?s=Ve31wEandref=link>

Amygdala Hijack: <http://www.educreations.com/lesson/view/the-amygdala-hijack/9509339/?s=e8qGAXandref=link>

Stages of Team Development: <http://www.educreations.com/lesson/view/tuckman-s-stages-of-team-development/9803887/?s=8jbhizandref=link>

Cognitive behaviour therapy: <http://www.educreations.com/lesson/view/cognitive-behaviour-therapy/9509903/?s=YNEiu9andref=link>

Ego states: <http://www.educreations.com/lesson/view/ego-states-and-transactions/9510932/?s=CrObXBandref=link>

Drivers in TA: <http://www.educreations.com/lesson/view/the-drivers-or-working-styles/9510679/?s=a7R88kandref=link>

Life positions: <http://www.educreations.com/lesson/view/08-26-2013-lesson/9786265/?s=GcNTkFandref=link>

Locus of Control: <http://www.educreations.com/lesson/view/locus-of-control/9786416/?s=w1CoUEandref=link>

Choice Theory: <http://www.educreations.com/lesson/view/choice-theory/9510098/?ref=link>

Thompson's Theory of Oppression: <http://www.educreations.com/lesson/view/tompson-s-model-of-oppression/9786552/?s=UK1Nqaandref=link>

The Resources / Demands Model: <http://www.educreations.com/lesson/view/the-stress-and-demand-model/9509209/?s=qTmpzBandref=link>