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# Abstract

## **An Ethnographic Study of Ethical Practices in Relationships Between Young People and Youth Workers.**

***Peter Hart***

Through this research I aimed to understand more about the ethical issues youth workers face in practice, using a comparative mini-ethnographic methodology. Compared to relationships young people share with other professionals, this 'youth work relationship' often has greater flexibility, wider and more nebulous concepts of professional boundaries, and inhabits an inherently more informal space. I begin by highlighting the contested concepts of youth work, and how they relate to dominant discourses in professional ethics. I acknowledge the reality of youth workers who may be in a risk-averse organisational structure, which promotes particular ways of working predominantly for the protection of the organisation.

The original contribution to knowledge within this thesis is in empirically recognising the ethical issues inherent in youth work relationships and beginning to develop a virtue ethics for youth work. In particular, it is through naming eight observed inter-related themes of the youth work relationship, and arguing that the appropriateness of behaviours and interactions should be understood holistically rather than through relatively simplistic codes and roles, that new understandings of ethical issues in youth work are created. I therefore conclude by arguing the complexity of the youth work relationship can be understood through a virtue ethics framework. Virtue ethics is helpful as the character of the worker is particularly important, and it is through both having a 'major premise' or *telos* of the youth work relationship, and through having a disposition to be professionally wise, act with integrity, and be trustworthy, that workers can navigate these complex relationships.

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# AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF ETHICAL PRACTICES IN RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN YOUNG PEOPLE AND YOUTH WORKERS.

Peter Hart  
School of Applied Social Science  
Durham University

PhD Thesis  
Submitted 2015

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I confirm that no part of the material presented in this thesis has been previously submitted by me or any other person for a degree in this or any other university. In all cases, where it is relevant, material from the work of others has been acknowledged.

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**Signed:**  
**Peter Hart**

**Date:**  
**14<sup>th</sup> January 2016**

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# 1. Youth Work, Relationships, and Ethics: Setting the Scene

*‘Ethical reflection is far broader than the scope of moral quandaries’ (Dykstra 2003:161)*

## 1.1 Introduction

In this introductory chapter I will set the scene for youth work as a professional practice occupying a contested space, in which relationships are crucial to successful work. I will explain what led me to this research topic, and provide a summary of the forthcoming chapters. The aim of this chapter is to provide a rationale for the choice and importance of this research topic, explain what the thesis contributes to pre-existing knowledge on youth work relationships and ethics in youth work, and provide an overview of the structure of the thesis.

## 1.2 Scope of the Study

This thesis focuses on the ethics of day-to-day interactions between young people and youth workers, including what is considered ‘good’ practice, and why. In short, the aim of the thesis is to:

*observe and reflect on what is considered ethical practice in youth work relationships, which take into account differences between centre-based youth work in various contexts, and provide recommendations for practice.*

The objectives of the research were to:

- Understand different conceptions of ‘good’ youth work through the testimony of youth workers, young people, and youth work literature.
- Investigate different understandings of ‘good practice’ in the youth work relationship.
- Discern, through observation, whether the differences between youth work relationships in the Christian and secular sectors in the literature are echoed in practice.
- Consider theoretical ethical frameworks that best reflect the reality of youth work practitioners engaging in relationships with young people.

To meet these objectives I used an inductive research methodology to answer:

- What are the main differences and similarities in models of practice in relationship building between church based and secular youth workers?
- What appears to influence conceptions of good practice of the youth workers in each sector?

- How do these different frameworks and models of practice affect young people?

Although, as shall be discussed later, the inductive fieldwork process necessitated a change in emphasis on these questions as the difference between sectors gained less prominence, and the consideration of 'virtue' became the dominant theme of the fieldwork and analysis. This research focussed on several contested concepts, which will be discussed in more depth in chapters 2 and 3. However, in the first instance it is about young people. This is often assumed to be a distinct group of the population, typically involving the teenage years, but it is also a socially constructed stage in life where individuals are more likely to be (or feel) marginalised and excluded from the rights and responsibilities 'adults' enjoy on grounds of age. For the purpose of this research, young people are defined as being 11 to 18 years old.

Secondly, this research is interested in youth workers. There are many professions and occupations that have young people as a primary focus, but a starting definition for this research are those workers who are practicing in a way consistent with the key purpose outlined in the National Occupational Standards for youth work, summarised as:

*Enabl[ing] young people to develop holistically, working with them to facilitate their personal, social and education development, to enable them to develop their voice, influence and place in society and to reach their full potential (Lifelong Learning 2008)*

Therefore, the scope of this thesis is to examine ethics in relationships between young people (11-18 years old) and youth workers (practitioners interested in the holistic development of young people and increasing their 'voice, influence, and place' in society).

This study has a particular focus on relationships in youth work. Relationships involve connections between two or more individuals, and can take innumerable forms. Within youth work, Sapin (2013:57) particularly stresses the informal aspects of youth work relationships, and some of the contested ideas of good practice in relationships are presented in chapter 2. Relationships between young people and youth workers are often claimed to be the predominant tool for transformation and growth in youth work. These relationships are notoriously complex, nuanced, context-specific, or simply 'messy'. Other occupations working with young people arguably have a clearer relationship between the practitioner and the young people, in contrast the youth work relationship is often open ended, with an informality similar to a 'peer' relationship which can make boundaries difficult to define.

This study is also focussed on ethical issues in those youth work relationships. In this thesis, ethical issues are considered to be those situations, attitudes, or characteristics where the welfare

and wellbeing of others is a concern. They involve matters of rights and responsibilities, harm and benefit, 'right' and 'wrong'. They can be examined from a range of perspectives: ethical issues can be negotiated from an individual, organisational, professional, or societal level. This study is predominantly concerned with ethical issues as perceived from an individual level, but recognising throughout that this is influenced by the organisational and professional conceptualisation of ethical issues. Ethics, therefore, in this thesis is about identity as well as actions: what youth workers claim to be and how they act, rather than simply a list of exclusions and imperatives (Sercombe 2010:3) or moral quandaries (Dykstra 2003:161). This also lays the groundwork for the consideration of the role character-based virtue ethics in youth work, which is presented in chapter 8. However this study uses an ethnographic methodology which was seeking to uncover ethical issues in the youth worker relationship, and as such it has less to contribute to understanding more about the internal frameworks and mechanisms that youth workers may use when deciding how to act.

Considering ethics in youth work implies judgements about 'good' practices. In Chapter 2 I will highlight some of the contested aims and values of youth work, however as a broad principle, practices are assumed to be 'good youth work' if they are consistent with the values in the National Occupational Standards (NoS). However, throughout the thesis other voices are considered which can reinforce, or challenge, the dominant discourses on what is 'good' in youth work. Ultimately, however, drawing on the NoS is to provide a distinction between youth work and other related professions. There may be some practices, for example, that may be 'good' social work or 'good' teaching practices, but would be inconsistent with the values of youth work.

The final area of concern for this thesis is the secular/Christian distinction, as there are two participating organisations in the research from each sector. As Jawad (2012) argues, 'Christian' can refer to a significant range of organisations from organisations aiming to promulgate the Christian faith or nurture believers, through to organisations with a Christian foundation but little or no overt Christian aim. In this thesis, it is those organisations that make an overtly Christian statement in their aims that are included. Organisations with no specific overt aim regarding faith (which may be phrased as a motivation, value base, or missional outcome) is assumed to be 'secular'. However difficulties in this dichotomy are further explored in chapter 5, and in practice these faith-specific distinctions became less important to the findings of the thesis that were expected.

### 1.3 Why Research Ethical Issues in Youth Work?

There is little empirical research on ethics in youth work; however there are significant works by esteemed authors, covered in chapter 3, and much of their writing is based in their own practices or their awareness of the field through training and supervising youth workers. Publications recounting UK based empirical studies of ethics in youth work seem to be limited to Sercombe and Sercombe (2010) reflecting on training workers, while several chapters in 'Ethical Issues in Youth Work' (Banks 2010a) have drawn from interviews with practitioners. The emphasis of this thesis on an ethnographic approach recognises there is a gap in the research on observing good practice: that is, there is an abundance of literature and research on formal and espoused ethical practice in youth work (e.g. Young 2010, Banks 2010a, Sercombe 2010a, Roberts 2009), but little found on operant forms of ethical practice – though Walker and Larson (2006) use observations to inform interview questions and some authors make use of their own experiences (such as Langford 2006).

Youth workers therefore find themselves in a position where ethical issues are discussed and debated with reference to other related professions (such as Banks 2012). While these studies are of significant value in helping youth workers reflect, there is a concern that the dominant discourses in ethics in social work, teaching, or nursing, become the dominant discourses in youth work; whilst the reality of their contexts, values, aims, and practices can be significantly different.

Although youth work has always been a broad occupation, the last ten years have been particularly contentious in some quarters (see chapter 2). The rise of 'new public management' combined with neo-liberal ideologies have left some authors and practitioners feeling that certain values historically understood to underpin youth work have been undermined. This is perhaps best exemplified with the rise of the 'In Defence of Youth Work' campaign in the UK, which seeks to protect youth work as a universal service based on informal education processes (In Defence of Youth Work 2014). There is a fear that market-based ideologies are causing youth work to lose its distinctiveness as young people are being treated as consumers not participants, and a pseudo-social work model is promulgated that attempts to work on young people with predefined aims in a more formal relationship. There has also been a new body set up in England since 2011, the Institute for Youth Work (IYW), which seeks to increase the status of youth work as a profession. Although it introduced a code of ethics (Institute for Youth Work 2013), it does not have the authority to ensure the code is followed by qualified youth workers, as membership is voluntary and youth work is not a profession protected in law. If a youth worker behaved 'unethically' there is no register from which they can be 'struck off' which would affect their employment prospects. Although the IYW can revoke membership, this is a limited deterrent and the IYW has a relatively

low membership at present. Therefore youth work is seemingly fragile, inhabiting an ambiguous, ill-defined space.

## 1.4 The Story of This Thesis

As with much research, the story begins with the researcher. As a youth worker for an Anglican church for seven years and a local authority worker for one year, this research is coming from the perspective of a practitioner. During the time I was based in a church I worked closely with the local authority, working in partnership to open a club in a disadvantaged estate for an extra evening per week. This highlighted to me how different the two sectors were: the statutory, and the church. My professional education at Durham University had also introduced this juxtaposition of faith based and secular youth work, where they overlapped, and where there were tensions.

Therefore when considering a comparative study (see chapter 4, for a full description) it seemed natural to choose the two sectors of which I already had some experience, and to which I would have access. However the comparison is interesting, as 'secular' youth work (though many people of faith may argue the work they do is essentially 'secular', that is, not explicitly religious) shares a strong tradition with Christian youth work in the UK. There is a significant literature around Christian youth work that aids in theorising the differences observed (as explored in chapter 2), and outside of the state, the church is the largest single provider of youth provision (Rogers and Smith 2010:7).

I also gained a flavour of the differences through a dissertation for a Master's degree. This used a survey method to ask youth workers in one town their opinion on working 'out-of-hours' with young people (Hart 2015). The overall conclusion was stark; there was a significant difference between workers (voluntary and paid) in secular settings and those working in churches. There was a much more positive approach to working out of hours with young people from church based workers, and it was particularly noticeable when asking about the use of Facebook and making personal phone numbers available to young people. Therefore, as a way to generate data through contrast, it seemed that making the comparison between 'Christian' and 'secular' would be most fruitful. Although I have attempted to be critically aware of my own history and perspectives, it is important the reader recognises this research has not been conducted by a neutral observer.

However the thesis grew out of this initial interest in the differences in practice. While I began with an interest in comparing Christian and secular organisations, the preliminary reading and early fieldwork provided some clear ethical issues that caught my attention. The process of moving from a primary concern of the difference 'faith' makes to an organisation, to considering ethical issues using the different cases to generate data, was gradual, organic, and to a certain extent unintended (though the inductive methodology made a deviation from the initial proposal a distinct possibility). In the field work, for example, there were fascinating differences not only in practice, but why workers believed what they were doing was 'good practice', or even why they believed there were better forms of practice that they could not engage in due to limited resources, organisational policy, or occupational values and expectations. While there were still interesting differences based on faith and theology throughout the field work, these did not become the dominant lines of enquiry in the ethnography nor were they the dominant themes in the analysis. By the time I was conducting interviews and focus groups at the end of the field work, conceptions of good practice and how ethical issues were engaged with became of greater interest to the thesis. Of course, there were still important elements of faith as a motivator and theological understandings of relationships that were key to some differences in practice, but by the end of the analysis the data was being viewed and interpreted through an ethical lens. This created a theoretical shift away from prioritising theology and the role of incarnational forms of youth work. Although these are still included in this thesis, this is to highlight differences in motivations and foundations for what is considered 'good practice', while the chief dialogical partners for understanding the processes evident in the data became ethical theorist: particularly virtue ethicists.

## 1.5 Outline of thesis

While it could be considered 'common sense' to define youth work relationships as 'messy', the original contribution to knowledge developed within this thesis is to empirically examine that messiness and begin to understand and interpret it within an ethical framework. By the end of the thesis I develop an argument for the usefulness of virtue ethics when considering what is 'good' or 'right' in the relationship between the youth worker and the young people. This is in contrast to dominant discourses in professional ethics that focus on duties, and dominant practices that focus on following policies or organisational rules.

This ethnographic study of four youth work organisations culminated in a thematic analysis of the data. The complexity of the youth work relationship is identified through eight key aspects: making self-disclosures, the youth worker's role in the wider lives of young people, setting an



example, showing respect, use of authority and power, trusting young people, prioritising needs and best interests, and formality and distance. These aspects are interdependent, and the field notes from the ethnography show how they overlap and affect each other.

The informal nature of the youth work relationship and the open-ended and contested nature of youth work, create distinctive ethical issues. Take, for example, a youth worker who explains to a young person something of their drug taking habits as a teenager. Perhaps before drawing a conclusion about the appropriateness of this self-disclosure it is important to have a greater understanding of the whole situation. What are the worker's motives for sharing this information? Who initiated the conversation? How does a worker decide whether it is appropriate to share this personal information – is there a policy promoting/preventing it, do they use their own judgement, is there a profession-wide recognition of when and where to self-disclose? Is the outcome of the self-disclosure more important than the nature of the disclosure itself?

The youth worker may say the same words in each example; however I argue in this thesis that the interaction of the different aspects of the youth work relationship affect whether it is 'good' practice (in an ethical, rather than purely technical, sense). As such, I conclude that a way forward (though far from a finished model) is to consider virtue ethics as a basis for the youth work relationship because interactions between young people and youth workers are best understood holistically; that is, every interaction has a context. Understanding that context is imperative when discerning whether the interaction was 'good practice'. However dominant forms of decision making in practice are immediate judgements about interactions based on predefined boundaries and rules, which can result in good work going undone. That is, 'good practice' and consideration of ethical issues can be conceived as protecting against bad practice, rather than proactively ensuring opportunities for good work are not missed. There are potential faults with such a virtue ethics approach, and there are situations where a stricter set of Kantian-style imperatives may be a better basis for making decisions in practice. However when considering the nuances and complexity of youth work relationships, and the requirement of professional wisdom, integrity, and trustworthiness in building sound relationships, virtue ethics is a good place to begin.

The second chapter begins by considering the competing aims and values of youth work. The second half of that chapter considers the relationships young people share with adults in general, particularly drawing from empirical research into the roles adults can take when engaging with young people, before considering the role of the youth worker in relationship with young people.

Chapter 3 focuses on ethics, beginning with an overview of the dominant discourses in professional ethics, before considering authors who have written on ethics in youth work specifically.

The methodology follows in Chapter 4, considering the process of engaging in 'micro-ethnographies' within the four organisations and the epistemological foundations on which the research is based. Here I work through the rationale for employing observations, interviews, and focus groups, and the ethical issues that were inherent in the research. This chapter also considers the analysis and the use of computer software for qualitative data analysis, NVivo. It concludes with a reflexive account and an overview of how many interviews, focus groups, and observations occurred in each organisation.

Chapter 5 begins the presentation of the data by introducing the youth clubs and providing some examples of typical occurrences. Throughout this thesis the four organisations are known by their abbreviations. The Local Authority Youth Centre (LAYC) is a statutory youth club, the Community Centre Youth Club (CCYC) is predominantly funded by the third sector, the Youth Ministry (YM) is attached to a church, while the Youth Café (YC) is a secular-funded, but church-managed, youth project. Chapter 5 concludes by drawing out the major differences between the organisations as seen in the data.

Chapter 6 is the second findings chapter, this time arranged by theme. Using an inductive approach, I discerned eight themes from the data that related to ethical issues in youth work relationships. These themes all relate to an aspect of the youth work relationship that resonated as being particularly important to the practice decisions that workers faced daily. These are considered in turn, and end with an extended example of the role money plays in influencing the relationship, to show how these aspects interrelate.

Chapter 7 then begins to introduce theory, both that which has come from the data, and applying theories of professional ethics to the data. First, I consider the way the themes interrelate and argue that a holistic approach to youth work relationships is required, one that acknowledges that youth work relationships happen as context-specific interactions between workers and young people, and this should not be trivialised or reduced to a set of rules. In the final part of chapter 7, I argue for the usefulness of virtue ethics in dealing with the complex relationships observed in the field work. The conclusion then draws all the literature and data together, and highlights final implications for theory and practice.

Chapter 8 then concludes by providing a summary of the thesis, theoretical implications of the research, potential for future research (including those questions still remaining from this research), and recommendations for practice.

## 2. Youth Work and The Youth Work Relationship

### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter is split into two sections. Firstly, I argue that youth work is a contested occupation covering a broad range of practices with a shared history, with various authors emphasising differing (though often not necessarily incompatible) purposes and values. However, I argue that there are 'golden threads' weaved throughout the dominant discourses that link the core purposes of youth work, though too broad for a unified definition. Secondly, I consider why adult relationships are often considered important to young people's development, and how the youth work relationship has been conceived in the literature. Particular attention is also paid to the difference theology makes in the Christian literature around relationships. Ultimately, relationships are recognised as a focus of interest in studying ethical issues in youth work, predominantly because of their informal and open-ended nature.

### 2.2 Youth Work: A Brief History

Youth work in the UK, along with related social professions of social work and community work, have their roots in evangelical Christianity. Smith (2013) charts youth work's move from being an expression of Christian faith to a wider movement through the nineteenth and early twentieth century. He points to Robert Raikes and Hannah Moore as the earliest pioneers, who founded the Sunday School movement with the aim of bringing education to children and young people, and the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) is credited with being the first dedicated youth organisation in 1844. Often these movements and organisations were a reaction to poverty as providing well as age specific services, aiming to give marginalised and oppressed groups of young people support and education. There was also a focus on teaching skills, socialising middle-class ideals, formal education, and inculcating prevailing social values (Bradford 2007). Yet there was also a strong appreciation of workers' roles in advocating for young people when they were oppressed or in danger: for example the Girls' Friendly Society was instrumental in fighting for the rights of young women in the work place (Fabes and Skinner 2001).

'Youth' did not become recognised as a distinct social category until psychologists began to pay attention to it, particularly Hall (1904) who coined the phrase 'storm and stress' in relation to adolescents in the early twentieth century. The rise of youth as a recognised stage in life saw a broadening of the role of youth workers and conceptions of youth work. It was in the beginning of

the twentieth century that a greater secularisation of youth work occurred with the rise of state-funded youth work during the First World War. However it was not until the cultural phenomenon of the 'teenager' was born in the 1950s, and the production of the seminal Albermarle Report (Ministry of Education 1960), that a more widespread appreciation of youth work as an educative endeavour developed, leading to a rapid expansion of statutory provision, youth club construction, and the training and organising of workers. However already by the 1970s state funding was diminishing, and throughout the 1980s and 1990s there was a decline in state-funded centre-based youth work, with fewer young people attending dedicated buildings. Political rhetoric during the 1990s, and into the new millennium with New Labour, prioritised social work, youth justice, education, and 'at risk' young people. There was also an expectation by New Labour that youth work was designed to 'relieve boredom' through providing 'activities', undermining its educative role (Bradford 2005:63-65). After the Every Child Matters report (HMSO 2003) there was a greater expectation of multi-agency teams to develop in local authorities, which led to a move away from dedicated youth services to 'Integrated Youth Support Services', and highlights a move away from youth work to a broader 'services for young people' approach.

During these last two decades there has also been a significant re-investment in young people by faith based organisations, particularly churches and a rise in Muslim youth work. Unlike the USA where there was a continued strong youth ministry presence (Pahl 2000), youth work linked with churches in the UK had been superseded by state provision. However in the late 1990s church-based youth work developed, with literature attempting to ground its theory and practices in the wider youth work tradition, yet also constructing it as a theologically distinctive ministry (e.g. Brierley 2003). The rise was partly due to a realisation by the Church of England that it had become institutionally ageist, with fewer young people feeling the church was a place for them, combined with congregations experiencing a rapidly falling youth population (Church of England 1996). The increase in Muslim youth work, however, has been attributed more also to policies designed to tackle perceived threats of 'extremism' in Islamic communities than evangelism (Smith 2013). Under New Labour, government policy began increasingly to recognise faith communities as offering invaluable support and potential (Orton 2007), particularly because they were often the only permanent organisation in a community when difficulties arose, being the first to engage with the community, and through having a large body of committed volunteers (HMSO 2008).

More recently, it has been argued by Davies (2013) and Nicholls (2012) that youth work, as with other policy areas, has become subject to a neo-liberal agenda which aims to increase the

efficiency of the work using 'market principles', but could be at risk of undermining youth work's historic commitment to working with all young people on their wider personal, social, educational, or spiritual development. One of the pressures practitioners face in a neo-liberal, market-orientated climate is the requirement to control young people or influence their behaviour in predefined ways: "in an era of accountability, social service programmes are subject to mounting pressures from funders to show measureable impact on the youth they serve" (Larson 2006:684). More youth workers in statutory settings are therefore being used to gather information for other agencies, or to use their skills to work with young people in other settings, such as Pupil Referral Units. Youth workers are now often asked to work with smaller groups of young people to achieve pre-defined outcomes.

Throughout the history of youth work there has been a strong sense of the importance of the relationship between young people and youth workers as the way to mediate change, whether this was social change or individual growth and development. From the foundations of youth work, with the social pioneers of the nineteenth century, practitioners have worked alongside the young people, developing relationships, and 'befriending' them (Blacker 2010).

### 2.3 Youth Work Occupying a Contested Space

This rich history of youth work has meant a range of practices have developed, making youth work notoriously difficult to define. It inhabits an 'ambivalent space' (Batsleer 2010:157), under constant threat from successive government policies, and being continually redefined through policy, funding mechanisms, and shifting dominant practices. Ingram and Harris (2005) argue it is a wide-ranging occupation, somewhat enigmatic, and yet youth workers will often consider their 'brand' of youth work to be of most value. Banks (2010a:4-5) recognises it as a broad concept, but suggests that at its core there is a commitment to informal education, and its practice is predominantly group-orientated, in which young people engage voluntarily. It is also about change and transformation (Green 1999:100), and there is often a personal, social and moral development aim (Young 2006:120-121). Batsleer (2010:161) refers to it as a 'malleable space', where competing powers and values can shape and define its nature and purpose, thus making a definition of 'youth work' somewhat context specific.

There are several key forms of youth work that emphasise particular features of the occupation, as covered in the National Occupational Standards. Several academic authors also investigate youth work's distinctive role and highlight different purposes: for example, youth work as education, mediator of social justice, facilitating association, enabling the flourishing of young people, and supporting and advocating for young people. Recognising the contested and fluid

nature of youth work's core purposes and dominant practices is important in understanding the youth work relationship. Different core purposes and the way values are understood and enacted may alter the nature of the relationship between a young person and a youth worker, and organisations with different understandings of the aims of youth work may have different conceptions of 'good practice' in the youth work relationship.

## 2.4 Core Purposes of Youth Work: Different Understandings

This section will highlight some of the different core purposes of youth work held by various authors and practitioners. This is a question of emphasis more than exclusivity, as the authors cited share perspectives. The contested purposes include education, radical and social justice aims, holistic development, association, advocacy, outcomes, and specific Christian purposes of evangelism and discipleship. The aim of this section is to highlight the myriad conceptions of 'good' youth work, several of which relate directly to expectations by workers and organisations during the empirical research and the debates around values in youth work.

### 2.4.1 Education

Based on the principles of radical educators like Freire (1985, see also Coburn 2010), informal education in youth work aims to promote critical thought by those who are held within oppressive structures. It places the power over the curriculum with the young people, making use of the natural tendency to learn through conversation. It can have a Habermasian (1996) approach, where education becomes a place to question previously held beliefs, beginning with the questions of the learner rather than the knowledge of the teacher. It is also focussed on praxis; seeking to make knowledge practically useful (Buchroth and Parkin 2010:69-82).

Informal education has an exploratory, dialogical nature, which enables young people to make choices (Green 2010:117). It is where young people are encouraged to "use their experiences of everyday living as opportunities for learning about themselves and others" (Crosby 2005:95), and young people are equal members of the conversation (Batsleer and Davies 2010:2). The role of the informal educator then, is to foster environments where meaningful conversation can occur and to use their 'repertoire' of past experiences to influence their interactions with young people where there are points of contact (Smith 2005).

### 2.4.2 Social Justice

Youth work has a strong tradition of promoting social justice (Nicholls 2012:138), which includes challenging discrimination and discriminatory attitudes (Banks 2010a:11), redressing imbalances in power (Roberts 2009:95), being aware of (and educating young people about) global inequity

(Sallah 2010), and helping young people's perspectives be heard (Bowler 2010:60). Radical youth work is often focussed on empowering young people to enable their escaping from oppressive situations and structures. This entails young people becoming aware of injustice (or conscientized, to use Freire's language) and creating space for marginalised groups to belong. In their ethnographic research, Sharkey and Shields (2008) found that young people perceived the youth centre as being a place of inclusion and belonging for those most marginalised by society, and Sercombe (2010a:33) argues that seeing injustice overturned is the primary motivation for youth workers. To Nicholls (2012), the chief end of the youth worker here is to raise awareness of the causes of oppression of young people, and empower them into action.

### 2.4.3 Holistic Development and Flourishing in Youth Work

The 'flourishing' of young people is based on an Aristotelian concept of *eudaimonia* – what it means to live a 'good' and fulfilled life. To Smith (2012) this is the purpose of a pedagogue, to care about and 'bring to life' the young people in their charge. This occurs partly through education, but also through a holistic understanding of the development of young people as individuals in a community (Banks and Gallagher 2009:44). Forrest (2010) hints at this (though does not draw directly from an Aristotelian approach) as he described the purpose of youth work as 'the cultivation of gifts in all directions'. This form of youth work emphasises facilitating positive change in the broadest sense (Sapin 2009:11).

Along with Smith, Young (2006, 2010) is one of the most vehement supporters of youth work as an aid to the flourishing of young people. She argues that youth work should not be defined as "a practice based on the need to address current social problems and political priorities, but on a commitment to developing the truly lifelong goals of rational judgement and authentic human existence" (2006:122). She goes on to argue that youth work should be enabling young people to reflect on what kind of people they want to be, and a youth worker's role is in modelling a 'good life', which she defines in accordance with neo-Aristotelian virtues (see chapter 3).

### 2.4.4 Association

One of the distinctive features of youth work is that it usually occurs in a group setting (Banks 2010:5). Association, however, is not only about building peer relationships. It is the process of meeting together for some common good (Roberts 2009:20-21, Patton 2010). This may affect the youth work relationship, as other professionals that young people are in a direct relationship with them as individuals or family units, or may work with several young people simultaneously without engaging in their social context (such as, teachers). With a core purpose to strengthen



young people's social networks for a purpose, the relationship with young people may reinforce the informal and egalitarian nature of a group facilitator.

#### 2.4.5 Supporting and Advocating for Young People

Youth workers can see their role as one of supporting young people (Hilton 2005:21). Collander-Brown (2010) suggest that a worker's task is in 'being with' young people in an ongoing caring and supporting role. At other times, youth workers may be advocates for young people by present a 'narrative of worth' that reinforces young people as autonomous agents with consulting with other professions (Lavie-Ajayi and Krumer-Nevo 2013)

#### 2.4.6 Outcomes

Although fiercely contest by some (particularly represented by the 'In Defence of Youth Work' campaign), targeted interventions within a neo-liberal, market-orientated conception of youth work have become the normative foundation of practice for many youth workers. Here youth work is about training young people in skills, with epistemic outcomes to reinforce the perceived value of the work (Ord 2014). Proponents argue accredited outcomes can increase a young person's self-confidence (Ord 2007:88), and task-centred work can help young people overcome issues they face in pragmatic ways (Payne and Campling 2005:100-101). Target based youth work also allows policy makers to prioritise funding on specific members of the population deemed 'at risk', and it is claimed to improve accountability and encourage workers to evidence their achievements (Tyler et al. 2009:9).

### 2.5 Specific Purposes of Christian Youth Work

As the research presented in this thesis includes data gathered from Christian youth work organisations, it would be helpful to examine some of the specific purposes prevalent in the youth ministry literature. Though much of the above can also be found there (particularly in the work of UK authors like Brierley 2003, and Pimlott and Pimlott 2008), there are some other motivations that can influence the core purpose for Christian workers, with some from a USA context suggesting Christian youth work needs to move away from a social-science base onto a theological foundation (e.g. Root and Dean 2011).

Before exploring the differences, however, Daughtry's (2011) comparative study in Australia highlights the similarities in practice between sectors. Both faith based and secular youth workers struggled with retention of older-teenagers, both found it difficult to reach marginalised youth, both had professional concerns around inadequate support systems, continuous professional development opportunities were lacking, and both needed clearer standards to judge the

effectiveness in their work. However in work between the secular and faith-based sectors more generally, there can be tensions and dilemmas where different language is used, which Orton (2007) recognises is more apparent as churches are attempting to interact more with their communities and policy makers are considering faith communities as alternative providers of welfare.

#### *EVANGELISM*

Evangelism can be conflated with mission, but these are different theological meanings. Evangelism refers, literally, to proclaiming 'good news'. In a Christian context this is the 'good news' of Jesus, and often with the aim of conversion of the person being evangelised. Contemporary and influential theologian Bosch (1991) considers mission as a wider concept than evangelism, referring to bringing about Christian values (as the missional community perceives them) in wider society: that is, supporting the development of the 'Kingdom of God'. This may include evangelism, but social action, campaigning for the rights of the disadvantaged, and engaging in political processes to establish an outcome commensurate with an understanding of Christian faith could all be expressions of 'mission'.

Evangelism in youth work relationships can appear problematic when the practices involved are contrary to the oft-expected informal and more egalitarian relationships; *if* evangelism involves didactic teaching or an element of coercion. However evangelism does not need to be conceived in this way; Green (2010) suggests that where evangelism is about creating opportunities for young people, and facilitating change for the better, this is consistent with the values of youth work (see also Nash 2011a).

Evangelism is central to the work of various authors on Christian youth ministry but often understood differently: Ward (1997) encourages workers to engage with young people in the wider community to draw a larger number towards the church; Fenton (2011) encourages churches to focus on the 'critical time' of 11 to 14 year olds because they have a statistically better chance of staying in the faith into adulthood if successfully evangelised by then, and he also advocates using care as a form of evangelism (p45); Fields (2001) provides a model for reaching more young people with a message of repentance and bringing them progressively further into the church, criticising previous models of youth ministry that have done an "excellent job of coddling insiders and a lousy job of reaching the lost" (p106); Nash (2008) ethnographically studied the practices of youth workers who moved into the area they were working in and recognised their ultimate aim was to build relationships to reconcile young people to Christ (p189); and finally Clark (2001) believes evangelism is an antidote to the church as a 'private club'

and that limiting evangelism to 'peer evangelism', thus missing large swathes of the population of young people, is to the detriment of a healthy and flourishing church.

#### *NURTURE AND DISCIPLESHIP*

Nurture and discipleship relates to the development of faith after some form of conversion experience, or commitment to Christianity. Some of the authors above, who prioritise evangelism, do so in reaction to youth ministries that seem intent on providing a safe environment for faith development within the confines of the church, without extending to the more uncomfortable territory of the community surrounding it. The model of youth ministry being proffered affects the youth work relationship, as some of those models (e.g. Fenton 2011) can focus on the protection of young people, and the youth workers assume a role of offering 'safe' alternatives to 'secular' past times. Here, the youth worker relationship can be used to influence young people into particular social groups or practices.

Dean (2001:32-33) defines the objective of youth ministry as being 'to help young people grow faith mature enough that they can use that faith – their assumptions about who God is and how God works in the world – to discern and execute faithful Christian action as disciples of Jesus Christ'. This objective works from the assumption that young people engaging in youth ministry will already have aligned themselves with the Christian faith (to some extent) and the role of the youth worker is to help nurture and develop that faith.

Other models of youth ministry may still focus on the discipleship and nurture of young people, but do so with a set of more empowering practices, where young people are encouraged to take responsibility for their own spiritual journey. For example, the contemplative youth ministry movement, as popularised by the work of Yaconelli (2006, 2007), is based on an assumption of pre-existing Christian faith and promotes the use of ancient spiritual practices in enabling young people to develop their own beliefs.

## 2.6 Values in Youth Work

While purposes provide a series of aims or motivation for youth work, values are the ideals practitioners attempt to uphold while pursuing the purpose(s). Although the values of youth work are contested, and some may argue what I have described as core purposes or emphases of youth work above could be interpreted as values, there are some other common values on which youth work is founded. Again, this is not an exhaustive list, however the values of respect, voluntary participation, empowerment and participation, equality, and anti-discriminatory practice are chosen because they are common within the literature and feature heavily in the National

Occupational Standards. These values also serve to set the boundaries for the kind of professional relationship inherent in youth work:

- **Respect.** Respect for young people is about recognising their ability to make sound choices (and respecting their autonomy even if they do not), and treating them as valued human beings (Banks 2010a:11, Roberts 2009:87,90, Hilton 2005:26).
- **Voluntary participation.** For many authors an abiding value in youth work is that young people choose to take part in the relationship and are under no compulsion to continue. This voluntary relationship builds trust (Nicholls 2012:185) and it develops a sense of mutuality and equality (Ord 2007:58, Brierley 2003:62-78).
- **Empowerment and Participation.** Empowerment is a contested concept in itself, however it can be defined as young people '[having] a voice and influence [over] the environment in which they live' (Banks 2010a:10). Young people should have opportunities to engage in 'adult' tasks within youth centres, such as leadership roles and decision making (Sercombe 2010a:130-131, Batsleer and Davies 2010:3). Informal education is often said to be based on values of empowerment and democratic participation (Jeffs and Smith 2005). Where participation assumes young people are 'motivated and able to be constructive agents of their own development' (Larson 2006:677), and that they are capable of 'self determination' (Banks 2010a:144) where young people are assumed to engage in sound moral reasoning of their own (Roberts 2009:75). Youth work based on a value of participation will treat young people as equal participants within the youth work process, and not as consumers of a service. However this is not a universally accepted value either. Belton (2009) believes talk of 'enabling' and 'empowerment' implies young people were disabled and powerless before the youth worker arrived, and affects the ethos of the relationship in which the worker assumes the young person is – to some extent – helpless or ignorant (p57).
- **Equality.** The value of equality entails ensuring all young people have access to the same opportunities and that barriers to their full participation are identified and removed. The social exclusion of young people is counter to this, and is said by Roberts (2009:50) to be against youth work values, and that "youth work is a place for young people to develop an experience of being equal and recognising other people's equality" (p51). Often young people in society can be marginalised and feel the disadvantage of inequality, with youth centres being one of few safe spaces where marginalised young people are assumed to be of equal worth (Sharkey and Shields 2008).

- **Anti-discriminatory practice.** Youth workers should engage in practice in a fair and inclusive way. Thompson (2005) argues good practice in youth work is rooted in an awareness of power structures and discrimination, as young people could exacerbate discriminatory practices in society. Anti-discriminatory practice, he continues, will commit the worker to valuing the uniqueness and individuality of each person, and work in such a way that equality and participation are achievable values. Or, as Sapin describes it, “anti-oppressive practice attempts to counteract negative messages about skills and abilities that young people may have absorbed from the media, the family, and other social structures” (Sapin 2009:117). Anti-discriminatory practice is therefore not only passively avoiding certain activities, but actively attempting to tackle discrimination young people may face.

These values are significant for the youth work relationship. Throughout the chapter so far, I have argued the youth work relationship is often assumed to be egalitarian and informal, often based in the young person’s social setting. However the values on which youth work is based begin to articulate which practices or attitudes influencing the youth work relationship may, or may not be, permissible. There may be different interpretations in practice of how to be respectful, or engage in anti-discriminatory practice in the youth work relationship, *but* these values begin to prioritise what the youth work relationship should emphasise and the kind of interactions that are (in)appropriate. How a worker is to discern whether their relationship with a young person is upholding the values on which their practice is based is discussed in chapter three, when considering professional ethics.

## 2.7 Summary: Purposes and Values in Youth Work

Although these six potential aims and five contested values of youth work may be present in different forms of the practice, there is little agreement in the literature about which should be emphasised or considered imperative. Also, the lists are not intended to be exhaustive, and none are mutually exclusive. So far I have explained multiple aims and values in youth work, recognising while most are present in some form, various authors emphasise their own main tenets of youth work differently. Rather than draw a discrete definition of youth work, I have deliberately reflected the broad range of potential definitions which leaves youth work in the contested space that practitioners are continually engaging (and, perhaps, struggling) with. However the dominant discourses locate youth work as being interested in the development (holistic, educational, and/or social) of young people, the social and structural setting in which young people find themselves, and specifically the evangelism and/or discipleship of young people found within the

Christian youth work literature. Youth work was described as being founded on values that respect young people, recognise their autonomy, and assume their ability to make sound choices regarding issues affecting their own lives with the appropriate support. However I have argued there are some 'golden threads' that can be discerned through most of literature, though too broad to be considered a 'definition': youth work is centred around young people, has a sense of purpose, and is focussed on movement that benefits the young people – which may be the development of young people or influencing change in the wider social structures affecting them. I have also argued that the core purposes can affect the youth work relationship, and an acknowledgement of values on which practice is based can begin to help practitioners articulate what is appropriate and to be emphasised in the youth work relationship.

## 2.8 Relationships in Youth Work

This section starts with the premise that humans are relational beings, and explores the conceptions of positive relationships between young people and youth workers. Initially, I will consider empirical research on the benefits of relationships between young people and adults, before specifically considering the youth work relationship. The chapter will conclude by arguing that close, positive relationships are of benefit to young people, and youth workers can offer that relationship. However there are dangers, including misuse of some of the aspects of the relationship (particularly misuse of power, and prioritising the best interests of someone other than the young people). There are also barriers to these relationships, including an occupational paradigm that promotes detachment and outcomes at the expense of authenticity and relationship. The youth work relationship is at the heart of this thesis, therefore the aim here is to explain why relationships with adults (particularly youth workers) are important for young people and what is commonly considered a positive relationship in youth work (though, this is also contested). Positive relationships will be shown to be personal with an emotional connection, enjoyable, young person focussed, having a sense of equality while the worker maintains an appropriate level of authority, limited in the sense there are appropriate professional boundaries to be maintained, dynamic, genuine, and authentic.

### 2.8.1 Attachment, Young People and Adults

This research is based on the belief young people benefit from the kind of informal adult relationships youth work provides. Rather than being an assumption, this has a significant body of evidence based on psychological studies into how children and young people become 'attached' to others, and the features of a healthy 'attachment'. Therefore, in this section I present

attachment theory as an empirical basis for recognising the importance of the youth work relationship to the development of young people.

Attachment theory began in psychology as an attempt to understand the role of parents in developing an infant's emotional wellbeing in their first two years (Bowlby 1953, 1969), focussing on the role of a Mother as a 'secure base' from which infants can begin to explore the world (Lawler et al. 2011). It now underpins some popular therapeutic relational models within social work across all ages (Howe 1998, Howe and Campling 1995, Ruch et al. 2010). In summary, "attachment theory seeks both to conceptualise the tendency of individuals to make bonds of affection to certain other people and also to explain the various forms of emotional distress which unwished for separation and loss promote" (Frederick and Goddard 2008:300). The theory suggests the lack of attachment in childhood and youth creates feelings of loss, defensiveness, disruptive behaviour, and over- or under-attachment in the future. Indeed many relational or social difficulties people face in the present may be the result of betrayed attachments in the past (Trevithick 2003). Though there are significant differences between infancy and youth (young people, for example, are often assumed to find close attachments to parents restrictive rather than secure), the process of attachment is similar. Young people in early and mid-adolescence may explore the world further than an infant, however during times of uncertainty and stress they will return to their parents (assuming a good level of attachment). In late adolescence parents are still important, but much of the function of attachment will have passed to peers and potential life-long partners. The success of this transition, according to Allen and Land (1999), will affect the young person's ability to develop meaningful attachments with others into adulthood.

The role of trusted adults outside the home, such as youth workers, is particularly important in facilitating this transition from parents to peers as the predominant attachment figures. A failure to make this transition, or a lack of parental attachment in childhood, can lead to attachment disorders. Research suggests relationships with professionals can be key in helping young people avoid attachment disorders who may have been susceptible to them. For example, Frederick and Goddard (2008) interviewed adults with limited attachments as young people, and found that they had few friends and relationships broke down quickly, however the researchers discovered a "dependable, receptive relationship" (p307) with professionals was key to preventing (and helping those with) attachment disorders. Indeed children and young people in households without close relationships can find meeting a 'socially competent' adult who offers a positive reinforcement of their strengths and qualities can be a turning point (Howe and Campling 1995:178-183). With looked after children in particular, the quality of the relationship with adults

has proven the most important indicator (and cause) of child wellbeing (Lawler et al. 2011, Hill 1999:135, McLeod 2010). Payne and Campling (2005:81-84) suggest issues around a lack of attachment can be overcome through nurturing, positive and encouraging relationships with practitioners (here, the research was with social workers, but the findings have broader implications). McLeod's (2010) research uses attachment theory to explain why some young people show a profound level of grief when a social worker moves on and argues that workers should have a longer-term mentality and acknowledge their potential as a 'secure base' from which young people can positively explore the world (see also McGrath and Pistrang 2007). Therefore, throughout this thesis, when considering relationships in youth work, it is done from an understanding that informal adult relationships outside the home during adolescence are important to all young people, and particularly those who have (or are at risk of having) attachment disorders. As shall be argued below, youth work has a strong tradition of offering those forms of relationship to young people, and they are of incalculable benefit.

Attachment theory in adolescence particularly highlights young people requiring attachments outside the home (Howe and Campling 1995:102-111), which is important for creating attachments with peers, where a disengagement from families is necessary for a robust adult identity to form, *providing* an alternative supportive set of attachments are present (Vaillant and Vaillant 1981). Though little has been written on attachment theory in youth work specifically, in one example by Howe and Campling (1995:217) they show the importance of practitioners with greater flexibility in offering young people support:

*The unqualified [social] workers became involved in ways which were practical, emotionally supportive and low in technical sophistication. The frequent, accessible support given to the parents helped them keep their children at home and in the family. The emphasis was on long term support, availability and 'being there' when needed. Less effective in keeping vulnerable children out of public care were short-term, time-limited and goal orientated techniques mainly practised by qualified practitioners.*

In their research, the unqualified social workers were described as having a more informal role, reminiscent of youth workers. Boundaries were expected to allow more personal relationships, a more holistic approach to the users' wellbeing, and a more egalitarian relationship than qualified social workers were able to offer.

## 2.8.2 Adult Support During Adolescence: Benefits and Barriers



Attachment theory offers a psychological framework for understanding and explaining the need for young people to connect with adults outside the home, including youth workers. Other research shows the difficulties that can arise through a lack of quality, positive adult support (the nature of 'quality' adult support will be discussed later). Abbott-Chapman et al. (2008) completed a comparative analysis of attitudes between young people and their parents, and professionals. They found the adults over estimated the extent to which young people would trust professional help or search out support for specific issues, while parents also overestimated their role in supporting their children. Less formal adult and peer support was seen as particularly helpful by the young people. Other empirical studies have found that young people are more likely to engage in 'risky' behaviour without non-parental adult support (Bond et al. 2000), young people are less likely to be ready-for-work if they have few adults engaged in their lives (Phillips et al. 2002), and they are less likely to commit to a faith community without at least five adults offering support (Powell et al. 2011). Taylor (2003) extends this to argue that profound psycho-social changes become increasingly stressful and confusing if coupled with a difficult time (such as the death of a loved-one) without supportive adult relationships outside the home.

Research has also shown supportive adult relationships can be of proactive benefit to young people, though there are still significant gaps in the empirical research (Rishel et al. 2007). In Jones' (2011) interview-based study, young people are shown to build greater social capital and develop more 'competencies' if they engage with adults who adopt 'relational strategies'. The rise in social capital through relationships also increases the self-confidence and resilience of young people, particularly if combined with opportunities for self-determination of the young people (McCay et al. 2011), and young people are more likely to achieve personal goals with adult support (Zeldin et al. 2005:3).

A significant attachment to adults outside the home during adolescence also aids the navigation through difficult experiences. Hurd et al. (2009) showed two positive role-models had a protective effect over risky behaviours, and outweighed the negative influence of other non-parental adults (parents being able to have a greater negative effect on young people)(see also Rishel et al. 2007). A pre-existing warm and genuine relationship also makes a young person more likely to speak to a 'professional' during times of crisis (Taylor 2003). The Children's Society report, 'A Good Childhood', recognises that the greater the stability of the relationship with adults (including parents) the better are the outcomes for the young person (Layard and Dunn 2009:144), including greater optimism and better mental health (see also McCay et al. 2011). Therefore the

relationship between young people and the youth worker can clearly be of advantage to young people during difficult times.

Relationships increase the influence adults can have in the lives of young people: “[young people] will usually take on board advice about their own behaviour, but only after a relationship of trust has been developed” (Hill 1999:141), particularly if the advice comes from someone who it felt to be alongside the young person, rather than an attempt to impose behaviour from above (Taylor 2003:6). During their ethnographic study, Jones and Deutsch (2011) noted ‘staff develop capital through the relationships that they exchange for meaningful participation’ (p1386) with some young people in the group describing the youth workers as the ‘most influential’ people in their lives.

This influence can extend to the peer culture, with youth workers cited as being in a position to work constructively around romantic relationships and bullying within a group (Taylor 2003:67). Young people also use their relationship with known adults to scaffold their future interactions with unknown adults. The youth work relationship in particular offers a safe place where relationship skills can be developed (Rhodes 2004, Jones and Deutsch 2011), and the negotiation that is possible between young people and youth workers provide ‘border zones’ that Walker (2011) observed as sites of adolescent transitions from youth to adulthood.

Finally, adults sharing an attachment with young people are in a position to be a role model, which popular psychologist Biddulph (2010:175) describes as being ‘wired in as an evolutionary trait in humans... an adolescent is a role-seeking missile, and he or she will lock-on to a range of targets before they have ‘downloaded’ enough material to shape their own identity’. This quote makes an assumption I find unconvincing: young people are passive in the process of negotiating their own identity. However the sentiment is shared in other research, particularly the work of Hendry et al. (1992) who developed a quantitative instrument for measuring adolescent attitudes to adults. They discovered young people see particular adults as more likely to be ‘role models’, including teachers and ‘group leaders’ (which included youth workers). However, Hendry et al affirm young people as consciously deciding who their role models will be (see also Hill 1999, Hurd et al. 2009). Ord (2007:99) further opens the possibility young people may be particularly ‘vulnerable’ to negative influences, while Larson (2006) argues the internal motivational systems that engender attempting to imitate a role model are complex and there is no evidence to suggest either a ‘moral’ or ‘immoral’ example is more likely to be followed – thus ‘providing youth with skills for selecting positive adult role models may be an effective strategy for adverse effects of negative nonparental adult influences they may experience’ (Hurd et al. 2009:786) .

Despite these benefits to adult-young person relationships, Abbott-Chapman et al. (2008) found many young people do not have access to these relationships. They undertook a large-scale quantitative study of risk-taking behaviour amongst young people in Australia, and found 13-16% of young people said they had no one to turn to for help or advice with personal problems, with 57% saying they would go to a parent with a problem. Barriers to adult relationships with young people are legion in a culture in which 'youth' and 'adulthood' are artificially separated (Jefferies and Smith 1999b:3, Holloway and Valentine 2003, Holland 2004, Mizen 2004, Zeldin et al. 2005:1, Yaconelli 2006). However some empirical research shows that young people are less likely to come into contact with adults in suburban and urban communities compared to their rural counterparts (Darling et al. 2002), that young people simply do not enjoy their relationships with many adults (Rishel et al. 2007), or that previous relationships with adults have been unreliable or authoritarian which negatively affects their willingness to engage with other adults (Taylor 2003:8).

Research shows adults can take innumerable roles when engaging with young people. Hendry et al. (1992) showed how different adults took on different roles, with American young people viewing group leaders (including youth workers) as 'enablers, believers, teachers, and role models' (p263), however peers were more likely to be termed 'supporters'. Young people can see adults as mentors (Darling et al. 2002), role models and inspirational exemplars (Hendry et al. 1992, Layard and Dunn 2009:41), offering emotional support and/or instrumental help (Tatar 1998), whilst also being authoritarian (Taylor 2003:8) or holding authority (Larson and Walker 2010:343). Walker (2011) interviewed American teenagers in youth development programmes and categorised five common roles workers were described as displaying:

- Friend – an equal relationship and an enjoyment of the worker's company. Friendships required long-term relationships and trust.
- Parent – marked by intimacy, but with the authority and disciplinary roles of parenthood.
- Mentor – an older person who offers support, guidance and instruction while remaining non-judgemental.
- Teacher – a worker with an instrumental or functional role, without offering emotional support.
- Boss – someone who teaches skills, but provides critical oversight and close management. Relationships are regulated and official.

In Walker's study all youth workers were described as mentors, and most (83%) as friends, followed by parents (78%), teachers (67%) and bosses (28%). It also seemed workers who could move between multiple roles were able to build more effective relationships.

Having considered the benefits of relationships with adults generally, using attachment theory as a foundation, the remainder of section will focus on the role of relationships in youth work, particularly considering why youth work is considered 'relational', how youth workers engage relationally with young people, and how issues of power and authority, intimacy and professional distance, and role modelling have been conceived in the literature as affecting relationships.

### 2.8.3 Conceptions of Positive Relationships In Youth Work

Youth work has at its core a relationship through which change is negotiated (Ingram and Harris 2005:16-18, Jeffs and Smith 2010b, Collander-Brown 2010:41, Ord 2007:7, Nicholls 2012:42). Workers may use various tools to aid them in building this relationship, such as sport (Haudenhuyse et al. 2012), conversation (Zeldin et al. 2005:7, Jeffs and Smith 2005), and activities (Tyler et al. 2009:41, Harte 2010). However these are often considered secondary to the educative or developmental tasks of youth work (Rosseter 1987). This commitment to a positive relationship can be in conflict with 'procedure-led' models of youth work, as has been witnessed in social work (Hingley and Mandin 2007, Turney 2012, Larson 2006:684) and can be harmed by contractual codes of practice that limit the scope of the relationship (Krauss et al. 2012:305, see also Smith and Smith 2008). The ability to engender a relationship is frustrated if there is no connection between two people, but an interaction of professional competencies and a 'problem' (Andersson 2013).

However 'relationships' do not often feature in policy documents or funding criteria as they are difficult to measure despite their importance: 'even if we do not consciously "educate" or "counsel" but spend our time "being with" someone then we may be doing something of incalculable value' (Jeffs and Smith 2010b:30). A healthy relationship with a youth worker creates spaces for reflection, growth, increase in wellbeing, and flourishing (Dunning 2010, Ward 1998:53, McLeod 2010:772, Rhodes 2004), and can be best placed to offer meaningful support if (or when) difficulties emerge for the young person (Taylor 2003:6, 152) – often through a pedagogical framework (Tyler et al. 2009:41). Relationships are therefore integral to fulfilling the dominant core purposes of youth work mentioned in section 2.4.

Personal relationships in youth work are part of its long tradition. Fabes and Skinner (2001) wrote about Mrs Townsend who founded the Girls' Friendly Society (GFS) after being moved by a 12

year old girl in poverty and set about finding her an adult 'friend'; McGimpsey (2001) considered the history of the settlements (Durham House in particular), and recognised that Octavia Hill's personal approach influenced the movement, where settlers from more affluent areas would move into the neighbourhoods they were working in to experience some of their plight; and Jeffs (2003) studied Basil Henriques and his commitment to building personal relationships with young men in order to develop mental, physical and spiritual wellbeing. This tradition of such personal relationships in youth work continues on today, often in faith communities, such as the 'Eden Project' on the Openshaw Estate in Manchester, where Christian workers moved into the area in order to build relationships with young people, believing their consistency and stability was a strength over the fluctuating services provided by other professionals who would move into and out of the area (see also Bishop 2007, Nash 2008).

The youth work relationship should be enjoyable, particularly for the young person (Rishel et al. 2007:504). To achieve this Jones and Deutsch (2011) argue that workers need to engage in 'relational strategies', which includes minimising the relational distance, using slang, being 'least adult', acting in a youthful manner (whilst also being able to challenge unacceptable behaviour), bridging the gap between club, home and school, actively promoting inclusion, attempting to create proximal relational ties through highlighting mutual interests and avoiding authoritarianism. They explain "relational strategies refer to instances when an adult invests time in building a relationship with a youth and then uses that bond for promoting engagement in activities and the support of the development of competencies" (p1400).

Folgheraiter (2004:216-217), writing about social work, compares 'linear' procedural interventions with relational interventions, and argues that relationship based social work places the power with the service user, who defines their own problem and develops a network to enable the problem to be overcome. He suggests relational social workers should see themselves less as an archer aiming at specific targets, but rather as travellers moving in a certain direction. The job of the social worker is not to prescribe a course of action, but to walk alongside the user as a guide and expert reader of signposts. This has a greater sense of dynamism in the relationship (see also Nash and Palmer 2011, Smith 2001).

Relationship building in youth work takes time. Taylor (2003:5) believes relationships 'develop slowly, requiring patience and commitment', recognising that personal development is a long term issue and it takes time to develop nurturing relationships (Zeldin et al. 2005:4-7, Hill 2010:95). It requires 'being with' the young person (Jeffs and Smith 2010b:52-53, Jeffs and Smith 2005:31, Smith 2001:21), and often a good way to be around a young person and develop a

relationship is through a shared activity or interest (Zeldin et al. 2005:7, Harrison and Wise 2005:59). Relationships in youth work should be authentic, with no 'prior agenda' (Ord 2007:53-54) which involves a 'genuine connection' based on an empathic understanding of the other person that encourages deeper conversations (Kroll 2010). There needs to be a sense of authenticity, where we allow our personality into the relationship (Smith and Smith 2008:47, Smith 2001). That said, the relationship can become draining to the youth worker, with a level of resilience required because there will be times of disheartenment (Taylor 2003:85, Smith and Smith 2008:36). Relational work should also be grounded in theory and not "left to the intuition of the worker" (Ruch et al. 2010:9). Often the work of psychologist Carl Rogers is invoked to this end.

Psychiatrist Rogers (1951) developed a model of the therapeutic relationship based on the needs of the client: Person Centred Counselling. He described a set of attributes needed to ensure a positive healthy relationship: respect, trust, empathy, authenticity, warmth, confidentiality and patience, and focussed on the person seeking help. Rogers referred to a genuine personal encounter at the heart of therapeutic relationship as 'congruence', and Smith and Smith (2008:48) broadened this to suggest any helping relationship requires 'congruence'. These attributes are argued to be vital in building helping and supportive relationships with adolescents as much as in a therapeutic setting (Taylor 2003:25-32, Pimlott and Pimlott 2008:132) as they provide a foundation for hope, optimism and flourishing, while relationships prioritising the detached application of particular skills or 'techniques' can "reinforce doubts and fears, generate mistrust, increase anxieties [and] deepen defences" (Trevithick 2003:165).

Young (2006:66) likens respect in youth work to a Rogerian concern for unconditional positive regard towards the young person, and it is also closely associated with recognising the young person's rights (Turney 2012:154) and autonomy (Harrison and Wise 2005:22, Hilton 2005, Banks 2010a:11, Roberts 2009:90). Young people want to be listened to (McLeod 2010:109, Westergaard 2005) and, as Ahmed et al. (2007:27) discovered, involved in decision making procedures for the communities of which they are part (here, faith based organisations).

However, within youth work the ideal is a more informal and egalitarian relationship than a therapeutic relationship, in which self-determination by young people is a key concept (Imam and Bowler 2010:144, Brandon et al. 1998:17-24) where they are empowered to exercise their rights and responsibilities as active contributors to their own (and society's) wellbeing (Wood 2010:100-112, Brierley 2003). Batsleer and Davies (2010:3) comment "explicit within youth work is a commitment to reducing to a minimum not just the usual barriers between adult and young person but also those that arise because of the power and authority built into that role" (see also

Jeffs and Smith 2005:21), and it is through this experience of being treated as an equal young people recognise others' equality (Roberts 2009:51). Typically youth work relationships have a greater sense of mutual respect than between social workers and teachers (Hilton 2005:23), where the boundary between personal and professional is narrower than in other occupations (Ord 2007:54, Walker 2011). This mutuality, Ord (2007:58) asserts, comes from the voluntary participation at the heart of youth work (see also Jeffs and Smith 2005). It is also this mutuality that makes ethical reflection demanding. As will be shown in chapter three, dominant discourses and practices assume the worker holds the power to decide 'right' and 'wrong' in the relationship and maintain the boundaries.

To produce a more egalitarian relationship, Folgheraiter (2004:111-113) contends practitioners (he is writing for social workers) must be aware of their own weaknesses and be willing to feel uncertain as situations unfold – rather than attempting to take control (see also Hingley and Mandin 2007). As social work often has statutory duties there will continue to be power imbalances (Turney 2012), but this is different in youth work. It can be manifest as a practitioner willing to learn from and be led by young people (Jeffs and Smith 2010b:29) where young people are seen as active citizens without the assumption young people will defer to the worker (Layard and Dunn 2009:153, Belton 2010:57). This egalitarian relationship is counter cultural at a time where society appears to wish to regain control over its young people (Holloway and Valentine 2003, Holland 2004, Mizen 2004).

Self-disclosures can also help the worker appear 'human' (Austin et al. 2006:89) and prevent depersonalised relationships that could lead to coercion and manipulation to ensure a young person complies with agency standards (Fewster 1990:28-30). Larson and Walker (2010:343) recognised these as dilemmas:

*[Other dilemmas raised during fieldwork] concerned when leaders should relate to youth in a professional versus a personal way. In one instance a leader deliberated on how to respond when youth asked her about her personal life. Should she share information with youth about her own teenage experiences as a vehicle for mentoring them? A repeated consideration across many dilemmas was when to position oneself as an "adult" – to maintain privacy, demand respect, be an authority figure – and when to relate to youth in a more peer-like way that allowed the leader to communicate and provide personal guidance.*

Though concepts of intimacy and friendship are common in discourses around youth work relationships, authors differ on their approach. Walker and Larson (2006:110), Blacker (2010:29), and Jeffs and Smith (2005:8) find 'friendship' to be a useful concept for helping prevent an imbalance of power. Others however, prefer the relationship to be based on trust without friendship (Batsleer and Davies 2010:3). Sapin (2009:69) echoes a common theme in the literature, suggesting youth workers need to be 'friendly' (i.e. showing interest and receptivity), without becoming friends. Or, as Blacker (2010) suggests, the word 'friendship' may have become unfashionable as the language of 'client' and 'provider' have become more commonplace; though she notes that in voluntary work, 'particularly practice linked to churches' (p27), the idea of 'befriending' is still current. Walker and Larson (2006) argue that youth workers are more effective if they engage in 'peer-like' ways: 'a personal bond [is] helpful in building rapport, motivating youth, and gaining trust' (p110). Within youth ministry the concept of walking alongside, or 'place sharing' with young people is a common metaphor for close, boundary crossing relationships (Nash and Palmer 2011, Root 2007, Fenton 1998). Therefore youth workers inhabit an unclear space between 'friend' and 'professional'. Most of the literature echoes this, using phrases like 'close, but not too close', 'friendly not friend', and 'peer-like not peers'.

Ord (2007:54) puts a functional argument for relationships succinctly:

*Despite the overwhelming importance of relationships in youth work it should not be forgotten that they are a means to an end and not an end in themselves. Too often youth workers are content with building successful relationships and forgetting to 'go beyond'*

Ord's 'end' for youth work is the education and transformation of young people, to 'move young people on'. Social workers, for whom there may be specific statutory duty invoked in the relationship, understandably agree; indeed Folgheraiter (2004) argues the decline in popularity of 'relational' social work in the 1970s and 80s was because the remit to influence change was forgotten, and relationships were allowed to continue with little transformation in the behaviour or circumstances of the clients. A concern may arise if this assumes young people are deficient, but a goal or purpose-orientated relationship need not descend into a deficit model of youth. Young people can identify their own needs and, through developing a range of skills and 'competencies', come to some form of 'end' (Hingley and Mandin 2007:178, Jones and Deutsch 2011:1400, Doel 2010:206, 210). Smith and Smith (2008:86-109) clarify, arguing helping relationships have no predefined objectives, but they do have an aim to achieve a 'good life' – to foster an Aristotelian sense of flourishing (see chapter three) in the other, a common commitment to 'the good', and create a space for virtues to be practised.



It is particularly in some of the literature from the Christian sectors that relationships are an end in themselves. Dunn and Senter (1997) compare the relationship to the Christian notion of 'grace', not dissimilar to Rogers' 'unconditional positive regard'; the relationship should endure whether there is any perceived change in behaviour or commitment to faith. Indeed, is it the belief in the inherent worth of a young person as being made 'in the image of God' that is the essential foundation for sustaining relationships without 'outcomes' in Christian youth work. Here "relationships are valued and affirmed as important for their own sake" (Pimlott and Pimlott 2008:116), and that although Pimlott and Pimlott believe it can be 'almost guaranteed' young people come to faith as a result of the relationship, this should not be the aim or predefined 'product' of the relationship. Pimlott and Pimlott continue to say they believe it is important to have effective strategies in working with young people, and to look for outcomes where they occur, but without losing a flexible, 'person-centred' long-term approach to youth work (p132). Jesus, they argue, had this approach; he had a mission that he was journeying towards, but in building relationships with others he allowed them to have choice, with no coercion or control.

Christian youth workers can have a pre-defined end in promulgating the Christian faith. Ahmed et al. (2007:36) engaged in ethnographic research in the North East of England, and discerned in practice many Christian workers see it as their remit to 'steer' young people into a Christian commitment (see also Brierley 2003:9, Hotchkins 1999:116). Root (2007) in particular would argue against this, claiming that Christian relational youth ministry should not become a 'strategy of influence' attempting to use Jesus as an example to follow, which then attempts to pressure young people into that pattern of living. He suggests this is a misuse of incarnational theology, and argues that youth ministers should be looking for Jesus in the midst of relationships, rather than attempting to take Jesus' example into the encounters. Rather than use the relationship to move people to a place where God could be found, he argues God inhabits the relationship itself.

#### 2.9.4 Relationships in Youth Ministry: The Dominance of Incarnational Theology in Literature

Although many strands of theology have influenced models of youth work, none are mentioned in the literature as much as the incarnation. It is used as a theological underpinning for many models of youth ministry, including those above. The incarnation refers to the belief that Jesus was a human being and simultaneously the God of the Jewish people. Exactly how this happened is a matter of much theological debate; however in youth ministry literature it has been broadly interpreted into practice in two ways.

Firstly, it can be understood as an example for youth workers to follow. As Jesus gave up the infinite riches and comfort of heaven to understand what humanity experiences and to make God fully known to humanity, so too can the workers following this model of incarnational work make sacrifices and share their lives with the young people they serve. The first element of this - following the example of Jesus in giving up power and status - is often referred to as a 'kenotic christology'. *Kenosis* is an ambiguous Greek word found in the New Testament to refer to the nature of Jesus' earthly powers. There is some debate over what 'kenosis' refers to, with many youth ministry authors interpreting it as being made 'worthless' or 'self-emptying'. Nash (2008) takes this approach, interpreting the work of Paul in the New Testament (particularly the letter to the Philippians) as his way of instructing wealthy Christians that Jesus refused to take full advantage of his status and joined in with the suffering of the poor:

*For incarnational youth workers a kenotic approach to ministry is not necessarily about suffering but primarily about seeking to imitate Christ's approach to ministry in a way that is relevant to their own social contexts (p173)*

She then relates this to other aspects of the Bible to show that the Judaeo-Christian God is a 'self-limiting' God, as he allows animals to be named by Adam in the story of the Garden of Eden, and his move from being omnipotent to sovereign within creation. Kenotic youth ministry is, therefore, the putting aside of self-interest, engaging in relationships as an equal, accepting a loss in status, and being motivated by love, respect and affection.

Nurden (2010:126) recognises this model as a motivation for youth ministers: 'The incarnation of Christ inspire[s] those engaged with youth work to enter the world of young people with sensitivity and respect'. He continues that, at some level, the aim of incarnational work is to link the young people's story to God's (or the faith community's) story (p129). Incarnational work is about setting an example, demonstrating practically the youth worker's theology (O'Collins 2002:6-8), with Pimlott and Pimlott (2008:75-77) asserting through attempting to 'be Jesus' to others young people will likely come to Christian faith. This form of kenotic incarnational youth ministry is, therefore, profoundly relational in nature (Ward 1998, 1997).

Returning to Nash (2008), in her study of a large para-church organisation's policy of relocating youth workers into deprived areas, she recognised the average length of time an 'incarnational worker' (here, defined as one who lives where they work) would hold a position for three and a half years. This was seen as insufficient to build the kinds of relationships that could produce change, as the strength of incarnational work was to walk alongside young people and their

communities in a sustained way. Incarnational ministry was seen as desirable as it allowed young people to have wider access to the youth worker, whom they would meet regularly in the street or at the shops. This organisation saw incarnational work as a form of evangelism; being 'salt and light' in that culture. The 'fruitfulness' of this work, she found, was in the depth of relationships that grew between the workers and the young people, as they moved from 'cold contact' to the young person becoming a member of some form of Christian community. Secondly, she observed that there were some normative stages workers went through, a simple linear strategy to building relationships, from introductions, to conversations, to 'deepening friendship', to using that relationship to introduce Christianity. Finally, Nash found that there were numerous other benefits (not including conversion) that she summarises as becoming 'people of peace'. That is, community members engaged in less harmful behaviour, and increases cooperation within the community, which was directly attributed to the relationship with the incarnational worker. This form of incarnational work is not unusual in denominations where the church minister is expected to live in the locality (or parish) in which the church is situated (Williams 2008:315).

A second model of incarnational youth work interprets it differently, and therefore has a different set of practices associated with it. If the first interpretation is about 'self-emptying' and 'walking alongside' young people, possibly for the purpose of evangelism, the second interpretation emphasises the youth worker as a 'place sharer'. Root (2007) critiques the first model of incarnational work, arguing that using the incarnation as the basis for setting an example to young people, or evangelising, is using relationships as a 'strategy of influence'. Rather, he says, workers should use relationships as 'the invitation to share each other's place, to be with each other in both joy and suffering, and in so doing to witness to Christ among us' (p5). The differentiation here is subtle, but important. Rather than attempting to *be* Jesus, or set an example as Jesus may have, rather the incarnate Christ is found in the midst of the relationship. It is, he continues, through helping each other become fully human in a context where humanity (through oppression, abuse, or neglect) has been eroded that Christ becomes apparent. Central to this is the theology of Bonhoeffer, whose theology of the incarnation was one of the minister becoming a 'place sharer': 'we place ourselves fully in the reality of the other, refusing to turn away even from its darkest horror' (p66).

Here the worker takes responsibility for remaining alongside the young person, but not responsibility for fixing them or their situation. This requires an awareness of the structures affecting young people's lives and choices, and workers would not ask a young person to confess faith or change their lifestyle as if these external forces do not affect personal choices. It may be

appropriate, Root continues, to confront negative or destructive behaviour, however it is done with the motivation to free young people into their full humanity, recognising some sexual behaviour and substance abuse can be limiting and dehumanising (p128). Though Root has been the first to critique previous models of incarnational work as a 'strategy of influence' and made use of academic theology to do so, several other authors have also recognised his key understanding of incarnational practices: to journey alongside young people, and find Christ in the journey or the relationship, rather than use the language of 'being Jesus' to young people (Nash and Palmer 2011, Pimlott and Pimlott 2008).

## 2.10 Summary

In this chapter I have argued that youth work is a contested occupation, with a range of dominant aims and values mentioned in the literature and, while these often cohabit both in literature and practice, there is little agreement over which (if any) are necessary for an encompassing definition of youth work. However it is recognised individually none of them is sufficient. Similarly, while there is a dominant discourse running throughout the literature that relationships in youth work are important, and common ground on what a positive relationship is, there is no definitive description of what a youth work relationship should look like.

This is significant to the thesis in two ways. Firstly, it sets a foundation for the differing ways 'good practice' in youth work has been popularly conceived. There were also some 'golden threads' discerned, including young people being central in youth work, the work has a sense of purpose (though that purpose is contested), that it results in some kind of positive momentum or transformation, and the centrality of relationship. Secondly, this provides a basis to begin to measure the normative models of relationship observed in this research with the more formalised conceptions of positive relationships found in the literature.



## 3. Ethics and Youth Work

### 3.1 Introduction

In this chapter I discern the nature of ‘ethics’, and review some of the literature around professional ethics: particularly focussing on values, codes of ethics, professional boundaries, and three broad theories of ethics. Then the chapter continues by focussing more specifically on ethics in youth work. By considering formal statements of ethics that have been produced by national institutions, then referring to the wider literature for other ethical issues in youth work. Issues around power, informal relationships, boundaries, wider Aristotelian ethical discourses, external policies, and the role of proselytising in youth work are all considered. Finally, a contemporary issue affecting youth work practice is New Public Management, which is considered in relation to the ethical issues this raises for youth work relationships.

### 3.2 Ethics

The terms ‘ethics’ and ‘morals’ are often used interchangeably, to refer to norms of conduct within the realm of human wellbeing and rights and responsibilities. An individual’s (or, organisation’s) ‘ethics’ is a guide to behaviour for themselves, and for others. Banks (2010:11) characterises the subject matter of ethics as:

*principles and norms of behaviour people espouse and follow in relation to right and wrong action and the good and bad qualities of character and relationships people develop that are relevant to the flourishing of human beings, animals and the planet.*

‘Ethical’ can be used as a synonym for ‘ethically good’, and an antonym for ‘immoral’, but in an attempt to be clear throughout the thesis I use ‘ethical’ to refer to the whole sphere of right and wrong, good and bad practices, rather than as a term to judge a practice morally praiseworthy. Likewise, ‘good practice’ can refer to someone engaging in a particular practice with technical competency, however in this thesis ‘good practice’ is used with the assumption it is also referring to ethically sound practices. I have used those values set out by the National Occupational Standards referred to in the introduction of this thesis, and the dominant discourses on the purposes and values of youth work described in the previous chapter, when considering what is generally conceived as ‘good practice’ in youth work; however I also recognise these are debated and contested. Even where values are agreed upon in principle how they should be embodied or enacted in practice may cause disagreement amongst youth workers. While it is likely that ethically good practice will also be technically good, it is entirely possible for technically good practice to be ‘bad’ or ‘wrong’ in an ethical sense. For example, a technically good youth worker

may be extremely skilled at building relationships and listening to young people, thus gather lots of information. However if they somehow misuse that information to the detriment of the young person, this behaviour may be deemed 'wrong'.

The scope of this thesis is in considering ethics and relationships in youth work because these are intertwined. Discussions on ethics are often situated in the realm of individuals' relationships with those around them, whether the actions or attitudes they display are considered appropriate, whether their actions affect others (or themselves) in a 'good' or 'bad' way, or whether their actions aid, detract from, or are neutral towards the wellbeing of themselves and others. Youth work, I argued using the literature in the previous chapter, is a profession that prioritises a particular type of relationship which sets it apart from other professions: one that is young-person centred, informal, inhabiting the young person's social space, and more egalitarian than many other relationships young people share with adults.

### 3.3 Professional ethics

Banks (2010:4) and Sercombe (2010:3) situate their discussion on ethics in youth work in the wider discourses on professional ethics. Although 'profession' is another contested term, Banks suggests youth work can be considered fitting in a grouping with other occupations that provide a service, and share 'concerns about the integrity, trustworthiness, and honesty of its practitioners' (p4). Sercombe has a longer discussion on professionalism and youth work (p7-14), and argues that it is the relational nature of the practice that defines youth work (as with other occupations) as a professions. Therefore, before focusing on ethics in youth work in particular, some of the wider dominant discourses on professional ethics that have influenced youth work will be considered: values, codes of ethics, professional boundaries, and three dominant ethical theories.

Values are inescapable in discourses about professional ethics. Banks (2012), writing about ethics in social work, claims values are of fundamental importance to professional work, which cannot be detached from action even though often referred to as if they are abstract mental concepts. As discussed in chapter 1, the values of youth work are contested, but often include concepts such as the autonomy of young people, their agency and empowerment, confronting oppression and discrimination, and continually serving their best interests – which can lead to emphasising ends of social justice, education, association, and flourishing. They may align with individual youth workers, and individual agencies in framing how values relate and are enacted.

'Codes of ethics' often a feature of a profession, and are particularly important if practitioners are required to adhere to them or risk being 'struck off' from the register that allows them to

practice. Codes of ethics can include the range of duties in the profession, its remit, its social responsibility, and the expected relationship with clients (Banks 2001:101). Banks (2004:24, 118-120) considers a code of ethics to be an important feature of professional ethics which can make it appear more credible to the public and creating a professional identity; but she warns that it can be slavishly imposed in the wrong context, especially if it can be used so the worker can deny any responsibility for decision making. They can also be seen to a 'compilation of collective wisdom' (Sercombe 2010:53), and seek to make clear the expectations of the members of the profession so users can recognise good and bad practice (Clark 2000:47).

Finally, boundaries are often considered in literature of professional ethics. 'Professional boundaries' can be framed as rules that govern practice and set limits on activities and behaviours, designed to ensure practice remains within its remit and both professionals' and clients' wellbeing is maintained. In youth work they can inform and regulate the relationship between the young person and the youth worker. Austin et al (2006:81) describe boundaries as "the edge of appropriate helping behaviours and allow for clarification of what is permitted in professional... relationships", yet relational boundaries are often blurred. Austin et al. (2006) continue to argue that while a lack of boundaries can make a relationship 'toxic', rigid boundaries do not convey the 'softness of reality'; that is, they do not recognise the myriad context and situations in which relationships occur and can make a broad assumption that real interactions can be predicted and known in advance.

These dominant features in discourses on professional ethics (values, codes, and boundaries) are often discussed alongside three broad theories on which they can be based: deontological; utilitarianism, and character-based ethics. Though each theory are huge areas of debate and discussion in philosophy, here I shall briefly explain how they have been understood in some of the literature on professional ethics.

### 3.3.1 Deontological Ethics

Deontological, or duty-based, ethics is based on a set of principles. It is essentially external; deontological ethicists are interested in how people behave more than their motives or intentions. During the Enlightenment, western society moved beyond being concerned with what something *seems to be* to *what it is*, and according to MacIntyre (2011:105) this movement towards understanding what can be observed, and the causal mechanisms in place, also happened in philosophy. However to create causal laws about observed actions the vocabulary had to move away from meanings and intentions, as was common in pre-modern ethical discussion. Ethics must instead be reasoned, with objective judgements and the right decision



assumed to be universal: to a duty based ethicist “we must abstract ourselves from our personal and particular concerns and contexts and put ourselves in the position of an impartial observer” (Banks 2004:99). These duty-based approaches have, according to Banks (2012:40), dominated discourses in professional ethics, which forms the content of the client-practitioner relationship.

Kant was one such Enlightenment philosopher. He believed ‘morality is based on a universal and impartial law of rationality’ (Crisp and Slote 1997:1), and that the motives for doing right comes from the moral duty or obligation to perform a particular task (Hursthouse 1999:130). Often the highest duty in professional ethics, particularly from a Kantian tradition, is respect for others and devising (or discerning) universal principles, from which behaviours or attitudes can be judged to have upheld or broken those principles. Kantian ethics in a profession typically focuses on the autonomy of the service user, whose workers would stress confidentiality and require informed consent from the client about any decisions affecting them (Banks 2004:13). In social work, with a statutory remit to protect the public, often patients with mental health issues subject to incarceration are held there predominantly to protect society at large (a utilitarian approach), however a Kantian perspective would give greater consideration to the patients/clients (Dixon 2010:2410). Therefore a Kantian approach to ethics in professional life will prioritise the needs and agency of the client, but do so through creating principles that are assumed to be universally applicable.

Human rights is another deontological discourse. Rights are those aspects of society to which individuals are entitled, or behaviours allowed to partake of, for no other qualification except being human (Roberts 2010:7). Rawls was another proponent of deontological ethics, however he advanced thinking on human rights in the twentieth century through a belief in certain inalienable rights that could be empirically knowable (Lovat and Gray 2008). Professions, in their role as political, social, or economic institutions, are often required to uphold the human rights of their clients and others (Roberts 2009:37-59).

### 3.3.2 Utilitarian Ethics

Utilitarianism is the most commonly referred to form of consequentialism. Based on the work of Bentham (1891) and later Mill (1861), this works on the principle that the right action is that which leads to the greatest good for the greatest number. As such, it is often related more closely to the social sciences, as philosophers and practitioners attempt to devise models for decision making that can lead to the greatest good (Lovat and Gray 2008:1106) and focus on welfare and justice in society (Banks 2012:30). Utilitarian philosophers are interested more in the social than the individual, and much of the moral discourse in western individual societies is occupied by the

discrepancies between Kantian and utilitarian theory (Clark 2000:73). There are various forms of utilitarianism – notably *act utilitarianism* and *rule utilitarianism*.

In act utilitarianism the practitioner would ask whether performing or omitting to perform an action will create the largest amount of good for all those involved (though this can involve significant pain for one or more individuals affected)(Mulgan 2007:115-118). Each action will be taken individually, and a decision based on that measurement. In rule utilitarianism the consequences are considered on a greater scale (Mulgan 2007:119-129). The first stage is to think of the *kind* of action being deliberated. For example it may be telling a lie to prevent a friend getting into trouble. The actor then considers different rules that could maximise happiness in general, and acts based on that rule. Following the example, it may be that in telling a lie the immediate consequence is less painful for both the liar and the friend, however a rule stating *do not lie* is better to maximise happiness in general.

The reality of working with finite financial and time resources requiring fair distribution to create the greatest good is one outworking of utilitarianism (Banks 2010a:14, Parrott 2010:57). It is also of benefit to professionals who must make decisions balancing the rights of the individual with the best interests of society at large: “the skill that social workers must develop is the ability to work within a framework that considers risk, whilst at the same time not losing sight of the needs of the individual. In doing so, they should accept the need to apply a utilitarian position that considers public protection whilst regularly re-evaluating the appropriateness of this position through consideration of service user autonomy” (Dixon 2010:2407). Utilitarianism can also create a sense of balance with what Doel et al. (2010) say is the ‘current obsession’ with individual interests in ethical discourses (see also Sercombe 2010a:53).

### 3.3.3 Character-Based Ethics

Rather than considering ethics to be an externally derived rule which is applied to a given situation, character-based ethics begins with the internal traits of a particular type of person, and what they would do in a particular situation. Of the forms of character-based ethics, virtue ethics is perhaps the most discussed with regard to professional ethics.

Virtue ethics is concerned with character above action. It entails asking the question “who should I be?” rather than “what should I do?” (van Hooft 2006:12, Banks and Gallagher 2009:28) and concentrates on becoming the ‘right’ kind of person rather than simply producing the ‘right’ actions (Crisp and Slote 1997:1-2). It asks questions of the motivations and intentions behind human behaviour. This shift from the external (i.e. actions and behaviour) to the internal (i.e.

motives and character) makes virtue ethics appear a somewhat nebulous concept (Crisp and Slote 1997:1) as it is difficult to truly know an individual's character.

McDowell (1997:141) defines a virtue as 'a disposition to act rightly' as a person reacts appropriately to a situation with their sense of virtues as a framework for making judgements. He goes on to say "if someone guides his life by a certain conception of how to live, then he acts, on particular occasions, so as to fulfil suitable concerns" (p156) and as such becomes "one who sees situations in a certain distinctive way" (p162) rather than being one who applies universal principles to every situation.

Despite the recent rise in interest in character-based ethics, it is still underrepresented in the professional ethics literature (Banks and Gallagher 2009:2). There is currently an imbalance of emphasis on "obligation based performance to externally defined principles, rules and standards" (p44). Carr (2006), writing into an educational context, would argue this is because the move from duty based ethics to virtue ethics involves the risky move from doing the 'right thing' through self-interest to doing the 'right thing' because it is the right thing to do. That is, the youth worker behaves in a particular way in order to abide by policy and keep their job (self-interest) rather than behaving in such a way simply because it was 'right' to behave that way.

### 3.4 Ethics in Youth Work

Moving the discussion from professional ethics in general, to youth work in particular, there has been very little empirical research into professional ethics in youth work. However the development of a code of ethics in youth work has been subject to recent debate, within the National Youth Agency (NYA) and newly established Institute for Youth Work (IYW). In this section I consider the statements of ethics produced with regard to English youth work, before moving on to some of the key ethical issues that are distinctive in youth work as found in the literature. Therefore, whilst ethics can be framed in the context of a dilemma, here it encompasses a much broader debate about nuanced daily interactions between youth workers and young people as they engage in regular youth club life (Banks 2013).

#### 3.4.1 Ethics and Youth Work: Institutional Expectations

In 1999 the National Youth Agency produced a document on 'Ethical Conduct in Youth Work' (2004), which is used by Roberts (2009) to structure his discussion on ethics. The eight principles are split into two groups, ethical and professional principles, summarised below:

### ***Ethical principles***

*Youth workers have a commitment to:*

- 1. Treat young people with respect, valuing each individual and avoiding negative discrimination.*
- 2. Respect and promote young people's rights to make their own decisions and choices, unless the welfare or legitimate interests of themselves or others are seriously threatened.*
- 3. Promote and ensure the welfare and safety of young people, while permitting them to learn through undertaking challenging educational activities.*
- 4. Contribute towards the promotion of social justice for young people and in society generally, through encouraging respect for difference and diversity and challenging discrimination.*

### ***Professional principles***

*Youth workers have a commitment to:*

- 5. Recognise the boundaries between personal and professional life and be aware of the need to balance a caring and supportive relationship with young people with appropriate professional distance.*
- 6. Recognise the need to be accountable to young people, their parents or guardians, colleagues, funders, wider society and others with a relevant interest in the work, and that these accountabilities may be in conflict.*
- 7. Develop and maintain the required skills and competence to do the job.*
- 8. Work for conditions in employing agencies where these principles are discussed, evaluated and upheld.*

Here there begins a Kantian prioritising of the young person as autonomous and deserving of respect (points 1 and 2), but with a utilitarian assurance that this principle will be overruled if a young person would come to greater harm. The need to provide a safe environment is framed as an ethical issue, which could be interpreted as either displaying a virtue of care or a series of rigid rules – though the inclusion of the second half of the principle is acknowledging an absolute avoidance of any risk may be counter to the aims of youth work. The fourth point recognises the values youth work seeks to uphold and frames them as ethical imperatives. Throughout these

four points the different aims of youth work (described in the previous chapter) are being protected – the autonomy of the young person and their holistic development is included, as is creating space for educational experiences, and the agendas of radical youth work. The second set of four points are not unique to youth work, however the way they are interpreted in youth work practice may be very different from, say, social work.

Reflected throughout these points is the tension between creating a concise statement of ethical principles while being true to the ambiguous space youth work inhabits. Points 2, 3, 5, and 6 all include provisos – highlighting situations where the first half of the principle may be broken, and reinforcing ethics in youth work as difficult to codify. Point 5, for example, shows an awareness of the balance between being in a professional relationship and displaying genuine hallmarks of friendship; but by itself it seems to describe the dilemma workers regularly face, without providing guidance on how to overcome it.

This set of principles was supplemented with the Institute of Youth Work's code of ethics, which members are required to sign up to (though the Institute has no authority to hold non-members accountable nor mechanism to deal with complaints against members). On their website they hope this code of ethics reflects the practices of the range of workers, from qualified to volunteer, and interestingly they particularly highlight 'including faith-based', as if it may have been left out or somehow require special treatment. The twelve points are:

1. *We have a duty of care to young people. In the youth work relationship the best interests of young people have priority.*
2. *We do not seek to advance ourselves, our organisations, or others – personally, politically, or professionally – at the expense of young people.*
3. *Our relationship with young people remains within professional boundaries at all times, to protect the young person and the purpose of the work.*
4. *We work in a fair and inclusive way, promoting justice and equality of opportunity, challenging any discriminatory or oppressive behaviour or practice.*
5. *We seek to enhance young people's personal and social development by:*
  - a. *Enabling them to make informed decisions and pursue their choices;*
  - b. *Supporting their participation and active involvement in society;*
  - c. *Helping them to become independent and move on when the time is right.*
6. *We promote the welfare and safety of young people, while permitting them to learn through undertaking challenging educational activities. We avoid exposing young people*

*to the likelihood of harm or injury. This includes implementing safeguarding policies and procedures.*

- 7. When we receive or collect personal information about young people, we make them aware of with whom and for what purpose that information will be shared. We do not disclose confidential information unless this is necessary to prevent harm or is legally required.*
- 8. In our engagement with young people, and in our resulting relationship, we strive to be honest and non-judgemental.*
- 9. We respect the contribution of others concerned with the welfare and well-being of young people and will work in partnership to secure the best outcomes for young people.*
- 10. We encourage ethical reflection and debate with colleagues, managers, employers and young people.*
- 11. We make sure we have the knowledge and skills necessary to work effectively with young people. We work in a reflective way to develop our abilities. We take account of the impact of work on ourselves.*
- 12. We maintain consciousness of our own values, beliefs and interests, are aware when these conflict with those of others, and approach difference respectfully.*

The IYW code is greater in scope than the original NYA ethical principles as it explicitly considers more aspects of a youth worker's remit, and specifically highlights some challenges youth workers face (such as confidentiality). As with the NYA principles, the IYW code does not define some key issues (such as 'professional boundaries'), perhaps due to the breadth of practice associated with youth work in a range of contexts. As with its predecessor, reference is made to some of the aims of youth work. There are some elements of Kantian respect included, particularly around respecting confidentiality. There are also more references to features that could be interpreted as character traits, such as honesty and remaining non-judgemental, though point 12 falls short of calling for integrity by the workers. There is also a sense in which it is guided by current issues. While this makes it particularly useful for contemporary debates, such as the role of information sharing (point 7), Sercombe (2010a:305) recognises that codes of ethics should be 'living documents' and subject to change, but also they should 'resist the mere winds of fashion and the pressure of outside influence'.

Taking these statements together, there are some key themes that highlight some ethical issues youth workers face:

- Respect for the young person, and their agency, valuing them, working for their best interests, and respecting their privacy through maintaining confidentiality.

- Avoiding discrimination and judgementalism that may marginalise young people.
- Taking the welfare and safety of young people seriously.
- The wider remit of youth workers towards social justice and the emancipation of young people.
- Professional boundaries, that negotiate the balance between care and distance.
- The quality of the workers and the work, making sure the work is competently conducted in an organisation that takes ethical reflection seriously.
- Actively promoting the development and wellbeing of young people.

Although the empirical research and scope of the thesis, is based in England, the Community Learning Development Standard Council for Scotland have produced a code of ethics for all their work (CLDSCS 2010), and with a commentary particularly focussing on how the code may be applied to youth work (CLDSCS 2011). Here, the code overlaps significantly with the above NYA and IYM statements, however it defines boundaries as set to ‘intentionally limited to protect the constituent and the purpose of our work’, with only ‘sexual engagement’ subject to a blanket prohibition. Helpfully, however, the commentary provides an expectation on how individuals are expected to use the code: that is, as a ‘lens’ through which decision making is made. There is an expectation, therefore, that youth workers will systematically reflect on their daily practice, and it begins to highlight some characteristics youth workers may need to be able to perform this ongoing reflection: particularly, integrity.

### 3.4.2 Ethics and Youth Work: Other Perspectives

These statements have been helpful in situating some of the ethical issues youth workers face. However these documents alone do not reflect the broad range of issues affecting practitioners. Banks (2010) highlights several of the key ‘issues’ youth workers, or the occupation of youth work in general, contend with. These include ethical issues inherent in working in an organisation that may seek to control the youth work process (McCulloch and Tett 2010); the ethics of being an agent of the state amongst marginalised and oppressed groups of young people (Mizen 2010); dual relationships and their challenge to professional boundaries (Sercombe 2010b); the role of evangelism and ‘conversion’ in youth work (Green 2010); the threats to confidentiality (Morgan and Banks 2010); and the effect of funding provisos (Jeffs and Smith 2010a).

Amongst these authors there is also a range of responses to ethical issues: Green appeals to the purposes of youth work to define what is appropriate action; Jeffs and Smith and McCulloch and Tett describe some external forces that can cause practitioners to compromise their work; Sercombe creates almost-universalised principles that are concerned predominantly about the welfare and safety of the young people; Morgan and Banks wrestle with a specific dilemma that may not have a ‘right’ response; Wood (2010) and Young (2010) frame youth work as a practice

involved in developing ethical thinkers; and Roberts (2009) who elsewhere appeals to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child to discern right actions. Therefore, there is an impression of the complexity of levels of ethics faced by youth workers, in terms of their regular interactions with young people, the ethical practices and consciousness raising they engage in with young people, and the response of workers to external influences that may conflict with the values the workers are attempting to uphold.

In Christian youth work, very little is specifically written about professional ethics. Green (2010) has considered the role of the youth worker as an evangelist and youth work as a means of conversion, and based her conclusions on remaining true to the values of youth work, rather than relating this discussion to a particular ethical theory. Langford (2006) considers the safeguarding implications of one-to-one work with young people in a church setting, but again without overt appeal to ethics. Only Nash and Hirst (2011) begin to draw on Aristotelian understandings of character and virtue when arguing that youth workers should have a sense of integrity through having a congruent set of personal and professional values. Much Christian youth work does have profound ethical implications, but as with the discussion on the incarnational model(s) in the previous chapter, these are framed as theological rather than ethical issues.

However within the literature in youth work, there are some common themes of youth work that contribute to distinctive ethical issues in the youth work relationship: power dynamics, complexity in informal situations, professional boundaries, the wider Aristotelian discourses surrounding youth work, external influences affecting practices, and proselytising.

### *Power*

Ethical issues are pervasive in youth work, Banks (2010:3) argues, because young people have fewer rights than the adults working with them, they may lack power compared to the adults, and be at greater risk of exploitation or harm than most. However this is not unique to youth work, what is more distinctive is the egalitarian nature with which many workers attempt to engage with young people, as explained in the previous chapter. Relationships in which the worker may have authority, but willingly rescind their claim to being more powerful than young people can create conflicts if organisations or funders are expecting workers to use their power to a certain end.

The ideal of egalitarian relationships is one in which young people are equal with the youth worker, with regard to the curriculum and deciding on the practices of the centre. The centre is often (though, perhaps Davies (2013) would argue with the increase of multi-disciplinary hubs less so now) traditionally seen as an informal space, opposed to the structure of school; it is



considered to be young people's space and the work happening within their social context, opposed to the domain of the 'professional' (Sharkey and Shields 2008); and without statutory duties, opposed to social workers' remit (Sercombe 2010a:77). Therefore with this different expression of power in the relationship between youth workers and young people, boundaries are existing in a more fluid, negotiated space than in other occupations working with young people

There are practices around the use of power Sercombe describes as being 'imperative', in a Kantian sense of principles that should not be broken, including empowerment and prioritising the best interests of the young people. This commitment to an egalitarian relationship while prioritising young people's best interests, in a policy and organisational landscape that may not recognise or appreciate these aspects of youth work, has not yet been fully explored in empirical research.

### *Complexity and Informality*

Chapter 2 highlighted the informal and situation-specific nature of youth work relationships, particularly as they usually are built in the context of a young person's social group. Banks (2010:17) argues that character-based ethics can be better at explaining ethical decision making in informal spaces, suggesting that decisions based purely on 'impartial' principles or derived from specific rules can ignore some of the nuanced contexts youth workers face that require judgements to be made.

Cooper (2007) explains the education of youth workers is important here, as is their career stage, when considering ethical frameworks. She considers the role of teaching values in youth work in a UK context. She researches espoused theories and theories-in-use of students to discern any differences between them. She argues it is values, not technical skills, that define youth work, and therefore workers need clear values to inform decision making. She argues that youth workers move from 'context free' rules (i.e. following policy documents) to 'situational rules' as experience and expertise grows. She also found where personal and professional values conflicted, there was usually a belief by the workers that the professional values were better – but perhaps more difficult to uphold consistently. Although she frames her discussion in terms of 'values', not ethics, she concludes her research by arguing youth workers should seek to be capable of reflection-in-action and making sound judgements, based on values. Though an Aristotelian tradition may cause a worker to think of 'virtue' rather than 'value', the need for contextualised decision making in youth work is clear from Cooper's research.

Although empirical research into ethics in youth work in the UK is rare, practitioner Alyssa Cowel (2007) shares her experience in the journal "Ethics and Social Welfare" and illustrates the

complexity of decisions workers face because of the informal and relatively open-ended nature of their work. She eloquently explains one situation that requires her judgement as a detached youth worker. A young person in the street admits to having unprotected sex. There were only two hours remaining for the 'morning after' pill to be effective, and the only place to obtain one is the Accident and Emergency department at the local hospital. The young person wanted the youth worker to go with her. There was no senior worker at hand to ask, and Cowel knew in the past the line manager would not consistently support youth worker's decisions if they deviated from the policy, and though there was no policy to cover this eventuality it meant she felt insecure about using her judgement for fear of her superiors failing to support her decision. Cowel based her decision on what she believed was being respectful towards the young people. However she also appealed to virtue ethics, stating that she was attempting to do as a person of integrity would have – that is, she took the young people to hospital. Though she is keen to stress the organisation did not have a policy that covered this situation, and it would be interesting to know whether a policy explicitly prohibiting taking the young person to the hospital would have affected her decision. However, she explicitly considered it her duty, in a Kantian sense, to help the young person. In this case, Cowel believed her decision making was rooted in both a Kantian and virtue approach to ethics.

Sercombe (2010a:57) finds codes of ethics helpful in negotiating this complexity that derives from informal relationships. He suggests that there is a 'messiness' in youth work that transcends some agencies' disposition for neatness and predictability, and a riskiness inherent in building informal relationships (p107). In some empirical research Sercombe and Sercombe (2010) suggest that many arguments against their use in youth work are exaggerated claims of extreme levels of conformity by uncritical workers who slavishly follow the codes as if they are offering rules.

### *Boundaries*

Professional boundaries define the "edge of appropriate helping behaviours and allow for clarification of what is permitted in professional... relationships" (Austin et al. 2006:81). Within youth work, they can be used to help the worker balance care and support with appropriate personal distances between themselves and the young person (Roberts 2009:98-100). Boundaries, Cooper (2012:12) argues from a social work perspective, come from a range of motivations, including maintaining health and safety procedures and a desire to keep clients safe, protecting the wellbeing of the worker and client, and setting the scope of the profession. The research of Doel et al. (2010) on the use of boundaries in practice has shown that there are a range of conceptions of a 'boundary', from a clear line depicting a universal imperative a worker should not cross under any circumstance, through to a 'disputed territory' where boundaries are

better thought of as fluid and negotiated. However in practice, boundaries are often written in policy as if they are fixed and sacrosanct, while the 'grey areas of everyday practice' (p1884) mean their enactment can be flexible.

Professional boundaries can be hard to define in occupations like youth work, that require its workers to have an emotional attachment to the young people. While clearly demarcated boundaries may be appropriate when working with particularly vulnerable people, where statutory duties necessarily formalise the professional/client relationship, or where the relationship is time-limited with a specific aim that will bring the relationship to an end, relationships in youth work are not like this. Rather, youth work relationships focussing on the holistic development of the young people have a more egalitarian quality, they are time-limited only in the sense that often youth workers have an upper-age limit, and they are informal to allow the educative mechanisms for holistic development to occur. This is why Smith (2001), for example, argues strict boundaries and the obligation to meet targets defined by funders is causing the youth work relationship to become increasingly detached. The 'personalised relationship' expected within those occupations working alongside young people can be undermined by the professional demeanour that is adopted on the assumption it reduces risk to the young people (Fewster 1990:26-30). Lund (2011:82), writing for youth ministry practitioners, argues that the social construction of adolescence has placed young people into a special 'stage' that assumes adult guidance is required, while simultaneously removing opportunities for sustained, quality adult relationships.

Boundaries in youth work have been the subject of little empirical research, compared with social work and nursing. In a USA context, Walker and Larson (2006) researched youth development programmes, and recognised that youth workers are more effective if they engage in 'peer-like' ways, where a 'personal bond [is] helpful in building rapport, motivating youth, and gaining their trust' (p110), therefore friendship should be authentic (see also Smith 2001). Using interviews and observation the researchers identified ethically difficult situations, with many focussing on personal-professional boundary issues, such as being invited to a young person's party, or being asked personal questions by the young people. Here the authors suggest workers divulge personal information when it is of benefit to the young person. They do conclude that 'role modelling' and having the ability to handle these decisions in practice (what Schön (1983) terms 'reflection-in-action') are essential definitions of a 'quality' youth worker (p117).

There is an understanding in the literature that the relationship between young people and youth workers often has less clarity and a greater closeness than with teachers and social workers (Sercombe 2010a:10-11); Ord (2007:54) describes this closeness in youth work thus:

*The boundaries between personal and professional life in youth work are narrower than other professions, but the quantity of information one is expected to disclose and the quality of information – the type of information one is expected to disclose is greater. Who you are as a person, as well as a professional, is of vital importance in youth work.*

Two of the organisations observed for this thesis were church-based, and here there are increased tensions over the placement of boundaries as the workers and some young people were also part of the same intergenerational community, and the workers have a particular missional aim better served through closer relationships. Pimlott and Pimlott (2008:144 see also Williams 2008) also describe this tension with regard to a vocational approach to youth work:

*The professionalization of youth work can sometimes appear to create a tension for those of us who are committed to a whole life approach to ministry. We would want to emphasize the importance of boundaries. Those working with young people need time off, and need to work safely and responsibly, taking account of safeguarding and other policies. Within these boundaries, however, we also have to find ways of sharing our lives with, and giving meaningful, relational time to young people.*

Here, Pimlott and Pimlott are suggesting that youth work can become a whole-life project by a worker who sees it as a 'calling'. They recognise the need for professional boundaries to ensure workers have their own time and space, and ensure safeguarding practices are followed, but this can be challenged by a worker who wishes to share their lives with the young people they serve. Therefore, although boundaries are the dominant discourse in considering appropriate behaviours in professional relationships, there are different and unique considerations in youth work.

### *Wider Aristotelian Discourses On Youth Work*

While there is no obvious dominant ethical discourse on which practices in youth work are built, Young (2006, 2010) has attempted to show youth work has a natural home in an Aristotelian tradition. She argues the intricacies, complexities, and ultimately the artistry of youth work (2006)

are suited to teleological and character-based philosophy. She considers youth workers to be moral philosophers, and youth work to be an ethical practice (that is, a practice concerned with ethics)(Young 2010). Young's work is in reaction to deficit based youth work, and she argues youth work should be 'a practice based not on the need to address current social problems and political priorities, but on a commitment to developing the truly lifelong goals of rational judgement and authentic human existence' (2006:122). As youth work has always had, she argues, a commitment to increasing the ethical standards of young people, then youth work rests on the values and ethics of the worker. Youth workers must have integrity to be able to fulfil their role as people who facilitate ethical reflection and are aspiring to support young people to being virtuous, an assertion also supported by Smith and Smith (2008). Therefore Young appeals to the philosophy of Aristotle, in as much as she believes to have a 'good' life one must have a disposition towards doing 'good'.

Bessant (2009) is also explicit in issuing a call for youth workers to engage with virtue ethics, arguing that utilitarianism and deontological ethics do not provide an adequate framework for the complex relationships and ethical decisions that youth workers make and maintain. Her discussion is theoretical, rather than empirical, however she believes a commitment to virtue ethics identifies good youth work. Bessant deliberates utilitarianism, considering it troublesome, as it relies on numbers and the moral majority (i.e. adults): "because 'youth' as a cohort are less powerful than most other age groups, they are as a permanent minority subject to the tyranny of the majority and recurrently marginalised" (p426).

Finally, Bessant argues a good youth worker is more than someone who knows the rules, but is living a good life: including health, social, creative, moral, and spiritual life. The development of these 'goods' is required in the youth workers before they can affect young people. Therefore she argues for virtue ethics on the basis that a good character produces a flourishing person – the type who should be engaging with young people. Virtue ethics, she concludes, affirms individuals in shaping their own social and moral norms, and therefore emphasises character development in youth work.

Ord (2014) also adopts an Aristotelian perspective, and again is not *specifically* considering *ethical practice* in youth work, but *all* practice in youth work; however he does believe Aristotle's idea of *phronesis* is better suited to youth work than *techne*, or technical skills, though outcome-focussed youth work prioritises technical skill over wisdom. However, Ord argues that *phronesis* produces practices that are more context dependent where the definitions of 'good outcomes' are based on the situation the workers and young people find themselves in. This, he goes on to conclude, is

better than pre-defined outcomes that can be easily managed and measured, but may not be in the best interests of the young people.

There are multiple points of contact between an Aristotelian philosophy and some of the aims and values of youth work, based around character development, virtuous living, and a teleology based on the flourishing of young people. A youth worker engages with young people to increase their capacity to act as social beings in a social world in a positive and productive manner, through what Forrest (2010) terms “the cultivation of gifts in all directions”. It addresses this need to foster holistic growth predominantly through a young person’s personal, social and educational development, offering informal opportunities to learn about themselves, others and society (Jeffs and Smith 2005, Brierley 2003:6-7). Within a Christian context, Nash (2011:xvi) believes youth work to be about enhancing young people’s wellbeing, which she defines as being their satisfaction with life, personal development, increasing a sense of meaning and purpose, and belonging. Smith (1988) summarises the *telos* of youth work into three overarching goals, and explains the emphasis given to each affects practice. He says youth work is essentially character building (engaging in and encouraging the personal and moral development of the young person), based on social education (helping young people fit into their place in the community, and capacity building), and emancipatory (helping young people who are overlooked or ignored because of their age). Later he says, youth workers are there to enable young people to autonomously pursue a sense of ‘wellbeing’ (p123). As part of this, Sercombe (2010a:21) sees the responsibility of youth workers in promoting autonomy, responsibility and self-directedness in young people, with the purpose of encouraging them to make sound choices for themselves. Through this young people’s levels of critical consciousness will be raised enabling them to lift themselves from a position of powerlessness to seeing injustice overturned (p33).

### *External Influences Affecting Practice*

There have been criticisms the lack of coherence over the aims and values of youth work, that youth workers can find themselves swept up in the policies of successive government (Gilchrist et al. 2001:2). Furthermore, the reality youth workers find themselves in is increasingly controlled and based on specific predetermined outcomes rather than this idea of *eudemonism* (Forrest 2010:18, Sapin 2009, Jeffs and Smith 2010b:5-6). Youth work, however, is not always considered through an Aristotelian lens. Sercombe (2010a) approaches ethics in youth work from a different perspective. Although he acknowledges the uses of neo-Aristotelian thought he relies on it less heavily than Young and Smith. He suggests that many of the roles of youth workers are essentially ethical projects: social justice, empowerment, and inclusion, for example. As with Young, he recognises the content of youth work (as well as the practices) as being ethical endeavours: issues

that affect young people are often not simply technical issues, but are morally wrong (e.g. abuse and safety). Sercombe argues that ethical frameworks (such as a code of ethics) protect a pre-existing profession, rather than define the profession; therefore youth workers should approach ethics on their own terms – for example, compared to other forms of relationship young people have, the youth work relationship will necessarily be intimate, but intimacy remains bounded by the purpose of the relationship. In youth work, Sercombe suggests, ethics is not assumed to be an objective set of laws waiting to be discovered, but requires ongoing dialogue with others in the community(ies) of practice.

This kind of protection can be offered by a code of ethics (though perhaps it is too soon to see if the IYW code of ethics has made an impact in this sense). Sercombe also acknowledges codes of ethics as an important step in explaining to other professions what youth work *is* and in providing a resource for workers to decline to do work that is *unethical* that can come about through the external organisational, policy, and funding influences as recognised by Jeffs and Smith (2010) and McCulloch and Tett (2010).

### *Proselytising*

Using the youth work relationship as a means to evangelise, or otherwise impart a set of values or beliefs, was considered in chapter two. However the role of evangelism in youth work is an ethical issue. I argued elsewhere (Hart 2014) that it can be relatively easy for workers who are not critically reflecting on their work to use their influence with young people to coerce and indoctrinate, without any malicious intent, through failing to pay due attention to young people's agency and addressing power imbalances in the relationship. Green (2010) also writes that evangelism is in line with dominant ideas of values in youth work, if it is done respectfully, and as a form of education and providing opportunities for young people. However in some literature for Christian youth work (or ministry), it can become a rather narrow aim. How, and when, to evangelise is, I would argue, an ethical as much as a theological question.

## 3.3 Managerialist Ethics

As a contemporary debate affecting practice, managerialism's influence on ethical issues in youth work is an important discussion. This final section of the chapter will frame the way managerialism has affected conceptions of 'good practice' and decision making in youth work (and wider social professions), and how that sets a foundation for studying ethics in organisations that are influenced by a managerialist agenda.

The 1980s saw the rise of an externally controlled, homogenising, managerial system that focussed on targets and outcomes (Banks 2004:38, Gilchrist 2004:76, 18). This increased under New Labour, where the managerial agenda prized innovative increases in efficiency, performance, and participation. This has had a profound effect on ethical discourses in practice, encompassing elements of Kantian, rights-based, and utilitarian philosophies – whilst also asking workers to conform to predefined rules, and can be a reaction to heightened perceptions of risk around young people and adults interacting (Marshall and Mellon 2011). The lack of professional autonomy is in danger of putting predefined targets and procedures over and above the users' needs, and McCulloch and Tett (2010:39) argue it is possible that youth workers in this context could seek to uphold the dominant interests and legitimise the structures that give them a privileged position.

However Du Gay (2000, 2005) extols the virtues of bureaucracy, arguing it has become fashionable, even glamorous, to deride managerialism with caricatured descriptions of an inherently immoral rule-based system. He contends that red tape, impersonalism, and fastidious record keeping are too easy to dismiss within a society that admires flexibility and craves human interactions. However, civil servants (he is predominantly writing about apolitical government departments) are also criticised for poor record keeping and inconsistency across cases. A bureaucracy, therefore, is best seen as a 'by-product' of a society that values fairness and justice in its agencies, and comprehensive paperwork as a requirement of a complex modern democratic organisation. He does concede however, that the current disposition to create monolithic organisational structures incapable of flexibility or guilty of moral blindness are not the form of bureaucracy that Weber had originally imagined. Rather Weber (1947) had presented a bureaucracy as being an effective structure to organise large groups of people, complete complex tasks, and allocate resources fairly and transparently.

A bureaucratic or managerialist system then, offers: clear lines of accountability (McCulloch and Tett 2010:42-43, Cooper 2010:241, Du Gay 2005:4-7); equity in the form of due processes and standardised systems (Banks 2012:153, 2010a:39, Newman 2005, Du Gay 2005:54-55); a somewhat utilitarian argument for increases in efficiency to produce the greatest good with finite resources (Banks 2004:96, Rose 2010, Du Gay 2000:12, Clarke 2005); and the ability to measure progress against the aims of an occupation and minimum standards (Rose 2010, Cooper 2010, Carr 2000:163, Parrott 2010:2-5). Additionally, it seeks to ensure workers have the necessary skills and prioritise best methods of working (Tyler et al. 2009:p34-35) whilst preventing the misuse of 'professional judgement' (Du Gay 2000:44).



However with regard to ethical practices, some forms of managerialism seem to have taken the consistency of Kantianism, without the commitment to respecting the autonomy and individuality of the clients (or even the practitioners). They may be framed as a form of rule utilitarianism, with workers abiding by rules that managers have decided will enable the organisation to continue to work most efficiently and safely. This therefore increases the good the organisation can achieve, however the underpinning rationale for these rules may instead be fear of high profile cases of abuse or negligence affecting the organisation (Belton 2009:119), or following government policy, whether it is considered just or unjust. Despite its advantages, the steady increase in managerialism in youth work over the last two decades has produced professional boundaries which distance the worker from the young person (Banks 2004:20-21, Banks 1999:5, Austin et al. 2006:81, Kelly 1990:167, Knapp and Slattery 2004:555, Popple 1995:75, Powell 1990:178). These provide a challenge to youth workers, who have already been described as seeing their role in decreasing the distance between themselves and the young people for the purpose of building transformative relationships.

There are also concerns that rule-orientated bureaucracies move workers to 'habitual compliance with rules and norms' and can encourage 'moral ambivalence and ethical blindness' (Parrott 2010:144). Organisations preoccupied with efficiency, calculability, and predictability, Parrott continues, can become these forms of bureaucracies. An organisation then has the ability to 'get under the skin' (p152) of the practitioners and affect their values. McCulloch and Tett (2010) argue creating a climate of control where organisational rules are not accountable to the values of the profession can also become 'legitimising structures' that allow dominant interests to be prioritised. They present four forms of organisation:

- Bureaucratic: well defined lines of accountability and levels of authority, where autonomous action of workers is limited.
- Parental-ethical: organisations wanting to do the 'right thing' without trusting the workers to make decisions, which often have a dominant individual or group and the centre.
- Regulatory ethical: The worker is accountable to a wider community than the context they work in, through adhering to a professional standard or ethical code.
- Professional-ethical: An organisation allows practitioners to work independently towards working from a sound ethical base.

Though McCulloch and Tett do not examine this, it is unlikely these are intended to be seen as a hierarchy – or even mutually exclusive. It may be possible, for example, that a Local Authority

would come under the 'bureaucratic' system, however, within an individual youth centre the managers take a regulatory-ethical approach. It may also be that some, perhaps more experienced, workers are allowed greater autonomy than an unqualified worker just beginning their career.

Schön (1983:326-337) also critiques the lack of reflection-in-action in organisations that promote the need for unilateral control by managers while attempting to mitigate any personal liability for decisions. He says 'for... teachers and social workers, bureaucracies are the institutional settings of professional practice... as society becomes increasingly subject to professional management, professionals tend increasingly to play out their roles within bureaucracies that depend upon the exercise of professional knowledge' (p326). He then explains that bureaucracies require stability, therefore managers require predictability from their subordinates. In this context a reflective practitioner is both a strength (providing new organisational learning to improve the bureaucracy) and a weakness, due to the instability they can engender. Generally, he believes, bureaucracies resist any attempt to move from technical expertise to reflective practice, but this de-professionalises the workers as they lose autonomy, while reflective practitioners can criticise agency-wide patterns of injustice or oppression (see also Argyris and Schon 1974).

### 3.4 Conclusion

The significance of the available professional discourses about ethics, and lack of a dominant discourse on which youth work practice has been built, is twofold. Firstly, while codes of ethics are recognised as helpful aids to ethical reflection, they do not (perhaps cannot) adequately reflect good practice across the contested occupation of youth work, as described in the first chapter. While a fuller conceptualising of youth work in light of one of the ethical frameworks may provide a basis for good practice across the breadth of youth work, little empirical research has been conducted into ethics in youth work to begin this, and none through observing youth work practices through an ethical lens. Secondly, this is significant because there is a growing disquiet with the use of managerialism to define and dictate good practice, which may conflict with the aims and values of youth work. However there are limited resources for youth workers to draw from to measure whether the practices they are being asked to engage in are ethically sound.

Although there is currently a limited range of academic literature on ethics in youth work (notable exceptions being Sercombe 2010a, Banks 2010, Roberts 2010), the combination of traits that differentiate the youth work relationship from other occupations working with young people are deserving of in depth understanding and reflection. While many of the ethical issues within youth

work are shared with other professions (such as, limits of confidentiality, and the effect of the New Public Management agenda), the informal, egalitarian relationship on which youth work is often based creates a range of issues unique to youth workers, with an increased possibility of situation-specific ethical decision making, given the social and often unrestricted context in which youth work occurs. It is in recognising the range of situated and nuanced ethical issues that I believed an in depth study into the youth work relationship would be helpful. There are gaps in our understanding of how managerialism is encountered in practice with regard to how it affects relationships, the ethical decisions youth workers face when building relationships with young people, and a detailed understanding of the context in which these decisions are made. It is to this end that I engaged in an ethnographic study, to seek to understand in detail these ethical issues (and others), as will be described in the next chapter.

## 4. Methodology

In this chapter I will set out the rationale for choosing an ethnographic methodology. I will begin by referring to the aims of the research and the epistemological assumptions on which it is based, before explaining the use of observations, interviews, focus groups, and documentary analysis during the field work, and creating an argument for their use in researching ethics in youth work. In the research I observed four organisations, which are briefly described and the rationale for their choice given in the subsequent section. Next I consider the ethical issues inherent in the research, including a reflexive account of how my presence may have affected the quality and validity of the empirical data. Finally, I consider how the data was analysed and any possible improvements that could be made to the research design.

The aim of the empirical research conducted for this thesis was to:

*Observe and reflect on what is considered ethical practice in youth work, which takes into account what may be different and unique about Christian and secular centre-based youth work.*

Although directed by this aim, the intention was to complete an inductive piece of research thus allowing the data to 'speak' (Bryant and Charmaz 2007:11, Glaser and Strauss 1967, Henn et al. 2009:254, Greener 2011:90-91). This thesis is based on four simultaneous eight month ethnographic studies of youth work organisations in one particular geographical area. The organisations were chosen based on a 'most difference' (Falzon 2009:13, Ragin and Rihoux 2009:xvii) approach to compare sufficiently different organisational cultures and how that affects ethical practice in youth clubs. This was particularly around differences in sector, management, funding and aims, however all clubs were defined by offering centre based, voluntarily accessed, universal youth provision. The clubs are referred to by descriptive pseudonyms: the Local Authority Youth Centre (LAYC), The church based Youth Café (YC), the voluntary sector Community Centre Youth Club (CCYC), and the Youth Ministry (YM). In total there were 92 observations, 19 interviews with workers and managers, and six focus groups with young people, and five other interviews with youth workers who have worked in Christian and secular clubs.

### 4.1 Epistemology

Although this research was designed to adopt an inductive strategy, in reality a more abductive approach was taken. An inductive strategy begins with data collection that can then be used to produce knowledge and theory, and it assumes a linear progression from observation and data

collection to theory creation (Blaikie 2007:8, 64-67). By contrast an abductive strategy does not only present the data as a theory, but also seeks to explain the data through existing theories. Abductive reasoning expects the researcher to infer an explanation of observed realities, and as such it is better able to cope with the complexity and ambiguity of doctoral research: as Bazeley (2007:41) notes, a purely inductive approach is often jeopardised through the expected immersion in appropriate theoretical literature before entering the field. It still begins with social actors and makes explicit knowledge that is implicit to their understanding of the world.

Theories are then constructed from the context of the social actors, and therefore remains within an idealist ontological position, but there is greater recognition of the iterative, complex relationship that best describes the process of moving from the data, to emerging theory generation, to the literature, and back again (Blaikie 2007:8-12, 90). Therefore recognising the underlying research strategy as abductive acknowledges the reality that this research was an iterative process of 'weaving' through the data and the emerging and established theories (Bryman 2008:12).

The research was based on constructivist and interpretivist epistemological assumptions. It recognises that the task of an ethnographer is interpretive; that meaning is ascribed to actions and behaviours by the actors and the observer. Working from the definition of constructivism set by Henn et al. (2009), abstract knowledge cannot be used to understand the social world and internal meanings cannot be objectively understood as external behaviours are assumed to be. This research, therefore, aims "to discover what a social actor 'means' by his or her action in contrast to the meaning that this action has for other social actors in the situation or for an outside observer" (Blaikie 2007:129), therefore framing the actors' experiences within the wider academic literature (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007:231, LeCompte and Schensul 1999:221).

Before considering the methods employed, I shall first consider the potentially idiosyncratic nature of the research. That is, can this ethnographic, idealist, interpretivist/constructivist research have wider implications? A 'large N' quantitative study, typically survey based, places the burden of generalisability on the researcher (Have they made their sample large enough? To what extent can it be assumed to be representative? To what level are their statistical analyses significant?). A set of findings based on small scale, in-depth research places the burden of transferability onto the recipient of the research. A contextualised study provides rich transferable sources on which the reader can judge whether the findings apply to their context: "the degree of *transferability* is a direct function of the *similarity* between the two contexts" (Lincoln and Guba 2000:40, see also Hammersley and Atkinson 2007:35-37). Wolcott (1995:164-

175) explains his frustration at qualitative researchers, when asked about the generalisability of their findings, suggesting they *are not* transferable. He argues this is both an unsatisfying and lethargic answer, designed to ward off positivist attacks whether the researcher believes in the idiographic nature of their research or not. He says the story of the research should transcend its source and the implications of the findings be appropriately transferable to other settings. It is arrogant, Wolcott asserts, to assume we have nothing to learn from a single case.

Lincoln and Guba (2000) also argue the 'naturalistic generalisation' (p36) of ethnographic and case-based research creates 'powerful' stories that speak into the contexts of others, which is a natural human process as knowledge is typically built from the specific day-to-day encounters to the general (Ragin 2008:5). However, despite all the pleas to the transferability of the findings based on the 'thick description' of the cases, it seems appropriate to close with a warning from Ragin (2009:524): "it is always possible to push casing too far – to homogenize social phenomena in ways that contradict their specificity and their integrity".

Therefore this research is predominantly concerned with the lived experience of the social actors participating in the research. It recognises the importance of the implicit meanings ascribed by the actors on their behaviour, and assumes the best way to create theory and knowledge from operant and normative forms of ethical practice is from the data created through observing and listening to those actors. However approaching the research with an abductive strategy pays homage to the reality of doctoral research – that entry into the field has already been influenced by some immersion into the literature and a predefined (though quite open) set of research questions and aims that set the boundaries of the ethnographic study. From the very beginning there has been an interplay of my own pre-existing interest as displayed in my research proposal, data from the field, theories from the literature, and emerging theories from the data.

## 4.2 Methods

### 4.2.1 Ethnography

Youth work is fundamentally based on relationships and interactions (Batsleer and Davies 2010:3, Blacker 2010, Hill 2010, Sapin 2009:69-70, Smith 2001, Nash and Palmer 2011, Ward 1998, Ord 2007:53, Tyler et al. 2009:43, Jeffs and Smith 2010b). An ethnographic approach was chosen because 'ethical practice' in youth work is understood differently when these interactions are observed rather than relayed via interview. That is, ethical practice is essentially a set of behaviours and actions (which in turn have been informed through policies, rules, experience,

expectations, organisational influences, and character) that can be deemed ‘appropriate’, ‘good’, or ‘right’ in a given situation. Robson (2002:310) explains it is this direct access to practice without prior interpretation by participants (though still with interpretations by the researcher and reader) that makes an ethnographic approach to studying ethical practice appealing

An ethnography is the study of people in their natural setting that describes the culture they inhabit (Brewer 2000:10, Spradley 1980:3). The intention is to produce a rich report of what has been observed, sacrificing a large sample size for significantly greater depth (Greener 2011:73-74, Henn et al. 2009:198, Silverman 2007:12, 18). An ethnographic account aims to provide the “description, modelling and analysis of processes in the world” (Falzon 2009:194). It is essentially a reflexive endeavour (and as such I have included a reflexive account in section 4.6) relying on the human capacity to observe and reflect. Ultimately an ethnographic approach was chosen because “through participant observation of the social and cultural worlds... [there is] the possibility of an understanding of reality which no other method can realise” (Walsh 2004:237). It is because of this Hammersley and Atkinson (2007:19) refer to it as being ‘more powerful’ than, but not ‘superior’ to, quantitative work. Much ethnographic work seems to be documenting the mundane and ‘common sense’, however part of the role of the ethnographer is to understand and recognise that which the actors themselves do not see, and place that knowledge into a wider social and theoretical context (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007:231, LeCompte and Schensul 1999:221).

Both Goffman (1989) and Wolcott (1995) suggest engaging in an ethnographic study for at least a year, or for ‘one cycle’ of the culture, because this allows for a sample of unanticipated events, seasonal events, to ensure the researcher is ‘deeply familiar’ with the culture. Due to the timescale of the research this was not possible, and the intensity of working with four organisations simultaneously would have become unsustainable for a year. However I do recognise that there would have been a benefit in being around the organisations to ensure some of the larger events in the calendar – the summer holidays and Christmas, for example – would have been properly covered by all the organisations.

However, the method of conducting this research was influenced by Wolcott’s (1990) article “How to Make a Study More Ethnographic”, which offers some mitigating circumstances for a shorter ethnography. His article was aimed at taking interview based research (as my original proposal had outlined) and showing the benefits of a more ethnographic approach. He recognised a full anthropological ethnography would not be appropriate or possible for many studies, however a ‘micro-ethnography’ could be employed if there was already a focus or particular

behaviour of interest deliberately emphasised (here, ethical practice). Bryman (2008:403) agrees, stating that a clear focus allows for an ethnography to be conducted over a shorter period of time.

Looking wider than youth work, ethnographic approaches have been used to good effect when researching the lives of young people (see Allen in Bradford and Cullen, and Gallagher 2009:72, Heath et al 2009:99), and also when researching practice (for example Sadler 2008), though there are few examples of the two together. Some researchers have preferred quantitative methods when considering the importance of relationships in adolescent lives (and I have found the work of Coleman et al (1992) to be of a great deal of worth), though the frustration with their writings is the lack of an understanding *why*. They have shown that adolescent relationships with adults are important, however they fail to show *why* that relationship is important, they are also silent on *how* that relationship grows or the way that boundaries, policies, professionalism, and conceptions of ethical practice affect those relationships.

#### 4.2.2 Participant Observation

Observations are the mainstay of ethnographers. The role of the observer is to “interpret the meanings and experiences of social actors, a task that can only be achieved through participation with the individuals involved” (Burgess 1984:78). It also gains access to subcultural capital and the context of the actors and phenomena of interest (Burgess 1984:80, Spradley 1980:6-10). Or, as Goffman (1989) succinctly describes it, to be a participant-observer is to “physically and ecologically penetrate [the subjects’] circle of response to their social situation.... To take the same crap they’ve been taking” (p125).

Observations were the predominant method of data collection. I took the role of participant-as-observer (Bryman 2008:410); that is, I clearly remained a researcher when in the clubs, but did join in activities at appropriate moments, particularly if invited, and was regularly interacting with young people and youth workers. As Heath (2009:109) emphasises, it is usual to alternate between extremes of ‘fly on the wall’ and ‘youth worker’ when researching in youth clubs. However I made it clear to the young people I was not there as a ‘youth worker’, though I had worked as one in the past.

I resisted the temptation to become a pure observer – hiding in a corner writing notes – for several reasons. Firstly, I was concerned that being too distant would affect the dynamic of the session more than if I were taking part. The young people would gravitate towards the ‘odd’ person in the corner to find out why they were there and (potentially) make a game out of



disrupting the study, it would unsettle the flow of the evening, and potentially make the workers *more* aware of my presence than if I were next to them joining in. Secondly, I felt I would be able to experience first-hand some of the ethical decisions to be made. The alternative, becoming a complete participant, would have made note-taking more difficult (and I found I had to rely on note-taking throughout the session to ensure their accuracy, see below) and there would have also been unnecessary ethical implications as ‘complete participant’ could be ‘covert’.

In practice this role proved fluid. For example, there were certainly times when I felt like a complete participant:

*After people had their fill of chocolate fountain, some of the young people began to play cards. I played too, and about 10 minutes later Pat [worker] joined in. The whole scenario felt ‘natural’. The atmosphere was fun, and loud. There was lots of banter between the girls, myself, and with Pat too. [CCYC field note #12]*

There were also other times when I was a complete observer; for example the meeting of local youth workers hosted by the Youth Ministry, when I was introduced as an observer and did not participate in the meeting at all (Youth Ministry Meeting #1). The reality of my level of participation and observation was therefore nuanced and situated as I fluctuated between the extremes, with the modal or default stance being participant-as-observer.

The observations extended beyond the youth club sessions to many rituals before and after the centre opened: for example, the interactions with young people as I walked towards the club, observing the groups outside as they waited for the youth centre doors to open, the repeated checking of the toilets before the workers left the building, the setting of the alarm, and the switching off of the lights. In various ways these rituals seemed to reinforce the nature of the club itself. The observations were particularly focussed on discerning any differences between youth workers’ espoused and operant ethical practice (Gillham 2000:14, Robson 2002:310). As such it was a vital method; it would have been difficult, if not impossible, to gather this data on ethical practice without it.

There were a series of choices to be made when observing. In one of the clubs (CCYC), everyone was together in a small room most of the time; however the other three clubs required choices to be made over what was going to be observed and what missed. There was also a range of possible evenings I could have attended, too many to do every session for every club. I attempted to compensate for this by moving around rooms on evenings (though not too much, because it was more important to listen to whole conversations and watch whole games than constantly moving

between rooms – ‘depth not breadth’, was my mantra to remind myself not to be too easily enticed by sounds and smells coming from other rooms), attending at different times and different days (where appropriate), and on some evenings I either followed a particular group of young people or a youth worker.

There was significantly more happening in each organisation than I could attend, and in what I did attend there was more happening than I could observe, and when I did observe there was more to take in than my memory and note-taking would allow. However through increasingly conscientious note-taking, and the systematic and purposeful movement around days, times and rooms available to observe, I believe I did everything possible to ensure no young people or workers were underrepresented and no unique settings or situations in which ethical practice could be observed went missing. Ultimately by the end of my time at each club I felt I had achieved a sense of ‘immersion’ (Punch 1986:11), I was on first name terms with the staff and young people, I was being recognised in the street, and we were able to share jokes and conversations. By the end of the time the clubs had begun to feel ‘homely’.

### *Note taking*

I took a note book with me wherever I went. My intention was to use it sparsely, and occasionally to use my phone to type notes into, in order to seem less intrusive. However I soon became aware that valuable data was being lost, and a great deal of energy was going into trying to decipher these very short notes. My reason for wanting to seem unobtrusive however, was more through a lack of confidence and concern with how others would perceive my presence than my effect on the youth club. As I gained in confidence in my role as an observer I found myself making more and more notes, and of greater depth and as time went on they began to resemble Burgess’ (1984:169) idea of a ‘detailed portrait’. I would not write notes as I was talking to people, but immediately after conversations I would retreat to somewhere that I could write uninterrupted, but still within sight of the session – often behind the coffee bar or tuck shop.

After about a month my note taking improved significantly. I found a dictaphone ‘app’ for my phone and thought that would make my observations easier to record. I tried it out one evening. I got verbal consent from the worker in charge and, in my mind at the time, this was no different to writing notes down. After consulting with my supervisors this began to feel dishonest because a phone was so inconspicuous compared to a dedicated recording device. I asked the worker again, this time making clear it was my phone and that I was not intending on giving any warning when I would turn it on. He looked visibly uncertain and, although he was hesitantly consenting, I

withdrew my request as I recognised that he seemed to *want* to decline the request but, for some reason, was not able to. I then deleted the other recording I had made.

However through this exercise I realised how inaccurate my notes were. They covered the main events of the evening fairly accurately, and they also covered much of the topics of conversation I heard – though there were several omissions from my written notes and memory of conversations I had been part of in the evening. The general ‘feel’ of the conversations was accurate but when I was attempting to write up passages of speech verbatim these were often a long way from the actual words used – particularly with the young people who have their own colloquialisms. This, then, pushed me into writing more elaborate notes and attempting to record verbatim some key phrases minutes, rather than up to two hours, after they were spoken. This exercise also highlighted how interesting a future piece of research using conversational analysis based on youth club interactions would be.

Towards the end of the time, when I began focussing more on the interactions between the workers and the young people and looking for examples of ethical theories-in-use, the notes became less broad and more focussed on specific events (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007:145, LeCompte and Schensul 1999:18). I developed a pattern of typing these notes up immediately, as Bryman (2008:417) recommends. This sometimes made for long evenings if the club did not finish until 10pm. If the observations required any significant commute (one of the clubs was about 40 minutes’ drive from my home) I would stop at a fast food restaurant and write up the notes up before they became ‘cold’ (LeCompte and Schensul 1999:32, Robson 2002:323).

### *Naturally occurring conversation*

Ethnographers, Bryman (2008:410-411) writes, are forced to use whatever sources of data are available to them. Conversations before, during, and particularly after the club proved some of the most fruitful data; conversations between myself and the young people or youth workers, and simply listening in to other conversations. I felt during interviews I often received the answer workers perceived as being ‘right’, while during a typical conversation I got a range of genuine frustrations, joys, challenges and admissions. On occasion these moved more from a conversation to an impromptu informal interview, as Hammersley and Atkinson (2007:108) explain that interviews in the field can be spontaneous and unplanned, requiring the ethnographer to seize the moment.

Recognising conversation is *the* central way in which we make sense of the world and produce local knowledge (Rapley 2004:384-386), I became increasingly confident at asking probing questions during or after an evening session. I became aware from about half way through the

fieldwork that conversation was going to be more valuable for understanding meanings than the interviews, so I set about deliberately asking questions of youth workers about their practice – or, as Wolcott (1995:102-103) phrases it, I was ‘getting nosy’ rather than passively observing.

For example, compare the field note from CCYC #3 with the transcription from the CCYC focus group, both with the same 14 year old female participant explaining her story of how she started at the club:

*[Mid-session] For a few minutes [the youth worker] left the room, so I took the opportunity to ask [the two girls present] how long they’d been coming to the CCYC. They said since last summer, Lexy had hurt her knee, and [the manager] had been passing, seen the accident, and brought her some plasters out. Then he told them about it, and they started attending. [ CCYC field notes #03]*

The focus group account of the same event has greater brevity, and misses out some issues key to this researcher: the kindness and compassion of the manager, his presence not only in the club but the street, and his presence of mind and wisdom in advertising the club.

*Interviewer- Lexy? And how did you start?*

*Lexy- I just saw the youth worker, right, walking round the street and they gave us a leaflet [CCYC focus group]*

Though I do not know why she shortened the story – possibly because admitting to being hurt in front of a wider group was embarrassing, or possibly because everyone else up to that point in the focus group had answered the question in few words, typically: “my friends brought me”. What is apparent is the detail received through a naturally occurring conversation would have been lost if I relied on focus groups entirely.

#### 4.2.3 Interviews

The main aim of the interviews with youth workers was to understand more about their perspectives on ethical issues that I had observed. They also aimed to uncover more about the workers’ journeys into youth work and why they continue to be youth workers. This provided an opportunity to compare hypothetical situations with real events that may have happened to other workers or clubs (of course, it would have been ideal to have observed reactions to similar phenomenon with all workers in all organisations, however this was not possible).

The interviews were undertaken towards the end of the observations. This had the advantage of a rapport already having been built, several questions already being approached during naturally occurring conversation making the interviews more efficient and focussed, and beginning to see some ideas coming through the observations. However interviews at the beginning could have been cross referenced in practice.

The interviews were with the youth workers and managers. They were semi-structured and had three broad themes that were discussed:

- The youth worker's journey into youth work, and how they sustain themselves.
- The nature of the relationship they had with the young people.
- Their understanding of 'boundaries' within that relationship

I also asked three questions to the workers and managers, which were also asked to the young people. There were: "how would you react to a Facebook friend request by a young person; an invitation to a special event by a young person; a request to meet one-to-one to discuss something sensitive with a young person."

Hammersley and Atkinson (2007:97) suggest interviews in ethnographies can help to understand the attitudes and opinions of observed participants, and this was the aim with the workers in this research. Not only the differences and similarities between workers and organisations were interesting, but also the differences between the hierarchy with young people, youth workers, and managers sometimes having similar, and sometimes very different, expectations. As Walsh (2004:233) argues, these kinds of questions have the benefit of creating hypothetical situations for comparing between organisations when similar events have been observed in some, but not all, organisations.

I also performed five unstructured interviews with local youth workers who had worked both in secular and Christian environments. Four of these were Christians who went to work for a secular agency, and one was not a practicing Christian but took up the role of youth worker for a church. This began serendipitously when at a meeting of local youth workers that I was observing with the Youth Ministry. A regional director for a parachurch organisation asked to meet for coffee to discuss my research further. Recognising the potential for data I asked to use our conversation and this simple discussion proved very helpful. The following conversations with other workers were unstructured, and when the conversation began to halt I simply repeated "Have you noticed any other difference in practice between the youth clubs you've worked in?" and the conversation would continue to flow. Although my aim was to use comparison to generate

knowledge rather than to perform a direct comparative case study their insights proved useful in offering practices I should look for in the observations, and in confirming some of those differences I had already recognised.

I transcribed the focus groups and interviews in noisy environments (like the coffee shops) myself, however I sent the recordings of the other interviews to UKTranscription to be professionally transcribed. Though some researchers prefer to transcribe the data themselves to understand it better I was conscious of making efficient use of time in the third year of my PhD, and I later listened and read through the transcripts to ensure their accuracy.

#### 4.2.4 Focus Group

I chose to speak to the young people because of the importance of understanding their perspective on what was happening, and why, in the relationships and practices I was observing – recognising that the interpretivist/constructivist epistemology on which this research is based places importance on the meanings derived by the actors involved. I decided to use focus groups after reviewing the methodological literature on researching with young people (Bagnoli and Clark 2010, Heath 2009, Bennett et al. 2003, Davis et al. 2009, Kirk 2007) because:

- These ethical practices are being displayed in a social setting. Using focus groups mimics some of these interactions to uncover implicit norms and group behaviours.
- I felt any disagreement or confirmation of opinions by peers would add validity to the perspectives of individuals.
- I felt it would put the young people at ease and make it easier for them to open up, even though they had all known me for least five months before the focus groups.
- Unlike the youth workers, who I felt may have given a ‘professional’ or ‘expected’ answer in front of peers, I felt this would not be an issue with young people who were often candid with each other.

The format was similar to the interviews. I asked the young people to discuss their initial involvement with the youth club. I also handed out a template of a ‘gingerbread person’ and asked them to describe the internal and external features of a ‘good’ youth worker and write them on the sheet. I then asked them to discuss their relationship with the youth worker, before asking how they would expect a youth worker to react to the three scenarios: sending a Facebook friend request, asking them to come to an event, and asking to meet them one-to-one. One young person was interviewed using the same format as they had arrived at the club after the focus group was completed, and they wanted to take part.

I completed six focus groups and one interview with young people. With the Church Youth Café, this was accomplished with four young people and then an interview, all male aged 14-16 (which is representative of the group). In the Youth Ministry, I ran two groups with seven young people, three male and four female, and the CCYC had one group of eight, though for the 'gingerbread person' exercise they split into two groups and fed back to each other. This was the only group that exhibited the perennial group dynamic issue, having a mix of timid and talkative young people (Barbour and Kitzinger 1999), though this echoed what had been observed in the club. I tried to draw the more timid out through directly asking them if they had anything they would like to contribute, however they generally agreed with what was being said. The 'talkative' young people were not being overbearing or intimidating, and provided some excellent reflexive accounts of their involvement with the youth club and they remained on topic.

With the LAYC there was two focus groups, one with three female members aged 16-18 and one with seven young people, five male and two female, aged 12-16. This missed one important group who declined to take part: 16-18 year old males who had been regular members for five years. This, though, is also indicative of their involvement in the club as they engage in little 'youth work' and use the centre as a cheap place to play five-a-side football. The focus group was also set up differently here. In the other centres I had, with the workers' permission, asked young people if they would take part and then we went to a quiet room. In contrast at the LAYC there had been some miscommunication with the manager, who sat all the young people down and minimized the expectation of participation in the focus group by declaring 'it would only take five minutes' and seemed to assume I would ask them questions immediately about their involvement with the club. I asked if I could pick a few and use a room, and he suggested the dance room. I picked about five at random, and told the others they could join in another group later. However about seven came in, and at various points other people kept coming in and interrupting – highlighting Heath's (2009:93-95) concern that the location of the focus group can affect the data. At one point I decided to stop the focus group because it was becoming increasingly difficult to manage and some of the young people who had been chosen were beginning to become upset at the interruptions. We stopped the session (though some valuable data was still gleaned) and tried again later, with much greater success.

Although this could be seen as a weakness in the data collection, and certainly was not intended, the interruptions and need to restart is itself a "clear overview of [the young people's] social world" (Michell 1999:38). For example, comparing to the other organisations, at the Youth Ministry interruptions were brief and usually followed by an apology, at the CCYC where the focus

group used the main room and those who declined to take part moved to another room, and at the Youth Café everyone was involved because numbers of young people attending were so small.

#### 4.2.5 Document Analysis

During the fieldwork I collected 20 documents. These were predominantly policies regarding the young people, with significantly more coming from the LAYC than the other clubs. No documents were collected from the Church Youth Café, despite repeated attempts. The manager did not seem to know where their constitution or child protection policy were kept, though they were sure they had them.

I then undertook an analysis of the documents in order to:

1. Understand more about what was important to the organisation.
2. Explore some themes from the documents.
3. Consider how these documents affect the context in which the workers operate.

This, Jocher (2006:43) argues, is required for a 'thorough' understanding of the organisation. The intention was to use the documents to better understand the role of the organisations. Their respective missions and official procedures. These documents are typically written to get some kind of message to their workers or stakeholders and reflect something of its culture and ethos. In some cases, Greener (2011:76) suggests, what is *not* available in writing may be just as informative as written evidence – as is the case with the Youth Café that could not locate its constitution or child protection policy. However some research has shown that the intended meaning and the meaning that individuals take from these documents can be quite different (Bryman 2008:522-527) – hence why having access to these documents alongside the interviews with youth workers and managers provided some interesting data on how they interpret the documents.

This 'dismantling' of the documents (Prior 2003:48) to uncover organisational assumptions always relate to the 'real world' as they can often provide the 'conditions for existence' of an organisation, especially if they do not inhabit an easily identifiable building or they have a rapid turnover in personnel (p60-63). The policy documents in particular will show whether a youth worker is behaving as the organisation expects a youth worker to behave. I took Prior's approach to engaging with documents – recognising they are not neutral, but they are active and the intentions of the author and how they influence practitioners makes them actors in the social processes of the youth club in their own right (see also Walsh 2004:234).



I undertook a qualitative analysis of the documents to uncover somewhat subjective elements to the text – does it seem an ‘approachable’ document, or a cold and bureaucratic one? (Robson 2002:354) Does it seem flexible and fluid, or does the language imply rigid policies and procedures? What do we know about the organisation, how they view their workers, and the young people, through reading these documents? How overtly are policies related to the mission statements/aims of the organisation? Are there any apparent contradictions? (Lundstrom 2011, Prior 2003:21).

Hammersley and Atkinson (2007:134-137) also encourage the ethnographer to take an interest, and collect if possible, the *artefacts*. When these were paper based – such as consent forms, programmes, and event information – I took copies, however many of the artefacts being used in the youth clubs could not be taken: displays, pool tables, computers, kitchens, etc. I therefore took pictures of these. The space in general show something of the story of the club, the surroundings and artefacts have a symbolic importance: “people do not act in a vacuum. Not only do they do things with words, but also they do things with things” (p137).

#### 4.3 The benefits of a comparative design

So far it has been argued the most appropriate way to discern ethical practice *in practice* is through observations that seek to understand the meanings actors ascribe to their behaviour. However a note on the comparative design is also required. Though not undertaking a full comparative case study, I did borrow a great deal from that literature, and considered whether a Qualitative Comparative Analysis (Ragin and Rihoux 2009, Ragin) could have produced some interesting data. Though as it became increasingly obvious the focus of the research was going to be inductive, entirely qualitative, and based on practice, this became less appropriate. QCA typically has a quantitative element, and an ultimate condition that is either ‘met’ or ‘not met’ (except in fuzzy set QCA, that allows for partially meeting a criteria, but in such a way a number can be placed against it), and it is not easy (or, perhaps, possible) to protract ethics and good practice in such a quantitative fashion.

This approach recognises that all knowledge, at some level, is produced through a process of comparison because it always appeals to some frame of reference (Bryman 2008:60, Ragin and Rihoux 2009:xvii). Ragin explains most statements have an implicit comparison, using the example “Great Britain is a democratic society” implies that there are other societies, some of which are not democratic. By suggesting ‘ethical practice’ in youth clubs is worthy of study there is an implication that there are competing claims of morally praiseworthy practice. Byrne et al. (2009) conducted their own research into the benefits of comparative case studies when researching

policies. They recognised that the ability to compare narratives of how policy was put into practice was of greater benefit and provided richer results than quantitative work.

Although this is not entirely synonymous with Falzon's (2009) concept of a 'multi-sited ethnography' (for example, it is not following a set of people or relationships across space), there are similarities. It is through understanding ethics in practice across sites that present interesting comparative data. If the sites essentially had the same ethical practice then one study would have sufficed. The pseudo-multi-sited approach helps to understand how people and ideas interact with places – for example, the status and use of policies in different organisations (Leonard 2009).

Here these comparisons cannot be seen as producing some kind of generic or generalised 'secular youth workers do x, while youth workers in a Christian context do y' argument. However the process of recognising that in one organisation behaviour-x is normal, while in another it is controversial or prohibited, has been instrumental in discovering and articulating some rather subtle and nuanced differences in ethical practice. One example was the difference I observed in relationships between workers and young people when the workers use self-deprecating humour and those that rely on sarcasm. Hammersley and Atkinson (2007:234) say this comparison across cases allows causal mechanisms within complex social phenomena to begin to be theorised. The search for regularity in experiences across organisations can be used to predict how 'variables' react with each other (Stake 2000:22) and provide explanations if not 'causal laws' (Williams and Dyer 2009:84-88), though this may then require further research to be proven (Platt 2006:281).

#### 4.4 Selection and access

The selection was taken from a theoretical rationale to ensure cases suitable for comparison were chosen (Eisenhardt 2006, Robson 2002:183, Burgess 1984:55). The organisations, and reasons for their selection, are explained below. However, recognising the need for a logical explanation for the choice of cases (Platt 2006:293), all youth clubs fit into certain categories. They all offered universal provision; that is, they did not restrict access to young people with certain predefined 'issues' or belonged to particular demographic 'groups'. They are all working with young people aged 11-19, or at some point in between. They all have some young people who have been in the club for at least a year and have workers who have been in the club for at least a year; this is to ensure there are some relationships between workers and young people that have had a chance to form.

There is a plethora of potential organisations that I could have approached which would fit into this criteria. I attempted to find four organisations that were significantly different from each other that would provide a different set of atmospheres:

- At least one large organisation (over 20 young people), and one small (less than 10).
- Two Christian organisations – one funded by a church congregation, and another funded through secular money.
- Two secular organisations – one a local authority, and one funded through a third sector organisation.
- At least one that relied on volunteers (i.e. volunteers made up the majority of the youth workers).
- At least one with significant external pressures for meeting targets, and at least one with limited external targets.
- A mixture of urban and rural.

Therefore the organisations were chosen because:

- LAYC is local authority funded, large, secular, and without volunteers. There is a strong emphasis on accredited outcomes here and it is situated in a small town.
- CCYC is funded through the third sector, it is small, secular, and without volunteers (though with a placement student), in a rural ex-mining community.
- Youth Café was chosen because I believed it to be funded through the third sector, large, Christian, and is majority paid staff (with support from volunteers). In reality, by the time I started fieldwork, it was a small organisation with a limited Christian foundation – as explained later. Targets are predominantly attendance figures and it is situated in a small town.
- Youth Ministry is funded through congregation donations, mid-to-large, Christian, and relies on volunteers with only one paid worker. There are no external targets to be met. It is situated in a small city.

TABLE 1 - DEFINING FEATURES OF PROJECTS HIGHLIGHTING DIFFERENCES BETWEEN ORGANISATIONS.

Defining feature		LAYC	CCYC	Youth Ministry	Youth Café
<b>Size</b>	Large				
	Small				
<b>Funding</b>	LA Funded		(partly)		
	Third Sector Funded				
	Church Funded				
<b>Faith base</b>	Secular				
	Christian				
<b>Targets</b>	External Targets		(targets defined by representatives of the local community)		(attendance only)
<b>Location</b>	Urban				
	Rural				

I chose organisations from the North East of England for several reasons: because of the economic disadvantage in the area there was a large number of organisations working with young people, there are still local authorities providing universal youth provision at a time when other regions have commissioned youth centres out, and there was a mix of large urban and small rural dwellings. I also have lived and worked in the region for several years, therefore I had a good understanding of its geography.

To gain access I initially emailed or telephoned organisations from which I had already gained some information. The local authority I knew well, thus making use of insider knowledge (Bennett et al. 2003), and the Youth Café was suggested as a possible case through a colleague who was interested in my research. The church youth ministry was already known to me from a previous role as a youth worker – though the paid staff had changed in that time. I had no knowledge of the Community Centre Youth Club (CCYC) before beginning this research, and access is described below.

Access to the club was smooth and granted with few requests or conditions from the organisations. The one exception was the LAYC, whose head of youth services asked to see the consent forms young people had signed. Gatekeepers in an organisation can attempt to influence the research, particularly if concerned about the reputation of their own groups (Henn et al. 2009:88), therefore I was grateful for such open access without conditions imposed by the managers. Access was renegotiated several times which Burgess (1984:45) warns is a likelihood, particularly around the length of time I was with the clubs (extending from an initial three months to six in each club) and the evenings I attended. This was relatively simple with the exception of CCYC where it took a few weeks longer to gain access to the evening with the older young people.

The main issue accessing the four clubs was disorganisation or slow responses to phone calls and emails. In two organisations it helped to take a second route in, one through a more senior manager and another through a worker. I felt that explaining my role as a JNC qualified worker helped in three organisations as workers recognised there would be some kind of sympathetic approach to the research, however with the CCYC this seemed to make one of the workers less amenable and possibly a little threatened. A few sessions in, however, this became unnoticeable as we built rapport.

As the descriptions of the context of the clubs are particularly important to any potential transferability of findings, where generalisations are made on analytical rather than statistical grounds (Wolcott 1995:173), below is a brief portrayal of each club and why they were chosen for the research.

#### 4.4.1 Local Authority Youth Centre (LAYC)

This is a very large, local authority controlled youth centre, on the edge of two areas of multiple deprivation in a post-industrial north eastern town. Ward statistics provided by the local authority from 2012 show the LAYC is serving an area with a high unemployment rate at 11.9%, with 7.7% of population receiving out of work benefits and 38.1% of children classed as 'in poverty'. The area is predominantly white-British (98.2%). 47.5% of the ward are male, with a predominantly middle-aged population, with 14% of the local population aged 10 to 18.

The centre had a relatively large staff team, some of whom worked predominantly in other centres. Of those I observed most often, three were male and three female, with one holding a JNC qualification and degree (the centre manager). All others held an NVQ level 2 in youth work, and one member of staff was working towards level 3. All staff were white-British, with one

exception: the centre manager was of Bangladeshi origin. The age of the regular staff ranged from mid 20s to mid 40s.

Access to approach the club was first gained through the head of the youth service. It took about two months trying to access the actual youth centre through the manager, who did not respond to emails or phone messages. After asking the head of youth services again, he responded, and the observations and communication moved smoothly after that.

I did my first observation in November 2012 and my final observation in May 2013. In total there were:

- 22 observations of a club evening, plus one team meeting and two training sessions.
- 17 documents were collected, including five pro forma for evaluations and referrals, 12 policies (including equality, educational visits, participation strategy, lone worker, etc).
- 24 photos of the centre and displays
- two focus groups with young people (though one was disrupted and restarted)
- six interviews, four with sessional workers, the manager, and the head of youth services.

#### 4.4.2 Community Centre Youth Club (CCYC)

This youth club is based in a large community centre at the heart of an ex-mining community. Statistics are not easily available for the village itself, however the district (which includes several similarly sized ex-mining villages) is 51.3% female, and 98.3% white-British. 32% of children are classified as 'in poverty', with 6.3% of the population claiming out of work benefits.

The paid community worker had a degree in Community and Youth Work, and one of the local authority workers also had a similar degree. The second local authority worker had an NVQ level 2 in youth work, and the student that was on placement while I was observing did not currently have a qualification, but was working towards her degree. The manager of the centre had no formal qualifications in youth work. The manager was in his 50s, with the paid worker in her 30s, and the student was in her 20s. All were white-British, with the manager the only male on the team. 9.5% of the area are aged 10-18.

The funding comes from various streams. The youth and community worker, who was employed by the organisation full time, is funded through the Rank Foundation who also paid for her training. I was interested in the Rank Foundation as a funder with a progressive approach to targets based around the provision of case studies and recognising community needs (Rogers and

Smith 2010). This provided a mid-ground between organisations without any targets, and those with a high expectation of returning predefined externally applied targets.

I did my first observation in November 2012, though I was asked to temporarily stop during December due to the busyness of the club, and inclement weather prolonged the reopening of the club after the Christmas break. I restarted at the end of January 2013 and then attended weekly until May 2013. By that time I had completed:

- 19 observations of youth club evenings. There were no training sessions to observe, and the manager said they did not have formal meetings very often, but matters were discussed as they came up, and I witnessed several of these informal meetings during my time there.
- I collected a child protection policy. I also took several photos of the space the young people use.
- I completed one focus group with seven young people.
- I also completed five interviews, one with a student, one full time worker, the manager, and two local authority sessional workers.

#### 4.4.3 Church Based Youth Café (youth café).

The Youth Café is situated on the edge of two estates on the opposite side of the road to the LAYC, and therefore the statistics for the local demographic make-up are the same. The café was built 10 years ago with EU funding and is an extension to a small Baptist church and continues to be funded through various third sector funds (at the time, the Henry Smith Charity), with some extra funding through local businesses, the NHS and the local voluntary development agency. Unbeknown to me when beginning, the centre was short of 'core funding' and the manager said that the church are subsidising the heating and lighting bills, and in March 2013 the weekend work was stopped and the workers made redundant, leaving only two paid staff down from five.

The staff and volunteers were generally low-qualified, or un-qualified in youth work. The volunteers had informal training that had been provided by the paid staff, and the two permanent paid staff members (including the manager) had an NVQ level 1 in youth work. Of those two staff members, one was male and one female, both in their 40s. One regular volunteer who was observed several times was 19, with no formal qualifications in youth work. The temporary weekend staff had two women (in their 20s and 30s) and one man (in his 30s), with one of the women holding a degree in Community and Youth Work. All were white-British.

When I arranged access I also believed this to be a large youth club; however between the summer of gaining access and the January when I began the field work, the numbers of young people dwindled. I also believed this was run with a Christian ethos and vision; however when I was there it had secular aims in its constitution, and the workers were not practicing Christians. However, the management committee was made up of church members, and the different aims and expectations between staff and management was an obvious cause of tension at times during my observations (as explored in the next chapter).

I had attempted to gain access through the chair of the management committee and he responded to text messages but I was not able to arrange an initial meeting with him, though he did give consent to the study in principle. Rather than continue to try to gain access through the chair I approached the manager, who again proved difficult to contact and often would not respond to messages, however after about three months I gained access. In reality, this was the weakest of the four centres for my study because of the lack of regular members (this was not the case when I originally approached the organisation, when they had large numbers of regularly attending young people. However, the conflict the stakeholders perceived between Christian and secular values, and the struggle between the aims of the workers and the assumptions of the management committee, made for an interesting study in their own right.

I started in January 2013 and completed in June 2013. Overall I completed:

- 25 potential youth work sessions were observed (several of which were without young people, hence there were more visits than the other organisations), and one meeting. There were no training sessions to observe in my time there.
- No documents, although I repeatedly asked for them, the manager and workers couldn't find them. I took several photos of the space and the displays.
- I completed one focus group with three young people, and one interview with a young person.
- I completed two interviews with workers, one with the manager, and one with the pastor of the church. The chair of the management committee was not willing to be interviewed.

#### 4.4.4 Youth Ministry

For the fourth organisation, I chose the title 'youth ministry' because that is how the workers refer to it. The centre is situated in the heart of a relatively prosperous community in a small city centre. It is part of an Anglican Parish church, with a great deal of amenities within walking distance. It is entirely funded through the church, who get their money through congregational



giving. The centre belongs to the church and the paid worker is salaried directly by the church's council. The city centre the church serves is 97.01% white-British, and 2.2% of the population were claiming out of work benefits. Although this centre had significantly more young people travelling in to the centre from the less affluent suburbs of the city.

There were five main workers observed (with some parents and other volunteers occasionally helping). Only one had any formal qualifications in youth work – the paid worker, who had a degree. All other volunteers had a non-accredited diocesan qualification. One of the volunteers was a gap year student, also engaged in wider work with the parish, and was being trained in theology while working. All were females, in their 20s, except the paid worker – a man in his 30s. All were white-British.

Access was granted by the paid worker, after he consulted with the parish vicar. Although it took a few weeks to set up, access was granted smoothly. I started at the Youth Ministry in January 2013 and continued on until June 2013, however I did the fewest observations here because they were closed during the holidays. In total I had:

- completed 18 observations of the youth club, one training session, one meeting, and two services.
- collected the church and the diocese child protection policy, both of which are used.
- took photos of the club and displays.
- performed two focus groups, with three-to-four young people.
- interviewed the vicar, the paid worker, and two volunteers.

#### 4.4.5 Focus Group Selection

Although the young people in these four youth clubs have different backgrounds and levels of educational achievement, they were all White-British, which was representative of both the clubs and the immediate area they serve. Taking all focus groups participants, there was a roughly equal male-female split, but within the club there was a big variation, though this did follow the demographics of the individual clubs. Ages too were roughly representative of the groups except with the LAYC, where the over 16s were underrepresented. All youth workers observed, except for one who declined an interview in the LAYC, were interviewed.

#### 4.5 Ethics

I gained ethical approval through the usual university procedures, which was predominantly concerned with consent, privacy and preventing harm. That helped me to consider some predictable ethical considerations, and I considered these the foundation on which to further

build an ethical piece of research. Indeed, Punch (1986:38) recognises that university based ethics can be concerned with protecting the powerful institution from litigation or damaged reputations more than the subjects wellbeing (see also Heath et al. 2007).

The question of ethics, Rogers and Ludhra (2012) argue, is more than how we enact certain methods, but it is about having a critical understanding of the social world and what the research is attempting to achieve (see also Homan 1991:2). It is not simply about asking research questions ethically, but considering whether the whole research is ethically 'possible or appropriate' (p45). Also, while the emancipation of a whole group may be a naïve aim, it is perfectly viable to argue an ethical piece of research is one in which 'mini-narratives' of smaller groups of people can come to the fore (Rogers and Ludhra 2012:50-51, 61). The research questions would seem to follow this ethical framework – seeking to give those relatively powerless (i.e. young people, and even some of the youth workers) a voice and a set of research questions that are challenging, rather than reinforcing what Henn (2009:78-81) refers to as hegemonic power structures, that affect perceptions of 'ethical practice'.

#### 4.5.1 Relationships

Any relational involvement with others can raise ethical considerations, and this is particularly likely in ethnographic fieldwork (Punch 1986:11-12). Due to the time limited nature of the research I avoided building attachments with young people. When asked if I would come and visit after the research, I was clear it was unlikely, though I expressed gratitude I had been granted entry to the club. Some young people, however, naturally gravitated towards me – especially those with whom I had a shared interest, for example I have a Saluki-Greyhound and this automatically started conversations with some of the young men in the LAYC and Youth Café.

Developing relationships with staff was important, however, as I wanted them to trust me and build rapport ready for interview, as well as feel they could 'be themselves' around me during observations. Building these relationships took time, and I generally tried to be positive, affirming, and show my gratitude. I enjoyed talking informally to the workers and finding out more about their background; this ranged from chatting while packing up table tennis tables, through to looking at photos of a family wedding in a far-eastern country with a youth worker for half an hour. They were fascinating people with interesting backgrounds and getting to know them helped increase the depth and quality of the observations.

I feel these relationships helped put the workers and young people at ease while I was observing, but it also helped to have a rapport in place when interviewing, thus improving the quality and

reliability of the data. Relationships can also be the platform for consent to be continually negotiated (Alderson 2004). Some sessions young people were happy for me to be around them; other times they made it clear they wanted some space. I was aware that these relationships could be perceived as being exploitative. To alleviate this I continually reminded people that I was a researcher, here for a limited amount of time – and then assumed the participants would decide whether our relationship was worth investing time in.

#### 4.5.2 Consent

I gained consent from workers through a form they signed at my first visit to the organisations. With young people, however, I waited a little longer until I had the opportunity to speak to them and gained verbal consent before approaching them with a form. A group of young people from the LAYC gave verbal consent but refused to sign a piece of paper; however there was little unique data gathered from that group. When approaching young people to speak about my research and my roles, the majority were not interested. Different approaches to research ethics were apparent in different organisations. For example, in one club, CCYC, the workers encouraged them all to read my leaflet before signing it, while in the Youth Ministry when I attempted to get young people to read the form the youth worker said:

*Basically. I know you're trying to be all ethical about it Peter. Honestly, these are young people, just tell them what to tick. 'Sign here'. Just tick and hand it in, job done. [YM field note #06]*

The participation of young people in research can be controversial. Farrell (2005) explains how asking young people to participate in research can be considered 'risky' as there is currently a heightened level of protection around them. She believes that recognising the age of the participants, the young people's ability to participate without risking harm, and the substance and context of the research is essential when considering the suitability of using young people in research. Allen (2005:20) quotes the UK National Statement on Ethical Conduct of Research: "research involving children and young people... should only be conducted where... the research question posed is important to the health and wellbeing of children or young people". I believe this is satisfied as the research will benefit young people through an increased understanding of ethical practice in youth work.

As is typical in this kind of research with young people, appeal was made to the Gillick case regarding consent (Rogers and Ludhra 2012:48, Alderson 2004, Alderson and Morrow 2004:99, Coyne 2010:227, Lewis 2004:46-50). After conversations with workers, young people were all

deemed capable of understanding and agreeing to the research. In reality, encouraging young people to care enough about the process of consent to give or revoke it was the most difficult part, which other similar PhD theses also comment on (Plows 2010, Armitage 2012, see also Gallagher et al. 2009), and it is possible some young people were giving consent because I was a distraction and they wanted to go about their business quickly, as Gallagher et al. (2009) also found.

The ethical difficulty with consent, however, is the line between genuine, informed, process-consent from young people presumed to be competent, and 'assumed consent' where the youth workers are assumed to have given consent on behalf of the young people (Heath et al. 2007). Therefore I ensured there were ways of reminding young people and youth workers I was there as a researcher; for example whilst note writing seemed incongruent with the atmosphere of the youth clubs, before long it became part of my identity while observing and sparked some conversations and proved a better way of gaining *informed* consent than signing forms.

I also tried to remain sensitive to the nuanced levels of consent between sessions. As Hammersley and Atkinson (2007:211) suggest, research is not dichotomous (overt or covert) but there are degrees of openness, and I attempted to be open throughout the fieldwork without making youth workers and young people feel uncomfortably scrutinised. Young people (less so the workers) also gave and withheld consent to be observed by their actions, and I attempted to respect that. If a group moved away when I sat with or near them, I would give them a wide berth for the rest of the evening.

#### 4.5.3 Anonymity, Privacy and Confidentiality

Young people and workers were assured they would remain anonymous, as were the clubs. However I was also clear – particularly to the workers during the interview – that enough information would be given so that someone who already knows of their involvement with the research (such as, their line managers) may be able to recognise them. I promised to prevent any material becoming public that was likely to cause harm and recognised that anonymity must go beyond pseudonyms during the writing up process, as asserted by Burgess (1984:188-189). I also encouraged them to contact me if they were concerned that, on reflection, something they had said could cause them difficulties if it were attributed to them. I was also clear to the young people that I would not directly tell the workers what they said during the focus group, unless they were disclosing some information about someone being harmed or in danger. Confidentiality became a particular issue in focus groups. All members of the group know what each other has said, and there may have been a temptation to 'gossip' outside the group. Young people were

reminded to keep the information to themselves, though ultimately nothing potentially incriminating or controversial was shared.

Hard copies of data were stored in a locked cupboard in the post graduate office, and digital copies were kept in four locations, all password protected (a laptop, a home computer, backed up online and on an external hard drive).

#### 4.5.4 Preventing Serious Harm

An essential requirement of ethical research is that no respondent will come to any harm through taking part and that any data gathered is used in such a way that no harm can come to the young people, youth workers, or organisations (Punch 1986), and therefore all participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any time. Though this seems rather like common-sense, in practice this may be contentious depending on the definition of 'harm'. If this research were to lead to a change in practice in any of the organisations taking part (though, that is not an explicit aim of the research, as it may be if it were a piece of action research) then whether that change is positive or harmful to the youth work in the organisation may change according to perspective. Equally, harm may come to workers if they offer a critical overview of their organisation, possibly critiquing management or policy decisions, and management within the organisation read the thesis and take action against the person. Harm may also arise if the information shared by the young people in the focus groups becomes public knowledge, and they have said something to disgruntle or offend a youth worker, which leads to them being treated differently or a relationship is broken – as Goredema-Braid (2010:51) writes:

*one might envisage a piece of research aimed at evaluating young people's views on youth service provision in which individual teenagers might make critical comments concerning individual youth workers... [that] might create problems for a young person if their views are publically attributed to them.*

Harm, then, in this case is most likely caused through insensitive handling of data and a lack of confidentiality. As seen above, I ensured the participants recognised that though they would be anonymised their contributions may still be recognisable by others.

#### 4.6 Reflexive Account

This reflexive account deliberately follows from the ethical discussion, as to be honest and produce an ethically sound piece of research it is important to 'come clean' (Punch 1986:15) with those issues that may have affected the validity of the data.

The young people also at times interacted with me as if I were one of their youth workers (despite being reminded I was not), asking me to serve them at the tuck shop, or to play table tennis, or talk to me about their day at school. At other times they were all too aware I was not a worker; disregarding suggestions and swearing in front of me with a ferocity that would not typically occur in front of a worker. These personal encounters with young people and youth workers must also have been affected by my background. Despite deliberately avoiding a 'youth worker' role in the organisations, I have no doubt that someone with no youth work experience would have found the ethnographic experience different to my own. I was able to understand conversations and acronyms without having to ask, when workers talked about their training and used technical language I understood. It also meant I was coming in with a set of skills to talk, gather information informally, and build relationships that other ethnographers may not have. This meant that I was able to keep the conversation flowing naturally, and that I felt comfortable talking to young people immediately, thus improving the speed of access to the data I was interested in. However, at the same time there may have been potential data overlooked due to familiarity with the settings.

There were aspects of the observing that I found difficult, particularly around my own role confusion while observing. I found that being a practicing youth worker both helped and hindered my research. I was able to draw from a range of previous experience and literature to help discern the practice, I was prepared and able to cope with some of the uncertainty and awkward, uncomfortable moments that often come with working alongside young people – although I was occasionally unsure what the best action should have been. For example, when some of the young people in the LAYC were taking turns trying to say increasingly explicit phrases to prompt a response I was unsure how to act. As a youth worker, I would have explained it was not appropriate right at the beginning; however I certainly did not feel like I could join in with that type of 'banter' and retain any integrity, so I ended up sitting quietly and uncomfortably, feeling in limbo. I recognised this to be similar to Emond's (2003) experiences, where young people will test a researcher to see if they can be trusted and attempt to categorise the researcher as an adult who will be on their side. Fine and Glassner (1979:160) also suggest that adolescents' character may change – sometimes becoming more aggressive – in an attempt to 'impress' the researcher, which could also have been the cause for this and similar behaviour, though I would challenge the assumption this is a specifically 'adolescent' problem (Jeffs and Smith 1999b). I believe my previous role as a youth worker also helped with the informal conversations that turned into valuable data, ultimately using the skills of an informal educator to understand more about the youth club from the young person's perspective.

This role confusion in my own mind continued in other places, and was often exacerbated by the confusion of workers over my role. For example, in the Youth Café I was asked to look after a group of young people who wanted to play table tennis while the worker ran an errand outside the club. I agreed – in this case it felt I was able to be helpful and reciprocate the courtesy they had given me, and I was also still in a position to talk to young people and occasionally still observe the other female worker. Another session, this one on a lunch time, I was asked if I would stand outside the school giving out leaflets for the centre. This request I declined as it seemed to step over the line – I (gently) reminded them I was there predominantly to observe, and I was happy to be helpful but not at the expense of collecting data. The literature on competing roles in research seemed to work on the assumption that the researcher would be from a different culture and background to the researched and therefore it is important to make efforts to be accepted. For example, Goffman (1989:128) says the ethnographer may need to change to fit into the new culture without resorting to mimicry, however I found I had to consciously be *less* youth worker-like.

I did take on other roles a youth worker may be expected to, but this was more out of good manners and politeness than attempting to be a ‘youth worker’, such as helping to tidy away at the end of the night. I was willing to play games with young people (as already mentioned, this also provided good data collecting opportunities), however typically I would not initiate a game nor use it as an opportunity to engage in informal education as I would as a youth worker. To most young people, though, while I attempted to explain my role as a student, they simply did not show an interest in me. To them I was an adult – and in no danger of being mistaken as a young person - who they assumed would attempt to correct them if they pushed boundaries (which I did not, unless they were being dangerous or upsetting another young person), and would serve them in the tuck shop (which I did).

There were times when I was observing conversations with youth workers and young people it was difficult not to intervene, though generally I tried to allow conversations to play out. This is because youth work has become part of my identity, and I would consider it my current vocation rather than previous job. So to attempt to ‘turn off’ the desire to challenge a young person’s xenophobic or sexist comments (especially when a worker was present and either remaining silent, or even agreeing with the young person) proved difficult. I would not say there was a pattern or thought process for those times I intervened and those times I did not, however when I did speak up in front of other workers I tried to do so in such a way that was not directly

contradicting what they were saying – often by speaking in the third person: for example “Some people would argue that immigration is good for our country, because...”

Although research literature refers to the problems of remaining silent and reinforcing a potentially harmful ‘norm’ (Homan 1991:165), it does not provide much advice on how to handle prejudice. For example, one of the workers said, in relation to Muslims on the news at the time of Lee Rigby’s murder portrayed by the media as ‘Islamist’ terrorism:

*[A volunteer] sat next to me talked about the stabbing yesterday in London, saying that he didn’t like ‘those people’ [Muslims], all of them, that they were ‘gimps’. He was overtly racist. [Youth Café field note #20]*

How non-judgemental should a researcher be? My youth worker identity wanted to challenge the attitudes, but by doing so I was concerned that the worker would stop providing their candid opinions. Vanderstaay (2005:400) presented a utilitarian argument for these cases, saying that observing unethical practice in order to make judgements that could improve practice meets a greater end. However Hammersley and Atkinson (2007:213) are uncomfortable with this attitude as silence could condone attitudes harmful to the wellbeing of the community. With young people, if racist or sexist language was used I gently challenged it if no youth workers were present, at least to show I was uncomfortable with those attitudes. If a worker *was* present I remained quiet and allowed the worker to take the lead. This issue of silently condoning behaviours could also extend to issues of serious malpractice in youth work. However I feel confident no harmful practices were legitimised through my observations, though possible some that could be labelled ‘undesirable’ (Punch 1986:31).

I also recognised that it was difficult to have the detached ‘first experience’ that ethnographers particularly praise (Goffman 1989:130). Having spent time in church and local authority youth work there was much that was similar to my previous experiences. However I believe the comparative nature of the study helps to highlight some of the important, but mundane and easy-to-overlook, aspects of the youth clubs.

#### 4.7 Analysis of Data

In this section, the process of analysing the field notes and transcripts is described. The process is taken chronologically, beginning with the purpose of the analysis, how themes were developed, and how these themes provided an original contribution to knowledge.



While there was a huge amount of data produced, the data presented in this thesis (predominantly in chapters five and six) are included because they highlight something of the youth work relationship. I have attempted to keep to excerpts in these sections, and then offer shortened paraphrases in the analysis in chapter seven. Occasionally, however, if there is a second or third example of a particular finding these have been included as brief comments summing up the experience. This means, predominantly in chapter five, it should be obvious to the reader what is coming directly from the data, and what has been inferred. Chapter five, which provides an overview of the centres, has been written with fewer direct quotes from the field work, because attempting to provide a comprehensive yet succinct description of the centres required an amalgamation of many pieces of data – particularly the field notes. On a few occasions, either in the field notes or during the commentary, I resort to explaining a situation with regard to how it ‘felt’. In these cases, it was difficult to explain how a particular interaction seemed to prioritise the youth worker’s or young person’s best interests. Yet, there was something about the history of the relationship, the atmosphere of the interaction, perhaps even the body language of those involved, that left a distinct impression. However the reader may wish to recognise the subjectivity inherent in those decisions – therefore, I have attempted to clearly explain if something was an impression, or a direct observation. Throughout this process I analysed within the cases, reading them and creating nodes as if they were discrete entities. Using matrices on NVivo was particularly helpful here, as it allowed me to see patterns between the dominant themes and the individual cases, and draw out the difference between them (Robson 2002:479-481). Then I brought them together in the final stage of analysis and beginning of the writing-up process (Eisenhardt 2006:307-309). When the dominant themes that mapped the complexity of the youth work relationship were coming to the fore I began asking questions of the data – if an observation was coded as a ‘self-disclosure’, for example, I would ask ‘who is holding the power? In whose interests in this disclosure being made?’ etc.

#### 4.7.1 Organising the Data

The field notes and transcripts provided around 300,000 words of data, split over 123 documents, plus a further 24 policy documents and 24 photos. Choosing how to best organise such data proved difficult. Some authors advised splitting them by type (keeping interviews separate to field notes, for example), however because of the multi-sited nature of the ethnographic study I used the qualitative computer analysis software NVivo 10 to file them by organisation. I then used ‘nodes’ to categorise the documents by type: field notes, interview transcripts, policy documents, focus groups transcripts, and photos.

#### 4.7.2 Descriptive Node Creation

Using NVivo, I began with some basic descriptive analysis during the field work. These were codes that had clear, bounded, usually objective categories (LeCompte and Schensul 1999:62, Silver and Lewins 2007:71). I created 'people nodes' for each youth worker and placed any observations involving that worker into it. At the beginning of the field work I also created people nodes for the young people, however after a few weeks this list of names (and, when names were forgotten or not gathered, descriptions) became unwieldy and I amalgamated them into groups – this was somewhat arbitrary as, although in the larger youth groups there were definitely cliques, some young people would appear to belong in more than one of them. I also created separate nodes for the days of the week I was visiting. For some clubs (the Youth Café and YM) this made little difference, however for others the activities, workers, and regular young people changed depending on the day. The data was split this way to allow for the creation of matrices and ease of comparison of the organisations and workers. Although NVivo was used to aid with the coding, keyword searching was limited to attempting to find specific examples quickly and was not used at any stage to code the data, which should always be considered a secondary method of analysis if used at all (Bazeley 2007:10).

Also during the field work I developed some descriptive nodes that reflected what was happening with minimum inference: observations of football games, evaluation sessions, meetings, etc. were all separated out. This aided the efficient comparison of how the clubs began their sessions, or the kinds of craft activities they ran. Again, later in the analysis process, it also allowed the comparison between organisations between inferences nodes during particular parts of a session: for example, did the theme of 'authority' differ between the four centres during the evaluation sessions? This also allowed for the comparison of themes between types of data – for example, how was respect for young people coded in interviews, compared to observations?

#### 4.7.2 Inferred Node Creation

Coding the data required pulling together similar examples of phenomena experienced in the field work in an attempt to 'give meaning' to the raw observations and transcripts (LeCompte and Schensul 1999:3-5, 57). The process of drawing out and developing inferred themes took three full readings of all the field notes and transcripts, with some key field notes and passages re-read several more times. The process of inductive coding was used, beginning with having many codes covering every conceivable theme, followed by a second pass of axial coding where those codes are grouped together with a greater focus, and finally selective coding, returning to the data in an attempt to find more examples of the emerging themes (Silver and Lewins 2007:84-85). This

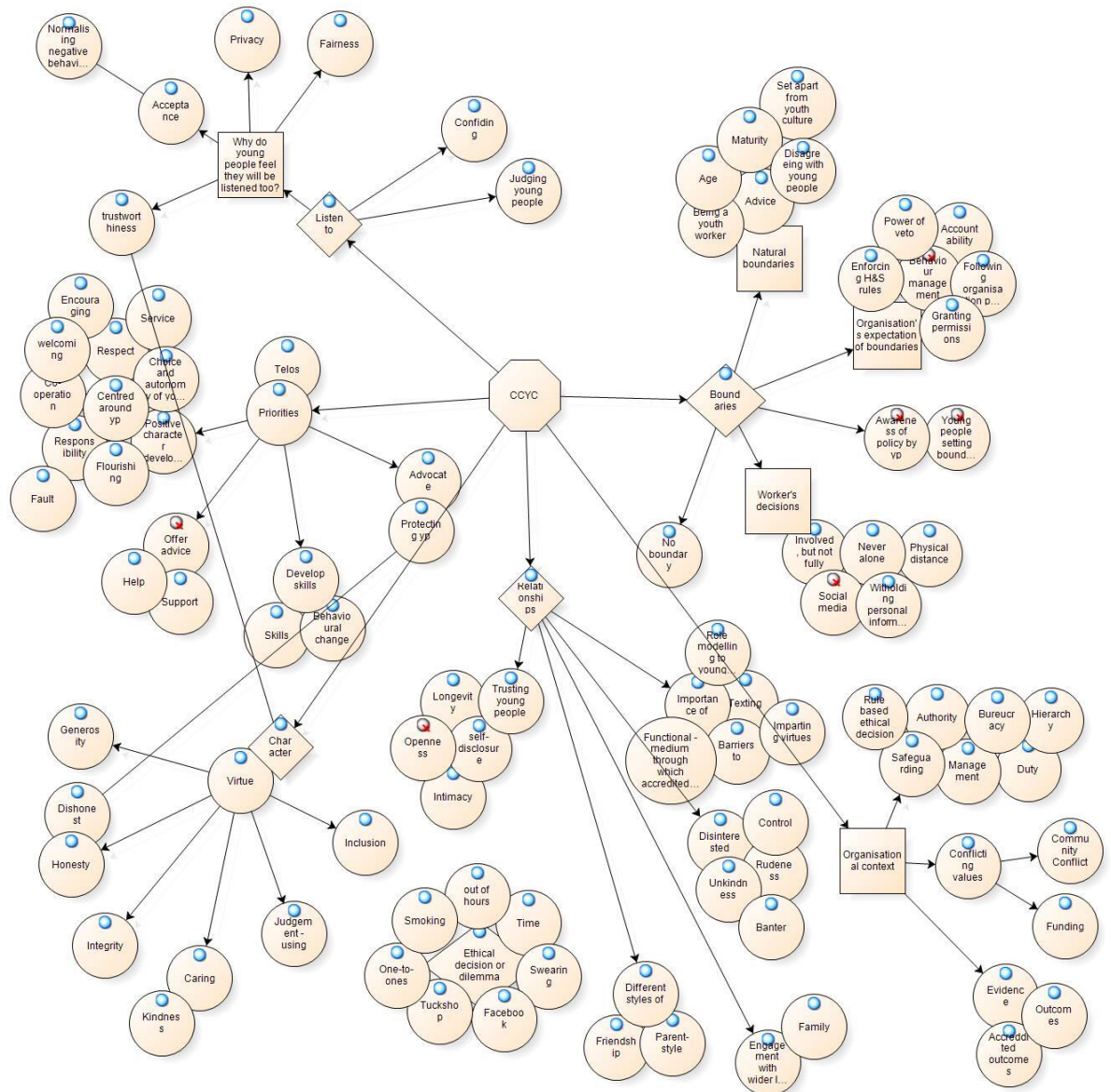
process began about two months before the end of the field work and took a total of eight months of reading, conceptualising, comparing, summarising, writing, and re-writing before I felt I had a list of eight themes relating to relationships in youth work that began to accurately reflect the complexity of ethical issues in youth work relationships. Indeed, at times it was tempting to leave my findings at 'relationships in youth work are messy and complex', but it was through wrestling with the question 'what makes them complex? Which of the disparate themes are responsible for the messiness?' that the dominant themes arose.

The first read-through of the data attempted to discern some inferred themes that were very broad. However it was from attempting to understand what might connect some of them that the overarching subject of this thesis – relationship – was drawn out. This first pass created 113 different nodes – some of these were developed in a 'memo', a diary-like file in NVivo I used to place thoughts and ideas for themes as the data was being collected. This felt like a mammoth task to understand them and, rather than use them, I decided to start again, but this time focus during the analysis on themes that related to the relationship (already a dominant site of ethical reflections). As most of youth work is relational, this list of nodes was only a little more succinct, with 104 different nodes.

Therefore, in an attempt to create a more manageable list of themes without damaging (too much) the rich variety of the data, I used NVivo's 'model' feature to create a diagram of how the themes appeared to clump together – one for each organisation, in an attempt to retain some of the richness that comes from the comparative nature of the ethnography (see figure 3.1 below, for an early attempt at conceptualising how the themes related to each other). As the relationship between the workers and the young people began to take centre stage in the research, other themes seemed to fit within it. Other themes were used to create comparative studies of each organisation to keep the 'thick description' of the context in which the relationships and interactions were occurring.

Throughout this process I analysed within the cases, reading them and creating nodes as if they were discrete entities. Using matrices on NVivo was particularly helpful here, as it allowed me to see patterns between the dominant themes and the individual cases, and draw out the difference between them. Then I brought them together in the final stage of analysis and beginning of the writing-up process. When the dominant themes that mapped the complexity of the youth work relationship were coming to the fore I began asking questions of the data – if an observation was coded as a 'self-disclosure', for example, I would ask 'who is holding the power? In whose interests in this disclosure being made?' etc. On some occasions these answers had to be inferred

(and where that's the case, it is clearly explained in chapter 6) however these inferences were coming from the depth of understanding an ethnographic study can provide.



## 4.8 Improvements

There were some omissions that could have improved the quality of the research. I was not able to interview the chair of the management committee at the Youth Café, or any other members of the committee except the minister of the church. Doing this would have added greater depth and understanding to some of the conflict in that organisation. One of the focus groups at LAYC descended into chaos; though some valuable data was collected, the focus group could have been significantly better. The observations at the Youth Café would have benefited from more young people and a more consistent membership. The Youth Café was interesting in its own right due to the conflict that was present, but this distracted from the aims of the research.

To improve the research further I would have spread the field work out over a longer period. Due to access issues and the university ethics process I did not get into the field until November 2012. Ideally I would have been engaging in field work in September, working through to June 2013. If I had space in the middle to begin analysing and reflecting on themes. I would have further improved my observations as they began to focus down on specific issues. Instead, my observations remained very open; however while analysing I often came across ideas and themes that I would like to go back and observe.

## 4.9 Summary of Methodology

In this chapter I have explained the rationale for choosing an ethnographic approach to considering ethics in youth work. The research strategy was abductive, with an interpretivist and constructivist epistemology. The organisations were chosen with a 'most difference' approach, and while ethnographic research is often idiosyncratic I have argued that the detailed descriptions of the cases can mean the story of the research can transcend the organisations in which it is based, with wider implications as the readers recognise the transferability in their own situations.

A micro-ethnography was chosen to gain access to practices without prior interpretation, taking a participant-as-observer stance. As time went by the observations became more focussed around the relationships youth workers and young people shared, and greater use of naturally occurring

conversations way made. Interviews and focus groups at the end of the fieldwork helped to ask hypothetical questions where similar observations were missing between centres, and also to uncover opinions on issues affecting relationships, while documents were also collected and analysed (with photos of the environment) to understand more of the culture of the organisations.

The comparative nature of the design was considered, together with the rationale for the choice of the four cases, and the ethical issues inherent in the research – which included managing my own relationships with young people, gaining consent throughout the research process, consent from young people, and the particular need for sensitive handling of data provided by young people. In the next chapter there will be a fuller description of the four cases, showing how the methodology has provided some rich and informative data.

## 5. Description of Cases

This chapter describes the four youth centres, particularly focussing on the areas they are serving, physical descriptions of the centres, and some generalised description of typical evening sessions proceeded.

### 5.1 Local Authority Youth Centre (LAYC)

This very large youth centre was situated on the edge of two estates deemed areas of multiple deprivation. There were several other local amenities close by, with two residents' associations, two churches (one with a youth café attached and one with uniformed organisations), a children's centre and two primary schools within 5 minutes' walk. Adjacent to the centre was a skate park which ran independently of the youth centre and generally attracted different young people to those who went inside. The entrance had two large doors into a hall way with toilets and the office on the left (there were offices, meeting rooms, and computers upstairs, but these were not often used during the evening). At the end of the hallway was a very large room with two table tennis tables. In an alcove stood a pool table, and round to the right was a coffee bar area with a snooker table, sofas in a line, a small kitchen area where the tuck shop was situated, a vending machine, and a TV. The TV was occasionally used to watch TV programmes, but more often used as a radio. Through double doors at the end of the room there was another hallway leading to a large sports hall used for football and basketball. Just off this hall was a dance room with two large crash mats, and a fitness suite (not used during the evening).

On the walls there were a mixture of posters and displays affirming this space as a *youth* centre. There were graffiti-style paintings on the wall, and a series of large notice boards. Some of these depicted events these young people had been part of – such as a residential or sleepover – with others displaying photos from other groups (the skaters and the Duke of Edinburgh groups). Some of the displays depicted various values: respect, tolerance, confidence, and conflict management. Others were more educational, with a large display on alcohol misuse and some posters on domestic violence. One was for information, comprising a set of centre rules and consequences for breaking those rules, and a copy of the local authority's youth charter.

Funding came directly from the local authority who still have a commitment to providing universal access, though there have been rumours in the youth service that they are going to commission universal youth provision out to the voluntary sector. To pre-empt discussions on the future of the youth service, the head of youth services has already instigated a series of policies, including 'substantial intervention forms' and an online database to show youth work as a valuable part of

the local authority's 'early intervention strategy'. Young people also paid 30p per session and £1 per year membership fee, with membership required for access to the club. Young people without money were either asked to leave, or allowed to owe the money – however there did not seem to be a consistent approach to allowing access to those who could not pay.

The centre opened from 7:10pm to 9:10pm. The previous group finished at 6:30pm, and the workers required time at the end to clear, so youth service workers were unable to use the office until 6:50pm. It opened four nights per week, however Friday was typically very quiet compared to the other evenings. It remained open during school holidays, though they ran a different programme of activities during the summer. At least thirty young people were present on a regular basis.

This universal provision focused around the use of leisure equipment and providing spaces for young people to talk. There were rarely planned activities, though a few young men would bake around once per fortnight with a worker. This, however, would be changing in the near future as the manager wanted to increase the amount of 'project work', and before I left workers were being asked to think how they could run activities that would gain some accredited outcomes for the young people.

Staff regularly made an appeal to written policy when questioned on their actions, however evidence of these organisational rules were not always found in their written policies. The physical documents in the office were several years out of date, and only one team member was able to help me find the documents on the organisation's intranet. None of these policies were specific to youth work, and required interpretation in their implementation. One-to-one work and offering lifts, for example, were not prohibited in these policies (though certain rules applied); however workers often cited them as their reason for not being able to take a young person somewhere in their car.

In spite of the 7:10 start time, by 6:50 there would usually be several young people sat on the table outside the office waiting. Also by 6:50 youth workers were beginning to arrive, converse in the office, and divide tasks and responsibilities for the evening – as well as check a large diary that had messages in from previous evenings (such as, who had been 'barred out').

At 7:10 (precisely, usually) the young people were allowed in and the first ten minutes before the young people broke into other activities were often frenetic. The youth workers tended to move straight to the coffee bar area, leaving one behind at the office to sign the young people in and take their 30p entrance fee. Young people need to be members to enter, and most have already



paid their annual £1 subscription and filled out their membership form. Typically about 20 young people come straight in (though on Friday evenings this is often halved compared to the other four nights), and there are two distinct groups – the older teenagers that have been coming to the club for a long time and are now approaching adulthood, and a sizeable group of young 13-15 year olds. This newer group of young people has some members that have been loyal to the club for over two years, but is continually having new people come and join it as friends invite friends. There was not usually much interaction between the two groups.

Some of the younger group would begin by heading straight for the coffee bar to put down a small deposit to use the table tennis tables (this is to discourage damage and ensure easily-lost items, such as the table tennis balls, are handed back in). Some young people go and buy tuck, while the older boys gather around the snooker table waiting to be allowed to go and play football. The young women would usually head straight for the sofas, choose a TV channel, and begin talking to each other. After these first frantic, energetic few minutes it is normal for a few other young people to trickle in during the evening.

About 5 of the younger group would congregate around the pool table in the alcove, where they were left alone by the workers. Once the older group of young men move to the gym some of the younger group would come and make use of the snooker table near the coffee bar. Often some of the girls would want to go into the dance room, and would collect the iPod docking station and go into the room with one of the workers – they were not allowed to go in by themselves - but a small group would usually stay on the sofas by the TV. That group would see the most interaction with workers, usually at least one would spend the evening talking to them. Topics of conversation regularly included nights out and college work, and they were typically uninterrupted for an hour, until the older boys came back from playing football in the gym. Youth workers talking here would be periodically disturbed for a few moments at a time by young people needing to be served at the tuck shop, or putting deposits down/requesting deposits back for the equipment.

The main form of maintaining discipline is 'barring out' young people – that is, having an enforced period of time where they cannot attend the centre – typically for 1-2 weeks, though occasionally longer sanctions were observed. Young people would often swear, and the workers would challenge this. Occasionally swearing results in a young person being barred for a night, but there was a recognition by the workers that sometimes the young people were not even aware they were doing it.

When the older young people had been in the sports hall for an hour they usually swapped with the younger, predominantly male, young people. They would then habitually sit with the young women by the TV talking, either to each other or with the youth workers. Towards the end of the evening things would begin slowly winding down. The younger lads would not last as long playing football and start to drift off after 45 minutes. Often matches concluded when young people began to frustrate each other, sometimes ending in verbal fights that the workers were adept at calming down through talking to them.

As the evening drew to a close the equipment was put away at 9:05 and some of the young people, rather than leave straight away, congregated at the sofas. They often (jokingly) refused to leave, saying they did not want to go. Workers typically responded by reminding them that they wanted to go home. The workers then congregated in the office at 9:10 to talk about the evening. The team leader or manager would fill out the monitoring and evaluation form (which included a list of topics that had been talked about that evening). Youth workers shared any concerns they had about the young people, and shared the stories and experiences young people had confided in them. Most of the evaluation sessions comprised monitoring and information sharing, but some parts were centred around improving practice and ensuring the best health and safety policies were being followed, and that the arrangement with the use of resources and rooms was fair. There would be regular reminders if the manager was present to be filling out substantial intervention forms so that the work of the centre was properly recognised. When all workers were ready to leave, at about 9:30, the toilets were checked and the doors locked, with everyone leaving together.

## 5.2 Community Centre Youth Club (CCYC)

The large community centre the young people used was based at the heart of an ex-mining community with few other local services, except some small shops, a primary school, and a church. Users entered through two heavy double doors and on the left was a meeting room, in front was a suite of computers (often being used by community members on a Thursday club night), and to the right was the community lending library and a kitchen. The library was about the size of a large living room, with a few tables and chairs in the middle, walls full of books, and a photocopier in the corner. The kitchen was large and suitable for catering. It had a ball room/hall upstairs that the young people sometimes used for games and badminton. There were few displays on the walls, and they were typically notices aimed at the whole community with little specifically for or about the young people. There was nothing displayed to show that there was a space for young people here.

The funding came from various streams. The youth and community worker, who was employed by the organisation full time, was funded through the Rank Foundation which also paid for her training. There was also a worker on placement from a local university, and a manager who was funded through proceeds from room hire and the local parish council. One evening a week two local authority workers host additional youth work sessions in the centre. This mutually beneficial session meant that the local authority did not have to pay for a venue, and the community had extra youth provision it did not pay for directly. Young people also paid 50p per session to attend.

The centre opened twice per week for young people. On Mondays, there was a group for 10 to 15 year olds run by the Rank Foundation supported worker from 4:00-5:30pm, and on Thursdays the local authority ran a session for 13-19 year old young people from 6-8pm. The Monday session had been quite small, with 3-4 young people. On Thursdays they received up to 10 young people. The majority are female, with one male member of each group. The local authority workers were open about preferring predominantly single sex, because they believed they faced greater behavioural issues in mixed groups. In theory the centre was open to young people at other times as members of the community, but in practice this seemed rare. The club opened as usual during school holidays, but occasionally closed due to adverse weather if the workers (who do not live in the village) could not drive in.

Usually there was a particular focus or activity for the evening. For the local authority workers, this typically involved an accredited activity such as first aid or food hygiene, or part of a wider project such as a fashion designing project culminating in a catwalk and fashion show. On Mondays, the activities were more ad hoc and included cooking, playing games, and crafts at particular festivals.

Although CCYC did not feel particularly bureaucratic upon entering, after a few weeks I began to notice that paper work was continually being collected, particularly at the beginning and end of a project. Consent forms had to follow a set procedure, and there was a clear evaluation policy for the local authority run evenings. When the club was being run by the centre workers evaluations were more relaxed, and tended to focus on collecting evidence of any work done and asking the young people's opinions (to which they nearly always responded with the same phrase indicating they enjoyed themselves: 'canny mint'). The manager said the lines of communication between the workers and himself were so close that paperwork was not typically required, the workers would speak to him directly the next day if something needed to be shared. He believed this flexibility provided space for creativity.

The club had a hierarchy, with Maureen leading the local authority evenings, and manager Dennis officially being in charge on other evenings, though he explained during interview he recognised Flo was the trained youth worker and he placed himself under her authority during youth club sessions. As the manager infrequently reports to the parish council and a funding body, he felt he could work quite flexibly. The Rank Foundation, with a progressive approach to targets and evidencing, was looking for the needs of the community to be met and evidence provided through case studies, rather than statistics and evaluation forms. The manager was very supportive of the youth work and would like to see the young people take a greater role in the community centre.

On Thursdays by 5:55pm there were usually two workers from the local authority waiting outside the room used for the youth club, talking to a few young people. Inside, a younger children's group would be finishing and tidying up, with parents and children leaving (though timings changed in my last couple of observations to allow greater time between sessions). Two young people and the centre's own youth worker were usually already inside as they had been helping at that session. By 6pm the last of the children had usually left, and the workers and young people were inside, with a few more young people joining them shortly after 6pm. The local authority workers would bring with them the equipment and resources they needed and begin setting up on a table. The planning for the evening was usually done by the two local authority workers and they would be ready to begin within minutes.

Once the young people had arrived one of the workers signed them in and took their 50p to enter. Young people would typically pay in without comment, and it was usual for any debts to be settled without reminder. All the young people stayed together for the whole evening, unless a young person asked for a private conversation with a worker. The young people patiently sat round the table, talking and using their phones, as they waited for the session to start. When regular young people were missing the workers asked where they were/how they were by name, and a worker would send a text on a work mobile to remind the missing young people it was on and the plans for the session.

On Thursdays a computer club for the local community took place at the same time. The community centre worker sometimes left to make teas and coffees for the other group, and occasionally the leader of that group came in. When she did, the group talked to her respectfully, and she took an interest in what they were doing. The exchanges were light-hearted and there was regularly banter between the lady and most of the girls, though some would choose to ignore it and continue to focus on their projects. Swearing – though often frowned upon by the workers – was particularly checked when the other members of the community were using the computer

suite for fear of offending them. Some work, particularly around sexual health, was also low-key for fear of offending the strong Roman Catholic presence in the village.

One of the workers regularly took photos as evidence of the work they were doing and when this part of the session was winding down they gathered in anything they had been designing and making 'for their file', which could lead to an accredited outcome. The young people would help to tidy things away and then ask to use the remaining time to play badminton upstairs.

If they went upstairs, two workers would always join them, as a matter of policy. One worker may stay downstairs if a young person asked to talk to them about something sensitive (chlamydia tests were a particular concern while I was observing, though I did not directly observe any of those more personal conversations). Upstairs there would be a mix of badminton and card games. The workers invariably joined in the games with the young people and enjoyed the joking and banter.

At various points in the evening, the manager of the centre would come in and out, and nearly always had some kind of interaction with the young people even if just passing through. The young people knew him well, and he talked to them about local issues or upcoming events in the community. He liked to joke with them, and he was obviously proud of the achievements they had made over recent years, happily talking about their previous exploits when he would not trust them, and now he felt they had become more mature young women.

As the evening drew to a close, the equipment would be packed away at about 7:55. Young people, if upstairs, went back down to the library while the workers finished their paper work. They filled out their evaluation in front of the young people and asked the young people how the evening went. The young people said things like 'canny mint' and 'alright', so sometimes the worker pushed a little more: "have you done anything new? Have you designed clothes before?" putting their answers on the evaluation. The workers continued to talk to each other and the young people for another 10-15 minutes, before everyone would leave together at about 8:20, sometimes significantly later.

### 5.3 Church Based Youth Café (Youth Café).

The youth café was situated on the edge of two estates on the opposite side of the road to the LAYC. Inside there were two computers on desks for young people (though only one of them worked) and a new pool table, provided by a grant from a local business. To the left there was a large TV on the wall, usually with the news or soap operas on. The coffee bar was in the corner, cordoning off access to the small kitchen behind.

Through a short corridor there was another room with a broken table tennis table and two punching bags for boxing, and about 20 seats around the side. On the walls were large displays on the effects of drugs and alcohol, a couple of A3 posters young people had made on the rules of the club, and a map of the world. Generally the rooms looked badly cared for. The back room had broken chairs piled in a corner, two large radiators had their covers hanging off, and the paintwork was scuffed. The chairs had been stained and the floor was marked with litter and dust around the edges of the room. To the rear of the back-room there was access to the church to which it was attached, and also a long and narrow office running along the back wall.

The café was built 10 years ago with EU funding as an extension to a small Baptist church. During the field work it was being funded through a large voluntary sector trust, the Henry Smith Charity. When I started they also had funding from the Primary Care Trust (NHS) for weekend work, though this ran out at the end of the financial year and the weekend workers were made redundant. Young people paid 20p per evening to access the café. Local businesses had recently donated money for some equipment, and through the local voluntary development agency they had received small grants to do some project work, including an upcoming project renovating old push bikes. During the field work the centre was short of 'core funding' and the manager said that the church were subsidising the heating and lighting bills, but this seemed to cause conflict, and the centre often remained bitterly cold in winter to save money.

When I began, the centre was open on a Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Saturday evening from 5-8pm. I attended between 6-8pm as the manager said they very rarely had young people for the first hour. The centre had also been open at lunchtimes from 12-1pm, but this was not proving popular with young people. I also occasionally attended on a Thursday evening. The paid workers were present on Thursdays; however this was predominantly a church run children's club for 5 to 11 year olds, with some young people attending as helpers. Focussing on crafts and organised games, this club was significantly different to the evenings for young people.

Several times during observations the club had no young people at all, and several times young people only arrived for the final hour. When young people were present, typically there were 4-6, all male. Although their project work was often referred to by the workers, I only observed young people attending to buy food and use the equipment. There was nothing specifically planned for an evening.

There was some conflict between the workers and the management committee and church at the Youth Café. To the pastor and management committee, the aim of the café was to be a

discipleship group, and to achieve that the pastor believed it needed more 'structure' than its role as a drop-in. This was essentially because the church had no young people regularly attending their Sunday services – the pastor was open about it being an issue of self-preservation. The current Youth Café manager believed this aim would have been fulfilled with the previous manager – a strong evangelical Christian – however the church leaders would not allow the previous manager to lead services. When asked during interview Mary, one of the permanent workers, suggested that the church's espoused aims did not correspond with their norms of practice. She argued that the church run children's club is like the youth club, with little structure and no overt Christian input. The manager, however, talks about the youth club as being a place for relationships to build, to help young people, care for them, and give them a sense of worth.

Although no written policies were regularly being enacted, one weekend sessional worker had a degree in community and youth work and would make decisions based on her experience. For example she was the originator of a rule that each room required two adults if young people were to use them,; however this rule was frequently disregarded mid-week. These rules were given to young people if they made a request, and the young people would accept that policy and external rules prevented them from doing certain things at times. There was regularly inconsistency between the workers on different evenings over how equipment could be used, which behaviours were allowable and which were deemed unacceptable, and the level of supervision required.

Meetings with management appeared ad hoc, and management committee meetings happened every two-to-three months. There was one whole-team meeting in the six months I was there, and it happened during normal club time around the coffee bar to discuss new paper work (which I did not see enacted in practice). However this set of basic monitoring forms were intended to create some accountability to the management committee.

Mid-week evenings often had no young people until the final hour. When young people arrived, they would typically pay in at the coffee bar without being asked, buy some sweets and drinks, and then either play pool and talk to the workers or move down to the back-room to hit the punch-bags or play table tennis. Sometimes they would sit and talk on the chairs to the side. The male manager would often come down for a few minutes at a time and talk to them, but he could also sometimes be found in the office or talking to the other female worker who would rarely move from behind the coffee bar. The manager would offer to show the young people how to hit the bags properly, or play table tennis, and would engage in light-hearted banter with the young people (often the jokes were at the young people's expense). However the attention he gave the young people often came in short, sharp bursts. If a young person asked to play a game, such as

pool (which was also regular), he would usually accept enthusiastically and exclaim himself the 'champ' at the beginning of the game. Often he would lose, and be happy to concede defeat and extol the virtues of his opponent.

Both the manager and worker were regularly distracted during the sessions – either by sending texts on their phones, reading magazines, or when personal friends would call into the café. Several times young people would ask for food, such as pizza, at around 7:20-7:30pm, to be told by the manager it was too late. The young people regularly reminisced in my presence about how the centre used to be with the previous manager, when it was 'bouncing' and he would take them out individually for milkshakes at a local retail park. They talk about the equipment that they used to have, and how the computers and TVs need updating. Workers would begin to close everything down by 7:45pm (though 7:55 by the time on the clock in the club, which was ten minutes fast). Sometimes a young person would complain about the time on the clock, but nothing was done about it.

The Saturday sessions were slightly different, when they were running. There were three paid sessional workers and a volunteer. While the manager still had oversight of the weekend opening, he rarely attended. Here the young people were not allowed to use the back room unless there were two workers present in each room, therefore often the young people would use the games consoles plugged into the large TV or play pool. Occasionally young people would try the computer, but often became frustrated at how long it took to load.

## 5.4 Youth Ministry (YM)

I chose the title 'Youth Ministry' because that is how the workers refer to the work they do. The centre was situated in the heart of a relatively prosperous community in a small city centre, with a great deal of amenities within walking distance. There was a very large field over the road outside the centre that could be used for games and activities. The centre itself was relatively small, with one large room on the right with a table tennis table and table football, which is also where speakers were set up so young people could play music, and a basketball hoop which was often used. To the left there was a kitchen area with a tuck shop set up and another large room with sofas and tables, and a games console set up with a projector, projecting onto a dividing folding door between the two large rooms. A little further round was the youth worker's office with a computer, sofa and chair – as well as various paperwork in folders and ring-binders on shelves around the room. On the walls was a very large canvas with a Bible verse: "Do not let anyone treat you as if you are unimportant because you are young. Instead, be an example to the believers with your words, your actions, your love, your faith, and your pure life. 1 Timothy 4:12".



Lots of leaflets and posters are about upcoming events, the groups, and the programmes for the term, and also some toddler group photos as the centre is also used by them (and occasionally other church groups). In the office there are photos of previous youth group events. The centre still looks relatively new with good quality furniture and equipment, though the workers sometimes joked about the walls needing to be painted because of the scuff marks.

Young people do not pay to enter. The youth work is funded through the church, who get their money through congregational giving. The centre belonged to the church and the paid worker was salaried directly by the church's council. As a result, the YM had a specifically Christian slant – with workers invoking the doctrine of the Incarnation as influential in their practice, interpreted as both 'role modelling' a 'Christ-like' life, but also in engaging with a broader spectrum of the young people's lives than the other organisations. There were elements of direct and overt evangelism, and they engaged in wider missional activities, such as supporting social justice campaigns. This, combined with the calling workers say they felt to this work, produced a set of priorities that were based predominantly on what they believe to be best for the young person and their development. This led to workers providing lifts and getting involved (to some extent) in the private and school lives of the young people.

The club started at 7:30 but usually there were some young people in from about 7:20pm, chatting to the workers who were there from a previous club. Two workers and young people would often sit in the tuck shop area on the large leather sofas. Occasionally one of the workers would use the microwave in the kitchen to heat up some dinner. This informal beginning moved seamlessly into the actual session. There was a short discussion in front of the young people about the plan for the evening. More young people would continue to arrive during the first 10 minutes of the session. They talked to each other and the workers as they arrive, joining in their conversations. As there was no entrance fee or registration procedure here, the young people would move straight to the area and activity they usually went to – and there were typically areas that small groups of young people colonise. There was no specific 'start'. The young people slowly arrive over time, and activities wound-up over the course of the first 20-30 minutes. Everything seemed very relaxed and the atmosphere at the beginning of the evening was calm.

A group would often play basketball and sit by the sofas in the large room. They did not have much interaction with the other young people or the workers, however the paid worker went to check things were ok at regular intervals. They also felt comfortable asking for equipment from the workers, such as the speakers. They would set up, with the paid worker, the large speakers and mini mixing desk to play music from their iPods loudly. If the music got too loud for a

conversation in the adjacent room a worker would ask them to turn it down a little, which they would do immediately. However for most of the evening the young people were left unsupervised as the workers engaged more with the young people sat in the room with the tuck shop and sofas. Towards exam season, a few young people sitting their GCSEs would congregate in the youth worker's office with the door closed revising and using the computer.

The workers did not usually have specific jobs or roles during the evening, and so spent most of the time sat on the sofas in conversation with the young people. When a young person made a request or needed some help they would move around somewhat, but were typically focussed on the young people rather than performing specific tasks. The conversations tended to be mutual, with a peer-like quality to them. Youth workers offered their opinions and sometimes, very gently and naturally, an educational element would creep in – providing another perspective to a situation, sharing the workers' own experiences, or asking questions of the young people. Two of the workers regularly had their personal iPads with them, and would allow young people to flick through music and photos. A few young people would also regularly set up a projector with an Xbox and play just behind the sofas. Occasionally a worker would join in with them.

Activities were planned for every evening, however the workers judged the atmosphere of the evening on a Wednesday (the Sunday evening Bible studies were less flexible) and listened to young people's requests, and several times the plans were abandoned in favour of something else. These included playing specific games, baking or making something, or holding a quiz night. The worker would draw the evening to a close by informing young people of other local (often Christian) events.

At the end of the evening about half of the young people would drift off themselves, a few more were picked up by their parents, who came inside to collect them (typically people the workers knew from church, and have a brief conversation with workers while they were there). A couple stay and chat for about 10 minutes before leaving themselves. The workers pack up some of the equipment, clear up the litter, and talk about some of the young people and how the evening went as they wash up. The paid worker and the volunteers would talk about their next group tomorrow and what was going to happen there. They usually left about 20-30 minutes after the club had finished.

## 5.5 Conclusions: Key Differences Between The Cases

The first difference is between the physical buildings. Though all four centres had signs of wear, the Youth Café was the newest building but had the greatest need for repair, the most broken

equipment, and was cleaned less frequently. The CCYC was the only centre that was not specifically designated as a space predominantly for young people and this limited the activities. The YM was the only centre where young people had unmitigated access to the whole centre, including the kitchen and office. In the Youth Café, LAYC, and CCYC young people were not usually allowed access to the office, and required supervision from workers in whichever rooms they were using (though the Youth Café was inconsistent about this).

There were also some significant differences in the practices of the centres. At the LAYC, CCYC Thursdays, and Youth Café Saturdays, some young people began the evening outside waiting to enter – while at the YM, and other evenings at the CCYC young people were welcomed in early while workers set up. The LAYC was the only centre to begin with a time of catching up and planning for workers, while at the CCYC and YM this happened as an informal conversation while young people were around, and at the Youth Café there was no real discussion about the plan for the evening. At the LAYC the young people were required to take out annual membership for £1 and paid 30p per session, the Youth café 20p per session, CCYC 50p, and nothing for the YM. The three that had an entrance fee also took a register, the YM did not.

There was also a difference in levels of links with the wider intergenerational community. With the YM, though young people were separated from the wider congregation for most of the time, many parents knew and were friendly with the workers. The LAYC workers had very few links with the wider community, while the CCYC had links partly through the adult users in the centre, and the links the manager had built up over previous years in his role there. At the Youth Café some of the volunteers and management committee had links with the wider church, however there was not a particular commitment to the local area by the workers.

Decision making is another area of significant difference; the LAYC regularly making use of their hierarchy to allow senior managers to make decisions, the CCYC having workers make the decisions which were ratified by the manager, the YM had the focus on the workers making decisions as a team, and the Youth Café would make decisions based on the most senior member of staff there at the time, though these were sometimes overruled by the management committee at a later date.

The Youth Café worked as a drop-in, with no activities or project work organised by the workers. The YM on a Wednesday was similar, though workers would usually have a particular theme they prepared for, often the majority of young people would continue to engage with their own activities, and several times workers did not begin the planned activity if the young people were

not interested. The Sunday night bible study group was very different, which had a relatively formal study lead by a worker. The LAYC was similar to YM's informal sessions, though there usually was not a planned activity, young people made use of the equipment, and if they asked to bake something one of the workers would usually oblige. The CCYC was the closest to having formal project work, particularly on a Thursday with the local authority workers. They were usually spending the evenings working towards some larger project. The Mondays also had a particular activity for the evening, but these were standalone. This may have been because there were fewer resources (such as, pool tables and TVs) that could be used by the young people in the centre.

Youth workers at the CCYC and YM spent more time talking to individuals and small groups than the other centres. Partly because they had a more favourable staff to young person ratio, and the way the rooms were set up in circles around tables (particularly with the 'living room' feel of the large sofas at the YM) enabled conversation to flow more readily than the lines of chairs at the Youth Café and the LAYC, and the general busy-ness of the LAYC. Conversations were also hampered at the Youth Café if the manager was in the office and the worker stayed behind the coffee bar.

Behaviour was controlled at the LAYC and Youth Café by threatening to exclude young people from the centre for a fixed period, at the CCYC it was the threat of preventing young people attending trips, while at the YM no threats seemed necessary – the young people did as they were asked. Use of equipment was moderated at the LAYC by asking young people to place deposits down before taking cues or bats, while at the other three centres the equipment was all freely available – though usually used under supervision at the CCYC and Youth Café, on occasion young people were allowed to use rooms by themselves.

The end of the evening was different in each organisation. The LAYC followed a similar procedure every night, moving young people out of the large sports hall first, then making their way through the building turning off lights and packing up equipment during the final ten minutes of the club. Young people were ushered out, and the workers had a brief evaluation session. In all other three centres some young people were still usually present when the workers left, and they all went together. At the Youth Café this was regularly ten minutes before the advertised closing time, at the CCYC youth workers and young people regularly tidied up together during session time would often talk until after the advertised finish, while at the YM the tidying away would typically happen after the advertised closing time. Some young people would stay longer to help tidy up and talk to the workers.

Therefore, despite their commitment to universal, voluntary youth provision, the practices of the centres differed significantly. It is through comparing some of the differences in how youth workers engaged in a relationship with the young people that the themes presented in the next chapter were discerned.

## 6. Exploring the Complex Nature of Relationships Between Young People and Youth Workers

### 6.1 Introduction

After the description of the cases in the first findings chapter, here I consider eight dominant themes derived through analysing the data from the ethnography. Each theme helps to understand a particular dominant aspect of the youth work relationship.

### 6.2 Themes From The Data

Analysis of the field notes, interviews, focus groups, and documents identified many themes. These were usually relatively small, however several resonated with each other and I found I was considering groups of very narrow and specific themes together, creating eight dominant overarching themes when exploring ethically challenging aspects of youth work relationships. The themes also represent aspects of the youth work relationship, and therefore considering them first as individual themes from the data (in this chapter) and then as aspects of the whole youth work relationship (as in the next chapter and chapter 8) was a natural progression during the analysis. The eight themes are: self-disclosures, engagement in the wider lives of young people, setting an example, use of authority and power, respecting young people, prioritising needs and best interests, trusting young people, and formality and distance.

Youth work relationships can occur in a range of different, unique, nuanced contexts that affect the way a worker and young people may interact. This field work affirms there seems to be no simple, pre-packaged, 'right' way to develop a relationship with a young people. The dominant themes from the fieldwork that are presented here begin to identify and name some of that complexity, and map how these element of the youth work relationship can be associated with each other. Therefore, the rich description of the cases from the ethnographic data in chapter five is particularly important in setting the context for these themes.

The process of naming, describing, and theorising these themes can develop a model that helps youth workers to be more confident and intentional about the use of the aspects they represent, which is described at the beginning of chapter 8. There I will also argue for the usefulness of virtue ethics in building an ethical framework that workers could use as a resource to inform decision making and practices in the youth work relationship, given the nature of the complexity inherent within the relationship.

### 6.3 Making Self-Disclosures in the Youth Work Relationship

The theme of 'self-disclosures' relates to the pieces of information about the youth worker's personal situation, history or experiences that are shared with young people. The appropriate level of personal information shared between youth workers and young people varied according to the expectations of the organisations and individual judgements, and it is this comparison between the levels and types of disclosures between organisations that highlighted it as an important feature of the youth work relationship early in the data collection stages. Though most workers acknowledged during interview that sharing personal information can be valuable in building relationships with young people, for some there were barriers to self-disclosures that area described here too.

At the YM, workers' commitment to role modelling and life-sharing required a significant level of self-disclosure. The paid worker ran a fortnightly discipleship group at his home with his wife, and workers regularly shared aspects of their personal lives. I reflected on this in the field notes:

*Self-disclosures come in a huge range here – from really sensitive personal information, to talking about what they're doing on an evening. Tonight Emma [volunteer] was sharing with Sarah [young person] what she was wearing to a wedding, a bit about her friends, and her role as a reader in the wedding service. It occurred to me that even simple things about people's lives don't get shared much in other clubs that I observed. [YM field note #09].*

At the YM self-disclosures seemed natural, a norm of the group, in a way they did not in any other organisation. Things ranged from a worker sharing a story about a kitchen utensil (a flour shaker) that was over 30 years old and belonged to her mum, and she hoped one day she would receive it (YM field note #05), the paid worker had a small baby and often shared stories of what the baby was doing or how much sleep he had the night before with the young people.

Self-disclosure for the purpose of evangelism, relationship building and setting an example was evidenced in the YM. It was during a training evening that a direct link was made between these self-disclosures and a theological and missional underpinning, which promoted real-life examples of faith in action for the purpose of modelling the Christian life to the young people. Also, during one of the services I attended a member of the congregation shared how their faith affected their daily and work lives as a means to encourage others in the church. Self-disclosures were being used as a tool through which workers could achieve more as a role model, and their anecdotes

provide examples of how they would behave outside of the usual youth centre evenings. This is echoed by the practice of Christian volunteers at the Youth Café:

*Two of the female volunteers have more of a 'grandparent' feel than a youth worker, being interested in the wellbeing of the young people, their temperature, their birthdays, etc. One of them, Christie, talked openly about her Christian faith and how she prayed in the car when it was spinning while recounting a personal story of driving in the snow last week. [Youth Café field note #06]*

In contrast, during interview most youth workers at the CCYC explained they would not trust young people with personal information (except Flo, the community centre youth worker), which limited the self-disclosures that happened in the organisation. Jenny (student at the CCYC) said she would not trust the young people with any personal information “because they could take that and use it [against me]”. This attitude was shared by the LAYC workers, where several times young people were observed attempting to begin conversations about the workers’ personal lives. The workers tried not to say too much about themselves in case it could be brought up again in a less appropriate context:

*Carla [youth worker] said that when you're having a conversation with the older [young people] you can talk to them as if they're adults, and you think it is a mature conversation, and you can tell them things about yourself, and then they bring it up later (this was in the context of the team leader once saying she tried 'poppers' and telling them when she lost her virginity, which was brought up several weeks later). Carla said you can get 'caught up in the conversation' when they're in a mature mood. [LAYC field note #17]*

However workers at the Youth Café and YM seemed more comfortable with this. Though the young people will generally talk openly about some issues at the CCYC (such as the death of a mother, smoking, and sometimes boyfriends) at other times they refuse to engage in conversations about those more personal aspects of their life.

Self-disclosures were shown to be a tool by which young people could learn, and develop appropriate responses to information they have been given. For example:

*The final 30 minutes were taken up with playing Pictionary (at Betty's [young person] request) on the flip chart. Flo ripped up small rectangles of paper, and passed them out – four for each of us [I was joining in]. We then wrote something down (for example, 'apple', 'the queen', 'Harry Potter'), and then placed them in a glass. Flo asked Betty to go first,*



*and then Sarah [young person], each person drawing what they had picked on the card while the others guessed. Flo kept score, and Betty won.*

*One of Flo's cards said 'graduating', which Betty drew. She knew what to draw because last week Flo had brought in her photo of her own recent graduation ceremony. Sarah guessed it straight away – and they were aware that this was a significant event for Flo. [CCYC field note #04].*

The long term and serious illness of a worker at the YM provided similar evidence of this phenomenon. Young people would often ask the worker how they were, and sometimes inquire about an upcoming operation. However the context at YM was different; I did not hear the worker ever initiate a conversation or tell young people about his illness, but the intergenerational nature of the church, and the norm that personal information was spread around the church so members could pray for each other, meant this was information freely available to all the church going young people, therefore news of the illness spread to non-church going young people too. As in the CCYC, young people had an opportunity to engage with the worker on a topic that can often be seen as 'adult', and as such a self-disclosure that could aid in the social development of the young people.

In this next extract a young person at the CCYC makes a request and the worker's implicit refusal is attributed to a particular rule:

*At the end of the evening [a young person] – who had her cigarette box out in front of her all evening – asked [a worker] if she had a light. [The worker] looked straight at [the young person] but said nothing. [The young person] implied from that that she did have a lighter but couldn't pass it over. She said 'you're not allowed to are you?' and the worker replied 'Nahh, I can't really like'. [CCYC field note #09]*

Here the worker was not open about her smoking. The pause before she answered appeared to signal she was not sure if she should even admit to having a light, although the young person took the lead in recognising the awkward position she had put the worker in, and provided a way out.

In the organisations with fewer examples of self-disclosures by the workers (CCYC and LAYC), there would still be a greater amount of sharing of personal information if there was a shared interest. For example, in a conversation about horse riding a worker might talk about when the riding started, worst accidents, and where they ride now. The enthusiasm for talking about a shared interest or experience appeared to override the usual norms of the workers around making-self disclosures.

Similarly, even with workers who shared little about themselves with the young people, information that may have educational value was more likely to be shared. For example, one worker, Patsy (CCYC), displayed a more open attitude to self-disclosures during interview than her colleagues. She reported she would talk about her history if it would help young people make an informed choice, but not if it might legitimise a potentially harmful decision or if it could upset her:

*Being a mum - being a teenage mum - I kind of share that [with young people] and say what problems, the risks that has. As well as all the fantastic stuff, it is about helping them to make that informed choice in the same way, because I've been through it, and a bit about the homelessness and stuff. But I wouldn't go as far as getting on to stuff that was really emotional to me and things like that. Just the basics. I would say, "Well, I used to smoke."*

*If they said, "Have you ever tried cannabis?" or something, it is certain things like that you can answer, and certain things you can't. You know your limits, don't you? You would just say, "I don't really want to tell you that," and, "Why are you asking that?" [CCYC interview Patsy]*

Sometimes self-disclosures appeared counter to the organisation's principles, as in this observation from the LAYC, where usually young people are encouraged to take a moderate approach to alcohol consumption:

*Two young people were already in the office. They were playing on the chairs. Bill [youth worker] put a holiday on the calendar on the wall while they watched, and they asked where he was going. He said to London and Oxford, they asked what he'll be doing, and he said 'drinking'. The young people made some comment about that being wrong, or a bad thing, and [the team leader] said 'well, he's old enough to'. [LAYC field note #16]*

At the Youth Café, a 19 year old volunteer, Ben, drew attention to his own personal issue through a self-disclosure, somewhat subtly:

*Ben [volunteer] played [table tennis] the whole time [around 45 minutes], [the other workers came in and out of the game]. Afterwards Ben played a song on his phone to the group (including 2-3 young people), he then said today was supposed to be his wedding day and this was the song his fiancé was going to walk down the aisle to. One of the workers challenged this – "did you just play it so you could tell us the story?" – but he said*

*he was playing it just because it was a good song. The young people responded with signs of sympathy: 'ohhh', and 'that's sad'. [Youth Café field note #01]*

In this self-disclosure the worker had initiated the topic of conversation. Here he was not simply playing a song, nor was he coming straight out and talking about his relationship, but through playing a song and being slightly evasive (and yet hinting that it meant something to him) he garnered attention from some young people about his personal issues.

### 6.3.1 Reflections on Self-Disclosures

Self-disclosures come in a wide range, with individual workers and organisations having different levels of what was considered appropriate sharing. In some observations sharing the relatively mundane personal events in a youth worker's life seemed to add depth to the relationship. They also allow young people to display kindness and understanding, or develop appropriate responses to meaningful events in the lives of others. They were being used to set a positive example, particularly if the worker feels it is helpful information for the young person's situation – but not if it is in danger of becoming the subject of gossip. Indeed, some workers displayed a dislike of sharing personal information – even when helpful to the young person – because that information cannot be taken back and may be misused by the young people in the future.

Some of the self-disclosures I observed could potentially normalise undesirable behaviours (such as, excessive drinking in a centre promoting moderation) or were possibly being initiated for the purpose of meeting a worker's need. There is an issue, therefore, around the integrity of the worker when making a disclosure. Even in organisations with strict expectations against sharing personal experiences, if the self-disclosure revolved around a shared interest with the young person often enthusiasm for the subject took over and a range of personal stories are eagerly exchanged. The content of the disclosure was also an important consideration, with personal information around sex and partners, home addresses and previous engagement in illicit activities less likely to be shared (particularly in the CCYC and LAYC). However sharing stories that relate to personal faith (particularly with some volunteers at the Youth Café and YM), those that provide an opportunity to educate without admitting to illegal activities, or sharing information about hobbies were all examples of less contentious self-disclosures.

YM stood out as a particular case with regard to self-disclosures, as more than any other it was a natural part of everyday conversation for the workers to share about the rest of their day, other aspects of their life, and sometimes personal issues. Through interviews, and whilst observing the training, this appeared to be predominantly because they believed their work could be more

effective (and their work was missional) if young people heard about examples of Christians going about their daily life. That is not to imply this was a deliberate strategy; but the culture in the organisation was such that sharing stories was the norm. While the other three centres did this less so, some of the Christian volunteers from the Youth Café would share personal stories of faith.

## 6.4 The Youth Worker's Role in the Wider Lives of Young People

This aspect of the youth work relationship came from amalgamating multiple smaller related themes in the data. It includes working 'out-of-hours', conversations focussing on the young people's lives outside the centre, seeing young people outside the centre (accidentally), and engaging with the family. It also includes workers being aware of, or involved in, young people's family lives, including: having a presence in other places such as school, gathering information from young people about their lives outside the centre, engaging in online communications with young people (e.g. Facebook), and workers' reaction to being invited to events by young people.

The familial atmosphere at YM was heightened by the youth workers' engagement with the wider family of the young people. The church-going families were well known amongst the workers, the 'Sticky Faith' training offered to workers was also available to parents of teenagers, and one of the workers reported having a mentoring arrangement with a young person at the request of their parents:

*That's definitely a difference between different youth clubs, because of [the] important relationships, I could see why parents would want someone they can trust being alongside their daughter rather than someone they've never met. While in a local authority they would have no idea. [YM Interview Emma]*

Although it was most prevalent at YM, CCYC also had a worker and manager who knew many of the families of the young people through other contexts in the community centre, while at the LA seeing or speaking to parents was very rare – in fact, not observed at all, and having a parent phone the centre to speak to the workers was once a news-worthy event at a later evaluation session.

At the YM engaging in young people outside of the centre is also reinforced through the perceived requirement to evangelise, or provide opportunities for faith development. During the training session, for example, the leaders spoke of empirical research in which 16-18 year olds felt unsupported by the church and their solution was for more adults to show an interest; five adults to every young person. The trainers were not suggesting overt evangelism, but that a natural by-

product of genuine adult interest in young people's lives was young people keeping their faith into adulthood.

This is a two-way relationship. Young people in the YM were included more widely into the youth workers' discussions than any other organisation. This was modelled when the centre was opened and any waiting young people were invited in rather than there being a specific start time. It is apparent in allowing people time and space to leave at their own pace rather than the closing time, and in young people joining in youth workers' conversations without hesitation. Workers were rarely hidden behind closed doors. The paid worker in particular made a point of speaking to everyone who entered, though the volunteers found one particular group more intimidating. The workers generally drew young people on the fringe into conversations with simple questions – asking about their opinions or experiences on a topic.

Workers' role in the wider lives of young people is partly shown through how they communicated with them. At the LAYC there was little communication between young people and youth workers between evenings (though, the centre was open five nights per week) and workers had a strong opinion against using mobile phones or social networks to communicate. At the CCYC the workers would phone and text the young people directly, while the YM was the only group to openly use Facebook. The paid worker explained his reasoning during interview:

*Interviewer - If a young person were to send a Facebook friend request, how would you react to that request?*

*Paul - If they, if they requested that I be their friend then generally I'd just accept that. That would be fine. I, er, I'm very aware that I have young people as friends on Facebook. And, so I'm sort of quite careful about what I put on there or, like, I see that as part of my, erm, both Facebook and Twitter, the things that I share on there are things that I'm happy to share with... You know, I think it is part of being transparent and the integrity thing, there's nothing I need to hide on Facebook or anything like that. But I wouldn't search for the young people in the group and ask to be their friend, but I think if they want to be my friend or if they want to follow me on twitter that's fine. I wouldn't initiate it, but I wouldn't reject them. [YM interview Paul]*

With regard to social media, young people at CCYC also knew workers are bound by policies which affect their ability to engage with them:

*Betty- [referring to workers adding young people as friends on Facebook] I bet if they're allowed we would though.*

*Dot - Ohh, if they're allowed.*

*Betty - if it wasn't thingy.*

*Dot - but it's like it's their job against the friend request*

*Interviewer- you think there might be a rule against it?*

*Collective- Yeah*

*Pat- It's like teachers, they can't add us, their accounts are private. [CCYC focus group]*

This highlights an ongoing difference between the centres. At the CCYC and LA the young people were more likely to recognise youth workers were bound by policies they had little control over. This was more so at the LA, while at the CCYC young people believed there would be some flexibility for extenuating circumstances (see below), while at the YM and Youth Café the young people expressed fewer opinions that implied they were aware of policies that may affect the behaviour of the workers. There is also an important difference in the terminology used to describe *not* 'friending' a young person on Facebook: Paul used the language of 'rejection' for failing to accept a request, while the young people at CCYC use the language of 'rules' and more widely the LA and CCYC workers use language of 'boundaries'. Paul, it is implied, is predominantly concerned with the negative outcome of failing to accept, while workers in other areas are more concerned with unintended consequences of befriending young people online.

The collaborative nature of decision making at YM echoes the general assumption of mutual accountability. At the YM workers have thought through ethical issues and can explain why they hold their own rules – for example, the paid worker and one volunteer both accept Facebook friend requests from young people, but they have their own reasons and 'rules' for keeping the online contact appropriate.

Depending on the context each organisation had some workers willing to meet out-of-hours with a young person. Workers generally struggled with questions around invitations to special events for young people. Flo at the CCYC explained that if it were an important life-event she recognised a dilemma because the young person obviously wanted them there and she has experience of it showing the young person you care enough to go above-and-beyond expectations, however during interview she was concerned this crosses a boundary:

*Would I just politely decline? "I'm washing my hair that night." It is the fact that they've thought enough of me to invite me. What would you do?*

*Because I've had my own daughter invite one of her old teachers to her dance show. It doesn't happen in school time. This teacher came on a Sunday afternoon. It caused a sensation, because everybody was like, "Oh, [the teacher's] here", and the whole school was like, "Wow!"*

*I thought, "That lady has gone above and beyond what she does in her own working practice." She'd just shown the young people that she's got an interest in them, and she's caring about what she's doing. [CCYC interview Flo]*

Another worker at the CCYC said she would be polite but brief if she saw someone outside of the centre, and would not specifically go to see them, again for fear of overstepping a boundary. However the young people in this conversation from the CCYC focus group would expect them to meet one-to-one to discuss something important:

*Interviewer - ... what do you think one of the youth workers would do if you asked to meet them one-to-one to discuss something sensitive?*

*Dot - say yeah*

*Valerie- I think they'd say yeah*

*Betty- If it was here [the centre], then not somewhere else.*

*Dot- if it was a simple place for them, say like the centre.*

*Interviewer- ok, but if you say I don't know, like, can we meet in [a nearby town] for a coffee to Maureen [worker]*

*[collective]- nahh*

*Betty- I don't think she'd do that*

*Dot- I think Maureen would say straight away no bother, I'll come, if it was important.*

*Valerie- and it would have to be something important*

*Dot- but if it was 'come with me and have a cuppa' she'd say 'go away don't be stupid'. But if it was 'Maureen I'm pregnant' she'd say 'I'm coming now, I'll meet you at so and so', so they're there when you need them*

*Pam- and say if you're having family problems they'll come and speak to you*

*Dot- yeah, yeah. They're there for you, but they wouldn't go, like take you, if you were just like 'can we meet for a coffee' because they're doing their job as usual.*

*Pam- They'd go for a coffee if you wanted to chat,*

*Dot- yeah, but not just for the crack*

*Interviewer- Not just socially?*

*Dot- It is professional though isn't it. [CCYC focus group]*

Here the young people believed the workers would be available to them in difficult times, but there was something about the status of being 'professional' that meant they would not accept the invitation if it were purely social. The young people were more positive about a worker coming to see an event they were taking part in, stating in the focus group "they'd be the first one there, they'd be screaming" and "I think they'd be proud... they wouldn't dare not turn up".

At the YM there was also a positive attitude towards attending events that workers had been invited to, with the paid worker suggesting in interview that "it is important to show an interest in all parts of their lives, especially if they're asking for that". The young people at the YM were unequivocal – the workers would come provided they were available. However the minister has a concern that this may breed an unhealthy relationship should a worker go to several personal events – that if they do it for one young person they may be overwhelmed with requests they would then have to accept for the sake of fairness.

With regard to families, at YM many young people's family were known to the workers through church, but for those who were not part of the church the workers had little interaction with them. At CCYC there were occasional visits by parents, perhaps because the building they used was for the whole community. However at the LAYC the times that workers met with parents were relatively extreme and news-worthy events, for example the story that a parent had phoned the centre about the time they shut was passed around the workers over several nights as a news item.

#### **6.4.1 Reflections on the Worker's Role in the Wider Lives of Young People**

Although the levels of involvement of workers in the wider lives of young people produced the widest range of responses and observations, there were some common themes. In practice, this was a larger issue at the YM where it was relatively common practice to interact with young



people's wider lives, and in one case at a parent's request. With regard to communication, online interaction was an outright 'no' at three organisations, only workers at YM used Facebook as a way to communicate events and aimed to set an online example with a sense of integrity. The CCYC did make use of young people's mobile numbers to keep in touch and ask where young people were, or remind them about the group.

With regard to meeting outside the club, there was a more positive response if it was around an important event, but less so for a social meeting. For special events these were split into two by workers – firstly, those detached public events, for example attending a football match a young person was part of. Those who were positive about this said it showed that they cared and had an interest in the young person. Those who did not think it was a good idea suggested this was because of time and ability. Secondly a personal event – like a birthday party – was considered by most to be overstepping a boundary. Only the paid worker at the YM said that this could have relationship building advantages in showing that level of interest, but he would do it with his family, and 'pop in'. There was a further issue at the YM with supporting young Christians in a potentially hostile environment and therefore trying to get into their schools to be part of their lives there. However it was also recognised that the wider church and community context at the YM makes boundary setting 'messy'. This split between the YM and other organisations echoes a difference found in a small quantitative study on working out of hours with young people, published elsewhere (Hart 2015). Here, workers in a faith setting were significantly more likely to work with young people outside of their normal club or working hours than other voluntary sector workers or statutory sector workers. However in this research the reason why becomes clearer: many youth workers recognise the advantage in relationship building by going above-and-beyond expectations. It developed the implication that the young people were cared for.

## 6.5 Setting an Example

Setting an example also draws together the themes role modelling, flourishing, use of humour (which particularly relates to using it to set an example, positive or negative), *not* acting as a role model, and several potentially worthy actions including encouraging, and appearing kind or generous. That is, those times in the field work where a youth worker used their position (whether it was deliberate or not) to potentially influence the thoughts, attitudes, or behaviours of a young person. Setting an example was observed (or spoken about) as being a conscious decision to model a particular set of behaviours, and at other times it seemed to be a subconscious reaction to events, both are included here. At times the ability to be a positive role model was inhibited through behaviours that appeared to the observer as inconsistent with the

aims and values of the organisations (or, more generally, youth work), and these are also drawn together in this section.

Several different approaches to role modelling and example setting were found across the organisations. Some workers and organisations saw the role of the worker as being good example on the evening, but were explicit that this did not make an impact in other areas of their life. Some workers believed they were to be a role model at all times, even in their personal lives. And others felt it was good practice to 'be yourself' to avoid hypocrisy, even if that meant being open about certain undesirable behaviours or attitudes.

Within the confines of this research, which was considering ethical issues in youth work relationships rather than asking specifically about the ethical foundations on which decisions were made, it is impossible to know whether the workers were displaying the characteristic of kindness and generosity, however it is possible to recognise they were acting in such a way that is consistent with a 'kind' person – even if the motivation is based on a sense of duty or greater-good. Youth workers as role models in YM required a certain character as workers were expected to share in the wider lives of young people – that is, an individual who is not acting as a role model has little place sharing in the lives of their young people. It was also assumed one cannot be a role model without a sound character. This was often seen in youth workers serving young people through acts of kindness and hospitality, and also in acting as an exemplar for certain values. For example, in these short extracts the workers offer to make young people a drink, or go above-and-beyond expectations of their role:

*Paul [paid worker] answers the phone from a parent who is concerned about a revision book of their daughters that has been left behind. He goes into the office and finds it, and offers to bring it on Friday to a meeting where he will see the parent, or he can drop it off now if it's more urgent. [YM field note #05]*

*Paul was making a hot chocolate in the kitchen. When a young person came round the corner, Simon offered him one immediately [YM field note #06]*

*During the church service he [Paul] said to the congregation that the aim of the youth work was to provide a place for young people to meet, be accepted for who they are, and that parents like that they are part of a non-competitive club where the young people can just be themselves, and have a place to talk and receive support – they don't need to do or be anything special, or better than others, or prove themselves. [YM field note Service #01]*

In other organisations there was an expectation amongst some of the workers that they should set an example – when a local authority worker at the CCYC declined to take part in an art activity she was gently reprimanded by the visiting artist:

*Maureen did not join in with painting the canvases (which may have been because she did not want to use up resources – I felt like that). However [the artist] asked her to, and said she was ‘supposed to lead’ saying ‘if I can’t make you do it, then I won’t be able to make the young people do it because they’ll complain you don’t have to’. [CCYC field note #02]*

Equally there were examples of workers modelling kindness and generosity to others:

*Towards the end of the night the young people talked about ‘Shaun’, a 28 year old man (the young people referred to him as a ‘Smackhead’) who walked in. Laura (team leader) gave him a Snickers and sent him out, and this became a joke for an evening – she, and Carly [worker], tried to explain if he were on drugs there may be reasons for it (such as abuse), while the young people were saying that he ‘did not deserve anything’ or even that ‘he should be dead’. [LAYC field note #05]*

Whether intentionally attempting to set an example or not, here Laura was observed to be offering something small to a person who the young people thought undeserving, and rather than simply talking about why that person may be on drugs, it had become a physical example of an act of kindness.

A disagreement between two workers offered a different opportunity for workers to act as role models. At the Youth Café two workers took alternative positions about a young person asking advice on tattoos:

*She [young person] noticed Rob’s tattoos and said she wanted one. Rob said she should wait until she’s in her 20s, as he likes tattoos but the only ones he regrets are ones from his teens. The young person said she wanted a feather on her ankle and some song lyrics by Jessie J on her wrist. Mary [worker] said that song lyrics would go out of fashion and she’d be stuck with them, but Rob disagreed, saying that it was like a life-story, and that even if Jessie J went out of fashion it would remind her of something of her life now. [Youth Café field note #08]*

The content of this exchange was almost incidental, it was showing the young person how two adults could have a discussion over a potentially controversial issue. It was calm, and the workers

provided two opinions – which seemed to help the young person think through making an informed decision.

Role modelling was not only formulated as acting out a particular positive example, but also at times there were some behaviours workers would avoid in order to prevent a negative example being set – at CCYC and LAYC this was enforced by organisational policy. For example, workers were not allowed to smoke in view of the young people.

There were times youth workers would seem to set an example that was undesirable, when a youth worker's behaviour could be regarded as setting a negative example [from the CCYC]:

*When making the cakes the girls did the measuring and mixing, put the cakes in the oven, washed and cleaned up, then iced the cakes by making butter icing. During this time Jenny [student worker] reminded them of their hygiene requirements throughout, but then several times licked some icing or mixture off her finger, but then did not wash her hands afterwards. [CCYC field note #03]*

Youth workers at LAYC rarely talked about themselves as 'role models' during interview, though one worker did explain in interview they aimed to treat young people with respect and would not use offensive language towards them to model how to treat others. Occasionally there were times when I interpreted a youth worker's behaviour as contrary to setting a positive example – for example, being dishonest:

*Brian (youth worker) is talking about a conversation he had with a young person about gaining a references: 'Paula said to me earlier "If anyone rings I'm a volunteer youth worker". I went "It is alright Paula, everyone in here is a volunteer youth worker once we've done the CVs"' – though a more mature member of the group, she hasn't ever been referred to as a volunteer, nor given any kind of responsibility in the club. [LAYC field notes #14]*

Certain topics of conversation that could set a negative example went unchallenged, such as the normalising of excessive alcohol drinking by a visitor to CCYC and workers at LAYC, and this example from field notes with workers at the Youth Café normalising the sexualising of young women in their conversations:

*On the TV was 'Splash', a TV show where celebrities learn to dive. When Charlotte Jackson came on screen in a bikini Andy [paid worker] subtly tapped Ben [volunteer] and winked. A couple of minutes later, before the dive, Ben said something I did not hear, and Andy*

*replied with 'she is a good looking lass like' (all in front of the girls who were also watching). [Youth Café field note #02]*

Also at the YM, when the paid worker was advertising a 40 day programme of giving up 'luxuries' a volunteer worker spoke out:

*They were talking about a Lenten scheme where the young people and workers give up different things each week. Helen said she wouldn't be doing it, quite bluntly. It included giving up 'indulgences', media, the internet, and time – by doing something for for others.*  
[YM field note #03]

Here there are perhaps two interpretations: Helen is perhaps acting a role model, giving show that it was ok for young people to decline the programme too. However, she did take the focus off the message of the paid worker which may have affected its impact.

More subtly, ignoring undesirable attitudes from young people could also undermine the worker's ability to be a role model. Here, a particularly dismissive approach to 'love' was displayed but not challenged:

*While the snooker was happening, the girls were cutting out love hearts. Laura [team leader] asked them to write what they love – some put their boyfriends' names, but other put things like chocolate. Laura asked some of the boys to do the same, and they did, however their answers were generally more rude – like 'big asses'. [LAYC field note #10]*

One worker at the Youth Café did not think that outside of the club he had to be a 'role model'. He was challenged for walking in front of cars while crossing a road by the young people who saw him. This was challenged by another worker, Amy, who believed that he should be a role model at all times. Workers here were not always careful about what they shared with each other, or how that would affect their relationship and ability to be role models. A similar discussion arose with a guest (who was a youth worker, here to advertise a programme at another centre), at the CCYC:

*While [the guest] was here they were also talking about false eyelashes. She said that she had big ones on to go to the horse races, and she looked really nice, but then one fell off onto her cheek and she didn't realise it – she said she'd had a drink. Pat [usual youth worker worker] said something about being a role model, and [the guest] said she wasn't at the weekend.*

Therefore a youth worker as a role model outside of the centre – having that kind of integrity – is not a universally accepted ideal. However even in the centres there were some evidence of

workers setting an example contrary to youth work or organisational values or messages. Ben, 19, whose girlfriend was three months pregnant, talked at length about his upcoming baby. He showed ultrasound pictures to the girls, who appreciated it and made the expected 'aww' sounds, and asked questions like "so are you excited to be a Dad?", to which Ben was always positive (Youth Café field note #03). I felt this was in danger of glamorising or normalising teenage pregnancy. Ben did not say whether the baby was planned. Before the end of my time at the café, Ben had split from his girlfriend – something else the young people were made aware of. The implications of this for the young men were uncertain, but it is possible that they would see this as a norm – getting a girlfriend pregnant, and leaving with few consequences (though there may be some for Ben, these were not presented to the group).

There were times in the field work when youth workers had the opportunity to challenge negative behaviours or attitudes, and often they did, however this had to be held in tension with some workers' commitment to show unconditional positive regard and withhold judgement of a young person, for example:

*In front of the TV watching the BBC sports personality of the year Laura [team leader] sat down with two young women, and was chatting predominantly to the closest one. Topics of conversation seemed to be a hospital visit by the young person, training courses, and what she wore on an evening out. She spoke openly about being drunk, without any shame. Laura listened without showing any kind of judgement against her, but nor did she say or do anything that could be seen to be promoting that behaviour (though is being silent affirming drunken behaviour in itself?). [LAYC field notes #05]*

Reflecting on this exchange I recognised an inherent tension between avoiding a judgemental attitude and allowing young people to 'be themselves', but without unintentionally normalising negative behaviour.

### 6.5.1 Reflections on Setting an Example

Role modelling can be about the character of the worker and allowing that to come through in the work, or drawing from situations outside of the youth centre. Workers can be role models through the example they set in the club, whether that is echoed in other parts of their life or otherwise. As well as the characteristics displayed through the actions of the worker, it can also be displayed through modelling appropriate interactions and through allowing attitudes to come out through conversations. However, setting an example is not inherently positive. It is possible to set a negative example – for example, through the normalising of undesirable behaviours or

attitudes. Some organisations sought to curb this through the introduction of rules preventing objectionable actions in front of young people – such as, workers not being allowed to smoke in sight of young people. Failing to challenge young people when they display distasteful attitudes can also serve to set a negative example through normalising those attitudes – however this provides a greater dilemma, as there is a tension between appropriately challenging young people and ensuring a sense of unconditional positive regard remains.

Here there was little difference between organisations. Rather, the observed breaches in setting an example came entirely from workers who were sessional workers or volunteers, and perhaps training or experience is more important than sector here. However the observations did show the necessity for a sense of integrity as, even with the strictest professional boundaries in place at the LAYC, young people did see workers behaving in a way contrary to the messages of the centre. There was also displayed two approaches to setting an example; that is, in terms of the content of what is said and the characteristics of the worker being displayed. Helen's reaction to the lent project at the YM is a good example of the two in conflict: her willingness to be critical and independent when the worker was advertising the scheme, while the content (her negativity) may not have been appreciated by the paid worker.

## 6.6 Showing Respect

This section on showing respect comes from drawing together examples where workers appeared to genuinely listen to young people, showed positive regard for their wellbeing, engaged with young people's issues without judgement, situations where young people are assumed to be autonomous social agents and able to make their own choices, young people are provided a warm welcome and opportunities to participate, and through affirming young people's worth by being willing to go 'above and beyond' usual expectations. Conversely, those examples where young people do not appear to be particularly valued or respected are also included here. It includes situations where it seemed young people were treated as if they were valuable or of worth, or where it appeared as if the worker was behaving respectfully.

Workers' respect for others seemed to permeate throughout the interactions with young people. In most cases it extended beyond a functional approach to respect (i.e. giving some responsibility to young people and a passing commitment to the UNCRC), and rather affects almost every interaction in the clubs. For example, a theme from CCYC was listening to young people – listening with what appeared a genuine regard and respect. Young people often ask to talk about sensitive issues with staff, and say this is the only place they feel they can trust adults to listen without judgement and with confidentiality. However it is also broader than those times of difficulty and

crisis; workers engaging in conversation and listening to young people seemed to happen more at this club than any other, possibly facilitated by the small library-room that is used. As a routine example:

*The session was held in the library around a few tables put together. The workers spent most of the evening sat with the young people actively engaging with them in conversations about their parents, the 'Hollyoaks' story line, voting (today was polling day), school and the 'red room' [an exclusion unit], and the fact their school hadn't arranged anything for children in need. [CCYC field note #01]*

But these times of general talking led to more serious conversations – young people talked about funerals they had attended, issues at home, or issues with their partners. They particularly seemed to value the opportunity to be listened to because it is infrequent in other places:

*Chloe and Sarah both reported the teacher with pastoral responsibility for them said Chloe's problems were 'boring' because she was 'sick of hearing of it all'. Jenny [student youth worker] suggested she talks to another teacher – one she gets on with. They seemed to feel let down by this teacher who had listened to one person above another. Here, however, they found people willing to hear them out, to listen and ask appropriate questions, and to offer advice. [CCYC field notes #16]*

This openness and feeling of security and worth young people got from being listened to here put the workers in an excellent position to offer support. Chloe, for example, smoked when I first attended. Her Mother did not know, however the people at the centre did. Although the workers tried to get the young people on smoking cessation classes and generally showed their displeasure at smoking and encouraged 'informed decision making' (as Flo phrased it), the young people felt comfortable enough to continue on in their presence. One evening Chloe's mother caught her holding a cigarette – though Chloe argued she was only holding it for a friend she was 'barred in' (i.e. grounded) for two weeks. When she came back she decided to stop smoking – however found that much of the help was aimed at adults (Chloe was 14). In the centre Chloe found support and encouragement from the workers with whom she had a relationship. The milestones of a week and a month without a smoking were celebrated in the club. Because she was still maintaining her innocence at home, the full time worker made her somewhat generic 'congratulations on your hard work' certificates, to show support and encouragement without raising Chloe's parents' suspicions.



Young people's honesty was most pronounced with issues they would not talk about with other people as respecting them led to an increase in young people assuming the workers were trustworthy – during the focus group they said they would not ask for a chlamydia test at home or from their teachers, and the workers are the only adults who know some of these young people smoked:

*It also occurred to me that, as Dot's Mam didn't know she smoked, this was probably the only place with adults she regularly visits where she feels comfortable having her cigarette packet out, and talking about her smoking habits. This is an interesting ethical issue – smoking probably wouldn't fit with Aristotle's idea of a 'good life', given the health and life expectancy repercussions, and now also social stigma attached. But in a country with an outright ban on advertising cigarettes and where supermarkets can't display packets, and it's illegal for under 18s to buy cigarettes, Flo [full time worker] has presumably made the decision that the young people feeling comfortable to be themselves and open about who they are/what they do is more important than unwittingly normalising smoking in the group [this assumption was backed up when asked about during interview]. [CCYC field note #09]*

Young people's autonomy and right to self-determination was also generally respected. At YM it could be seen in the workers taking little for granted with the young people, even the consent form they use (which was originally worded by the diocese) had been altered because it had a clause assuming young people consented to the public use of their image. The paid worker changed this to make it an opt-in clause instead.

With regard to keeping information confidential, some young people during a focus group highlighted how this was something they felt made the youth workers different from other adults they interact with:

*Sam- But I definitely have a more relaxed relationship with my teachers now that I ever did at lower school because I feel a lot more comfortable going to ask them about something outside of school as well as inside school.*

*Emma- I suppose if you tell a teacher something sometimes they are obligated to have to tell someone*

*Sam- yeah they have to tell someone*

*Emma- If it's certain things, or say if they overhear a conversation or you might be saying something to a friend that they think is inappropriate you might get in massive amounts of trouble, whereas that's something you could approach a youth worker about. So I think with advice and stuff they're good, but with a teacher there's like boundaries.*

*Sam- teachers can get in trouble if they don't report something. They could then be held responsible if something happens.*

*Interviewer- So what kind of things are you thinking about when you say they have to report something that you say?*

*Sam- Say bullying. If you were being bullied, you could go to your youth worker and they don't have to tell anyone, but if you tell a teacher they will get another teacher involved and other people*

*Ruth- counselling and things*

*Interviewer- right, I hadn't realised...*

*Ruth- they have to tell senior authority or something*

*Emma- it's like in our year there has been loads of people that have got pregnant. Like loads and loads. And normally teachers just found out by hearsay from all the students, and when they did, the girls didn't say anything because they knew they'd be kicked out because it's not safe and stuff. So they didn't tell them at all and then they got in trouble for not telling them and then they got in trouble for telling them. [YM focus group]*

In this example, young people show they are grateful that information stays between them and the youth workers:

*Sarah - (who's had problems living with her Mam/Nan)- you can tell them something you can't tell your own Mam or Dad.*

*Betty - And like if people ask for a chlamydia test you know you can go to them. You wouldn't ask anyone else that.*

*Dot- Aye, you wouldn't go to your Mam 'can I have a chlamydia test'. [laughter]*

*Betty- stuff like that.*

*Valerie- and it just basically never leaves the room.*

*Interviewer- [talking to Pam] Would that be the same for you, you feel like you can trust them?*

*Pam- I think that's my main thing, trust. It's where you feel comfortable isn't it. You don't feel like*

*Rest of group- Yeah*

*Pam- you don't feel intimidated. You go places you feel intimidated or awkward, while here you just*

*Valerie- you feel yourself*

*Pam- just chilled don't ya*

*Valerie- like you're here with all your friends. [CCYC focus group]*

However the confidentiality of the conversations were put in jeopardy at the LAYC, where youth workers were being encouraged to use a region-wide database to report their conversations, or those conversations overheard, if they required a 'substantial intervention' (which included asking about contraception or for sexually transmitted infection tests). These conversations would then be accessible to social services, the police, and the NHS, who could use that information to their own ends. The manager at the LAYC was aware of this:

*We're still doing the youth work. We're still capturing all the moments that we used to do. But it's on paper now. If we're doing a substantial intervention, it means that if we're doing this substantial intervention with them, we're recording that on paper, and it's going on a database that our fellow professionals could see. It's there to help them. It's there to help them, but everything has a negative impact on them as well, doesn't it? Somebody could pick up something that the young people [said]... At the moment they're signing this consent form to say that they're aware of that information sharing. But I still think the young people are not fully aware of what they're signing up to. [LAYC interview Manager]*

Young people's decision making ability was respected at the YM. Young people influenced the programme of activity – both in planning it, but also on an evening making joint decisions on how – if at all – that plan would be enacted. The paid worker was often still the gatekeeper for these activities (i.e. the young people go through him and he says if it is ok or not), however I did not observe him turning down a request for a game, activity, or event suggested by young people. There are myriad ways at YM the young people could abuse the trust they are given with a lack of supervision and self-serving tuck shop. Equipment could 'go missing', tuck could disappear, unsupervised rooms left in disarray, paper work in the office disrupted. And yet typically these things do not happen. Young people are left in positions where they could make choices to

engage in negative behaviour, and yet they did not. There seems a close relationship between trust and respect.

Youth workers serving and offering hospitality to young people was observed throughout the ethnography. This went beyond workers making hot drinks or food for young people when requested, to workers welcoming young people in early and allowing them to stay after the club had officially closed (in YM), arranging special evenings with careers advisers for the young people (CCYC), making efforts to source better equipment and resources (Youth Café), and making space to work one-to-one with young people that asked for advice (CCYC and LAYC). However, acts of service could be split into two broad categories – those that happened through the youth workers offering something to young people (predominantly, YM) and those that responded to requests by young people (predominantly in CCYC and LAYC). In the YM workers were not only there to work with young people, to guide and support them, to nurture and develop their faith, but they saw their role as to serve them. The workers would volunteer to help the young people – from making hot drinks, to relaying messages to other young people, to stocking the tuckshop with items the young people had requested.

Youth workers at LAYC also occasionally served young people directly in some way – for example one worker would sometimes use the kitchen to produce food. This happened much less often than at the Youth Ministry and the CCYC, though significantly more than the Youth Café. When it did happen, it was different in emphasis. Typically at the youth ministry and, generally, at the CCYC youth workers would be proactive and ask young people if they wanted a particular drink or piece of food (e.g. hot chocolate after a snowball fight, or a hot-beef roll that had been left over from a community event). At the LAYC young people had to request something different – though every time this was observed workers would gladly make young people what they had requested, or would set about making it alongside the young people. By contrast, at the Youth Café, even when young people requested something from the menu (such as a pizza) the workers, particularly the manager, would decline it.

The structure of the different clubs provided different models of welcome. At the YM, where the young people did not pay in, young people were acknowledge and welcomed, with conversation starting immediately. If any regular attenders were missing they were asked about (thus implying to the young people present that when they are away, they are also missed). Young people behaving uncharacteristically quiet were sat next to, and those trying to enter a conversation or group were typically invited in. Workers at the YM also showed an active interest in the lives of the young people. This was shown during interview through their willingness to engage in the

wider lives of the young people, but also through asking follow-up questions from previous conversations. The paid worker in particular made a point of talking to all the young people throughout the evening.

In the other three clubs, words of welcome typically followed, or were immediately prior to, a request for payment. Although there was some formalising of the youth work relationship around money, in the LAYC several young people saw this as their place of refuge during difficult times. Young people come to the LAYC as a place they know they are safe to be themselves, where they will be welcomed in, and they can get advice and help. For example:

*When I arrived at 6:55 the three workers were in already, and one older young person was sat in the office. I was fortuitous – as I walked in Laura [team leader] asked why he was here ‘you don’t normally come on a Friday’. He said he’d fallen out with his Mam and he had nowhere else to go, so he came here. He obviously valued it as some kind of safe haven, or place to come. He asked whether Laura still had the list of apprenticeships, Laura said no but she would print one off for him. He said he was looking for one in Aberdeen where they will relocate you. [LAYC field notes #11]*

Particularly evident at the Youth Café however were multiple opportunities youth workers had to do something for young people, but these were missed. Young people recognised that the current workers here did less than previous workers. The workers, the manager in particular, found reasons to say ‘no’ to the requests made by young people, requests that appeared reasonable, such as asking for pizza:

*When the young people came in they asked Rob for pizza. He ignored their request, then when they were sat down in the back room they asked again at 7:15. Rob refused, saying it was too late, it would take 30 minutes to cook and then they’d not have time to eat it [the café shut at 8]. [Youth Café field note #09]*

A similar situation happened in two subsequent evenings, when the young people were refused food with around 45 minutes before close. Workers here had a preoccupation with leaving ten minutes early and this missed opportunities for them to serve young people. Young people remember times gone with other workers, when they felt more valued:

*Carl talked about Joe [a previous youth worker]. He said he’d take him for milk shake at Starbucks, at Teesside park. He said he’d spend from 10:30am-9:30pm at the club, and that it was ‘my life’. Obviously this connection had a profound effect on him, and he has good memories. [Youth Café field note #11]*

Though taking a young person to a coffee shop has its own ethical considerations, here the contrast between a worker who makes time to spend with a young person one to one, and a form of practice that refuses to produce food for paying customers, is evident.

Often young people were ignored at the Youth Café which gives an impression of disrespect. The workers appeared disinterested in them, those opportunities to make the young people a priority that are ignored, and the level of inconsistency, unreliability and disorganisation culminate in reinforcing a negative attitude towards young people – this appeared to highlight that the young people were not well valued or respected. Treating young people as a lower priority than text messages, conversations, and meetings, or neglecting to be sufficiently organised or reliable enough to care consistently is an ethical issue. The disrepair of the café implied young people's spaces were not worth keeping clean or well maintained, and the young people recognised this:

*David- Yeah and he [the last manager] had the Xbox out there*

*Joe- yeah the Xbox out there, he had a better pool table, better table tennis table, and he had the [inaudible]*

*Interviewer – Yeah?*

*David - Cos it is, yeah*

*Joe- But now right, the radiators fall apart. [laughter]*

*Carl- Scruffy as fuck [Youth Café focus group]*

When workers preferred to talk amongst each other rather than interact with the young people – or began playing table tennis/pool but are soon distracted – it seemed to imply that the young people were a lower priority. Refusing to make food 45 minutes before the end of the session tells the young person that the worker's time is more important than their hunger. When putting the heating on mid-February is a cause of discussion, this again showed the young people's comfort is not a priority:

*Amy [sessional worker] asked to put the heating on – Rob [manager] thought it was on, but the timer hadn't worked – though it was usual for it to be cold. Rob said she could if she took responsibility for turning it off. She said yes, but he said he did not think it would make any difference. The result was the evening was quite cold and everyone kept their coats on. [Youth Café field note #05]*

The context is important here. The Youth Café was a site of ideological conflict, with key members of the management committee hoping for a more overtly Christian space, while the workers (not practicing Christians) believed that was not in the best interest of the workers. The workers, too, were people who had little training in youth work and began their journey into youth work a few years prior, through a job centre placement scheme. What appeared a lack of respect, therefore, could have been the outworking of a divided staff and management team. However there are similar, less extreme, examples in other centres. For example, at the YM:

*At times Helen [intern] in particular looks disinterested – on her phone. Most of the conversation revolved around a dessert Island Disks party the interns were going to – and what book they would take [several young people were around the table for the conversation]. Two of the young people tried to join in the conversation at various points, however the particularly extrovert personalities of the three workers made it hard getting into the conversation – I found it quite tiring trying to join in, they would talk over each other and you couldn't pause mid-sentence to find the right word, or someone would take over from you. At one point Ellie sat down on a table which meant she had her back to two young people, rather than finding a way to enlarge the circle so all could be part of it. [YM Field notes #10]*

### 6.6.1 Reflections on Respect

While the internal characteristic of respectfulness is difficult to empirically verify, there were many examples of youth workers behaving in such a way that young people would reasonably feel valued or respected. This could be through listening intently and showing an interest in the issues affecting the young people. Respectful workers would take their concerns seriously and accept the young people's account of events. They supported the choices the young people made, assuming they have the right of self-determination, and encouraged them where other adults could not or would not. They supported young people in their decision making and in showing they were trusted. Young people could see the youth clubs as a refuge, a place they can be themselves.

Respect was also shown through acts of service, through making food and drinks for young people or getting better resources. These opportunities to serve came in two ways – as a request from a young person that is taken up, or as an offer to the young people. The welcome young people received also shows something of the respect they were offered and sets a tone for the relationship (more on this in chapter 7). There was a difference, for example, in being welcomed with the request for payment and being welcomed through an invitation to join a conversation.

There were other occasions observed where workers appeared disrespectful. This was through opportunities to serve young people and, over a period of time, this appears to affect the level of worth youth workers ascribe to the young people. Where youth workers sat, and who they were excluding from conversations or activities based on their position in room were important considerations, as was any implications from using their mobile phone during conversations (or instead of engaging in conversations with) young people.

In chapter 8 it is argued that the use of virtue ethics is important in working well in relationship with young people. Some of the key reasons are found in this section. There is not likely to be, for example, a written policy about sitting with your back to young people. It may be that one could consider it a 'duty' to position yourself in such a way that is inclusive, but then there may be times a worker wants to use their body language to provide a young person with some space or privacy. It is in situations like this having a character that informs good decision making over mundane practices (like where to sit) is particularly important. There are other examples already used that also highlight respect, for example respecting young people's ability to make decisions over whether or how to communicate with youth workers outside of normal hours. Chapter 7 and the first half of chapter 8 brings these themes together again, to show how them relate to each other and describe the ethical complexity workers are regularly engaging with when building relationships with young people.

## 6.7 Use of Authority and power

In this section those examples of uses of authority and the different ways in which power was displayed are drawn together. Authority follows Sercombe's (2010a) definition of the 'legitimate use of power', and includes youth workers enforcing (or not) health and safety rules and challenging attitudes and behaviours they interpret as undesirable. Power is considered through examples of youth workers maintaining control of the evening's activities and vetoing ideas, the theme of cooperation is included as it provides examples of youth workers and young people engaging in an egalitarian fashion, and also highlighting those times young people seemed to hold all the power. Themes of inclusion and participation are included here, as examples of inclusion from the field work often coincided with workers using or delegating the power inherent in their role to allow some young people to participate, or otherwise.

At times where the health and safety of young people could be jeopardised the youth workers used their authority. For example this extract from field notes shows the paid worker enjoying a snowball fight with the young people as if he was one of the group, however he maintained his authority for the sake of protecting the young people:



*All the male members engaged in a snow ball fight. Paul was part of this, and at times was indistinguishable from the young people, however he maintained a sense of authority by enforcing a 'no head shots' rule, and by trying to turn a free-for-all into a more structured game with two teams and bases. [YM field note #01]*

The minister of the church with the YM described this authority as being for the purpose of helping “folk feel secure” during interview and ensuring the relationship remains appropriate. The Head of Youth Services at the LAYC suggested workers take different roles with regard to authority, with some being particularly authoritarian or disciplinarian (though I did not observe anyone regularly fulfilling those roles there), with others shying away from any conflict. She felt it better for youth workers to display a consistent level of authority for the sake of enforcing rules and maintaining a safe environment.

The head of youth services at the LAYC also gave several examples of times when workers had approached her asking for advice or permission to use a certain level of their own judgement when engaging with young people, though not in child protection cases, thus the power to make decisions moves up the hierarchy:

*There are some things that, because of the way we're structured and we're a hierarchical organisation, have to be done right and should be done right. Things like child protection. The rules are the rules. But, even then, there are grey areas. There's that taking in the needs of the young people that has to be and should be done. [LAYC interview Head of Youth Services]*

Workers also have the power and authority to decide who is ‘included’ and ‘excluded’ from the clubs, or specific activities. Often the field notes coded ‘inclusion’ would coincide with those coded ‘power’ as workers were using the power and authority intrinsic to their position to delegate certain roles or responsibilities to young people, or to prevent young people from having access to certain resources. The level of involvement young people were able to have in the organisation was decided by workers, or organisational policy.

Inclusion came across in two forms: either as a tool workers used, or as an ethos that permeated the atmosphere of a centre. At the LAYC, for example, workers would include young people in programme setting meetings, and they would ask young people to help to plan residential and sleep overs. However they were excluded from the daily meetings, left outside on an evening until the workers were ready for them, and prevented from using certain areas in the centre. This had

specific advantages; it provided space for workers to reflect, and aided the smooth running of a busy centre, but it also served to exclude young people from resources.

By contrast at the YM and CCYC, young people were able to enter early and leave late, and at the YM all rooms were open to young people. Inclusion at the YM was also more reciprocal here than in other organisations. Workers would typically join in with the activities being offered. Though in other clubs it is typical to see workers play table tennis or snooker, it is less likely to see them play on a games console, play football, or engage in a snowball fight with young people. Inclusion here was also the aim of the whole church community, with the Minister suggesting during interview that they were trying to remove barriers from young people's participation in the wider life of the church.

There were few static rules at the YM and it was typical for workers to get together and talk when issues arose and use their authority flexibly:

*When Amy [volunteer] brought her Miranda box set she noticed it had a 15 certificate. She asked Paul [paid worker] if it was ok [to watch with young people] – and they noticed one of the other DVDs brought in was a 15 too. Paul said that everyone here was year 9, so there would be some 14 year olds, but that was probably ok. They then looked at the back of the boxes to see why they were 15 and made the decision that it was ok to watch because it was only for a small amount of bad language. To make the decision they – together – considered the ages of the young people (and decided against an absolute '14 year olds can't watch 15s, ever' policy), and used their judgement based on the information provided for why a 15 had been awarded. [YM field note #07]*

Other priorities concerning practitioners could work against an ethos of inclusion. For example, there was some concern over how inclusive the LAYC was with the deposit system for gaining access to equipment. Trish (who said in interview she liked consistency and rules) wanted a flat fee, while Matt (another sessional worker) argued that not all young people can afford to pay so there should be some flexibility. The 'mechanics' of inclusion and participation are displayed on the walls through a young person's charter, which includes the right to be listened to, heard, and have a key role to play. However in reality level of inclusion would depend on ability and willingness to pay – albeit a small amount of money (30p per evening, £1 annual membership fee, £1 deposit for equipment).

Typically misuse of power by workers was not an issue in any of the organisations during observations, and young people and youth workers' interactions were often epitomised by

cooperation (that is not to imply conflict was entirely absent from the relationships). At CCYC there was an awareness by young people that they needed to co-operate (e.g. with filling out evaluation forms) in order to keep the level of provision, or at LAYC though young people occasionally complained about having to share the use of the sports hall, there was a generally understanding that by co-operating with the rules around fair use of the resources and the deposit system the club would function smoothly.

At the YM cooperation is highlighted most when making food – which happened regularly. For example:

*Today the planned activity was to make pancakes. Two young people were helping Paul [paid worker] and Emma [volunteer]. Emma and Paul were producing the mix, and [two young people] (siblings) were pouring the mix and flipping. Paul and Emma were treating them as competent and equal members of the endeavour, following their lead as much as explaining what to do.*

*The pancakes were different colours, with the young people mixing food colouring into the batter. There were enough pancakes for everyone, until people were full. There was no cost involved. There were a range of toppings – syrup, sugar, lemons, and chocolate spread. The workers were talking to each other and to the young people. There was a general feeling of productivity in the kitchen, it seemed like they were getting along with producing pancakes cooperatively. [YM field note #03]*

When making pizzas, chips, or posters this feeling of co-operation came from the underlying assumption by the workers that the young people could be trusted and their decisions were respected.

Young people were also observed using their power over the environment and relationship to create boundaries (I have referred to this in more detail elsewhere – Hart 2016). They use the space and equipment to encourage or dissuade youth workers interactions. In the YM there was a particular group of young people who often played music through a sound system. When they wanted their own space they would turn the music up until the workers moved into a different room. In a focus group the young people assumed they had the power over which adults they allow over a threshold, and which they push away:

*Interviewer- it might be easier to think about it and compare it with other people who work with you, so I guess teachers are typically the adults most other people interact with other than parents. How do you think they compare to youth workers.*

*Sam- I think youth workers respect us a bit more*

*Emma- And they're closer to us. Because, like we'll sit and chat and do stuff. Where as we wouldn't dream of like having teachers next to you. [YM Focus group #2]*

Helen from the YM, during interview, recognised that young people held much of the power regarding the boundaries in their relationship with them:

*It's really hard because it depends on the young people. Some of them don't really talk to any of us, so you just say, "Hello," and they then go off on their own. Then, some of them do like to talk to you, so you do get to be... I don't want to say 'friends' because it's not friends, but more friendly with some than others, depending upon those who want to engage and those who don't want to engage. [YM interview Helen].*

Young people are profoundly aware of professional boundaries and how this affects youth workers. For example, two young people are aware here they may have compromised a worker:

*Emily and Faith [young people] sat in the office at the beginning of the evaluation session. Emily said to Georgia [youth worker] 'I see you more as a friend than a youth worker' (completely off the cuff), and Georgia looked slightly embarrassed and didn't immediately reply, when Emily seemed to realise she'd put Georgia in an awkward position and said 'no, not really, like...' – though it was obvious they do have that close relationship. [LAYC field note #09]*

Young people are aware youth workers should keep them from harm and would joke about 'suing' a worker. They are also aware of boundaries designed for their protection. For example, here's Betty reminding a student on placement at the CCYC who has previously been described as seeing young people as peers (Jenny) that she isn't a fellow young person, but a worker:

*When Betty had finished her box [a craft activity], Jenny asked to take her picture. Betty put the box close to face and opened her mouth (full of sweets). Jenny kept asking her to close it, and just before taking a picture she'd open it again. Eventually Jenny got a picture without Betty's chewed sweets, and Betty (jokingly) stood up and said 'you've got my picture on your phone, you peado'. Jenny and Flo [full time worker] just laughed. [CCYC field notes #11]*

Though one may question whether Jenny should have recognised Betty didn't particularly want her picture taken, much of this interaction could be between two peers. It is through the final

phrase that we see Betty using humour to maintain a boundary – ‘you peado’ wouldn’t make sense in many other contexts, certainly not if they were peers.

### 6.7.1 Reflections on Authority and Power

Authority and power are two overlapping and complex concepts. Here, I have used authority to consider the workers’ approach to the responsibilities inherent in their role, particularly in maintaining a secure and safe environment for young people. Where there is little sense of authority workers avoid confrontation and challenging young people. Power has been used to describe workers or young people in a relationship where one has control over the other – with a middle ground where the relationship is egalitarian. Co-operation is a trait seen where the power differentials are limited (though I acknowledge it is possible for a young person to co-operate in their subservience, this is not how I use the term here).

Inclusion was also considered here, as it often came alongside ideas of authority and power. Workers decided, for example, the level of involvement young people can have in a club’s organisation. In organisations where there is greater inclusion young people can come in early and join in with conversations – inclusion is an ethos that runs throughout the relationship where workers have little (if any) time behind closed doors. Inclusion can be hampered through a young person’s ability to pay, where that is required. It can also appear mechanical, where there may be a policy or charter and young people are invited at certain times to participate in decision making about the club – for example, when planning a residential or a terms activities.

## 6.8 Trusting Young People

This theme of trust relates specifically to whether, and to what extent, youth workers show they trust the young people. This includes those observations where workers allowed young people to make decisions, to be in rooms or use resources unsupervised, to plan sessions, or had been given responsibility. There were two broad approaches to trust: that it was given freely, or it had to be earned.

The staff at YM allowed their young people greater freedom and less supervision than the other three centres. This came through young people serving themselves at the tuck shop, being allowed to be in a room without supervision, and use of the manager’s office. At the LAYC, by contrast, young people were required to have near-constant supervision. The young people were aware they were under surveillance, as explained in the next chapter. Similarly, if the worker in the sports hall at the LAYC needed to leave the room the game of football stopped and the young people had to leave too – young people could not be left unattended, neither could they use the

office (the Youth Café also had similar rules, though used less consistently). Some flexibility with this rule was observed: in the LAYC workers judged who they would allow to use the dance room unsupervised, whilst at the Youth Café it seemed dependant on whether a worker was willing to supervise the gym – if there were staff available, but not willing, to supervise young people, then they were allowed to use it alone. However if there was not enough staff so a worker could be in the gym, they were not allowed to use it.

At the YM young people were assumed to be autonomous and capable of taking on responsibility. They could be trusted to bring consent forms and money on the day of events, and also with baby-sitting the worker's children, being given centre keys, and running (with adult supervision) sessions for the younger groups. Young people were also afforded opportunities where they could make decisions, through the appropriate use of the centre's WiFi at YM and CCYC, to providing their own recipe when making pancakes and pizzas at the YM, and borrowing small amounts of money from staff at the CCYC.

Flo (the CCYC centre worker) would also trust some young people with responsibilities, and the CCYC manager allowed them to take items from the tuck shop on the promise they would pay at a later date. The general ethos at the CCYC was that young people could be bestowed with similar levels of trust as the YM, but these had to be earned. One example of this was when Flo had been approached by two young people to volunteer at a younger club:

*When the second young person arrived, they asked to do 'the policy thing'. Flo said 'yeah, if you want, while we wait'. I didn't know what this referred to, but picked up the idea during the exercise, and checked with Flo at the end to see if I had the idea right – these two young people had asked to start helping with the younger junior youth club, and Flo had agreed they could start to help for two weeks as a probationary period, provided they did a little training – she was concerned it would become another session for them, and they'd require 'looking after' rather than being of assistance.*

*...[the field notes describe the two young being asked what policies they think the CCYC has and how they're use]...*

*Flo then asked what they would do if their friends turned up, and Sarah explained she'd ask them to leave while she was working. Flo said that if they came to help they would be given jobs to do – like getting snacks ready, helping children with their coats, and packing up. They both agreed to help with any tasks that needed doing. Flo finally explained that if*

*they had a problem with her during the club they could speak to the centre manager, and a problem with any other staff and they could speak to her. [CCYC Field note #04]*

Although training in policies and a probationary period are relatively common practices for safe recruiting of volunteers, the conversation with Flo around this highlighted the emphasis she placed on her willingness to ask the young people to stop attending if they were not being helpful and prioritising the younger children.

At the CCYC this sense of cautious trust amongst the workers was evident in other ways. The local authority workers at CCYC said during observations they showed their trust in the young people through taking them on visits – while I was observing, for example, they went to the theatre. Future trips were dependent on the behaviour of the young people in the club and whether they could be ‘trusted’. The local authority workers at the CCYC also said in conversations during the observations they worked on the assumption the young people will be forgetful or disorganised and do not trust them to take care of their own diaries. However, young people had said during the focus group at the CCYC they feel trusted because the workers are comfortable enough to do the ‘time warp’ (a song and dance from the ‘Rocky Horror Picture Show’, a musical the group went to see together two months before this interaction) in front of them and risk ridicule. But to the manager there’s a larger bigger picture with regard to trusting and training young people: he explained during an impromptu unrecorded interview one evening that he hoped some of the young people could be trained into young volunteers as a form of succession planning. The issue of ‘earning trust’ was significantly more explicit in the CCYC, but it was more subtly present in the LAYC:

*The first 15 minutes were manic as people were signing in, putting deposits down and asking for tuck. Three of the older girls were helping by serving at the tuck shop – Brian obviously appreciated this as he gave them all a free can for helping [LAYC field note #19]*

I asked Brian later about the suspension of the usual rule, where young people were not allowed to serve themselves, and he explained it was partly out of necessity because it was so busy, but also because the group he asked to help had shown they could be responsible and trusted. In the Youth Café this worked alternately; young people were trusted with the tuck shop, but some young people betrayed that trust by stealing, and now no young people are allowed to serve (this is explained in more detail in the next chapter).

Money and possessions are another factor in trusting young people. At the LAYC young people regularly attempted to circumvent the table where they were to register their attendance and

'pay in', while at the CCYC young people did not attempt to pay too little or sneak in (though, it would be very hard to 'sneak' in the small part of the centre the young people use). They usually came in and volunteered to pay their debts. In a YM example, a worker shared her iPad with a young person, who then went to find music she thought the worker would enjoy. This, I reflected in my field notes, was more than just a young person being trusted with an expensive gadget, but the worker was trusting the music the young person was picking and what she was making her listen to would be appropriate (YM field notes #08).

The tuck shop provided a fruitful place to make comparisons on trust across all four organisations (a fuller explanation of the findings play close attention to the tuck shop is in the next chapter). YM allowed young people to serve themselves because the workers, the paid worker in particular, believed it was better to replace some stolen sweets than give the impression the young people were not trusted. At the CCYC young people had to be served, or seek special permission and were closely watched if they served themselves. Workers here were concerned they would 'set young people up to fail' – a sentiment shared by a worker at the Youth Café, where they also required young people to be served. At the CCYC the tuck shop is not a permanent feature, however when it is brought out the workers also serve the young people, but more a practicality (the stock for the tuck shop is stored in the manager's office, and young people are not allowed to enter).

Young people, the workers at LAYC said during interview, were assumed to be untrustworthy and putting them in positions where they could betray trust was setting them up to fail. Trust comes, they argued, later – once relationships have been built, or once they have taken ownership of the centre. In reality the young men aged 17-19 were not trusted as much as the young women, though they had been attending longer. The first reaction of workers was often suspicion, whether it was a new young person wishing to stay for a sleepover, bringing in soft drinks bottles which workers check for alcohol, young people asking to use a room, or using equipment - trust was something to be earned. There were observations when this distrust prevented or delayed youth work, where workers are drawn away from conversations or playing games to serve:

*David and Sophie trade mild insults [while playing table tennis], then [another young person] shouts towards Brian [worker] – who is still playing at the table tennis with David – to ask to be served at the tuck shop. Both David and Sophie then follow Brian, saying they want to continue to play against him at table tennis. [LAYC field note #13]*



At the training offered by the LAYC there was an overt message by a senior leader in the education department of the local authority that the trusting youth work relationship could be used to 'get at the information' on the lives of young people they were struggling to receive. Therefore the reciprocity of this trust was important to the wider aims of the organisation. The young people at the Youth Café were aware that trust was to be earned, and think that by doing 'bad stuff' in the past they are not trusted now:

*Interviewer- do you reckon youth workers trust you?*

*Ethan- not really*

*Interviewer- how come?*

*Carl- I'm not no more, cos I've done bad stuff in here*

*Ethan- yeah*

*David- if they left you in the hall by yourself, say in the other youthie, well they wouldn't*

*Interviewer- but would you do anything? Do you think you need to be looked after like that?*

*Carl- It depends*

*Ethan- It depends. If I'm with him [Carl] then I'll run [riot?] [Youth Café focus group]*

In this example from field notes at the Youth Cafe, something as mundane as access to a table tennis table is based on a rule for the number of workers allowed per room:

*When we entered one of the young people asked if they could go to the second room to play table tennis. Rob [youth worker] opened his arms wide and said 'sorry no, need four workers for that, not my rules' and shrugged his shoulders. The young people seemed to accept that. [Youth Café field note #03]*

### 6.8.1 Reflections on Trust

Trust was observed being displayed through the use of money or possessions, by giving young people responsibility for an event or allowing them to help to lead a group with younger people, or, as reported by the young people, workers being themselves is a sign of trust. Lack of trust was displayed through the use of near-constant surveillance, and the prioritising of serving and supervising over engaging with young people. In some organisations there was an expectation

that young people will make unwise choices if trusted and that they will continually attempt to circumvent rules, which leads to workers checking bottles for alcohol (or, perhaps, this is experience teaching workers to be savvy). The responses from the young people, which will be explained more fully in the next chapter, showed that they valued the youth club as a place where they felt trusted – though there was an awareness that past behaviour affected the level of trust they were given, particularly at the LAYC and Youth Café. As has been explained in this section, there is significant overlap between trust and the example in the next chapter, which considers the complexity of the youth work relationship when all of these themes are drawn together.

## 6.9 Prioritising Needs and Best Interests

Prioritising needs and best interests were themes in their own right, but also draws together themes of offering lifts to young people, priorities and prioritising, some examples originally coded as ‘listening’, and they also overlap with some themes already mentioned. That is, often self-disclosures (for example) were highlighted as prioritising the best interests of the worker, or meeting a particular need for the young people.

The organisation, workers, and young people may have different needs that can come into conflict with each other. As already mentioned the observations and literature review leads me to believe there is a difference in being ‘friendly’ or self-disclosing when it meets a young person’s needs, aids in the informal education of young people, or builds a mutual relationship, and when it appears to meet the needs of the worker first. Examples already encountered include Ben the young volunteer at the Youth Café who used his relationship with young people to gain attention for his own personal relationship issues and as a place to share personal experiences of difficult times, but without it being asked for by the young people, or feeding into the wider context of a conversation about relationships and break-ups. There have also been examples where workers have used their interactions with a young person to meet the needs of the organisation through making formal reports about conversations that have been overheard, and running projects with accredited outcomes predominantly for the sake of meeting targets.

Use of time also provided many illustrations of whose needs were being met. This extract of a field note from the YM shows an approach to time that puts the young people first:

*The group was due to finish at 8:30, however by 9:05 there were still young people. Emma [volunteer] and I tidied up while the young people played basketball and Paul [paid worker] and a parent volunteer chatted in the office. The debrief (not a formal or written evaluation as other groups do) happened while washing up in the kitchen. Young people*

*came in and out of this conversation (compared to LAYC where it happens behind closed doors). No one was rushing off, as normal here the tidying and leaving was done at a relaxed pace with conversations continuing as they went. I have considered whether this is part of the 'vocation' of youth ministry, or whether this has anything to do with the hourly paid nature of other types of youth work, that creates a fixed time to leave. No one was chased out, or told to leave. [YM field note #04]*

Here the atmosphere is relaxed, young people left when they were ready or when they were picked up, and workers were not trying to leave quickly (though, in other examples from the YM, there were times a volunteer would excuse themselves early because they have work to prepare for). This approach to workers use of time was echoed at the CCYC where young people were allowed to finish their games or talk to workers after the official close time. This could be contrasted with the Youth Café, in the extract below:

*The young people went through the other room. Mary [worker] was trying to get them to leave at 7:45, but they said they had 15 minutes left. Mary said they stopped being paid at 7:30 (I think that may not be the case [I later found out workers were paid until 8pm]).*  
[Youth Café field note #18]

This was a common occurrence, particularly as the centre clock was ten minutes fast and when the young people complained it was not corrected.

Balancing young people's best interests and organisational policy or expectations could be difficult for workers at times. For example Flo, the full time worker at the CCYC, relayed during interview she would use her own judgement in times of ethical dilemma when a young person's wellbeing was at risk and assume that 'truth will prevail' in the event of that conflicting with organisational policy:

*Interviewer: How do you make that decision [about when to give a young person a lift in a car]?*

*Flo: It's your gut. It's your heart. I don't know. There's just something that's quite hard to actually label. There's a switch that flicks, and it's like you have got to act.*

*If you've got to explain yourself, and write a report, or stand up in a court and have people properly interrogate you, then you know yourself what you've done, and the truth will prevail. I suppose I have that trust in... (Laughter)*

*I don't know. I've never come a cropper of it. It's a gut thing. It's an instinct that the procedure says this, but they can't cover for every eventuality. Sometimes you just need to make that judgment call, and deal with the consequences as they arise. [CCYC interview Flo]*

Each other organisation had an example of offering a lift to a young person. At the YM, the paid worker offered a stranded young person a lift home without any concerns raised – his friend was supposed to take him home, and he forgot. At the Youth Café, on a cold winter's evening, a female worker took a young woman home. She was aware it was against policy, and tried to contact a member of the management committee, but when she was not able to make contact took the young person anyway. At the LAYC, no young people were given lifts, even when they were left alone on the doorstep of the centre, the workers would drive away. However, in the event of injury, a worker did share a story where she personally drove a young person home because his parents did not have a car.

'Needs' were difficult to observe and almost impossible to ask about during interview (few would admit to going to a youth group to meet their own needs for friendship or attention), and so a larger amount of inference was necessary here. It is conceivable, for example, the reason the workers stay behind at the YM was that they enjoyed the company of other people or there was some hidden disincentive to going home, and not just to meet the needs of the young people to have informal spaces to share information or build relationships. If there are hidden motivations and needs, however, they were less obvious than a worker following young people to avoid having to converse with the other youth workers and meet an immediate need for avoiding isolation, which I inferred from Jenny's behaviour in this extract taken from a trip the young people went on to see a new local 'hub', with some other youth groups invited too:

*Jenny didn't seem comfortable talking to the other youth workers, including Maureen [local authority worker]. Jenny spent her time with the young people – including being alone with them outside the leisure centre. When they came in the young people were joking about how she had been a bad influence, teaching them to throw pickles at cars. I don't know if it's true or not, but she was running past the other workers, laughing and joking as if she was one of the young people. [CCYC field note #14]*

There was something about the interaction with the other youth workers that gave me the impression Jenny was not with the young people because she was attempting to do youth work,

but because she seemed awkward with the other workers and was looking for other people to talk to for the sake of being included.

### 6.9.1 Reflections on Prioritising Needs

Throughout this chapter, the question of whose needs are being met has been considered. The issue of time, principally around closing times, is drawn on here – with some examples of clubs allowing young people to stay in the club longer if they were waiting for a lift, finishing a game, or engaged in a conversation. This is contrasted with other examples, where young people are asked to leave early so workers could get home. Throughout other areas in the chapter some ‘needs’ of youth workers could be perceived as being met in over-familiar joking that could seek to increase the status of the worker, sharing personal stories that meet needs for attention or counselling, or engaging in mischievous behaviour for the purpose of gaining the companionship of young people and avoid isolation. Here, though, there is significant overlap with other themes already discussed. We can (and in the next chapter will) use ‘prioritising needs’ as a way to qualify the some other aspects of the relationship – particularly self-disclosures and the use of authority and power.

## 6.10 Formality and Distance

Two themes are considered together here as they typically were coded at the same places in the field notes: the level of formality in the interactions, and the sense of distance or intimacy between the worker and the young person. This draws together examples of how body language, sharing experiences, style of working, and the use of paperwork and money created a sense of (in)formality in the relationship. It also highlights those differences in approach to physical proximity, the use of touch, and the use of workers’ homes.

The formality of the relationship could be seen through the context and atmosphere of the interaction, more than a specific list of behaviours. Emma, a volunteer at the YM, shows a very informal approach to interacting with this particular young person she knows well:

*Emma [volunteer] was sitting for most of the evening on the sofa talking to Emily [15 year old young person]. There was a peer-like quality to the conversations, in that they were sharing their favourite TV programmes at the moment, and favourite songs. They used Emma’s iPad to share music, and Emma has quite a ‘young’ taste in music (e.g. Taylor Swift, One direction, Ollie Murs). When Emily first came in Emma gave her an enthusiastic ‘come and sit here’, and patted the sofa next to her. They were virtually horizontal and*

*they relaxed into the sofa with their feet on the table, shoulders and elbows often rubbing against each other. [YM field note #08]*

Here the topic of conversation, the sharing of an iPad, the body language of slipping down into the sofa, and the lack of embarrassment about physical touch all highlight an informal encounter. By contrast at the CCYC the manager talked (during a conversation after a session) of workers having a greater physical distance between the worker and the young person, in a setting with greater formality. This extract involving the manager is from a conversation, which turned into an informal interview, at the end of one evening. Sadly it was not recorded, however the notes were made and typed up almost immediately after the conversation:

*Dennis [manager] said here they have cameras in case something happens [when a worker is alone with a young person]. He said, and Maureen [local authority worker] agreed, that you almost never have one to ones, but if it is needed then there's always a business-like approach – with a sizeable gap between the young person and the worker – which is their policy for reducing complaints against staff. [CCYC informal interview Dennis]*

Though Dennis believed in this 'business like' approach to sensitive issues, equally he recognised during the same conversation that paper work could increase the formality of the relationship, so he attempts to decrease it to ensure the relationships can remain as flexible as possible. The contexts of the YM and CCYC extracts are, of course, different. Emma is engaged in a typical, everyday conversation. Her posture, tone of voice, and line of questioning may change and become more formal if the conversation took a more serious tone, as is assumed by Dennis.

At the YM, on their trip ice skating, a worker who could not skate was willing to appear vulnerable and allow the young people to take the lead:

*Generally the girls would skate together, or two girls would split from the others, and the boys were skating together as a group. When Emma [volunteer] first appeared Mary [14 year old young person] took her hand and helped her onto the ice. She wasn't a confident skater, and Mary had lessons last year and was better practiced, and took her by the hand around the bend. There was an egalitarian feel – it felt that the youth workers were mixing with the young people in a peer-like way around the rink. [YM field note 02]*

This 'egalitarian feel' was not only in Emma being helped by a young person, but when the paid worker was skating too, and often talking to young people as he went round. When they stopped at the side the worker would engage in conversations with the young people, ranging from school

life, to thinking through changes to the younger youth group some of the young people helped at, to talking about church.

Continuing the observations of 'informal' interactions, these were also underlined by workers that use the club as an extension of their dining table (such as, workers eating their dinner at the YM), the use of humour, or allowing young people to see the workers' vulnerabilities (such as ice skating with the YM), can appear more informal or close.

However at times workers were observed having a peer-like quality to their interactions with young people when attempting to cajole personal information out of them (as with Jenny at the CCYC):

*During the baking the banter between the girls and Jenny [worker] was friendly, but often quite sharp – even aggressive. Conversations were in very short sentences, and most had some kind of quip or personal remark at the end. No one was upset by this – it seemed perfectly in keeping with the culture. At the end of the evening Joy [worker] was similar to the last time she was here – trying to extract information about Ruth's [young person] boyfriend that she said she didn't want her to know. [CCYC field note #07]*

The observations also highlighted how a more authoritarian worker created a greater sense of formality as they attempted to keep control of the behaviour of young people:

*[The young people are about to go to a nearby gym for a Boxercise lesson] As they were tidying up Patsy [local authority worker] said, in a higher and 'posher' voice than normal "We'll walk down in an orderly fashion", a couple of the young people gave a small laugh, and Patsy said 'that's what Maureen [LA worker] did last week', Flo [centre worker] replied 'really?'. There was a gentle mocking in her voice. She did, however, say seriously 'and make sure you listen to [the instructor] when we get there'. This seemed to be a tactic to get the young people to be aware of their behaviour (the assumption was they would be badly behaved and disrespectful towards the coach) without making herself sound as authoritarian as Maureen. [CCYC field note #05]*

Informality was appreciated by the young people in the YM focus group, where workers were 'not immature' however 'not too serious... don't take themselves too seriously', and they would be 'approachable'. One volunteer during interview at YM believes informality comes from the atmosphere of the whole evening:

*I just think it is really good fun. They're fun to hang out with and it is a nice and relaxed evening because there's no set structure. Everyone just turns up and chills.... and just have a nice, relaxed evening with no formal programme where they're forced to play rounders or they're forced to do this [or that]. [YM interview Helen]*

Helen goes on to comment that this informality changes the way young people see her, from a previous day-job as a teacher:

*I like this [less-formal] relationship, but it was weird at first. I remember going from being a teacher to taking some Guides to Euro Disney and I'd gone from being universally loathed as a teacher to the next week, where there were girls fighting to sit next to me on the bus, fighting to sit next to me on the rides and everything, to then going back to being a teacher... [YM interview Helen]*

She immediately qualifies this with a reminder that there are still boundaries, and that she must retain authority – 'be the one in charge' – to ensure the safety of the young people. To be informal and to lose any sense of responsibility or control could endanger the young people. Finally, explored properly in the section below, the inclusion of money in the relationship sets a sense of formality, as does having a very specific purpose to the relationship.

### 6.10.1 Reflections on Formality and Distance in youth work

Informality and intimacy has been shown in the relationships between young people and youth workers through the topics of conversation, being physically close, sharing resources, being flexible and able to react to events quickly, workers avoiding being too serious and maintaining a sense of fun and enjoyment, becoming over familiar (particularly through the use of humour or attempting to gather information from young people) and allowing young people to see vulnerabilities in the worker.

By contrast more serious or sensitive conversations, interactions that are 'business-like' and focussing on the particular issue at hand, keeping a physical distance from the young person, being more authoritarian, forcing young people into certain activities, and a strict approach to money can formalise the relationship and distance the worker.

Overall, the whole ethos of the organisation can influence how formal the relationship appears, and there is an important relationship between formality and authority. An informal relationship with little sense of responsibility by the worker is very different to one which retains that sense of authority.



## 6.12 Summary

In this chapter eight themes, dominant when exploring ethics in the field notes, have been examined. As all themes also related to aspects of the youth work relationship, I narrowed the focus of the discussion to this. Ultimately this chapter described the complexity in the youth work relationship, which will be theorised with reference to the literature in the next chapter. From analysing the data and drawing out themes I concluded that youth work relationships are a site for fruitful ethical discussion, as how to ensure the relationship are able to meet the aims of youth work and also ensure conceptions of 'good practice' are maintained require ethical reflection.

## 7 The Complex Relationship: Money and Relationship

This section is different from the themes explored in the previous chapter. It is derived from the data, but serves as an example to show how the eight themes from the analysis above are all aspects of the youth work relationship, which are associated with each other. There are several examples that I could have used to illustrate this, however the issue of money was chosen because it shows these aspects of the relationship in action, and it explores how external pressures can affect the relationship.

In order to understand the complexity within the youth work relationship, it was necessary to dissect the data into the eight dominant themes, however it is in recognising them as aspects of a youth work relationship that are in relationship to each other this complexity can be best understood and explored. Therefore in this section, I particularly highlight how the individual aspects of a relationship do not reflect the appropriateness of a particular interaction or health of the overall relationship, but it is in recognising each as part of a whole that those judgements should be made.

Money was a contentious issue. Entry fees, memberships, and funding all appeared as ethical minefields that affected the relationship between the young people and the youth workers. At the LAYC young people were required to 'pay in' before any other interaction took place and it appeared to encourage dishonesty. Some young people would refuse, or attempt to pay too little. Occasionally there was a young person who would appear unable to pay and whether they were allowed to stay or not seemed inconsistent. Some young people believed by paying in they earned the right to do what they wanted, for example when the older young people were only allowed to play football for half the evening so the younger group could have a turn, they believed they were entitled to a 15p refund. The collection of money seemed to formalise the relationship, and at times create conflict, especially when young people did not give the correct money or attempted to circumvent the worker taking the payment. As was typical with the LAYC, paying required consistency to be seen as fair, and if young people felt they were being treated unfairly they asked for financial recompense as a matter of principle. Though other centres had fees, here there was a greater feeling of entitlement, that the 30p bought some kind of service to which young people now had a right. The balance of power seemed to have moved to the young people who sometimes acted as consumers.

Having to pay deposits did limit some young people's access to equipment, and created an imbalance of power between those young people who put the money down for the resources,

and those that then required the young person's permission to use them. At times this became a cause for conflict. In this extract a young person, David, tried to turn the lights off in the sports' hall using the switch. Brian asked why he was being a nuisance, and David said it was because of the deposit (though I do not know to what that specifically refers):

*[David is trying to get into a box marked 'Danger 240 volts, Brian, a youth worker, is trying to stop him]*

*David – Yeah, but all it is is a light switch (Brian keeps trying to hold the cover for the switch shut)*

*Terry [another young person, comes over and stands behind David] – Smells of BO over here.*

*David – Brian!*

*Brian – It is not me, I had a shower.*

*David – It is you, it is, I can smell it!*

*Brian – It is not (dismissive, rather than defensive, and David starts to walk away)*

*Brian – Why are you being...*

*David – Because you made me pay a deposit*

*[laughter from all] [LAYC field note #13]*

However the deposit system was introduced because small items of equipment (like table tennis balls) would go missing, and large items (cues and bats) would get broken. One youth worker (Carla, during interview) believed this was effective at limiting the amount of damage that happened to equipment as young people forfeit their money if it is not returned in good condition – and during the observations all equipment was witnessed returned in good condition. Though I acknowledged this seemed a good reason, again compared to the YM workers seemed to be assuming a position of distrust, and workers were being pulled away from other roles to exchange money and equipment.

Regarding funding at the LAYC, the money comes directly from the local authority. However, steps had been taken by the head of the Integrated Youth Support Services to introduce mechanisms to evidence the work of the centres – this particularly revolved around youth workers putting information about young people on a database with notes about their behaviour

or concerns based on conversations they had. This was an attempt to prove their worth as compared to other services within the local authority. Payment by young people at the LAYC here was at times contentious – young people had to pay at the beginning, it was usually their first interaction with staff. Some regularly attempted to get in without payment. Some people without membership were excluded, and if people were allowed in without it this becomes a cause for concern by staff who felt it is unfair.

Money rarely changed hands in the YM. Young people did not pay to come in, rather they were welcomed and immediately joined in with activities or conversations, which set a more informal tone. It also meant when certain pieces of equipment or rooms were not in use, young people did not complain or ask for a refund. Young people were also observed being trusted with centre money to go and buy some items required for the evening. Young people were observed asking if they were able to take something and pay later. Invariably they were allowed, though one young person was told by a volunteer they had promised their parents they would not let the young person run up a tab again. The young person had opened the can before they had been able to get that information out however, and there was no formal record of the transaction.

Wider observations at the church highlight the organisation's approach to money. During a service a member of the congregation stood up to explain his day job and how being a Christian affected it (a regular slot in the service):

*He also volunteered that his new job he was particularly pleased with because it was run by a Jewish family whose mission was to 'make people happy as much as make money' which he felt fit with his Christian values, and again possibly shows why [the group] has the mentality towards money it has. [YM field note Service #1]*

The centre and the one paid worker is funded entirely by donations to the church from the congregation. The church is reliant on volunteers, without them the groups would close. The young people during the focus group assumed "they must enjoy it" to keep coming back – there was a clear understanding, however, that the workers were sacrificing their time. Unlike the stereotype in some churches, there was no expectations observed that the work was being funded to increase the number of young people on a Sunday morning. At the training, and through conversations with the paid worker and interview with the minister, church attendance seemed a future intention but there was an awareness that currently Sunday morning services were not attractive to young people.

Young people at the CCYC pay in, but usually do so voluntarily. There is no conflict over young people paying their subs – I did not hear any complaints, nor did any young people ask for a refund if they left early (unlike the LAYC). Workers typically did not have to ask, young people present their money as they entered and started joining in straight away.

*Compared to the LAYC, there was no problem with money here. The young people pay 50p per session, and both volunteered to pay before being asked. Later in the evening Flo [centre worker] asked the young people if they had any outstanding IOUs for the tuck shop. They said they did – Stacy had 90p, and Betty 40p. Betty said she only had 20p, but paid it – Flo said she did not need it today, and she did not want to take her last 20p off her. Betty said to take it anyway as 20p wouldn't buy anything. Stacy paid her 90p in full straight away.*

*I wonder why the difference in attitude to money – especially as 50p gets access to far fewer resources than 30p at LAYC. [CCYC field note #08]*

The Rank Foundation funds some of the youth worker's salary at the CCYC and although the worker has to keep records and evidence, they did not have a set of targets to reach. However the workers are aware they need to keep the number of young people coming at sustainable levels in order to keep funding coming:

*This evening Flo asked the girls to make a poster advertising the Monday club to attract some more young people in [numbers had dropped to 2-3 for a couple of weeks]. She left them to design the posters by themselves – they already knew how to use Publisher. There was very little conversation while they were doing this – in part because they had music on in their headphones coming through the computer. In the computer room Flo filled out a sheet that asked who was on each computer, and for how long. There was a sign that said this information was required because internet usage was recorded.*

*At the beginning Sarah asked 'what are we doing this for?', and Flo explained it was to get some more people to join. Sarah replied 'but I like it with just us'. Flo explained that the funding might stop if they did not get any more young people, and then they'd have to close on a Monday. That answer seemed to appease Sarah. [CCYC field note #08].*

The manager at CCYC said during conversation he had to exaggerate the less desirable behaviours of the young people in order to get money for the project – making them appear at greater risk or more anti-social than is really the case. He also expressed concern he had to continually reinvent to project to make it sound like they were doing something new; the whole issue of finding

funding, it appeared to me from his comments, required a certain level of dishonesty (or at least, not absolute honesty). For the local authority run evenings funding was secure, however they were aware without showing an 'improvement' to the young people their interventions had made their funding could be cut and put into other services. The young people asked for the club to be open more evenings and for longer hours, but the workers' reply was always lack of money.

Ultimately, the manager believed he needed to make the centre self-sustaining as funding decreases. He is aware the young people's 50p entrance fee would not pay for a worker, so he was expecting to use room hire to subsidise community activities. This created a dilemma for what he believed a community centre should be:

*[During a conversation at the end of the evening the manager said] it is hard to make the centre a business which is what's expected now. He said that takes the 'community centre' away, and makes it a place for local amenities like the post office or a library – which are important, but not what a community centre is about. [CCYC Field note #09]*

At the Youth Café young people pay 20p to enter, and then pay for whatever food or drink they require. Generally young people paid without question, though occasionally there was some joking involved before they handed the money over. Most young people only came for part of the evening but there were no requests to pay according to the proportion of the evening they were participating.

Originally set up with funding from the EU, and currently funded by a secular charity, there was a tension between a project constituted to be secular yet managed by Christians. For example, both the current manager during a conversation one evening, and a worker (Amy) during interview, explained the controversy of a lottery grant. They were offered a large amount of money (match funded by other charities – in total, Amy said over £100,000 over three years) from the lottery, however the church (i.e. the members of the congregation) demanded to the management committee that they send the money back. To them, it was unethical to obtain money from an organisation promoting gambling. Amy, instrumental in gaining the grant from the lottery, said the church were putting their own principles ahead of the best interests of the young people. But this also showed the difficulties in management. She believed the reaction from the church was started by one person, the Chairman's wife, and she did not believe there was any sound theological reflection in the decision, but a kneejerk reaction. It was sticking to this principle, she believed, that had led to declining young people, poor resources, no heating, and redundancies.

This is the only club where it was mentioned that the young people would fundraise to gain money for the club:

*Andy [team leader] got out some paper and asked the girls what they would like to do, or if they would like to go out somewhere, because the club was 'male dominated'. Their first ideas (including the Metro centre) wasn't written down and Andy said 'no, not like that, like,... well, I don't want to tell you or give you ideas'. Ben [volunteer] then gave several ideas, all of which the girls said yes to (the cinema and ice skating amongst them), and then Andy asked Ben to stop giving them ideas because he wanted it to come from the young people. There were only a couple more ideas offered after this, then Andy tried to get ideas for fundraising to be able to do these activities. The young people came up with a list of potential sponsored events. One of them said they could 'use supermarkets' – Andy pushed what they meant, and they explained about buying things to sell on, and standing outside asking for money. Andy obviously had in mind bag packing [he continually dropped hints about how they could help people, and have they seen other people by the tills fund raising], and asked them over and over again what else they could do – but they obviously did not have the knowledge he was trying draw from them.*

These ideas did not come to fruition as the weekend workers planning it were made redundant when the funding for weekend work diminished. But here a worker attempting to involve young people in decision making (though, the idea for fundraising came from the workers, not the young people). He used the promise of future trips get them involved in fundraising, though he stifled several of their ideas, and seemed to have something in mind he wanted them to agree to.

The current lack of money for 'core funding' was affecting the level of service. Equipment remained broken (though a new pool table was provided by a local business), and the café freezing as heating was turned off to save money. Though the church cut off the lottery funding, the workers said that the church was not willing to subsidise the bills for the café and this was a cause of conflict.

## 7.1 The Tuck Shop: A Case Example

As another source of income, each organisation had a different perspective on the innocuous and ubiquitous tuck shop – the part of the youth club where young people were able to buy sweets, crisps and drinks. This was a space for ethical action, in particular questions of trust.

At the YM young people serve themselves at the tuck shop, and workers acknowledge this is a sign of their trust, but recognise at times it was abused. In practice it meant workers engaged in

conversations and games are uninterrupted while young people serve themselves. The paid worker suggested during interview it was partly this trust and freedom that young people appreciate, as at school they were 'locked down'. The paid worker also explains during interview that this trust grows over time, depending on the age of the young person:

*For example, with the tuck shop at [the children's group] they can only spend 30p but we let them pick out what they want and they help with serving. With [the 10-14 year olds' group] they can spend what they want on tuck, and again some of the young people help to staff it with adult supervision. And then by [the older group] they can help themselves and put the money in the tin. Now I know that has been abused, but I think it says something about, that we're expecting a maturity, a sort of development through them and through that relationship, and if we show trust to them generally they don't abuse that. And similarly, in terms I mean in terms of, errr, I think as well as the tuck that's just one example, but it's the same with the activities or their access to the youth centre sports equipment, or the stereo, or anything like that. By the time they're 14+ we give them fairly free reign. And also with [the group] they don't have to arrive at a certain time and be picked up at a certain time, and it's kind of got more of a drop in feel, and we know where they are and once they've come in we know if they're around here, or when they're actually going home. But yeah I think we try to demonstrate quite a lot of trust and I think that goes quite a long way with young people..... And I think just develops a more equal relationship between us and them. Erm. And I know sometimes that's slightly abused, the odd bit of tuck might get nicked, or the odd bit of equipment might get wrecked, but in generally terms I think that's the better way to be than trying to lock everything down and sign for everything. Erm, and I think also the other thing with the trust, most of them the school system they're in is very locked down. So, you know, they're in by quarter to nine and out the door at quarter to three. Very little breaks, they're not allowed off site during the day. They're not given any freedom, and so, I think to give them some freedom and give them some trust to not abuse that freedom, they value that I think. Erm. I think that's a big part of why they come as well. [YM interview Paul]*

Young people in one of the focus groups commented that no one would steal anything from the tuck shop, because most young people know and respect each other. When they started to discuss whether someone should serve at the tuck shop, one young person remarked:

*but on the other hand, if there had to be a youth worker serving... it's like at [the children's group] when we are doing tuck the kids are more likely to start pretending to*



*steal, or try to steal, if – because we have to do it for them. Whereas like here, no one even thinks about taking any I don't think. It's just, it's there, I mean we could if we wanted to, but nobody really does. [YM focus group #1]*

At the CCYC there was not a tuck shop set up, but there were some sweets and cans in the manager's office, and when a young person wanted to make a purchase they would ask one of the workers to get it for them. Young people were allowed to owe money, and they had been observed either volunteering to pay back, or would pay without argument when reminded. Young people left a note of how much money they owed in the tin housing the float. The centre worker did not decide whether a young person can owe money however, she directed them to the centre manager – decisions over money were his remit.

At the LAYC young people were not allowed to owe money for tuck, and usually workers were required to serve young people. If a young person did serve themselves, a worker would closely observe. Young people were aware that they were under surveillance:

*After buying a can [from a vending machine] he went to serve himself at the tuck shop – he made a big thing of buying four giant strawberry sweets with 20p, saying 'look you can check, I've put my money in...' and then proceed to count in quite an exaggerated way. [LAYC field note #11]*

More generally, however, at the LAYC young people take workers away from games and conversations to be served at the tuck shop:

*I started by playing Black Jack with two young people and Brian [worker]. It's a very simple card game based on luck, but the young people were really engaged. Brian played for about 30 minutes, but he was often interrupted (around 6 times) mid-hand by people who wanted serving at the tuck shop. This spoilt the flow of the game. [LAYC field note #15]*

The need to ensure young people were paying appropriately for tuck was greater than the need for sustained engagement with young people. However on one occasion, a group of female regular members were asked to run the tuck shop when the centre was short staffed. They agreed, and took the responsibility seriously, and were later rewarded/thanked with a can of cola.

At the Youth Café the tuck shop rolled into the café's usual function of providing food and drink. Here, though, one of the workers would regularly take food without paying for it, to the

annoyance of the other permanent worker. Young people were not allowed to serve themselves, and the sweets were on a tray that was put behind the coffee bar to prevent anyone taking it. One of the workers during interview laments that she felt she could not trust young people, she would like to, but tuck had gone missing in the past:

*Interviewer: To what extent did you trust the young people who came?*

*Amy: Not very much.*

*We did have a lot of things stolen. You couldn't turn your back on the counter. They were always trying to steal things from behind the counter: crisps, sweets and pool balls for some reason. I know not every one of them was, but you had to have eyes in the back of your head with them. You knew which ones were most likely... There are a few young people in [the Youth Café] who I've left behind the counter when I've needed to go into the backroom or somewhere because I trust them. It might be more than the trust. I see what you mean. By not trusting them as well, are we just labelling them and they're living up to that? At the same time, you don't trust them because you caught them nicking stuff in the first place. [Youth Café Interview Amy]*

Here we see Amy wrestle with a dilemma – she seemed to want to trust the young people, and on occasion had in the past, but she was also aware that they have stolen from the tuck-shop previously and this causes distrust, and yet also perpetuates a stereotype of untrustworthy teenagers she wanted to challenge. However during interview two of the workers at the YM commented that they are aware occasionally things go missing, but they believe it is better to replace stolen tuck than lose the bond of trust between themselves and the young people. During the focus group the young people recognised this, and were grateful for it.

This extended example illustrates four different approaches to the tuck shop. At three organisations it was a fairly central position and activity of the centre (not the CCYC), in one young people are trusted to pay themselves and this means the workers are free to engage with young people (YM). In one, only a small group of young people are trusted to serve in an emergency while the other young people are aware they were not trusted (LAYC). In two (YM and CCYC) young people are allowed to 'owe' money. At the YM young people ask if they can owe some money even though it was done on a system of honesty, and at the CCYC they must ask the manager who invariably consented. In both these organisations young people paid voluntarily, or without argument when reminded.

## 7.2 Reflections on Money and Relationships

At the four organisations money was treated differently. In the LAYC money from young people seemed to imply a contract regarding a certain level of service young people assumed they have a right. For some young people, avoiding payment became a game which encouraged their dishonesty, while in CCYC and the Youth Café young people habitually paid in without reminder and made no further reference to it throughout the evening. At the YM, young people did not pay, and the movement from street to engaging with the centre is almost seamless. There was a marked difference in how young people are welcomed when young people are asked for money as they arrive, with those who are engaged in conversation and activities.

With funding, the managers at LAYC felt pressure to 'prove' their work through the use of an online database that produces dilemmas of consent and confidentiality to prevent becoming a victim of cuts, while at the CCYC some evidence is collected, and with the LA workers, some accredited work occurs – which requires young people to fill out some evaluations and paperwork (which they do reluctantly, but with understanding that this is important for sustaining the club). The manager here is aware he has had to be overly negative about the young people to gain funding, and he feels discomfort with this – however the alternative is to make the community centre into a business to subsidise the work, something else that makes him feel uncomfortable. At the YM there was little pressure over ongoing funding as income is secured by the congregation's giving. Although there were some expectations about future church attendance from the young people, and this was an aim shared by the worker who wished to see young people develop a Christian faith. On a day-to-day level this is very gentle, and both the worker and the minister were aware that first there need to be structural changes to the church to prevent institutionalised ageism before this would be realised, and thus releases the worker from any expectation of meeting any targets. Finally, at the Youth Café funding pots were limited by the church who force the workers to work by their principles regard lottery funding. The workers are expecting to run out of money soon and are not actively trying to write large funding bids. The upkeep of the café is being subsidised by the church (such as heating bills) but this is a cause for tensions – the church want to impose their values on the funding procedure, but did not want to subsidise the café.

## 7.3 Summary

In this chapter, I have presented evidence that a range of options are available to youth workers in how to respond to daily situation they face. This could provoke a range of responses, and often the specific issues they face that are not covered by organisational policy. Rather, I inferred the

health of a relationship and the appropriateness of the interaction is better based on a range of interacting themes that are not easily codifiable.

In the next chapter these themes will be theorised, with reference to other literature and research. In particular, the way the themes relate will be considered, and how the complexity of the youth work relationship comes from the way they collectively influence the health of the relationship. After this I will consider why virtue ethics would be a helpful framework for youth workers when considering the appropriateness of their relationships with young people.

## 8. Ethics of the Youth Work Relationship

### 8.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I begin by highlighting the inter-connectedness between the different aspects of the youth work relationships explored in the previous chapter, and I draw from pre-existing literature on these aspects to further understand and challenge some previously held assumptions about them. From this I argue for the usefulness of virtue ethics when considering what is 'good' in these relationships. I then explain *why* virtue ethics is helpful when developing an ethics of youth work relationships, and seek to conceptualise and illustrate three virtues that, when looking at the data presented in chapter six, are pertinent: *phronesis*/professional wisdom, integrity, and trustworthiness. Two key arguments are presented in this chapter: firstly, relationships are complex, with the worker simultaneously negotiating appropriate attitudes and behaviours while paying attention to the context of how well they know the young people, what organisational rules permit, and their conceptions of the values and key purposes of youth work. Secondly, that navigating these relationships require more than technical skill, it requires the worker to have a disposition to display certain moral qualities.

### 8.2 Complex Relationships

Youth work relationships have been described in previous chapters as complex, helping, and transformative – they are the heart of youth work. Relationships, I argued in chapters two and three, are more important than programmes for supporting young people's development. In chapter three I also examined the dominant practice of making and implementing rules which assume aspects of the youth work relationship are easily codifiable as discrete entities – an assumption I will challenge in this chapter. Then, through the analysis of the data, I recognised several associated aspects of the youth work relationship: self-disclosures, the youth worker's role in the wider lives of young people, setting an example, offering respect, use of authority and power, prioritising needs and best interests, formality and distance, and trusting young people. These have all been discussed in their own sections in the previous chapter, where I analysed youth work relationships through these constituent parts to understand them, but here relationships are considered once again as a whole. That is, these are not discrete aspects of youth work relationships, but rather overlap with each other, and affect the overall perception of the health of the relationship, or conception of 'good practice' in an interaction.

In this section I present several examples of how the aspects of the relationship, drawn from research, are inter-related. I argue that dominant conceptions of rule-based practice which

regulate the behaviour of workers taking these aspects as discrete entities are insufficient to ensure good practice. The themes observed in the relationships from the ethnographic study are not intended to represent aspects that are either 'present' or 'not present' during any given interaction. Rather, they are all present to some degree in nearly every interaction (and those where some are not recorded as present may be a sign of incomplete data collection rather than their total absence). I will also highlight some examples where the aspects relate to each other, to argue that youth work interactions need to be understood and reflected on as a whole, and not split into easily codifiable actions. Ultimately I argue for an understanding of interactions as different in *kind*, not simply severity.

Several of the examples of self-disclosure illustrate this well, as self-disclosure was not a concept well defined by being 'present' or 'not present'. When the youth worker at the LAYC describes their opinion on the latest edition of the X-Factor they are opening up their personal opinions and attitudes, together with their typical Saturday evening habits, to the young person. They have disclosed something of themselves. However I would suggest this is significantly different to an interaction with a worker talking to a young person about a recent divorce or providing details of their sex-life. Just to say both involved a 'self-disclosure', devoid of context or content, would be misleading.

This difference is not simply one of 'degree' of sensitivity involved in the disclosure, but of 'kind' of disclosure. The findings showed it would be insufficient to label the strength or sensitivity of one particular disclosure to compare to another and pronounce a value judgement. Conversing about tastes in music and TV may seem less personal and sensitive than talking about sexual experiences, so it may encourage a conception of good practice based around the production of strict and very specific rules in which certain topics of conversation are deemed taboo ('sex is too personal, workers are never to discuss it'). Instead if the sensitivity of the self-disclosure is judged in the presence and absence of other aspects we begin to see a more complex picture of the suitability of the discussion. We may ask, for example, whether it is the young person's needs being met through this conversation, or the youth worker's? We may ask who initiated the conversation and what does this tell us of the use of power and authority in the self-disclosure?

At the YM, workers considered self-disclosure a tool for extending the ability of a worker to be a role model and offer a sense of integrity and congruence. I also observed that worker self-disclosures offered young people the opportunity to practice appropriate responses to 'adult' issues at YM and CCYC, including a worker's graduation, and another worker's long-term illness. Though some workers were reticent to offer too much information about their lives for fear of

appearing too close to the young people, some workers recognised self-disclosures as a powerful tool for helping young people make informed choices or as contributing to meeting their needs. Therefore I often analysed data as a self-disclosure alongside material I coded as representing respect, meeting needs, setting an example, and having an 'egalitarian' quality.

This resonates with Ord's (2007:54-61) argument that youth workers may make disclosures about their personal lives when it is the needs of the young person being met (see also Turney 2010:138). These relationships, Ord argues, move across boundaries – that is, the youth worker should still be engaged in youth work if she meets the young person in the supermarket. An example in my study occurred when Andy at the Youth Café was spotted crossing the road in front of a car that a young person was riding in, and later was asked to defend the example he was setting by the young people and another worker in the centre.

Participant observations of workers engaging in the wider lives of young people also provided examples of taking a holistic approach to the youth work relationship, which provides a better basis to judge practice, while understanding these aspects as discrete entities ascribed with fixed rules distorts the perception of the relationship. When workers were engaging in the wider lives of young people and were also acting as a role model, workers were extending the reach of their positive influence. By contrast, there were several examples in the field work where workers were involved in young people's lives outside the context of the centre in a way contrary to the values or aims of the centre, which negatively affected their authority. Therefore, drawing on expectations of youth worker's values epitomised in the National Occupational Standards (highlighted in chapters one and two), I concluded that sharing in the lives of young people, but with a lack of integrity or congruence, distorted the relationship. If the workers engage in the wider lives of young people, but in a way that was not particularly personal, they were also acting as a role model, and they were seeking to develop a closer relationship with the young person then this could be meeting some of the key purposes of youth work. For example, a worker could be developing the kind of relationship that provides the foundation to meet an immediate need at some point in the future. That is, a pre-existing close relationship with a young person allows a youth worker an opportunity to intervene, support, or facilitate change with a young person at some point in the future.

Seeing and being seen by young people outside of normal working hours seemed to have a particular resonance with the theology of the workers at the YM. They were attempting to use their understanding of incarnational theology to 'be there' for young people (particularly the paid worker, who expressed this during interview). In the literature, space for meeting young people

outside the centre is more prevalent in those texts aimed at Christian youth workers. For example, Pimlott and Pimlott (2008:144) suggest meeting a young person for a coffee or a family meal can break down barriers, and that it is possible to engage in such informal meetings and still have high standards for good and safe practice. There is a greater recognition of the youth worker's role in engaging with family life in Christian youth work too (DeVries 2001, Powell et al. 2011). Youth workers in this context are more likely to have those 'dual relationships' that are inherent with being part of an intergenerational faith community. Dual relationships, as theorised by Sercombe (2010a) and Pugh (2007), are those situations where a youth worker has some kind of regular interaction with a young person in a non-youth work situation: for example, the youth worker is neighbour or family friend, as well as youth worker. This was exemplified when the paid worker at YM said he would 'pop in' to a young person's birthday party with his family, or when the volunteers said they would be happy to support young people at sporting events, and when they regularly see each other in church, school, or when workers are invited for dinner at their homes.

Workers were also occasionally observed legitimising potentially harmful or arguably undesirable behaviours and attitudes when seen outside the centre (that is, those inconsistent with the National Occupational Standards' values and competencies). For example, this included Bill at LAYC talking about his drinking holiday or sexual comments from workers at the Youth Café. When youth workers are in a position of authority over young people, Ord (2007:99) argues that it is reasonable to assume self-disclosures (such as these) can normalise attitudes that may be contrary to the norms of the organisation. Some organisations, such as the CCYC and LAYC, used conceptions of 'professional boundaries' to attempt to prevent workers from setting a negative example, for example, they implemented rules against smoking in the company of young people. The imposition of external policies increased the formality of the relationship and limited the kinds of self-disclosures youth workers make, and were often seeking to protect the young people. But a side effect of those kinds of rules was removing potentially positive influence from young people. However the assumption that workers *should* display National Occupational Standards' values outside of work is not universally held, as seen by Ben at the Youth Café when he argued he should not be expected to be a role model outside of work time.

There were many other examples of aspects of the youth work relationship being associated with each other to make each encounter context specific, nuanced, and situated (usually) in a pre-existing relationship. I shall consider one more: 'showing respect' was an aspect of the relationship that was under particular threat in some organisations, and yet was important to



many young people in the focus groups. Youth workers being respectful was an aspect that separated youth workers from other professionals, and was the foundation for encounters that required young people to trust the worker. Keeping confidentiality was recognised as a mark of respect – showing that young people have ownership of the information they have. Lavie-Ajayi and Krumer-Nevo (2013) go further in their article decrying the ‘deficit narratives’ that many professionals spread about young people, arguing “the sharing of the hegemonic deficit narrative between professionals – even for supposedly laudable purposes such as improving the community’s responses towards the youth – is an important element of the maintenance of the hegemonic narrative” (p1701). They go on to argue that the narratives youth workers should share about young people are positive, and not stories defined by the problems they face, but they should share stories about the victories they have won. Therefore, when a worker took information provided by young people and used it in such a way that was not in the best interests of the young person, they were being disrespectful. For example, when the workers at the LAYC wrote up a conversation they had overheard and entered it into the region-wide database they were using their power to prioritise their own needs to meet targets or for the centre to gain kudos. This could be perceived as acting disrespectfully – particularly as the manager admitted the young people were not aware where their conversations were being shared. However, during a meeting with the staff, the manager was able to highlight that his centre had produced the least reports, and that only two people were putting enough ‘substantial interventions’ onto the database, and this was affecting their reputation amongst other professionals working with young people.

Appearing to respect young people seemed to engender a closer relationship. A close relationship with youth workers became a safe place for young people to return to for help (for example, when a young person came to find Lucy at the LAYC one evening after falling out with his parents, or the young women seeing Maureen at the CCYC about sexual health concerns). It is when coupled with respect (which leads to trust) that these close relationships fulfil their transformative potential, according to Hill (1999:141), especially if the workers act as role models. However, several authors had the same concerns as some of the workers at CCYC and LAYC: that youth work should be in a close relationship as a means to an end (though as seen in chapter two, that end is contested), however if the relationship begins to prioritise the worker’s need for friendship or socialising, the relationship is no longer a healthy one (Sercombe 2010a:11, Turney 2010:147, Jeffs and Smith 1999a:83).

With regard to closeness, Rishel et al. (2007:504) share a similar opinion to the young people at the YM, who expect the relationship to be enjoyable with minimal distance between the workers and young people. This was exhibited through snowball fights, watching TV together, sharing songs and videos on iPads, and playing table tennis. If there should be a closeness to the relationship, the measure of *how* close is not a linear scale, but intimacy can be *qualitatively different*. As such, I am arguing it is not the level of closeness but the form that closeness takes that is important in maintaining an appropriate relationship, ensuring the distance between workers and young people remains within the purpose of the relationship.

In the data I recognised there were several barriers to these kinds of relationships, for example: fulfilling paperwork requirements that met organisational needs at the expense of young people's wishes, authoritarian relationships, and using money to formalise the relationship. In some situations funding was directly affecting practice (though young people were aware of this and complicit), particularly if the relationship became based around fulfilling a project rather than being young person-centred. This confirms the work of Doel et al (2010) and Ruch et al. (2010:7), who also argued that becoming too distant from the young people can, if combined with an increase in managerialism, create a 'patriarchal' model that prioritises the agency over the need of the young people. It is therefore impossible, I contest, for the relationships observed in the research to be fragmented into discrete behaviours and actions, and have codes and rules applied to them in isolation from the context of the relationship, without affecting the nature of the youth work relationship and the ability to meet an aim of youth work.

### 8.2.1 External Influences

After describing the aspects that make youth work relationships complex, which I have argued make youth work relationships difficult to codify, this section will highlight external forces from the data that I recognised as influencing the relationships with young people. There were several interactions that appeared as if an external force was influencing the relationship. The first two statements in the Institute of Youth Work's 'Code of Ethics' attempt to protect workers and young people from any external influences that may not be in the best interests of the young people, by stating clearly that young people's needs are to be prioritised:

*We have a duty of care to young people. In the youth work relationship the best interests of young people have priority.*

*We do not seek to advance ourselves, our organisations, or others – personally, politically, or professionally – at the expense of young people. (Institute for Youth Work 2013)*

This ethical imperative can come under pressure from funders, governments, and managers to produce quantifiable outcomes, and from personal motivations that are not in keeping with the aims and values of youth work.

At the LAYC in particular, this conflict was evidenced with the workers gathering and using data on their young people by entering it into a database. This, the manager admitted, was somewhat covert; the young people signed a form consenting to information sharing by the youth workers to other professionals, but soon forgot that their conversations could be shared. One of the young people during the focus group highlighted this issue by asserting she believed she could tell the workers anything and, unlike teachers and social workers, they would hold the information confidentially. This would lead me to suggest that, while there is an important place for information sharing between professionals, there is a need for ongoing transparency about which information is being shared and when.

Organisational policies can also seek to protect the interests of the agency more than the young people. A paternalistic approach to removing risk can seek to protect the organisation's reputation rather than seek to meet the needs of developing young people (Sercombe 2010a:108-112), and boundaries should be used sensitively to protect young people's interests, but can become a "bureaucratised and risk-averse... system" (Turney 2010:143). Peterson (1992), writing from her own perspective as a victim of boundary violations by a social worker, argues that seeing a client as an object can allow the worker to justify why their own needs could take preference, and many boundary violations happen before one of the 'rules' is broken. The boundary violation begins, she asserts, as soon as the worker puts anything at a higher priority than the needs of the client. The research here supports the potential for this, particularly at the LAYC where it was assumed written policies were sacrosanct. However, what has been considered less in previous research is the way workers can assume a 'rule' has been devised (for or against an action), but has actually come about by way of rumour or 'urban legend'. For example, when a young person was left alone outside the club when the workers went home, I asked one of the sessional workers why they could not offer them a lift. In the field notes I recounted that it was against the 'lone worker policy'. I later asked for a copy, and found that there was no rule preventing a young person from being given a lift in the written document; rather the rules for the provision of lifts for young people is rather small, generic, and focussed on good practice when providing lifts rather than preventing them. However this risk-averse understanding (or the assumption that rule had been conveyed accurately) by the worker was in-keeping with the ethos of the LAYC.

Another external influence comes from the prevailing organisational culture. For example, it has been assumed increasing the distance in the relationship is one of the facets of the formalised, new managerial professional agenda in the social professionals (as referred to in chapter three). Layard and Dunn (2009) argue being too distant can also buy into an individualistic culture, which affect the wellbeing of children and young people. It can also be a symptom of a 'patriarchal' model (Doel et al. 2010), where boundaries to protect the agency can lead to a failure to meet user's needs. However this research shows that this assumption a managerialist culture *must* create distance is too simplistic. As the apparent health of the youth work relationship involves a nuanced interaction between a range of themes (eight of which have been observed and discussed in this thesis). The opposite is also true; a relationship negatively affecting a young person requires more than an increase in formality and distance, influenced by a more bureaucratic culture. Take, for example, the YM – perhaps the most informal atmosphere of all four centres, with very close relationships with the greatest sense of equality between worker and young people. However within the group there was a clique that preferred to talk without the workers present and situated their own barriers to prevent the workers getting too close. Alternatively, the LAYC was recognised as having the greatest distance between workers and young people – however there were times when some young people would seek out closer, more intimate moments with the workers, and the workers were receptive. For example, the young person coming in early to talk about his future plans after arguing with his mother, or the young person enjoying some one-to-one time playing a game with a worker, during which time his entire demeanour changed (albeit temporarily) into a more placid, helpful, and conscientious member of the group. Therefore it is possible to find moments of intimacy in formalised settings, and distance where closeness is the norm, suggesting an end to the rhetoric that assumes bureaucratic systems *must* be devoid of close relationships, and poses a question for future research: how do close 'professional' relationships develop within managerial systems?

The extended example at the end of chapter six particularly shows how external factors can influence the relationship between young people and their youth workers. As Jeffs and Smith (2010a) argue, funding can provide serious ethical issues for workers who may find funding conditions contrary to their values. For example, the perceived need at LAYC to show evidence for work done led to levels of confidentiality being influenced by the use of a database, which in turn is associated with aspects of respect and power in the relationship.

The CCYC was funded by the Rank Foundation, which invited the local community to set their own targets, as explained in a book they commissioned by Rogers and Smith (2010). On Mondays the

youth club was run entirely by centre staff (opposed to other days, where local authority staff ran a club from the centre) and this meant the work was very flexible, and each week had a different theme. Evidence was gathered by keeping a selection of work young people had done. For example, when designing posters and making Valentine's Day cards, the worker would keep them. At other times, the worker would take pictures to show the work that had been done. Only once did this seem to negatively affect a young person, when the full time worker (Flo) took a piece of work that the young people seemed embarrassed about, and would have preferred her to destroy it. On the CCYC evenings with their local authority workers, this was different. Young people were usually engaged in project work, often spanning multiple weeks, which resulted in some form of accredited outcome. There was paper work for the young people to fill out at the beginning and end of the observed projects, and some young people would complain and make it obvious they preferred not to fill it out, but did so because they recognised it was important. Young people were told candidly why they needed to fill it out; that it was required to meet funding requirements. I coded these interactions as "treating with respect" as it assumed an adult-like level of maturity in understanding why the paper work was required. Perhaps the paperwork was not directly in the best interests of the young people (they certainly were not enamoured by it), but a wider argument for ensuring good practice through adequate monitoring could be made.

So far in this chapter I have argued the aspects of relationships discerned from the key themes in the ethnographic study are not discrete entities, but are related in complex ways. They overlap, and together build up a basis on which to judge the appropriateness and health of a relationship between a youth worker and a young person. This comes into conflict with dominant discourses on good practice that take actions out of context and assume rules and codes are the best mechanism for discerning the most appropriate behaviours in a given situation. I believe, based on the observations, these rules can prevent good work from occurring and do not necessarily prevent negative influences entering into the relationship. Other external factors, including funder requirements and hierarchical expectations, can also influence the youth work relationship. As I shall go on to argue, this is not assuming there should be no predefined limits on behaviour in the youth work relationships, but that these limits should be a failsafe to ensure young people do not come to harm from a worker with malicious intent, rather than the dominant approach to defining good practice. Therefore as rules for good practice cannot always necessarily be trusted to ensure ethically sound behaviour, in the next section I provide an alternative framework using virtue ethics.

### 8.3 The Place of Virtue Ethics in Youth Work Relationships

Sercombe (2010a) argues that professions (including youth work) are defined by the nature of their relationship with their clientele. Sercombe goes on to argue some indicators of professional status, including qualifications and codes of ethics, are there to *defend* not *define* a practice. Therefore, the intention in this section is to recognise virtue ethics as helpful in providing an ethical framework that copes with the complexity of the decisions workers daily face in ensuring the relationship stays true to the purposes of youth work, and promotes the wellbeing of young people. Until recently much of the discourse around professional ethics has focussed around principle based ethics. Dominant conceptions of professional boundaries in particular have been imported from social work, which themselves were informed by boundaries for therapeutic relationships. Another dominant perspective is the managerial/bureaucratic forms of ethical decision making, which I critiqued in the literature review, where rules can be used to define the profession rather than protect what already exists, but were also observed in practice.

I shall argue that a virtue ethics framework can account for the myriad nuanced situations, the need for sound judgement, and the need for a sound character in relationship based work. Therefore, by asking ‘which virtues are, or could have been, helpful to the workers?’ with reference to the data from the observations, I shall begin to conceptualise the role of virtue ethics in an ethical framework for youth work relationships.

### 8.3.1 The Character of Workers is Essential When Relationship is the Catalyst for Holistic Development

It has been argued in previous chapters that the heart of youth work is the relationship between the worker and the young person – that is both a defining feature of youth work and the primary method of transformation and development. For this relationship to be authentic, argues Andersson (2013:180) an intermingling of two personalities and characters, not a ‘professional’ interacting with a ‘problem’ is required (see also Ruch et al. 2010). Therefore the internal character, as much as the external action, is important in ethics in youth work (Young 2006, Ord 2014, Bessant 2009). This lies at the heart of virtue ethics, unlike the externally-concerned deontological and utilitarian ethics (van Hooft 2006:28). There is an assumption in modernity, according to MacIntyre (see Lutz 2012:63-65), that people can be separated from their social roles. Virtue ethics, on the other hand, recognises the whole person. When a worker cares, or is trustworthy, for example, it affects the quality of the relationship and therefore the youth worker’s ability to perform well in the role.

To borrow from studies into formal education, Carr (2006:177) and Higgins (2010) argue that teachers require a sound character as they are charged with the moral and social improvement of

students. Being a 'role model' is not enough if the 'role' is not an indelible part of the teacher's (or worker's) character (Ryan and Bohlin 2003:164). The same is true for youth work. If relationship is the primary tool, then it seems right to consider the character of the worker as they will influence the ethos and aims of the relationship. For example, in social work Banks (2012:24) argues that a worker should respect confidentiality because they are respectful and trustworthy people and not simply follow rules that their profession has dictated. Moral rules still have a place here; a person with good character is likely to follow the rules and principles laid before them unless they compete with acting virtuously (Kitchener and Anderson 2010:60). However virtue promotes congruence; an integrity of character that moves beyond understanding and applying abstract rules to concrete situations. Youth workers are interacting on a personal level as they talk informally during regular evenings, as they share long mini-bus trips, when unusual events occur, and during sleep-deprived residencies. The disposition to act in a certain way when the evening takes an unexpected turn and decisions are made quickly displays the character of the worker, and serves to set an example to the young people about how to act in certain situations.

Virtue ethics is also particularly interested in motive. This is not just about whether a worker has performed a 'good' or 'right' action, but *why* the actor believed this was the appropriate action. (Darwall 2003:3). This underpins the requirement for an appropriate emotional response to a situation that guides and motivates actions and behaviours. A worker disposed to act in a certain fashion due to the development of virtues will not have a 'detached theoretical understanding' of the right action (Gill 2005:85-86), as if there was a clear distinction between reason and emotions.

Van Hooft (2006:106), in his brief survey of the history of virtue ethics, draws out three common tenets of virtue theory: ethics is rooted in the concrete realities of daily life, emotion is more important than reason in ethical life, and that the very nature of relationship with others is ethical from the outset. In youth work, Roberts (2010:3) also maintains that as relationships are at the heart of youth work, sometimes an emotional response is the appropriate motivator for action (see also Dunne 2011:21-22). Smith and Smith (2008:36) sum this up: "relationships, whether personal or professional, are often fraught with emotions and practical implications of being with another" and that "this supports the idea that we must allow ourselves to flourish and let our personality shine through into our work – not laid buried under a veneer of professionalism' (p47). Sercombe (2010a:120) succinctly sums this up:

*Our capacity for empathy, to be able to connect with the emotional state of the young person we are working with, to understand the emotional space and to work with a young*

*person in it – these are core skills of youth workers. You can't do it if you are not emotionally available.*

Emotions are not the only basis for right action. It is emotivism that causes MacIntyre to critique deontological ethics in favour of virtue ethics, and Griffin (1998) suggests that emotional involvement can lead to an individual proactively caring for a person, when they could be allowing that person to gain resilience. Here, though, Griffin has not overtly considered doctrine of the mean can allow a worker to mediate for this imbalance: it is true that if 'caring' was considered a virtue in a youth work relationship, that there would be a balance between extremes of 'uncaring' and 'overbearing' or 'smothering' to maintain. Youth workers need to recognise the role of their emotions in connecting with young people as a basis for offering care, and to prevent the relationships with them becoming distant, while *phronesis* and the idea of a professional relationship (Sercombe 2010a) prevent it from becoming too close. However, as Sercombe (2010:120-121) argues, emotional responses based on the worker's past history can unbalance the relationships if it begins to prioritise the worker's need to be heard, or somehow to compensate for their own prior history. Here a commitment to ensure young people's best interests are always being prioritised, treated as a deontic principle, can protect the relationship from this.

### 8.3.2 Responding to the Context of the Relationship

As seen in several examples in this research, and echoed by Dunne (2011:21-22), ethical interactions are not isolated incidents, but they become part of an ongoing narrative of the relationships where a larger story is being created and negotiated between the actors. A commitment to virtue ethics, which provides the resources for workers to make judgements based on the context of the situation, could prevent the unfortunate situations Marshall and Mellon (2011) describe in their research: adults were described as too fearful of litigation and accusation to care for children in need.

With virtue ethics, each situation is taken as a discrete phenomenon (Hursthouse 1999:85-86). In all decisions, McDowell (1997:162) explains, a virtuous person is not one who decides what to do through applying principles, but "one who sees situations in a certain distinctive way" influenced by having a disposition to display certain characteristics. Thus decisions about how to engage with a young person come about through approaching the relationship from a perspective that enables the worker to make judgements about how to use the various aspects of the relationship flexibly.



Attempting to discern an objective understanding of ethical action is not the remit of virtue ethics. While Price (2005) suggests that the end of virtuous action is human flourishing, the means is context-specific and requires *phronesis* (see below). A youth worker, therefore, would consider the whole situation and discern the best action that could lead to the flourishing of the young person. It is through the use of the virtues that relationships avoid becoming 'mechanical transactions' as interactions are context-sensitive (Clark 2005:85). Attempting to be objective and impartial when deciding on right actions in the youth work relationship ensures ethical decision making is rooted in the reality and complexity of engaging with others (Cottingham 1996:75). MacIntyre (2011:37) argues it is impossible to 'pass judgement... from a purely universal and abstract point of view that is totally detached from all social particularity', and perhaps more so when the ethical questions are arising in practice and may require near-instant responses.

To act rightly is therefore a creative endeavour, that makes reference to particular contexts, and may deal with 'the rare, the unusual, the highly specific' (Griffin 1998:60). Though many of the examples from the research of situations workers daily faced were relatively common-place, at times unusual situations arose. Examples in this research include: the worker walking outside to lock up and finding a young woman standing alone in the cold at the Youth Café; the unexpected closing of the skate park bringing in young people with a different set of expectations from the usual members into the LAYC; or the parents asking a worker to mentor their daughter. The rare, unusual and highly specific contexts in which relationships were being formed and lived out were relatively commonplace at the centres, and virtue ethics is one of the frameworks that can account for context. It is in the 'nuanced detail' of listening to young people that workers can make decisions with the aim of benefiting their clients (Roberts 2010:28).

I am not attempting to imply that virtue ethics does not result in consistency or predictability in practice. MacIntyre (2011) criticises the lack of predictability in understanding human behaviour after 400 years of exploring with a rationalist epistemological perspective, and Hursthouse (1999:29, 58) declares ethics to be 'uncodifiable' and refutes 'absolutes' in ethical decision making. However both still recognise that there are broadly predictable patterns to human behaviour (see also Griffin 1998:60, Wolfgang 2005). Hursthouse in particular draws on 'V-Rules' which provide a semi-codified set of actions, which can be amended and nuanced according to the context, while still remaining a broadly sound basis for right action in the youth work relationship. There are also some extreme cases (such as child abuse) where a worker can be so certain a virtuous person would never engage in it, they can treat it *as if it were* absolute. Rules

here are short-hand reminders for context specific decisions, which retain their values as long as the narrative which formed them is remembered (Hauerwas 1974:72).

Flexibility is not arbitrary or inconsistent, but grounded. Whether referring to MacIntyre's 'practice' and 'heroic stories', Aristotle's 'Polis', Hursthouse's appeal to the 'social and rational animal', or Hauerwas's 'community', the virtues are often referred to as being situated in some kind of tradition or narrative, opposed to being situated in an objective natural law. Ludwig (2005) argues that some virtues have displayed a 'remarkable resilience' (p91) over the millennia. Though this does not prove they are objective laws of human nature, it does show they are of value across cultures, and how they are displayed in and informed by society. He goes on to suggest that there are other values needed for a stable community: equality, freedom, cultural creativity and prosperity are communal goods that 'transcend', and inform, individual dispositions.

Youth work has particular traditions and communities of practice which inform and interpret the virtues, from a commitment to the autonomy of young people, to the values of democracy and equality, to a commitment to ongoing dialogue and education (see chapter two). The prevalence of context-specific decisions in the YM can also have a basis in the theological and missiological aims of the church. That is, Christian traditions, and the communities of practice that live them out, provide different expectations of 'good' relationships at the YM. This is exemplified by the paid worker specifically referring to his understanding of the 'incarnation' as a motivation for accepting friendship requests on Facebook. There is a different set of expectations and norms that are not only brought about through what is considered 'good' in youth work, but what is expected for a Christian, or a member of that congregation to do. This can also be seen when the paid worker at the CCYC said she had offered distressed young people a lift in her car because that is what a 'kind' person would do. In both these organisations, more prevalent than the Youth Café and LAYC, there is a greater appeal to a wider set of community norms than simply that found in youth work. Conceptions of good practice in youth work is also, therefore, in a relationship with wider notions of what it is to be 'kind' or what it means to follow a Christ-like example.

Therefore a virtue ethics for the youth work relationship would not take every situation as entirely new, but recognise there have been good practices and community and organisational expectations that may apply to a given situation in the majority of cases, while being able to identify those actions that do not seem virtuous in this situation. The response would remain grounded in the local and overarching youth work communities of practice and directed towards

the *telos* of the relationship, and perhaps the beginning of a virtue ethics of youth work would require some critical reflection on the communities of practice to which the workers belong, and which influence the work. Although chapters one and two focus on the National Occupational Standards as a basis for youth work and starting point for this thesis, the reality is much more broad, and none of the respondents specifically referred to them. There is a diversity of norms in youth work because contemporary practice is based on a range of traditions, and so workers may need time and space to reflect on and identify with the tradition of youth work practice they engage in.

Sometimes a worker is caught in a situation where the 'right' action in that situation could not be considered 'good', and virtue ethics can account for this (Hursthouse 1999:65), leaving a virtue ethicist feeling regret that one virtue has had to be sacrificed for another (Hursthouse 1999:44-47, Gottlieb 2009:118). For example, we might image a situation in which a young person pleads for secrecy when a youth worker becomes aware of an abusive relationship they are trapped in. I suggest there is a significant difference between a worker *just* following an obligation to keep a young person safe from harm, and a worker who refers the incident with a sense of regret that their role to care for the young person's wellbeing has come into conflict with their respect for the person's right to privacy. Or, in an example provided by Hauerwas (1974), when supporting a young person through the termination of a pregnancy so they can carry on in formal education, a worker may feel a sense of remorse that the injustices in society have made the young person feel raising a child is an impossibility, while respecting their autonomy and ability to make decisions.

### 8.3.3 Flourishing in Youth Work and Virtue Ethics

Aristotle believed that to reach *eudaimonia* a person had to practice the virtues, which can be imparted by others (MacIntyre 2011:174-175). Therefore an Aristotelian approach to youth work (as developed by Young 2006, Bessant 2009, Ord 2014, Smith and Smith 2008) would have as the core purpose the flourishing of young people. This would require youth work to focus on developing the virtues and, as a result, in cultivating the virtues in the youth workers. This chain from a youth worker's virtue to a young person's flourishing is something under-theorised by the youth work literature. A virtuous person is described as one with a 'happy' and 'settled' character with greater control during unexpected events (Hauerwas and Pinches 1997:12), and Smith (2012) argues will 'focus on the flourishing' of others. Higgins (2010) argues that a teacher cannot help their class flourish if they themselves are not flourishing – that is, if they themselves have not developed a moral character. This is, in part, because acting virtuously is passed on through mimicking other virtuous people and habituation (Banks 2012:53-54, Hursthouse 1999:36,

Katayama 2003:326). This, I argue, is equally as true for youth workers as for teachers, who have the holistic development of young people as part of their remit through the National Occupational Standards, and wider expectations of the youth work communities of practice, as exemplified in the literature reviewed in chapter 2. Although 'holistic development' is perhaps not synonymous with an Aristotelian understanding of human wellbeing and flourishing, the two concepts overlap significantly, with a recognition a 'good life' requires more than the acquisition of certain skills or physical acquisitions, but the ability to get on well in the world with others.

Young (2006) roots youth work in an Aristotelian virtue ethics and bases her argument on the assumption that young people want to live a good life, and that most individuals want to think of themselves as 'good' people. She suggests the work of virtue formation begins when young people begin asking themselves questions about identity and what sort of person they want to be. She does not suggest a particular set of virtues that should be important, but does argue that the purpose of the youth worker is to support young people's decision making that leads to a virtuous life (Young 2010:94). Ord (2007:88-92) would agree, arguing that the modelling of virtues, and their impact on the character of the young people, is not easily quantifiable. However when a worker treats a young person kindly, over time, that young person is likely to reciprocate and become kinder.

Prioritising the flourishing of the young people, where they are considered holistically, is the role of a pedagogue (see chapter two). Smith (2012) argues a fuller understanding of the ancient Greek pedagogue was as someone who was there to help children (boys in particular) learn, but also to be a moral guide, set an example, accompany and care for the young person: "We need to move discussions of pedagogy beyond seeing it as primarily being about teaching – and look at those traditions of practice that flow from the original pedagogues in ancient Greece. We have much to learn through exploring the thinking and practice of specialist pedagogues who look to accompany learners and bring learning into life."

When facilitating the flourishing of others, Carr (2006:172) argues practical wisdom (*phronesis*) is of greater value than *techne*, the technical skills required to perform a role, and the pedagogue cannot help their charges flourish if they are not themselves cultivating the virtues (Higgins 2010). Therefore, if flourishing is important to youth work, it is important the youth worker is flourishing, and that requires a commitment to the virtues. Within social work Clark (2006:79) asserts that the 'sham' of objective decision making undermines the commitment to promoting the flourishing of clients, while McNeath and Webb (2002:1028, see also Gottlieb 2009:49) argue that the worker must engage with the wider lives of clients as flourishing is a 'community enterprise'. Within

youth work the development of young people is assumed by Forrest (2010) to be holistic and process- not outcome-based (see also Young 2010, Smith and Smith 2008).

By contrast, Clifford (2013) argues that flourishing is a laudable goal, but doubts whether virtues are the chief way to achieve it, and whether tackling social injustices is required as much as forming character for achieving it. He argues that an Aristotelian understanding of *eudaimonia* requires a flourishing community based on equality: that is, the oppressed will not be able to live a 'good life' by virtue of their oppression, therefore social justice is required as much as virtue in the flourishing of individuals. However it is the concept of flourishing that prevents virtues becoming relative or utilitarian (Annas 1998:40), and Hursthouse (1999:170) argues it may be more accurate to think of virtues as necessary but not sufficient for a flourishing life. One may also need health, or freedom from oppression, for example, but virtues are still essential.

#### 8.3.4 Summary: Why Virtue?

Virtues, therefore, are dispositions to act in appropriate ways in complex relationships with young people, recognising that the actions and decisions they are being faced with in one context are part of a larger narrative of the relationships they share, where the motivation to act can be as much emotional as rational.

So far I have argued virtue ethics is an important dialogical partner in the youth work relationship. It offers the workers a framework to engage with the context-specific nature around the interrelating aspects of the relationship; the character of the worker influences the quality of the relationship with young people and this is the primary tool of the worker; and it is orientated towards a *telos* of human flourishing consistent with dominant discourses in youth work. Decisions and actions would still be expected to have a sense of continuity with the practice of youth work and expectations of the organisation, and there is still scope for extreme behaviours to be prohibited in a rule-like fashion if we can be almost certain no virtuous person would engage in them.

### 8.4 Characteristics/Virtues for the Youth Work Relationship

Having reflected on the nature of the complex and nuanced decisions workers face when building relationships with young people, and considered virtue ethics to be an important element to an ethics of the youth work relationship, I re-read the data from the field work and considered which virtues may be important in helping workers develop the character required for this complex youth work relationship. Though this was a wide ranging list (respectfulness, courage, friendliness and honesty were all considered), the three strongest virtues were: phronesis, integrity, and

trustworthiness. These virtues, though relatively generic, are used to show their importance in the youth work relationship through applying them to the empirical research in this thesis. The aim here is not to present a fully-fledged virtue ethics of the youth work relationship, as a full account would include a greater list of virtues. However I seek to highlight the importance of these virtues in developing a broader ethical framework for youth work relationships. Here it is shown that, alongside an awareness of organisational policy and the limits of resources, having certain character traits is important in navigating relationships with young people. Though the internal nature of the virtues makes it near-impossible to infer a virtue into a particular situation, the observations can highlight where a disposition to display professional wisdom, integrity or trustworthiness would be an aid to a worker's professional life. As van Hooft (2006:127) highlights, it is near-impossible to *know* through observation whether a person is acting virtuously, or from a sense of duty (his example of this ambiguity is a boy-scout helping a lady across a street). In describing an act as virtuous I would be making assumptions on the internal motivations of the workers. However, through the ongoing conversations with workers and the interviews, there were some opportunities to discern motivations for actions – for example, Flo at the CCYC talked about wanting to be 'kind', or Trish at the LAYC who felt a 'calling' to put young people first.

#### 8.4.1 Phronesis and Professional Wisdom

As a different form of virtue, Aristotle saw *phronesis* as being a disposition to discern the right action based on the other moral virtues. Aristotle's *phronesis* – a practical wisdom enabling actors to make good judgements – is central to discerning 'right' action through the concept of the mean. Aristotle believed all virtuous positions sit between two extreme vices (i.e. the 'mean'). Courage, for example, sits between the extreme of fool-hardiness and cowardice. This can be contextual, as a well-trained army officer would be accused of cowardice in dangerous situation for failing to act, where a civilian may be accused of foolhardiness if they joined in. Price (2005:262-263) and Gottlieb (2009:92) argue the concept of the mean cannot be known in the abstract, but workers must make their own decisions based on their understanding of the context in which they find themselves. Therefore phronesis characterises someone who is able to exercise good judgement and is able to balance the other virtues.

MacIntyre (2011:180) argues *phronesis* has four elements: the wants and goals of the agent which provide the context for reasoning; the 'major premise' that doing or having something is good or needed; the 'minor premise' where a person judges that this is an occasion that fulfils the major premise; and finally to act in a way that is consistent with the major and minor premise. For

example, in YM's tuck shop the immediate 'wants and goals' are to provide (or be provided with) food and drink, that is the context of the ethical decision making to follow (the reasoning for this example is hypothetical, and the motives are being inferred for the sake of providing an illustration). The major premise of the youth work at YM is assumed to be the flourishing and development of young people. The minor premise is questioning how providing food and drink via the tuck shop can help with the flourishing of the young people – here the workers have decided that trusting young people is one step that will lead to their future flourishing. The action, therefore, is to allow young people to serve themselves with an honesty system.

To explain this further, Christian ethicists Hauerwas and Pinches (1997) suggest that moral life can be likened to a journey or a trip. If considered as a journey, moral decision making has no definite end with a minimal idea of the route one should take. A journey requires character, which is a reflection on the multiple narratives that have brought the traveller to the current location. Though there is no definite, predetermined end, there is a large, overarching aim – a *telos* – in an Aristotelian tradition this is the 'flourishing' of an individual. Therefore on this lifelong moral journey the major premise (flourishing) sets the direction, which the minor premise (those regular decisions that are being made) help to direct towards.

Short-term trips, in Hauerwas and Pinches' analogy, require skills, knowledge, and rational thought to move safely and efficiently. This trip is normally a specific problem or moral dilemma, and the vehicle is reason. Decisions here may meet individual concerns, but are not part of a larger journey. Developing a practice based on the judgement of the worker, therefore, requires a tradition to which they can be true, a community that can aid ethical reflection, and some larger, overarching aim. Price (2005:269) argues this aim should be obvious – human flourishing – it is the means by which that can be achieved that requires *phronesis*, but Dunne (2011:23) argues there can be competing 'ends' to particular interventions: social justice, building social capital, raising aspirations, or consciousness raising are some examples he provides. Which of these short-term 'ends' best adds to the long-term flourishing of individuals that youth workers are engaging with is a matter of judgement. Professional wisdom is therefore also required when defining an end (or managing with a combination of 'ends') when working with young people. Youth work inspired by the Christian faith of workers may have a particular end, different to human flourishing. For example, when the workers at the YM spoke of the 'incarnation' as a model for their work, the expectation was of a missional goal: of providing young people with the opportunity to experience a 'Christ-like' life. At the Youth Café, the 'end' the Pastor of the church was hoping for was the conversion of young people to the Christian faith. Though unfortunately it

was beyond the data from the research, it is conceivable that the pastor and youth workers in a Christian context would see conversion as a means to achieving *eudaimonia*.

Banks and Gallagher (2009) define *phronesis* as the ability to reason between good and bad decisions. Being technically adept in a role (i.e. competent) is important but may not require *phronesis*. However the use of professional artistry requires a framework, creativity, and sound judgement, and that *does* require *phronesis*. Banks and Gallagher continue, *phronesis* is a disposition to make sound decisions on complex situations in a way that rules and protocols cannot. They use the term 'professional wisdom' for 'practical wisdom [*phronesis*] applied to a professional context' (p77). As such, decisions youth workers take would direct towards human flourishing and practice is taken holistically. They conclude professional wisdom needs both rationality and artistry to be able to perceive ethical issues, to exercise moral imagination, and to reflect, deliberate and make decisions to act. Banks (2013) suggests elsewhere that professional wisdom is required to navigate the 'creative tension' between personal engagement with service users and professional accountability. Here 'professional wisdom involves sensitivity to and the ability to perceive the ethically salient features of a situation, empathy with the feelings, values, desires and perspectives of the people involved and the ability to exercise moral imagination; the ability to reflect on and deliberate over what is the right course of action and the ability to give reasons for actions' (p12).

Ord (2014) suggests an approach based on *phronesis* is an alternative to outcome-based youth work. Outcomes should, he suggests, emerge from the youth work relationship, but recognising them requires professional wisdom. This is reminiscent of Schön's (1983) view of a practitioner's role in defining the 'problem', where he argues that the defining task of a professional is not in providing a solution, but being able to understand exactly what it is that requires a solution. Therefore to have any contextualised outcomes within youth work, the youth worker must display the professional wisdom required to recognise the problem(s) affecting the young people.

With professional wisdom comes good judgements from a capacity to reflect on previous actions, and while there is a plethora of skills a youth worker could use 'wisdom is essential in their application' (Barden 2011:109, see also Smith and Smith 2008:58-64). Therefore, professional wisdom is needed to define the parameters of the relationship at the beginning, to make judgements on how to proceed through the relationship, and to define the *telos* of that relationship.



Rhodes (2004), in her review of research into North American after-school clubs, reported that an over-reliance on organisational structures and policies affected workers' ability or willingness to use their own judgement (and show empathy), which led to undermining the formation of close relationships with young people. This judgement affects relationships, and sound judgement in youth work requires professional wisdom (Banks 2006:53-54). Even Clifford (2013:16), who adopts a sceptical approach towards virtue ethics in the social professions, recognises the value in professional wisdom for complex situations; though he balances it with a warning against an over-reliance on an individual's judgement when they are in a position of organisational power. And, despite a benefit to the use of phronesis being context-specific, it should still be assumed that decisions will be consistent with the community of practice's overarching set of aims, rules and codes (Dunne 2011:17-18).

Therefore, professional wisdom has been conceptualised as the basis for making sound judgements, based on the context of the situation. Those decisions are anchored by the 'major premise' (the flourishing of young people), with a wider awareness of the aims of the relationship as well as the immediate context in which the judgements are being made. Unless there is an absolute rule (such as, reporting cases of abuse) using professional wisdom guides workers away from making decisions that only relate to the immediate issues to basing judgements in the wider relationship, and the aims of the organisation. Professional wisdom is based on rational thought, but is also informed by emotional responses, values, and desires.

### *Applying Professional Wisdom to the Youth Work Relationship*

Professional wisdom could be inferred in those observations where workers were faced with making decisions for young people's wellbeing, making decisions about actions based on context, making mutual decisions with the young people, and when they were acting in conflict with organisational policy. However, at times workers demonstrated an inability (or unwillingness) to use their own judgement to make decisions, instead relying on rules, or passing decision making up a hierarchy. Although wisdom and judgement are not synonymous (it is possible to make unwise judgements), they are considered together here because professional wisdom cannot flourish if there are not opportunities to make judgements in practice.

Phronesis can be more than an individual character trait, and can involve a community of practice, *polis*, or tradition that allows for the development of collective wisdom. Therefore, professional wisdom should not be considered simply as collective knowledge to be learnt, but it can be acquired through participation in the communal life of an occupation. This seemed the case at YM, where they were expected to use their professional wisdom by the minister. The expectation

during his interview was that each situation would be considered individually amongst the team of workers to make a sound decision. The policies provided principles to follow, but the workers would make their own creative decision on what good practice looked like in that situation. This recognition of 'grey areas', usually ignored by policies and codes, can create ambiguity (Doel et al. 2010:1882); however youth workers as educators should expect to work with that uncertainty rather than escape it (Jeffs and Smith 2002). For example, this was demonstrated when the workers were deciding together on whether it was acceptable for the group to watch a DVD classified as suitable for viewers aged 15 years or older when 14 year olds were present.

At the LAYC there were opportunities to observe youth workers using their own judgement – however here this was infrequent compared to other organisations. Typically, if a young person made a request the worker referred to the bank of previous rules and policies. If it was something unusual, the typical response was to send them to the team leader or manager. For example, when workers at the LAYC could not decide whether the 'crash mats' in the dance room were suitable for young people to use for back flips they asked the young people to stop until they had the opportunity to ask the manager to make a decision.

By contrast the manager and head of services at the LAYC during interview both showed relatively large amounts of freedom in decision making. With the exception of online communication between the workers and young people (which was always prohibited), the head of youth services said she expected any unusual requests or circumstances not covered by policy to be brought to her, so they could talk through an appropriate response which would usually be positive.

Youth workers often found themselves in a position where they need to make decisions about what they will share with young people. For example, when Patsy at the CCYC explained during interview she would not usually disclose much about her private life to a young person, unless it pertained to a particular issue that would help a young person make an informed decision. Even then, she said, there were some parts of her private life that would still be inappropriate to share, though she struggled to create a clear distinction when it would or would not be appropriate to share. Workers therefore have to use professional wisdom in deciding what, and when, to self-disclose. Decisions requiring judgement were common, and to make sound judgement *phronesis* is required.

*Phronesis* is in a relationship with trusting young people, as whether a worker trusted the young people seemed to inform their decisions, particularly at the CCYC, Youth Café, and LAYC. The three reactions to the tuck shop highlight the potential relationship between the judgements a

youth worker makes as their ability to trust influences the making of a wise decision. With YM the workers trusted the young people to serve themselves, perhaps using their professional wisdom to make the decision that losing some tuck was less important than the benefits to the young people and the club (though, perhaps, this could also be a utilitarian argument). Some workers at the LAYC were concerned about 'setting young people up to fail' by placing them in the way of temptation, thus their understanding of the situation and the pertinent issues perhaps led to their decision to have the tuck shop permanently staffed. However this left one worker at the Youth Café with a sense of regret during interview; she wanted to trust the young people but previous experience had affected her ability to do so. Different policies regarding the amount of surveillance the young people required in the clubs also echoes these decisions. This affected the clubs differently because of the layout of the buildings. At the LAYC, the tuck-shop was in a corner behind the snooker table, and workers were less able to hold a conversation and often asked by young people to play table tennis or pool (to which they declined). At the Youth Café, the small room the tuck shop was in meant the worker could still engage in conversations with the young people in that room, and often young people would gravitate towards the coffee bar area and sit on the stools to speak to the worker.

The worker is in a position to make a decision how and when to trust the young people, a disposition to make wise choices can lead the worker to make a decision somewhere between being overly suspicious of the young people and naivety. Trust being 'earned' to go on trips with the CCYC or stay for a sleepover at the LAYC as was experienced at the CCYC, though sounding like a transaction, could be understood as youth workers attempting to find this balance: a framework around which they are able to suggest which young people can be given responsibility or trusted to behave appropriately in given contexts. Professional wisdom is therefore required when a worker decides who to trust, that is, who to take on trips.

At the CCYC the manager seemed pleased that he was in a position where he could learn from the good practice of the local authority workers, however he believed he had the flexibility to swiftly meet young people's needs as they arose. Having that authority over the practices of the workers at the centre was almost liberating, and also provided a rationale for why it was important to know more about the wider lives of the young people and the communities they inhabit. Responding creatively to ongoing issues, and to move quickly when opportunities arose, was important. As Hall et al. (2010) found in their research, the exercise of professional autonomy was needed to fully engage with the needs of young people and families in the 'here and now' (p354). As an example, Flo, during interview in her account of offering a young person a lift, highlights

how she used her own rational professional wisdom (if there were a false allegation she believed ‘the truth will out’) in order to meet the young person’s immediate need to be taken to a place of safety despite being against organisational policy. Displaying *phronesis* could also provide the creativity and competence to mitigate risks. For example, perhaps Flo ensured she took the shortest route home, phoned a manager to explain what was happening, asked the young person to phone someone from home, or put the young person in the back seat.

Workers not only display on their professional wisdom when deciding on appropriate actions, but also go about their work in such a way to make unlikely the kind of misunderstandings or false-accusations. Using professional wisdom (with its appeal to creativity and competence) workers could be able to meet the needs of the young person without bringing the organisation, or their own practice, into disrepute. Being professionally wise entails youth workers being morally aware and able to recognise situations that require ethical reflection (Banks and Gallagher 2009:86). If a worker is attempting to meet the needs of the young person sound judgement is needed to know how this should be done (Collander-Brown 2010:46). There may be a range of skills and techniques a youth worker could draw from. However wisdom is essential in their application (Barden 2011:109).

### *Summary: Professional Wisdom*

Based on the parameters of the relationship, its *telos*, and the context, workers with a sense of professional wisdom will be competent, engage in critical reasoning, but also be able to work creatively within a given situation to ensure the relationship between the worker and young people is directed towards the ends of youth work. The major and minor premise, as explained by MacIntyre, allow the worker to engage in daily activities referring their decisions to the *telos* of the relationship. It has a two-way relationship with trusting young people, as who to trust is a question of professional wisdom, and whether a person is trusted affects decisions made in practice. When attempting to prioritise the needs of the young people using professional wisdom provides the flexibility and judgement to ensure young people come first, but in a competent manner, and not in any manner that ignores the wider need to appropriately protect the work or the organisation. Drawing from professional wisdom benefits the youth work relationship as a worker can draw from it to inform how closely to engage with a young person, when to help them, when to engage in their wider lives, when to trust them, when to share (and how much) about their personal lives, and when to make use of their authority.

Though certainly not an exhaustive attempt at describing the benefits of professional wisdom in the youth work relationship, it has been argued the general principle of being able to make

decisions rooted in competencies and the *telos* of the relationship, but with the ability to transcend rules-based decision making when necessary, is significant in maintaining the youth work relationship. Workers with a disposition to display *phronesis* has been shown to inform decisions using the context of the situation, while recognising any risks to the worker and young people.

#### 8.4.2 Integrity

Alongside *phronesis*, integrity is the other of Aristotle's virtues which is required for others to be properly applied (Gottlieb 2009:110, Banks and Gallagher 2009:149, Radden 2007:124). Through this section I shall show that integrity particularly relates to self-disclosures, engaging with the wider lives of young people, setting an example, and the level of distance in the relationship. To begin I will present two broad interpretations of integrity, as a consistency between private and occupational self and as consistency between the values of the organisation and the person during work time.

Firstly, Van Hooft (2006:134) defines integrity to be the virtue that ensures a person is virtuous across contexts, that avoids a 'mismatch' between personal convictions and public declarations. Integrity can be seen as having congruence between personal and occupational values and behaviour, and is one aspect of a vocation, where life is approached as a whole (Roberts 2010:158). This professional identity becomes part of the worker's personal identity, where the values are being understood, reflected and acted upon in the personal as well as occupational life (Banks and Gallagher 2009:206-209, Kole and de Ruyter 2009, Hogan 2003:208-211). Here youth work is not a role, but an identity with a commitment to a set of values workers take with them – "acting consistently with their won convictions" (van Hooft 2006:163). As Nicholls (2012:178) argues: "someone is a youth worker first and foremost – this is what marks a person out; a youth worker is not defined by who he or she works for". Being technically adept and able to follow principles of good practice do not provide all the right tools for navigating the ethical reflection that is needed (Kole and de Ruyter 2009), but internalising the values of youth work becomes a powerful resource to draw from in the youth work relationship. Similarly, Banks (2010b:2169) defines integrity as a "commitment to hold on to a set of deeply held professional values in the face of adversity or pressure".

Referring to social work, Ruch et al. (2010:52-57) highlight the different identities we can present in different contexts and refers to them as 'circles'. They argue that the worker's different 'selves' is represented by these circles overlapping, as in a Venn diagram, with the centre being the individual's 'core' self. A perfect integrity is perhaps impossible in this model, however they

suggest that some individuals have circles that overlap more than others (greater integrity), and others allow their circles to be entirely separate (no integrity). This can account for situations where a worker may have an entirely different set of values outside their working life, but recognise the need to work with a value-base as a practitioner. Therefore, a common tradition or community that underpins both personal and professional values could be helpful: this, I suggest, was best seen in the YM where the workers shared a particular set of evangelical Christian values in both their youth work and personal life. However to develop professional integrity a clear set of professional values is required, which is understood in light of the traditions of the profession, reflected upon, and acted upon (Banks and Gallagher 2009:210).

When in a helping or educating relationship with others it is essential to be “seen as people of integrity” (Smith and Smith 2008:13-14), that is, to avoid appearing hypocritical, but also to ensure the relationship is authentic (p145). Cooper (2012) agrees, suggesting a social worker must ‘maintain a higher standard of behaviour than you would normally’ (p72) in case the worker meets a client outside the professional setting thus preventing the moral authority of the worker being diminished. Maintaining this integrity outside of work is fundamental to the role of the informal educator, where habits and appearance set a tone for the educative conversations youth workers partake in (Jeffs and Smith 2005:79, 97). When Brian from the LAYC was seen inebriated in a club by some young people, he not only seemed to lose his authority in the conversation that followed at the youth club, but also other workers failed to challenge the attitudes and language displayed by the young people when mimicking him in a way they usually would. However Jeffs and Smith are not only concerned with a worker being observed out of hours (which seems to be Cooper’s predominant concern). They believe having integrity is an important character trait that permeates through the relationship with young people whether they are caught behaving in an inappropriate fashion outside of the youth club, or not. Youth workers, with their commitment to authentic relationships, have to be ‘real’ people which, according to Ord (2007:53), requires integrity.

The second broad definition of integrity considered here is displaying the values of youth work or the organisation worked for while at work, without drawing from them in a personal context. If it is recognised that we may be proficient and virtuous professionals without being virtuous in the same way at home, as Banks and Gallagher (2009, see also Hauerwas 1974:44) suggest, then integrity will guide what should and should not be shared with young people. Before making a disclosure a worker seeking integrity will filter their anecdotes and answers through the question ‘is this consistent with the values of youth work and my organisation?’ Hursthouse (1999:145-

152) also refers to 'blindspots', where people who generally appear virtuous have particular failings.

However, Ord (2007:54) would argue this could undermine the youth work relationship, and that integrity as a congruence between personal and professional selves is particularly important in youth work where "the boundaries between personal and professional life... are narrower than other professions, both the quantity of information one is expected to disclose and the quality of information... is greater". Without consistency between personal and occupational roles lapses in integrity can undermine the authority of the worker (Cooper 2012:72, Smith and Smith 2008:25). This would pit integrity against other characteristics, like honesty – should a worker be open and honest about smoking or drinking, or share views on immigration that contradicted the national occupational standards' values on inclusion, if asked directly? Should they lie? Or should they be evasive? It begs a wider question as to whether a youth worker can also be a member of a far-right political party (such as the British National Party) if they promised to uphold the value of inclusion while in the centre? To what extent can it be expected a sessional worker should display the values of youth work as defined by the National Occupation Standards outside of their contracted hours?

Virtues are not one-directional. While a community of practice may offer a foundation for virtues, it is equally possible that virtuous people can contribute to the collective values of an organisation or profession. It is this basis in collective wisdom that counters arguments against virtue ethics based on being too individualistic, and ignoring the issues of poverty, oppression, and social justice. Rather, a *virtuous* worker could be conceived as one who takes issues of social justice seriously and seeks to tackle the causes of injustice, because they the worker possess a disposition to displaying integrity, and the community of practice takes promoting social justice as a value.

These are difficult ethical questions, beyond the scope of the empirical data collected for this thesis, but there were some workers who believed they should embody the youth work values (as they conceive of them) throughout their life, while others believed this was only necessary 'at work', and a third group believed they should avoid hypocrisy by acting as if they held to certain values in the centre that did not reflect their private lives. However there was also evidence in the research of young people recognising when the values promulgated in the centre but not displayed outside by workers were discovered, and challenged. Therefore, as well as integrity being an important characteristic required for good practice, I would also argue it has a wider role in protecting the profession of youth work. This follows Banks (2010b) argument, when she

differentiates between several senses of integrity. Banks suggests that professional integrity can be regarded as doing what is right or expected (often as defined in a code of ethics), which can be important in maintaining public confidence. The manager at the LAYC was particularly keen to stress the need for the work to have sufficient boundaries in place to ensure the organisation is protected, thus rules are enforced to prevent a lack of congruence between organisational values and expectation, and the actions of the workers. This can prevent workers being a negative example to young people during club hours, and prevents self-disclosures and limits the involvement workers have in the wider lives of young people that may show workers engaging in something counter to the organisation's values.

However this may not extend to ensuring the integrity between the personal and occupational lives, which cannot be legislated for. Integrity in that sense becomes an internal characteristic. It is through virtue ethics, argues van Hooft (2006:163-168), that a 'mismatch' between 'personal convictions' and 'public declarations' can be avoided, where youth workers can act consistently with their personal values. There is also a concern by raised by Root (2007:107-109), in a youth ministry context, that if 'integrity' is defined as 'following the rules' then opportunities to show care and compassion could be lost. Dean et al. (2001:28), however, argue that integrity in a Christian setting is based on naming and understanding the theological basis of the worker's practices, and being consistent with it – avoiding 'leaky theology', that is, where a worker may believe or espouse a particular doctrine, but then act in a way inconsistent with it. Similarly the rise in the modern professionalising agenda has also been suggested to have led to an ethical vacuum between personal and occupational roles (Oakley and Cocking 2001), which distances the worker and the young person. Greater integrity, Oakley and Cocking go on to argue, ensures decision making will follow the ideals of the occupation (see also Kole and de Ruyter 2009).

This is reminiscent of Goffman's (1959) theory, that individuals are essentially performers on a stage in which they attempt to control the impression others perceive (p26): we are "always and everywhere, more or less consciously, playing a role" (p30). Goffman continues in a vein similar to virtue ethics and Aristotle's understanding of those virtues gained through habit. He suggests that those roles we are "striving to live up to" (p30), the person we would like to be, becomes a dominant role and an integral part of our personality. A 'mismatch' becomes less likely through practicing, or to use Aristotelian language, habituating the type of person the worker wishes to become.

At CCYC integrity (as integrating personal and professional values and behaviour) was considered almost universally important by the workers when asked to give advice to new youth workers. 'Be



yourself', 'don't compartmentalise', 'be congruent', 'don't have a split personality', were all phrases used to describe this sense of integrity during interview. However through the field work I recognised that workers simply 'being yourself' without recognising that this must set a positive example, can turn integrity into consistently displaying undesirable values. If a worker does not uphold the values of the centre/youth work they are not going to have a sense of integrity, or potentially be a good role model. In these cases organisations (particularly CCYC and LAYC) have rules designed to prevent behaviour incongruent with the practices and values of the centre – for example, preventing workers smoking with young people. However young people can see youth workers outside the usual club times (such as, Brian from LAYC spotted at a night club by some young people). These can be fleeting moments, but create lasting memories, and can normalise behaviours if the worker is viewed as someone with authority or is assumed to set an example. Integrity in an Aristotelian sense assumes that the congruence between personal and occupational life is positive, something that aids the flourishing of others. This prevents the displaying and normalising of negative examples – even if consistent with their values and characteristics at the youth centre – as being a sign of 'integrity'.

However this discussion has so far assumed the organisation is based on values an individual may aspire to hold, or somehow be considered 'good'. If a worker, for example, felt that the organisation was not working for the best interests of the young person or had a set of values they believed to be immoral, this lack of integrity between personal and professional – this inherent tension between behaving at work in a way one does not agree with – would create a less integrated sense of self. Here it would be the role of a virtuous worker to attempt to bring change to the organisation to increase their sense of integrity, or to recognise they cannot work in this environment and maintain their sense of integrity.

### *Applying Integrity to the Youth Work Relationship*

When considering the data presented in chapters five and six, there were several opportunities where integrity was (or could have been) an important virtue for the workers to display in certain situations. Integrity has various definitions at the youth centres, ranging from workers being open about their lives, being congruent with personal values and the values of the centre, and being open and honest about their own failings.

Integrity is important because youth work is often said to be built on the premise young people see and learn (informally) from the way in which a worker responds to others, particularly those who are in need. How a worker speaks about people who are not present – whether Patsy

speaking about Maureen missing from the CCYC, or the workers at the YM asking about the wellbeing of young people who were missing – can be informed by their sense of integrity.

Though a congruence between youth work and personal life was commented on most at the YM, the interview with Trish at the LAYC displayed a sense of secular vocation – she believed her life was orientated towards a commitment to young people, and therefore her professional and personal values overlapped. In practice there were differences of opinion as to whether a youth worker should set an example outside of the usual hours of work. In both the Youth Café and LAYC there were examples of workers disagreeing with the idea they were bound by organisational ideals outside of working hours, which then has implications on whether it is appropriate to engage in the wider lives of young people if the values of the centre are not going to be reflected.

At the YM, there was a proactive integrity that seemed to invite young people further into the lives of the workers allowing them to see the values portrayed in the youth club in action. This fuelled greater self-disclosure and greater involvement in the wider lives of the young people. The aim is not simply to have an internal sense of integrity, but to be transparent and take opportunities to display that integrity (Nash and Hirst 2011:5). This proactive integrity is also shown in how the groups meet fortnightly at the paid worker's house, and know his family and children. During interview he highlighted this helps to set an example of Christian family life, and can produce a sense of authenticity that is vital, according to Ord (2007:53), in the youth work relationship. This is even more pronounced in the youth ministry literature where workers should be actively setting a 'Christ-like' example (Fields 2001:196, Fields 2002:25, Griffiths 2013, Nash and Hirst 2011, Whitehead 2011, Root 2007:107-109). When deciding whether to befriend on Facebook, for example, a worker must decide whether their whole lives live up to the ideals and values of youth work as they perceive them.

In the fieldwork I recognised that the different backgrounds, theologies, and traditions affect what this 'Christ-like' example would look like. The workers at the YM came from a similar evangelical perspective, and saw their role in interacting with young people outside of the centre to either offer support (particularly with regarding faith development, and attempting to prevent young people drifting away from the church) or to set an example which they believed modelled the example Jesus would have set. This was coming from a relatively common interpretation of incarnational theology in practice (as discussed in chapter two): the youth worker sees incarnational theology as attempting to 'be Jesus' to young people. However, this requires a significant level of interpretation of what the youth workers *think* Jesus would do in a modern

situation very different from first-century Palestine. They are focussing on Jesus' time of being present, being accessible to his disciples, sharing a common life together; therefore the workers talk more freely about engaging out of hours and sharing virtual space on Facebook with young people as a way of making themselves accessible and Jesus was to his disciples. However, Root (2007) was considered in chapter two, who presented an alternative understanding of the incarnation. He would see issues in using it as a template for youth work because the incarnation was a one-time-only physical event in the person of Jesus, and to reduce the incarnation to 'being Jesus' to other people undermines the belief that Jesus is still alive and active in the world today. This model of being 'open' also fails to account for the times Jesus spent away from his disciples up mountains or in a desert, the relatively short period of his active public ministry at around three years, and the secrets he kept from his disciples. Seeing the incarnation as a life of solitude, short-termism, and secrecy would, perhaps, create a different model for youth work. Rather than attempt to model Jesus using an appeal to incarnational theology, Root argues youth workers should walk alongside young people ('place-share') to understand how their lives feel, and together to search for Jesus in the midst of their own situations. While integrity is still important in this model, it is not synonymous with attempting to be 'Christ-like'. However what is prevalent at the YM opposed to the Youth Café is a genuine sense of the workers engaging in practical theology – thinking seriously about what they believe about Jesus and the Gospel, and how that could or should affect their practice.

### *Summary: Integrity*

Based on the literature and empirical data, I have associated integrity with regulating (or being used to ensure the appropriateness of) self-disclosures, engaging in the wider lives of young people, and the intimacy and distance between the worker and the young people. Workers could draw on their understanding of integrity to help regulate how close a worker should be to their young people, what to share with them, and ensure they continue to set an example with young people if (or when) they interact with their lives beyond the centre. A sense of integrity also enables the worker to make judgements on whether the relationship is of benefit to the young people (as defined by the values of youth work and/or the organisation they gained their values from), and that action and attitudes displayed by the worker are meeting (or aiming towards) the purpose of the relationship. Conversely, where there is a lack of integrity this can negatively impact the authority a worker has.

### **8.4.3 Trustworthiness**

In the research a trusting relationship was shown to corroborate Taylor's (2003:152) assertion as "the core ingredient for responding to and helping a young person" when going through difficult

times (Taylor 2003:152). It is essential to producing change (Jones 2014:228), and vital to their participation in local politics and decision making (Emslie 2009:327). Trust is formed when young people believe the youth workers are competent, will act in their interests, and when workers have provided times of undivided attention (Taylor 2003:6). To be trusted also requires technical skills around organisation, ensuring safety, and good management (Tyler et al. 2009:41-42). All social professions would break down without trust however the current approach to move to contract based relationships can remove this (Banks 2004:59-60). Therefore, if trust is essential to professional relationships in general, and youth work in particular, having workers with a disposition to act in a trustworthy manner is also vital.

Banks and Gallagher (2009:149) argue that one may not trust someone equally in all contexts (one may not trust a doctor to fix a car, for example), however to be *trustworthy* is a universal virtue. Trust is an element of a relationship (as seen in chapter six), however trustworthiness is a character trait, a disposition to be reliable, consistent, and dependable. An element of being a trustworthy youth worker, therefore, is recognising the limits of their skills and knowing when to signpost a young person to another service (Andersson 2013:182). It is also, argues Sercombe (2010:126-127), through being trustworthy that youth workers should maintain their authority, not through the use of power and contracts. A trustworthy worker may also have persistence, patience, and a non-judgemental approach (Nicholls 2012:185).

To be trustworthy is to respect confidentiality (Hill 1999:141, Morgan and Banks 2010:158). The IYW code of ethics declares that young people should be 'fully aware' of what information is being collected and who it is being shared with, but when Belton (2009:124) ran opportunistic focus groups with twenty workers at a conference participants highlighted their suspicions on how data they were sharing was being used. Ord (2007:106) recognises the 'central assessment framework' used by multiple agencies to standardise the referral procedure could damage their relationship with young people, however to 'opt out' would risk a loss of status amongst other professions. This, he continues, was considered to be important in the aftermath of Victoria Climbié and 'Every Child Matters' (HMSO 2003), and was highlighted again when a lack of communication contributed to service providers failing to recognise the danger Baby Peter was in (who was killed after multiple opportunities for professionals to intervene). However, he concludes, youth work works precisely because it operates outside that system and engenders trust. These concerns about information sharing and confidentiality are shared with the manager at the LAYC, who commented during interview that he was unsure how the information was being used, and that young people may not be aware of the information being shared about them.

Confidentiality, however, is not the same as secrecy. As the focus group from CCYC and the YM explained, they believe the workers will keep their information confidential, however they will share it between the team. This, the young people at CCYC said, was acceptable because they trusted all the workers in the centre, however they would be unhappy if it was shared beyond the organisation. However with information sharing at the LAYC, this assumption of confidentiality appeared under threat with information being shared when young people were not aware of this sharing. This practice is in conflict with Morgan and Banks' (2010) argument, that behaviour observed by the workers in the centre should remain confidential, so the young people recognise the centre as a safe space where they can be themselves without fear of being reported to the police – though recognising there are some occasions when potential dangers come to light, and this should be reported (drug dealing, or abuse, for example). There is also a tension if criminal activities are kept confidential, as this may implicitly convey that these actions are acceptable. Ultimately, they conclude, keeping young people informed and in control of the information they provide is an important part of what is distinctive about youth work. In the organisations where confidentiality is threatened, so are the ideals of youth work. This particular issue could be have a rule to protect young people's (e.g. 'never share information without express permission'), however the virtue of trustworthiness is a wider disposition to be act in such a way that will not betray the trust of the young person *and* the organisation, and a professionally wise worker would have the resources to navigate any tension between these parties.

For many young people, particularly as seen by those who will only smoke in front of their youth workers at the CCYC or the young man who came straight to the LAYC after a disagreement at home, the youth workers can offer a safe-haven to many young people who may fear repercussions if they open up about certain behaviours at home or school, which echoes the findings of Taylor (2003:49), and Layard and Dunn (2009:40). Hale and Bazzana (1999) take this further in a Christian setting and argue that young people recognise the difference between a 'real relationship' and a 'work relationship', and that they would confide in a youth minister to a greater extent than a 'government worker', thus creating a greater level of honesty. To encourage young people to be open and honest, it is important youth workers reflect that authenticity in the relationship too (Rogers and Carmichael 1965, Jones 2014:228, Fields 2002:236). Trustworthiness is the basis for development and transformation, so a worker is listened to and their perspectives are taken seriously (Folgheraiter 2004:97, McGrath and Pistrang 2007). According to Young (1999:5-6) honesty, closely related to trust, is essential to the youth work relationship. It is honesty that moves trustworthiness from being synonymous with 'reliability', as it is possible to be reliable and dishonest (Banks and Gallagher 2009:141).

Trustworthiness also has a relationship with 'taking responsibility', one of van Hooft's (2006:141-146) core virtues. Here, taking responsibility is taking ownership of an issue rather than leaving it to others. The alternative vice, he argues, is to assume 'it's not my problem'. A worker may need to adopt the approach of one taking responsibility, of saying 'I can contribute to the solution' (of whatever issue may befall a young person, the community, or the centre) to be trustworthy. Or, alternatively, if a worker did not take responsibility for the issues they were faced with, they would soon become untrustworthy.

Walker (2011), in her research, also found that young people trusting their workers led to caring relationships, and trust (combined with commitment to care) allowed workers the latitude to switch between roles. Though as seen above, it is possible to be 'trusted' without having the virtue of 'trustworthiness', being trustworthy would allow a worker to (for example) become more authoritarian when there was potential for harm. Amongst some of the most disenfranchised young people, Andersson (2013) proposed, a trusting relationship is essential to be able to signpost them to professionals that could help. To engender this, she argues, young people need to feel like they are being treated as individuals and that workers are bringing their personality, not just their skills, to the relationship.

### *Applying Trustworthiness to Relationships*

A commitment to being trustworthy may affect the willingness of workers within the LAYC to make information available to other organisations without explicitly informing young people. Youth workers were consistently described by young people as those they could confide in and when young people developed relationships with adults, it appeared through the focus groups that trustworthiness was important to them. Many conversations and behaviours by young people (particularly around sexual health, alcohol use, and smoking) were privy only to youth workers and friends. Young people noted that some adults in their lives – particularly parents – could become quite intrusive, while others – namely teachers – would spread information about them around to others.

However youth workers, they felt, would not make rash decisions about who to share information with. The workers at YM felt that one of the purposes of this relationship was so that they could be trusted by young people who would then open up when needed. If youth workers shared a relationship with other family members, this did not seem to faze the young people, who still trusted the workers to maintain confidentiality. The youth café was a slight exception to this rule, with the relationship between youth workers and young people having fewer examples of 'confiding' than other groups. One young person, Carl, said in strong language, that he would

prefer to speak to a mentor at the Pupil Referral Unit than any of the youth workers at the Youth Café.

Trustworthiness was displayed in simple ways throughout the fieldwork. For example, the worker at LAYC who was approached by a young person who wanted to share some stories with her. He asked the young person to wait until everyone had signed in. About 20 minutes later, the worker then took the initiative to find the young person and ask them about their weekend. At CCYC trust comes through in an array of examples, but in particular young people believed what they said to youth workers would be dealt with sensitively and appropriately. Here trustworthiness was synonymous with acceptance and a lack of judgement to young people – they can be themselves without feeling intimidated, believing what they tell the workers remains between the two parties. A trustworthy youth worker is one who will use the relationships for the young people's needs, and not to meet his own (e.g. Ben at the Youth Café seemed to use his relationship with young people to share personal issues for his own benefit).

Trustworthiness is underpinned in youth work by a commitment to confidentiality, which can be undermined by information sharing. Morgan and Banks (2010) also highlight the importance of confidentiality in youth work. They suggest there are ethical issues inherent when young people share and a worker has to make a choice between agency policy and the young person's wishes or best interests. At the LAYC the manager is mindful that the young people are not aware of how much information about them is being shared with other agencies. During focus groups, the young people particularly valued the way youth workers could be trusted to keep their information. Workers at the LAYC would regularly write on evaluation forms conversations they had overheard, or conversations they had engaged in. Occasionally, with more serious conversations, these were written up and placed on an online database that other organisations (such as the police and social services) had access to. The covert nature of the information gathering and sharing, though 'honest' in the sense young people signed a consent form saying their information should be shared, led the manager to question to what extent this could be considered dishonest. There is, however, a wider concern. At the training at the LAYC it was made clear that information sharing was being used to show the value of youth work, thus creating an argument against making cuts to the youth service. While the manager at the LAYC felt uncomfortable sharing information about young people given with the assumption of confidentiality, this utilitarian argument was difficult to argue against when information sharing is presented as securing the future of the youth services.

Trust can be broken through unreliability, which shows a lack of respect for the young people, and can leave them feeling powerless. Consistency is required, therefore being virtuous in private makes workers more trustworthy (Smith and Smith 2008:30). A worker should not, therefore, assume that they can be a role model within the centre only, as Ben at the Youth Café assumed when he defended his actions outside the café as 'not being at work'. To be trustworthy, therefore, will also require a disposition to be organised and reliable and display integrity. Tyler et al. (2009:16-17) equates trustworthiness with management skills, saying that if a worker does not appear dependable then her authority will be undermined and the young people will begin to feel unsafe. Perhaps displaying greater trustworthiness would have helped the workers at the Youth Café provide the food on the menu, consistent opening times, and ensure the heating was put on in a timely manner.

The level of honesty at the CCYC and LAYC seemed to be limited by rules and organisational expectations. Jenny at the CCYC, for example, did not lie about smoking, however she did not volunteer that she smoked when asked by the young people. MacIntyre though, points out the absence of virtues or presence of vices (such as lying) – even if one party is completely unaware – sets the ethos of the whole relationship. There are also times when workers would not be entirely honest, particularly the student on placement (for example, over their smoking habits) for fear of breaking an organisational rule or overstepping a boundary. That is not to say this person lied, but remained uncharacteristically stoic when she was asked for a light, and whether she would like to go outside for a smoke. Although, when Bill informs the young people from LAYC he is going on a 'drinking holiday' when asked why he is taking leave by the young people he is providing an example of active honesty where, perhaps, less information would have sufficed. Being honest does not require complete self-disclosure (Sapin 2009:66).

However, Pat from the CCYC explains during interview that she would not volunteer personal information about herself, unless it was something specifically helpful to the young person in the given situation. In doing so she is providing an example of a virtuous form of honesty that is able to provide information that makes the encounter with the young person authentic and genuine (Smith and Smith 2008:47-50), but without providing an entirely open account that could become counterproductive. The dialogue on which informal education, a dominant discourse in youth work, is based requires this form of honesty and openness (Walker and Ivanhoe 2007:56, Jeffs and Smith 2005:28-31). That is, if a worker has some information from their personal life pertinent to a relationship building or educative conversation (perhaps a past experience of drug taking), and they withhold that information and allow the young people to leave ignorant of



something that may further meet their needs (how they have now reflected on their experiences of drug taking), the informal educator may have failed to provide the best educational experience possible. There were also occasions where workers would not be open with young people, nor answer their questions directly, particularly if they were concerned about self-disclosures overstepping a boundary. Jenny at the CCYC, for example, explained she might relay personal information into the third person. I am arguing, therefore, that withholding personal information relevant to building the youth work relationship may not be a neutral (or even positive) act of remaining behind a boundary, but may prevent a better and more effective youth work encounter occurring.

Openness fosters trust by the young people towards the workers. Workers guided by openness will have fewer conversations off-limits with young people, and often discussed future plans and issues the centre faced in front of the young people, though this must be tempered with respecting the right to privacy (i.e. some conversations may be entirely appropriate to have behind closed doors). Having most of the 'leader' conversations at YM in the open shows transparency. However, openness is in danger if a youth worker feels the young person will misuse the information they give in the future – as Carly from the LAYC referred to in interview, when explaining that some young people come across as mature and the worker provides information about themselves, which is later used to make the worker feel uncomfortable. In these situations knowing when to be open and honest requires *phronesis* – the wisdom to balance the need to maintain authority, with attempting to develop a purposefully close and intimate relationship with the young person, and the potentially transformative and educational nature of making self-disclosures.

When an organisation or worker *has* to act against the values of youth work – perhaps for utilitarian and pragmatic reasons, to keep the club open long-term – this can still be done with a sense of honesty and integrity. A worker could, as with CCYC, ensure the young people are aware of the realities of filling out forms – that successfully completing the paper work makes funding for future activities more likely.

## 8.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that an ethical framework for youth work relationships needs to account for the complexity and nuanced situations in which they are built and maintained. I argued the current preoccupation with reducing relationships into a series of easily identifiable and codifiable actions that can be individually judged to have 'crossed' a boundary does not engender the best relationship-based forms of youth work. Rather, relationship building

interactions are best judged as to their *kind* which can only be discerned through taking on board a range of contextual information, including the how the interaction balances the various aspects of the youth work relationship. Therefore, virtue ethics is particularly important because it works in midst of uncertainty and unexpected situations, and because it aligns with the aims of youth work to prioritise the flourishing of young people. Virtue ethics – with a focus on the character of the worker – is the basis for understanding the relationship as an interaction between two whole people, rather than a ‘professional’ and a ‘problem’. Throughout the data in previous chapters it was shown that many situations required creative responses with workers aware of the details of the interaction and the young person. While there is still a place for rules and consistency, these rules have a narrative that makes them suitable for common – but not every – situation.

An ethical framework for the youth work relationship that includes virtue ethics would draw from the traditions of youth work – its values and aims. It would root ethical practice in the expectations of the community of practice. As such, youth workers would remain committed to the holistic development of young people through recognising the need for flourishing. Workers do this, in part, through modelling the virtues – setting a positive example, and avoiding normalising undesirable behaviours or attitudes. Workers would engage with authenticity, allowing an emotional response to situations that can be the motivator for finding the best actions. This is important to protect the practices of youth work, in which building informal and transformative relationships is marked by the integrity, wisdom, and trustworthiness of the worker. I have argued the context of this relationship should be taken as a whole when making judgements around ‘good practice’; however I have acknowledged a concern that rules governing practices in youth centres can reduce this complex relationship down into a handful of codifiable behaviours that can promote some behaviours (for example, information sharing) and prohibit others (for example, self-disclosures) without considering whether these are helpful for building relationships that will meet some larger aim of the youth work relationship. Though, that said, there were examples throughout the four organisations where workers *were* using their own judgement and making context specific decisions, but this was more prominent in the YM and CCYC, and with particular workers at the Youth Café and LAYC.

Three virtues were highlighted as being particularly important in the development of an ethics of youth work relationships. Professional wisdom provides the basis for sound judgements on nuanced situations, while the worker drawing from *phronesis* will be directed towards the flourishing of the young person – this prioritising their best interests and needs. Professional wisdom can be used to help to balance the various aspects of the youth work relationship – how

much and when to self-disclose, when and how much to trust the young people, and how to ensure the young people are being prioritised. Integrity was recognised to be more than simply being consistent between personal and public selves, but in internalising the values of youth work and displaying them in all contexts. Youth work becomes a whole-life project: a vocation. Thus, youth workers continue to set a positive example to young people when engaging online, when building intimate relationships, when meeting young people outside of a normal club evening, and when using the power inherent in their role. Trustworthiness was the final virtue considered, which required reliability, organisational skills, longevity, respecting confidentiality, honesty, and openness. A relationship in which the worker is trustworthy can be the basis for transformation with the young person. Being trustworthy is not to open up every detail of the worker's private lives to scrutiny, but it is important to make all the pertinent information that can help a young person available to them.

## 9. Conclusion

In this final chapter I will set out the aims of the thesis and summarise the findings. I will then set out the theoretical implications, including the conceptualising of a virtue ethics for youth work and consider aspects of relationships in youth work in terms of quality rather than severity. Then I shall consider the implications for practice: those from individual themes and from the appeal to virtue ethics. Finally, I shall produce a set of recommendations for future research and for practice.

The aim of the empirical research that forms the basis of this thesis was to:

*observe and reflect on what is considered ethical practice in youth work relationships, which take into account differences between Christian and secular centre-based youth work, and provide recommendations for practice.*

In doing this study I have particularly focussed on the youth work relationship, having recognised the dominant themes from the field work were more relational than technical or procedural (though, certainly, there is significant overlap). The research was completed using a micro-ethnography of four centres, chosen to be significantly different from each other, yet still engaging in universal-access centre-based youth work. This methodology provided a new perspective on ethics in youth work, and through gaining direct access to ethical issues youth workers face, I am able to produce some distinctive contributions to both theory and practice around the use of rules and professional boundaries, and different ways good practice could be recognised and understood, which will be set out in this conclusion. This research also serves to begin conceptualising a virtue ethics approach to youth work relationships as an alternative to dominant discourses of Kantian ethics from the literature and managerial rule-based procedures from practice. However this is a larger project than can be achieved during the constraints of a PhD.

The importance of this topic was highlighted in chapters 1 and 2, where managerialism has been affecting conceptions of good practice through the imposition of easily codifiable rules used to dictate acceptable practices and rigid notions of professional boundaries. However, this fails to recognise the genuine complexity of the daily interactions with young people that youth workers face. Nor do these rules necessarily protect young people from certain influences in the ways intended.

Youth work was described as being difficult to define. It is nebulous, affected by various values and policies, and has various overlapping definitions and the core purpose and values are still contested. Despite the work done for the National Occupational Standards, youth work still has numerous possible purposes, including education, social justice, holistic development or flourishing, association, and supporting young people. However often at an organisational level, more specific formal outcomes are used as an aim and measure of the youth work. Christian youth work was described as having similar aims and values to secular work. However it also has unique motivations and aims in evangelism and nurturing the Christian faith, and social justice from the perspective of liberation from sin. Various broad definitions of youth work were also considered, with asset- and deficit- based youth work providing different foundations for practices, different sets of assumptions, and a different conception of 'youth'.

Relationships were considered essential to youth work, and to the development of young people generally. Positive, trusted relationships with adults can facilitate change. In youth work the relationship is often framed in Rogerian terms, focussed on empathy, respect, trust, authenticity, and unconditional positive regard. The relationship is often marked by being enjoyable (particularly for the young people), long-term, purposeful, caring, and dynamic. It is a relationship that copes with changes in context and circumstance, which can remain consistent whether a young person's situation improves or worsens - consistent, that is, until they reach a certain age and cease to be considered 'youth'. At this point community-run and faith-based organisations often have an advantage, where young adults who have graduated from the youth provision may still have contact with workers through wider community groups, events, or acts of worship.

However this kind of relationship already presents dilemmas as outlined in the literature, including the appropriate use of self-disclosures, whether the relationship is a means to an end or an end in itself, and 'how close is too close?' is a common question. The literature reviewed in chapter 3 also highlights the ethical issues around imbalances of power, with a youth worker often seeking to have a more informal and egalitarian relationship than young people may enjoy with other professionals. Ultimately, the relationships are considered complex, or 'messy', and the informal nature of those relationships means they are not easy to place within static notions of good practice. In this thesis I have been able to explore that complexity in depth, and then consider the strengths and weaknesses of current ideas of how to work in that complexity, before suggesting there could be another way to conceive of the complexity and work within it.

Using the data presented in this thesis I have argued that youth work relationships are complex, and are best understood holistically through a range of eight related aspects drawn from a

thematic analysis of the field notes (though this is not intended to be an exhaustive list): self-disclosures; youth worker's role in the wider lives of young people; setting an example; showing respect; use of authority and power; trusting young people; prioritising needs and best interests; and formality and distance. These complex relationships, I argued, are not well served by creating rules and simplified 'professional boundaries' that serve to present a definitive list of behaviours that are acceptable, and those that are not. Rather, by taking a holistic view of an interaction it is possible to recognise whether it is the *kind* of behaviour that is appropriate in the youth work relationship, rather than attempting to categorise a behaviour as (un)acceptable through implying some form of quantitative measurement – that is, the question should not be *how close is too close?* But *what form of closeness* is appropriate? Not *is this self-disclosure too personal?* But *is this self-disclosure appropriate for the situation?*

## 9.1 Theoretical Implications: A Call to Re-Conceptualise Professional Boundaries and Build a Virtue Ethics for Youth Work.

The theoretical implications of this thesis come predominantly through adding to a body of knowledge about the limits of professional boundaries and other dominant practices that imply a rigid or narrow understanding of 'good practice' in youth work. It would be of greater benefit to develop a holistic framework for helping to discern and reflect on good practices in youth work relationships, which includes considering how the eight dominant themes observed in this study are manifest in interactions between young people and youth workers.

### 9.1.1 Conceptualising a Virtue Ethics of Youth Work Relationships

Though the themes from chapter 6 could be taken as discrete aspects of youth work relationships, I have been clear to show that it is not appropriate to treat them as such. They could all be envisaged as being on their own scale, where they move between various extremes and at some point at the scale a line is placed, a boundary, where a self-disclosure was *too personal*, or a youth worker began behaving *too informally*. However, some aspects of the relationship interact and affect each other significantly. The overall picture is not a group of discrete aspects that can each have an 'ideal' position based on the values of an organisation, or youth work more generally. How they are balanced with each other affects the appropriateness of the relationship at a given time. There are no simple rules that can adequately and definitively measure whether an interaction is appropriate by implying a quantitative measure against them: such as, 'that self-disclosure was too personal'. These rules would not (and where they exist, do not) reflect the reality of complex situations in the midst of nuanced relationships. While inflexible rules can often be effective in providing a framework for interactions in a predictable environment, encounters

between young people and youth workers that occur in unexpected situations are not as easily regulated.

Maintaining strict rules about acceptable practices can create a sense of dissonance with an informal ethos in a youth work relationship. In the research, workers would often adopt what Jones and Deutch (2011) term a 'least adult' role through highlighting mutual interests, using slang, acting in a youthful manner, actively including young people in conversations, and seeking to maintain proximal relationships, while also being able to challenge unacceptable behaviour. But although the informality is important, the youth worker does not have to attempt to be a peer. Young people expect something different from their youth work or that they do not get from 'friends'; namely, the authority that derives from their professional role.

Workers should still maintain their duty to behave responsibly and keep young people from harm. This may appear incongruous with the more egalitarian aims many youth work organisations have, however the legitimate use of power required to keep young people safe is often willingly given to the workers by the young people, who expect workers to maintain their authority over the group for the safe and efficient running of the centre. Authority does not necessarily entail distance or formality, and avoiding holding the authority needed to keep young people safe is not democratic or egalitarian, but negligent. Therefore, despite the workers laying down their power and control to negotiate with young people during much of their everyday practice, maintaining this authority is still an important part of this role. This authority comes predominantly from workers being trustworthy and dependable, with a history of prioritising young people's best interests and making good decisions. This authority, therefore, is dependent upon workers consistently displaying particular character traits.

However there is a balance to be maintained. While the youth worker maintaining authority does not have to imply a formal relationship, when displaying authority becomes about maintaining power, the relationship can become more formal, and this was particularly true around issues of money (such as, 'paying in') and maintaining control over areas of a centre young people are not allowed into without authorisation by a worker.

If a worker is required to balance these multiple aspects to facilitate with the young people a relationship that is both egalitarian and authoritative, that is able to balance the various aspects of the relationship to be able to meet the purpose and values of youth work, I argue that virtue ethics is of value in helping to conceptualise what good practice in youth work can look like. A

virtuous youth worker would have the disposition to act well in the complex range of situations they may find themselves.

Integrity is one particularly important character trait for youth workers. The fear workers may have a lack of integrity is one of the barriers to engaging online more actively with young people. While there can be other concerns (including overstepping a boundary, and unwittingly connecting a young person with a third party, another online contact, who may pose a risk to them), this was dominant in the literature and a prime concern in practice. While workers in faith based organisations may appeal to their understanding of incarnational theology for engaging online, they do so also understanding the requirement of integrity and ensuring young people are only being exposed to a positive influence through their online interactions and posts. It is beyond the scope of the data presented here to be able to comment on whether the dangers of engaging on Facebook with young people can outweigh the benefits, but the fact there is a difference of opinion, based on theological expectations of what youth work is (or should be), creates a fascinating basis for further ethical reflection. What is significant for this thesis, however, is the requirement of an integrated character that presents the worker as a role model in and out of centre hours, and is used to show the worker's virtue (i.e. to 'prove' the worker's attitudes and behaviour in the centre are not 'play-acting' during the centre opening hours, but an indelible part of their identity).

Related to this, some youth workers consider it their role to set an examples outside the youth club, and can intentionally use self-disclosures and dual relationships as vehicles for this. While there may be a concern in some organisations this oversteps a boundary, by being close and informal with the young person, a worker is able to allow their character to be shown in the relationship, as opposed to maintaining a 'professional front'. The extent to which a worker should be showing their character was contested in the research, but nonetheless it was an important element of some youth workers' practice.

It is possible that workers can engage in practices that could serve as a negative example to young people (according to organisational aims and the national occupational standards), or workers can manipulate the relationships with young people in such a way that they can be used as a means to an end, even in those organisations where policy rules exist to attempt to prevent workers from contradicting the values of the centre. This can happen through an ill-timed self-disclosure, or a chance meeting with a young person outside the centre. Therefore, the character of the worker – particularly their integrity – is essential if the values of youth work are intended to be imparted to the young people.



The best interests of the young people should be prioritised to help keep a relationship 'good'. However, recognising the best interests of young people (and whether that is collective or individual) is difficult. Trustworthiness (and competence) is required by the workers, as from an organisational perspective placing young people in a position where they are at risk of abuse or negligence is not promoting their best interests.

Showing respect for the young people a high priority is therefore important in youth work, but can be undermined by conflict in organisational policies and the limits of confidentiality. There is a recognition in government policy, the literature, and the empirical research that organisations need to communicate to ensure young people are being safeguarded and able to access appropriate support. However, the pressure on some youth workers and managers to compile reports about conversations (some of which were overheard, rather than directed to a worker) and place them on readily accessible databases shared with other agencies, creates dilemmas for workers who recognise young people are not entirely aware of who has access to this information. The dilemma consists conflict between a utilitarian need to prove the worth of the centre to keep youth provision open, and a commitment to respect young people and their privacy. In this, and any other dilemmas, youth workers require the professional wisdom to be able to make decisions that balance respectfulness with care, and appropriate choices about how to interact with such procedures and systems (and, indeed, how to influence and challenge them when they encourage a youth worker to become deceitful).

A virtue ethics for youth work, therefore, requires a major premise. This may be the key purpose from the National Occupational Standards. However as that is still contested (and not written with the intention of being a MacIntyrian major premise), greater thought is required into what a major premise could be, that *telos* which forms the basis on which all mundane daily interactions are measured against. I would argue, therefore, that it is the flourishing of the young people that should constitute the major premise of youth work. Although this follows the National Occupational Standards, there is a more significant contribution in the work of Young (2010), Smith (2012) and Smith & Smith (2008) towards conceptualising the eudaimonia of youth work and other helping professions. Other significant aims, including their education and social justice, can all build towards this one, overarching major premise. All ongoing, daily interactions between young people and youth workers would be expected to, in some way, aid in reaching this premise. Therefore, when debating ethical decision making in youth work, questions should focus around the extent to which an action or behaviour is likely to facilitate the flourishing of young people.

Flourishing, however, is a problematic term. In chapter 2 it was suggested it is associated with happiness, wellbeing, contentedness, and security, but there is no clearly defined end 'product'. Yet, taking a MacIntyrian approach, I argue that there are internal requirements to lead a flourishing life: particularly the virtues. However there are also extrinsic elements required for *eudaimonia*, particularly being able to engage in a common life with others, having physical and economic security, and participating in rational thought and debate. Therefore, when a worker is in a situation whereby they are considering what they should do, where they may have predominantly had the resources from organisational policies to draw from, they should also consider whether this individual, perhaps mundane, decision could build towards the major premise.

This also requires some clear thought, and further research, to draw the links between daily youth work practice and the flourishing of young people. There will still be some actions prohibited, that could reasonably be assumed will never build towards the major premise (for example, the sexual or economic exploitation of young people). However, there are other decisions a worker may take because it is likely to be part of the process of allowing a young person to flourish, which may be considered 'overstepping a boundary', when professional boundaries are assumed to be fixed. The option of providing a young person with a lift home, for example, would still remain a safeguarding issue. However, it also becomes an action that leads to a minor premise (for example, displaying kindness or generosity, or building a relationship) that can lead to the flourishing of the young person if they internalise those virtues themselves, or are drawn into a common life with others. Therefore rather than unilaterally prevent an action that could build towards the major premise, boundaries could be conceptualised in such a way as to allow workers to build towards the major premise, safely. Facebook is another example from the research of a 'tool' that could be used to build towards the major premise, but there are also safeguarding implications that currently cause (most) organisations to create strict rules around its (non-)use by workers with regard to young people.

This is where virtues – dispositions to display certain characteristics – become important. A virtue ethics for youth work would include integrity, professional wisdom, and trustworthiness, precisely because they are some of the dispositions required to be able to use the interactions with young people to build towards the major premise.

### 9.1.2 Quality of Relationships

There is a need to re-think dominant theoretical understandings that base conceptions of good practice on the adherence to certain rules, policies, or duties. There is a need to reconceive

unhelpfully restrictive rules that may prevent good work, which would be in keeping with the aims and values (or the major premise) of the work.

Taking specific interactions and aspects of the youth work relationship as discrete entities is an insufficient measure of how appropriate an interaction is in a youth work relationship. Instead, any specific interaction is better understood as a mix of inter-related aspects of the youth work relationship based within a context. It is only through taking the relationship as a whole that the health of a relationship (and the place of a particular interaction within it) can be known. For example, self-disclosures can be used to increase the range of influence and the potential of the relationship youth workers and young people share, but can be conceived of as a boundary issue. A potentially helpful, supportive exchange which aids the educative or relationship building aims of youth work can be undermined by rigid boundaries around what information a worker is allowed to share.

Therefore, I am arguing that before asking questions of specific interactions (e.g. 'Is it acceptable to share this information about myself? Is it acceptable to attend that event a young person has invited me to?') a wider reflection is required on how this fits with the flourishing of young people, whether a worker with a certain character would engage as such, and how this fits with the whole context of the relationship (for which it may be helpful for the worker to reflect on the eight aspects of the relationship explored here). However while managerialism and rigid boundaries can create the caricature of the uncaring youth work bureaucrat in a faceless organisation, this was not observed as a consistent reality in the field work. Even in the most bureaucratic organisations there were several significant (and touching) moments of close relationships flourishing, with workers actively caring for young people, drawing alongside them, and sharing important moments together.

### 9.1.3 Summary of Theoretical Implications of the Thesis

I have argued that this empirical research and the literature on youth work leads to a conclusion that ethical issues in youth work relationships would benefit from being perceived and theorised in terms of character. Therefore, when conceptualising good practice and safeguarding concerns, I argue that proponents of virtue ethics should be important dialogical partners – particularly with the virtues of professional wisdom, integrity, and trustworthiness, and defining good practice in a given situation against the *major premise* of youth work – the flourishing of young people. By considering the flourishing of young people to be the 'major premise', 'good practice' is less likely to be defined in terms of a protectionist endeavour to safeguard young people (which is important), but rather in terms of reviewing every interaction holistically as to whether it has

been used as a step towards the greater aim of the relationship, which in turns is reaching towards the major premise.

I have also argued that many ethical issues need to be thought through qualitatively, not quantitatively. Youth workers need to move away from a conceptualising of boundaries and good practice as relatively simple-sounding questions about whether a worker is 'too close' to a young person, whether a self-disclosure is too personal, or whether accepting an invitation to a personal event by a young person is overstepping a boundary. Instead, it is better to consider the *kind* of closeness, disclosure, and invitation, that is occurring, with reference to the broader relationship, the dominant aspects of the relationship recognised in this thesis, and the aims of youth work.

## 9.2 Implications for Practice

There are several implications for practice stemming from the discord between the current dominant discourses of defining good practice in relation to duty and policy and the findings here that suggest a virtue approach may be helpful. Firstly, I will discuss implications regarding themes from the research that require individual attention, though this predominantly reinforces empirically what can already be found in the youth work literature. Secondly, I will consider implications for practice should a virtue ethics approach to good practice in youth work relationships be adopted, including implications for training and the employing organisations. Finally, implications for safeguarding and good practice in relationships are considered holistically.

### 9.2.1 Implications From Individual Themes

Perhaps it seems obvious, but practitioners should ensure that it is the young people's needs being met and best interests prioritised. While it can be common to refer to the possibility young people can be used to meet a worker's sexual, power, economic, or social needs, there are also more subtle ways in which the needs of the 'profession' of youth work are prioritised. From the field work, this can be through using information gleaned from young people unethically to increase its status amongst other 'professions'; through using young people to meet funding requirements in such a way that is not in the best interests of the young people; or using young people to gain attention and social status for the individual worker. Workers should also be aware when they are being used to ensure external politically motivated needs are being met at the expense of the young people. Boundaries and policies must also be engaged with critically, as they are not always designed for the best interests of the young people, but for protection of the organisation.

The research also affirms informal relationships are an important part of the youth work's tradition, and are better for fostering a caring and influential relationship. I argued the increases in information sharing and targets can formalise the relationship, and this increases the distance between the worker and young person. However, it was also shown that the distance in the relationship is not only the remit of the worker – at times young people may choose to keep workers distant. Close relationships placed the person at the centre (rather than the 'problem'), which creates a foundation for a helping relationship if, or when, needed. This can be described as peer-like or friendly, though there was some debate over the term 'friend'. Having elements of a friendship, particularly showing interest and reciprocity, can prevent an imbalance of power in the relationship.

The relationship between authority and power was also highlighted in the research. This is an important theme in youth work, as discussed by Sercombe (2010a). Youth workers should be maintaining authority in order to keep young people safe from harm. However much of the discourse around power in youth work recognises the expectation of egalitarian relationships between workers and young people. The observations here reinforce Walker's (2011) findings, that if a youth worker treats a young person with respect they are more likely to be able to convincingly switch between the roles of a professional with responsibility to keep young people safe, and an egalitarian peer-like relationship. Without that respect, workers seem to either maintain a distance and sense of formality with the young people the majority of the time, or engage in peer-like behaviour but without being able to effectively use their authority to control potentially harmful situations. This research highlights the importance, therefore, of maintaining authority in an egalitarian relationship through the use of respect, developed over the course of the relationship.

The findings also highlighted the importance of mutual trust in the youth work relationship. Some organisations maintained an ethos of distrust, through the constant surveillance of young people, protection of the tuck shop, deposit systems for use of resources, and entry procedures to the centre. While these systems were often understandable reactions to past events, it is in stark contrast with organisations where workers provided a significant amount of freedom to young people and trusted them with the use of rooms, self-service tuck shops, and provision of equipment. This trust went beyond physical items, but the sharing of personal information requires trust on behalf of the youth worker too, though there can be a concern that young people would use any self-disclosures in an untrustworthy manner at a later date. In chapter seven I suggested that this is one reason for requiring the development of professional wisdom –

so workers had the disposition to make wise judgement about who, and when, to trust. However I suggest organisations need to engage in a wider conversation about trusting young people, and consider what social and personal benefits to trusting young people are lost through protecting themselves against financial loss or personal embarrassment. I do not believe there is a 'right' answer to the level of trust required (hence, appealing to *phronesis*), but I would argue that youth workers should not be assuming a position of distrust with regard to young people as the norm.

Finally, because there was such a stark difference in policy between the YM and the other three organisations, I suggest how youth workers use social media requires greater reflection. The norm in professional life appears to be to separate job role and personal role online. However, through creative and imaginative use of Facebook, and a commitment to displaying integrity of character online, this can benefit young people and expand the reach of youth workers in engaging in pastoral and educative dialogue. However, often its potential is ignored or seen as an ethical minefield better avoided, both in terms of bringing the organisation into disrepute, but also in terms of which other people could gain credence through being 'friends' of the youth worker who would gain access to young people. Greater thought is perhaps required about how Facebook can be used safely, and for what purpose, in developing youth work relationships.

The ethics of the welcoming stage of an evening is also important. An entrance procedure that involves a financial transaction before any pastoral interaction creates a different, more formal, atmosphere than one in which young people are welcomed into conversations and activities, where their presence is intrinsically valued before paying fees. Prioritising the exchange of money for access gave the impression young people were a means to keep the centre open. The collection of money in general needs to be considered with an ethical perspective. What example to young people do money collection procedures set, what expectations do the workers have of young people, and how does it help to meet a MacIntyrian 'major premise' of youth work? There was certainly some evidence, for example, that trust was in a relationship with (though it would go too far in the scope of the research to say caused) a sense of responsibility and inclusion by the young people.

### 9.2.2 Implications from the Appeal to Virtue Ethics

In virtue ethics, workers base ethical decisions on how a person with a particular character would act in a given context. That requires a role model for workers, and behaviours they can habituate until the characteristics form. This will not occur by imposing a framework of rules and procedures, but by reflecting on what good youth work looks like and how it happens, and ensuring exemplars are present that work can be based on. Basing good practice on these

principles would fundamentally change some organisations' training and CPD programmes, moving from being skills based to also contemplating character and reflecting on practice. If an emotional connection is expected, then popular conceptions of professional detachment and objectivity require critiquing and amending. Rather than having 'boundaries' as the dominant metaphor for the limits of the relationship, having a sense of virtue based on a community of practice would allow appropriate forms of emotional attachment to develop and be displayed. Conceptions of 'professionalism' and 'detachment' are the dominant perspectives of an increasingly professionalised youth work sector.

However, approaches that prioritise attachment and care could still be conceptualised as safe and accountable practices. There is also, in that dichotomy, an implicit gendered assumption that feminine approaches to safeguarding and good practice require greater defending than masculine ideals that imply objectivity and impartiality. As I have argued the data presented in this thesis demonstrates, the character of the worker is already important because of the informality of the relationships, so therefore youth work organisations need to invest in the character of their workers as well as training them in technical skills.

Considering MacIntyrean virtue ethics causes me to go further than simply suggest greater reflection on character and finding an exemplar for youth work to follow. Firstly, youth work needs a 'major premise', that is, an ultimate goal in youth work towards which all the mundane daily interactions with young people can build. The various purposes in chapter 2 could contribute to a major premise: social justice, flourishing, association, and liberatory education are examples. While not universal, the flourishing of the young person is one of the dominant discourses for an ultimate end in youth work (and human life in general), and this also strengthens the argument (along with taking account of context and the need for a sound character) for virtue ethics in youth work. Having a clear major premise for the youth work provides a basis on which to judge good practice – attending a special event outside working hours, for example, can be judged as 'good practice' if it is a small part of the larger journey towards whatever the 'major premise' is. A role of the wider youth work community of practice could be in training managers and facilitating organisation's deliberations as they discern their own aims in light of this major premise, and how their regular (and occasional) activities can all be part of the same journey.

Aristotle's concept of the mean is also important here. It can be recognised that it is not wise for all workers to engage in the same practices. A worker with skills in counselling may be better placed to comfort an upset young person after a bereavement. If one worker, without those skills, were to ask another worker to intervene this would be showing wisdom rather than cowardice or

incompetence. In the same way, workers with limited experience at the beginning of their career, may withhold any information about their private lives, not because they are 'detached', but because they know they have not yet developed the skills to recognise when and where it is appropriate to share.

To develop professional wisdom, there needs to be space for workers to exercise their own judgement. Though not all judgements will be wise, by replacing space to think and act with policies and rules there is a risk of 'crowding out wisdom' (Marshall and Mellon 2011). The importance of integrity from the workers was also shown through the fieldwork, and for authentic relationships to be developed, with policies that engender trustworthiness not subterfuge. We need to value reliability and consistency, and for young people to have power over their information.

Secondly, MacIntyre invokes the concept of a 'practice'- a modern version of Aristotle's Polis where ethical issues are debated by equals engaging in dialogue. While I do not want to uncritically adopt a MacIntyrian stance on practices, in chapter 2 I presented several authors who recognised that virtue ethics relied on some wider community, tradition, or narrative on which to base judgements about virtues and practices. An organisation could, therefore, become a place where virtues are expected to be practised; a place where youth workers are expected to be wise, trustworthy, and work with integrity. The community of practice becomes a space for reflection, where there is debate and dialogue into good practice, and where there is an expectation of youth work decisions and relationships happening in nuanced detail, and a remembering that the rules are 'short hand', created with a specific context in mind.

Virtues would help youth workers navigate the ethical issues highlighted in chapter 3 and as discussed in the data. Questions around the influence funding bodies can have on youth work practices would be mitigated by a worker with a disposition to act with integrity; and questions of confidentiality met by workers with a disposition to be honest and trustworthy, questions of how and when to evangelise met by workers with a disposition to make wise judgements based on the whole context of the relationship and the situation to which only they have access. These dispositions come from habituation and following an exemplar, and from engaging in dialogue around practice. This creates the need to ensure there are workers in training positions who are able to set that example, and that there is a culture of ethical reflection in the organisation.

There is also an assumption in most literature (and practices) that youth workers are responsible for maintaining boundaries with young people. However this authority is in tension with the



expectation young people will be empowered through their participation in youth work. In reality, this is too simple. Young people already hold power over how and when they interact with youth workers, and the notion of professional boundaries in youth work (as if youth workers hold all the power) is more complex than the assumption workers have unilateral control of the encounters they share with young people.

Policies, therefore, to be accurate and of most benefit to workers, should be written with this complexity in mind. It should be recognised through the wording of policy that the major premise is paramount, and while there are important guidelines to be followed, workers may face a dilemma between a written guideline and an opportunity to build towards a major premise of youth work. They should be written to allow good youth work to take place safely, rather than unintentionally create rules that can be interpreted in such a way as to prevent opportunities to facilitate the flourishing of young people.

Therefore, I am arguing a disposition to act in certain ways can create the right balance in a relationship, which can lead to the major premise of youth work within a particular setting. This requires the training, CPD, supervision, and a wider community of practice to expect workers to display and further develop certain characteristics or virtues. It also requires, as I shall argue next, workers to be willing to change their dominant conception of safeguarding procedures and boundaries.

### 9.2.3 Conceptions of Safeguarding and Boundaries

Finally, though recognising the appropriateness of a given interaction is best understood with reference to the entire context of the relationship and the major premise of the youth work, I conclude that an approach to safeguarding and boundaries that moves beyond the application of abstract rules is required. As Hursthouse (1999) suggests (discussed in chapter 2), it is perfectly permissible to state some actions that a virtuous person would never do, and it can be entirely appropriate to treat those as 'rules' (for example, sexually or economically exploiting a young person). However the examples from practice were not that extreme. Rather, in appealing to 'professional boundaries' and 'organisational policy' when faced with a young person alone outside a centre asking for a lift, young people asking to borrow money to buy tuck, requesting online interactions with the workers, or any number of other examples, the worker is at risk of overlooking the nuanced detail and complexity within the relationship they share with young people by imposing a 'rule' (and one that may not even have been written for the purpose they are using it). Therefore I suggest safeguarding policies are written in a language that reflects the ambiguity that can come from this complexity. That it is presented more humbly as the beginning

of an ongoing conversation for what good practice looks like in a given organisation, rather than the final ruling on the practices of the centre. This is not suggesting an ad hoc approach to youth work practice, and a MacIntyreian understanding of virtue would still have norms and expectations within an organisation. However, a system could be developed that allowed workers to deviate from the norm and policies could be worded to recognise they *are* presenting a shorthand rule that may be appropriate in many situations, but a worker's judgement (if they are professionally wise) may lead them to recognise a situation is atypical and requires a different response. Or, that many situations a worker engages with do not fit into relatively neat categories assumed by policies written in a finite space.

Several authors whose work I discussed in the literature review commented on the narrower distance in youth work between young people and practitioners. This was highlighted several times in the field work: the reality for youth workers, compared to other professionals working with young people, is that they inhabit this informal, malleable space with young people. There are situations and relationships that require rigid boundaries, but that there are many times those boundaries shift and change – and in such a case, I suggest 'boundaries' ceases to be a useful word to describe the limits of appropriate behaviours as the relationship grows and changes. Being aware of the limits of the concept of fixed 'boundaries' in a profession like youth work can lead to better understanding of good practice. For example, I would argue the dominant professional discourses around closeness in youth work could benefit from a change in language. Rather than referring to 'how close' a youth worker is to a young person as if it is a quantitative measure, I suggest considering the whole context of the relationship and discerning if it is the *kind* of closeness that is appropriate. For example, I would argue that even a very low level of romantic 'closeness' or intimacy between a worker and a young person is not appropriate. While at the right time, a worker and young person could become very close through the mutual sharing of personal events if the young person needs significant pastoral support, and a close relationship will be beneficial. Therefore, rather than creating barriers to make all forms of closeness appear unprofessional, I am arguing that professional discourses around safeguarding can be re-focussed around the quality of the distance in the relationship, rather than 'how close is too close?'.

Ultimately, therefore, I argued for the importance of virtue ethics in a framework for underpinning the daily decisions about how and when to interact with young people. It highlights the importance of character in an informal relationship where workers may self-disclose, can be seen outside of the centre, and where they are expected to set a good example. It also aims at the flourishing and wellbeing of the young people, takes account of the motives of the workers, and

provides important virtues on which to base good practice that navigates these complex relationships: professional wisdom, integrity, and trustworthiness.

### 9.3 Recommendations for Future Research

This research particularly highlights some practices in the YM, which are potentially shared across the faith sector, that would benefit from future research. For example, the role that the operant theology of an organisation/worker plays in their practice decisions and the ethics of youth work relationships would benefit from further study. However there are also interactions between workers and the family of young people, and rationale for engaging in their wider lives, and practices around use of social media that would all be fruitful areas for research.

Sercombe (2010b) and Pugh (2007) have already discussed the important issue of dual relationships. In some settings workers are in ultimate control of their relationship with young people and are in a position to manage the situation. However the reality in faith based practice may be more complex, with differing expectations by families, managers and ministers, and young people themselves to have a more intimate pastoral roles compared to secular organisations. To help church-based workers meet the ethical challenges this sets, greater research into these ethical issues, how workers currently perceived and navigate them, and how practice could be improved is required. This could be completed using another ethnographic approach, however it could be fruitful to conduct a piece of diary based research, with workers recording their perceptions of interactions with young people, who could then be interviewed about how and why they interacted in such a way. This would provide observation-type data through the recounts by the participants, but also gain access to the implicit motivations of the workers.

One weakness of the methodology used in this thesis was the inability to gather in depth understanding of the motivations of workers, and also to be able to consider practical issues with the proposed changes in direction for ethics in youth work. A piece of participatory action research with the aims of understanding the internal decision making process for workers, and improving ethical reflection and action in youth work practice, could aid this. This could seek to take some of the recommendations provided here, and begin to put them into practice, to research the affect they have on the youth work relationship, and see whether it would be possible to recognise the importance of virtue ethics within an organisational setting.

## 9.4 Concluding Comments: Recommendations for Practice

Taking into account the known ethical dilemmas in the youth work relationship from the literature and how they relate to the findings of the empirical research, here I present a series of recommendations for practice based on the conclusions of the research.

### 1. Space for Ethical Reflection

I recommend creating an atmosphere within youth work organisations where virtues can thrive. This requires creating space for dialogue between youth workers, so they can actively engage in ethical reflection on the everyday issues they face. Many organisations already have regular space to reflect on safeguarding procedures, practical issues, and health and safety concerns through monitoring and evaluation sessions. However there should also be specific space to reflect on ethical issues, and debate and challenge conceptions of good practice in light of a major premise for youth work *as well as* from a safeguarding perspective. In a similar vein, management and supervision time should include engaging in continuous ethical reflection. Although professional qualifications in youth work, such as the JNC qualification, often require this element of training, it does not seem to be well embedded into the structures for supervising more experienced youth workers.

### 2. Framing and Interpreting Policies and Procedures

Organisational documents and policies should be written in such a way virtues can be developed. Workers should be aware that the rules are 'short hand' reminders for good practice, which were often devised in response to specific situations that required clarity. The context in which these rules were written down should be remembered and explained to workers who begin their practice after these rules have become enacted. An analogy could be considering judges' use of Hansard (the record of sessions of Parliament) to understand the context in which an ambiguous phrase in law is to be interpreted. It is unlikely a paragraph in an organisational policy is intended to prevent young people from receiving the best possible care, but rules implemented devoid of context *can* prevent good work from occurring, or even leave young people at greater risk through inaction. Understanding the context for which the rules were created can provide a basis for making wise decisions about those times the rule was not intended for. Though reminiscent of one of Kant's imperatives, it might be helpful if a statement with the major premise (or the specific aims of the organisation) was provided at the beginning of documents containing policies and procedures, with a caveat stating that where the two seem in conflict workers may use their collective wisdom to provide a context-specific course of action.

### 3. Allowing and Encouraging Ethical Closeness

Even in the most bureaucratic structures, moments of closeness and care can be regularly encountered. How, therefore, these can be promoted while also maintaining the best of the bureaucracy (that is fairness and consistency across the organisation) requires more research, but in the mean time I recommend organisations and workers should reflect on how they can encourage an appropriate form of closeness within the context of their organisation. It could be expected that workers would be able to spend time alone with young people to allow close relationships to form, or to 'waste' time talking together in small groups.

### 4. Developing Personal Integrity

I also recommend youth workers display personal integrity, through maintaining a consistency of attitudes and behaviours between their professional and social lives. I recognise for many youth workers, perhaps particularly sessional workers, youth work is a 'job' that should not have any bearing on their personal time. However inconsistencies between the personal lives of the practitioners and the aims and values of the centre can be brought to light through young people observing their youth workers outside of the usual centre setting, and this can undermine the good work being done through normalising values contrary to youth work's values.

Ultimately, therefore, I am arguing for a virtue ethics for youth work, which pays particular attention to a major premise of youth work and specific virtues that are important for workers to hold. This will aid youth workers and improve practice as they engage in complex, messy relationships with young people they are attempting to support, encourage, and develop. While I recognise safeguarding is of paramount importance, it is important to develop and use professional wisdom and recognise the complexity of the youth work relationship, so that can mean opportunities to fulfil the key purpose(s) of youth work are used to full advantage.

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