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Searching for Meaning: Learning from Youth Workers' Lives, Formation and Profession in Austere Times - a Critical Narrative Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

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SEARCHING FOR MEANING: LEARNING FROM YOUTH WORKERS' LIVES, FORMATION AND PROFESSION IN AUSTERE TIMES - A CRITICAL NARRATIVE INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

Graham Bright, August 2021.

Abstract

This thesis is concerned with the life histories and motivations of youth workers and what these mean for professional youth work in the UK. The research is based on a novel methodological approach, combining narrative and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. It involved conducting a series of three interviews with 16 qualified and student youth workers to trace the importance of life histories in shaping and maintaining their vocational motivations. 'Borders' – the significance of intersecting structural barriers - and 'reparative impulse' emerged as significant themes. Given these life histories and motivations, the thesis contends that youth work can be regarded as an 'ontological praxis' which interactively draws on practitioners' selfhoods and living histories in developing relational learning and critical meaning with young people. Discussions regarding the 'use of self' lead into analysis of participants' accounts of their experiences of professional formation, noting that many qualifying youth work courses do not consistently and systematically address the 'use of self' in their curricula.

The thesis proceeds to consider the influence of neoliberal policy frameworks upon youth workers' practices and their professional and personal subjectivities. However, despite the clear devastation wrought by neoliberal austerity, and its corrosive impact upon the *telos* (core purpose) of youth work, participants appeared to continue to maintain a passionate and psychically-entrenched commitment to practice. Moreover, many expressed continuing optimism regarding possibilities for its future. In advancing a more criticalist hermeneutic, I join *with* participants in the Freirean tradition underpinning youth work practice of 'naming the(ir) world'. However, in doing so, I contend that 'Freirean naming' is, of itself, insufficient. I therefore integrate Foucauldian perspectives on governmentality to develop a novel

dialectic synthesis that highlights the deeply embedded inculcation of neoliberal rationalities and technologies in participants' personal-professional subjectivities. I argue that these mechanisms, including 'technologies of vocation' and 'technologies of hope', when 'unnamed' risk becoming manipulatively affective devices of 'cruel optimism' which continuously contort and manipulate respondents' subjectivities and motivations towards youth work practice. Such technologies cause youth workers to act on themselves and young people in ways that unwittingly contribute to the very neoliberal machinations of oppression which much of the Profession abhors - machinations which ironically have, in many instances, been responsible for contributing to the original catalysation of respondents' sense of vocation to youth work practice.

Implications for professional education and practice are also discussed. These include a call for professional qualifying courses to enable explorations of youth workers' living histories and enacted identities in fostering critically reflexive insights which promote ethical practice with young people.

Key words: youth work; youth workers; vocation; life histories; professional education; neoliberalism; Freire; critical pedagogy; border pedagogy; Foucault; governmentality.

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Signed

Graham Bright

August, 2021.

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Introduction

1.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I outline the scope, aims and objectives of the study. In doing so, I set the scene by briefly articulating the nature of youth work and by locating youth workers within contemporary practice. The chapter introduces key concerns which have driven the research. Firstly, it highlights the importance of 'vocation' in youth work and the significance of practitioners' life histories in shaping this. Secondly, it foregrounds the importance of youth workers' relational 'use of self'. Thirdly, it locates professional training and formation in the field. Finally, it highlights the importance of understanding how youth workers view contemporary practice and what this may mean for professional identities and subjectivities. The chapter also briefly signals my approach to the research and begins to 'tell the story' of the thesis and its foundations in my own personal reflections and observations, before concluding with an outline of the remaining chapters.

1.2 Scope of the Study

The aim of this thesis was to: 'understand the significance of youth workers' life histories, sense of "vocation", and experiences of professional formation on professional practice in an era of neoliberal austerity.'

The research therefore examined four broad, but inter-related arenas:

1. Youth workers' life histories.

2. What 'draws' people to become youth workers

3. Youth workers' experiences of professional qualifying education.

4. Youth workers' experiences of contemporary youth work within shifting policy environments.

It does so through engagement with the following research objectives:

1. To explore and understand youth workers' life narratives and life histories.

2. To explore how youth workers' personal narratives have influenced their vocational choices.

3. To explore and analyse youth workers' perceptions and experiences of personal and professional formation.

4. To examine how youth workers understand and construct their identities.

5. To consider how youth workers understand and employ their 'use of self' in professional practice.

6. To analyse how youth work practitioners experience the realities of professional practice within contemporary policy climates, and how such experiences influence personal and professional identities.

7. To investigate the extent to which these questions (of self and identity) are (or should be) attended to in professional formation.

This research explores a number of contested ideas: 'youth work', 'vocation', 'profession', 'formation' and 'identity'. In the first instance however, it is concerned with youth work and those who practise it. At its core, the thesis is interested in 'who' this cadre of professionals is and what has motivated them to become youth workers. These questions seem particularly pertinent given the relational nature of youth work practice (Batsleer, 2008; Tiffany, 2001; Wood, Westwood and Thompson, 2015) and the demands such work makes upon

practitioners in using and drawing on the 'self' in fostering informal learning with young people (de St Croix, 2016; Murphy and Ord, 2013; Turney, 2007). In this regard, the thesis represents an 'ontological quest', to foster deeper understandings regarding the nature of contemporary youth work; more specifically however, it is concerned with uncovering something of *the personhood* of youth workers. This, given the political and politicised nature of practice discussed in the following chapters, is no benign task. The thesis therefore engages abductively[1] with different lenses drawn from critical theory[2], post-structuralism[3] and humanistic[4] thought to highlight the significance of the ways in which youth workers construct and enact identities – identities, I contend, which are ultimately assimilated via various 'technologies' by the neoliberal state for its own ends.

1.3 Developing Context

Whilst recognising the contestability of ideas, the following section (briefly) outlines and locates different concepts and debates and the ways in which they intersect within the thesis.

Emerging in the nineteenth century as a philanthropic response (and mechanism of social control) to issues of urban poverty (Bright, 2015; Jeffs and Banks, 2010; Jeffs, 1979), youth work has evolved to become a flexible (and some would argue contestable) set of practices,

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[1] The 'abductive' approach adopted is explored more fully in Chapter 4. In sum, it contends that readings of the empirical are influenced by how the researcher 'reads' the world conceptually and vice-versa.

[2] Critical theory is a set of evolving ideas that find their genesis in Marxist analysis and the Frankfurt School. It is concerned with understanding and revealing the social, economic and cultural processes that contribute to and perpetuate social inequalities, thereby challenging them. Critical theory tends to highlight that oppression and hegemony are perpetuated by social structures and cultural assumptions (Thompson, 2017).

[3] Post-structuralism is a critical approach which emerged synchronously with postmodernism. Post-structuralists tend to hold that reality is generated via relational power dynamics which inculcate (self-)oppression via different cultural and aesthetic forms. Human subjectivity is produced via unfolding interactions with a myriad of individuals and networks of institutions which encourage people to reflexively act on themselves in the production of malleable subjects. This idea is further developed throughout the thesis.

[4] Arising from the Enlightenment, during which significant strides were made in recasting scientific, economic and philosophical knowledge, humanism began to place people (rather than for example, God) centre of all forms of inquiry. This new intellectualism began to frame human transcendence, which would later give rise to phenomenological thought (Allen and Goddard, 2017).

which are founded upon particular principles. There remain significant debates regarding what constitutes youth work; some thinkers appear to embrace changes in practice brought about by social and political shifts. Others adhere to more 'traditional' views which hold particular principles (e.g. young people's voluntary engagement) sacrosanct. These debates are developed later in the thesis; however, what briefly follows articulates a more 'traditionalist' standpoint. Firstly, youth work is grounded in informal education wherein learning is not prescriptive or prescribed. Rather, learning starts with young people's concerns and experiences of the world and uses dialogue regarding those experiences to foster thought, learning, action and change (Batsleer, 2008; Young, 2006). Traditionally, young people have chosen to be involved in youth work and negotiate what their participation looks like. Youth work is thus a social practice, founded upon democratic principles, which seeks to promote young people's inclusion, and to address issues of justice (Wood *et al*., 2015). It is a relational pedagogy wherein relationships of trust between youth workers and young people are cultivated in promoting learning. Youth workers' capacity for relationality and their ability to draw on their own experiences, learning, wisdom, and insight in promoting learning[5] is therefore integral to practice (Tiffany, 2001). *Who* youth workers are, therefore matters. It is this concern, together with a need to know what motivates people towards becoming youth workers which lies at the heart of this thesis. Issues of 'vocation', 'passion' or 'motivation' in youth work practice have rarely been addressed (cf de St Croix, 2016; Doyle, 1999; Hart, 2015); this thesis attempts to develop new insights in this regard.

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[5] Turney (2007), amongst others, terms this the 'use of self'. This is an idea that will be further developed in forthcoming chapters.

Questions regarding issues of identity are significant in understanding how people perceive and enact various roles. This seems particularly important in the 'people professions'[6] wherein those working in different fields draw on the essence of selfhood in serving and enabling others in contributing to societal inclusion and wellbeing. The reconfiguration of public services during the neoliberal era has however shifted the *telos* and culture of the public and voluntary sectors (Burton, 2013; Rochester, 2013) which youth work has traditionally occupied. Indeed, it has been argued, the neoliberalisation of youth work has led to fundamental changes in its character and expression (Taylor, Connaughton, de St Croix, Davies and Grace, 2018). The questions posed in this thesis regarding selfhood and identity as forms of lived professional practice and the impact of neoliberal reconfiguration upon subjectivities appear to be highlighted all the more as a result. The research therefore explores youth workers' experiences of contemporary practice and the impact of practice upon aspects of their personhood. It also examines youth workers' views regarding the future of the Profession.

Conceptually, the thesis is concerned with the nature of 'professionalism' as a subjectifying social and political construct. Youth work has always had an ambiguous quasi-professional status (Bradford, 2015), yet despite this, the last number of decades have seen increasing demands placed upon it. This has included a requirement that practitioners qualifying professionally since 2010 hold a degree or post-graduate award in youth work. However, little research has been developed to explore youth workers' experiences of contemporary professional formation on these courses. Moreover, given the potential significance of youth

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[6] By way of example, teaching, social work, nursing, community development work, youth work, and counselling might be classed amongst these professions. I also use the term 'human service professions' to represent such work.

workers' life histories in shaping their sense of vocation and 'use of self', there appears to be no research which examines practitioners' experiences of exploring 'questions of selfhood' on professional qualifying courses[7].

On the basis of these concerns, 16 qualified youth workers were recruited to participate in a series of three in-depth interviews. In the first interview, participants narrated their personal life histories. In the second, they explored relational aspects of their practice and ways in which their 'use of self' was influenced by personal experiences. The second interview also examined practitioners' experiences of their qualifying award and the extent to which 'questions of the self' were, or might have been, attended to. This work is complemented by interviews with two youth work academics whose courses included specific exploration of 'selfhood'.   The final interview allowed participants to consider their perceptions of contemporary practice and the impact of this upon personal subjectivities. Alongside this, respondents also expressed their views regarding potential futures for youth work and how they perceived their future relationship with the Profession.

1.4 The Story of the Thesis: A Heuristic Inquiry

> '… the relationship between autobiographical memory and identity [is] intimate and inextricable' (Goodson and Gill, 2014:123).

> '…researchers should know and be able to articulate who they are and what they believe personally, so that they may understand and acknowledge how these factors influence the research' (Savin-Baden and Major, 2013:68).

This thesis is about generating phenomenological understandings of youth workers' life narratives. Moustakas (1990), advanced important insights regarding the richness,

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[7] Indeed, given that there is no codified requirement for such work to be included in professional awards, there seem to be significant variances in this happening at all.

possibility and significance of researchers' own stories, experiences and reflections in framing research questions. This 'heuristic' work, he contended, is associated with the co-creation of phenomenological insight through the shared experiences of researcher and research participants. This thesis is in many ways a heuristic inquiry. It is driven by a need to develop insights regarding personal∞professional phenomena, to somehow compare my own experience of 'vocation', 'use of self', 'youth work practice' and professional identity with others. Following the heuristic ideas developed by Sultan, I use the infinity symbol (∞) throughout the thesis to indicate 'nondual', 'eternal', interrelationships between entities (Sultan (2018:xvi).

It would seem appropriate to make explicit some of the personal narrative that has led me to undertake this study. Doing so, I hope will enable readers to understand and engage with something of my own journey whilst adding a sense of reflexivity and transparency to the work.

The kernel of experiencing that led to this thesis can be traced back to the spring of 1987. I was fourteen years old, bursting with teenage angst, excitement, hope, anticipation, wonder, shyness, and resentment together with a profound need for freedom. U2, the band which was to become the soundscape of my life, were at the peak of their powers with *The Joshua Tree.* The world seemed so vividly alive to me, and I so electrically alive within it. I had spent the first thirteen years of my life being a compliant child. I tried hard at school, middling to keep up rather than to excel. At home, I tried hard to please my parents who were loving and hard-working. We were a working-class family. My dad worked as an electrician in the Ravenscraig steel plant, which, like so many other traditional industries in the 1980s, faced

decimation. He was robust in his contempt of Thatcher. Strikes and uncertainty punctuated the air. It meant there was always a certain tension in the house, one which I still carry and replicate. My mum, as typical of many others at the time, went back to work to support the family. For those thirteen years, I had been brought up in a Pentecostal church. I had experienced God personally. There was however another church down the road which held a particular attraction for me. It too was Pentecostal but was 'younger', growing, thriving even. It had a big youth group and more girls. I started to go, I started to make new friends, I started to be a part of it. It was dynamic. People (and especially the youth leaders) were *genuinely* interested in me. There was a deep sense of community, and I felt really cared for. Scotland and the church were very different places. Two of the youth leaders, David and Barbara who were in the early 20s and had been married less than a year opened their house for some of the boys (about 7 or 8 of us) to sleep over on Friday nights until some loose time on a Saturday afternoon. I was invited to come. I was thrilled. I felt part of something really important, I felt part of a community. Those seven or eight guys now in their 40s remain some of the most profound friendships I have known. Together with David and Barbara, we would share meals, go shopping, play music, watch TV, hang out, discuss teenage troubles, get creative, play football, talk about God, pray together and care for each other. We were left bereft around a year later when David and Barbara announced they had decided to move to Florida to attend a Bible College.

We were introduced to Andrew and Ann, another young couple from the church who lived in the countryside some fifteen miles away. I remember them saying "We can't replace David and Barbara, [I remember thinking 'Who *could* replace David and Barbara?'] because we are not David and Barbara, but, if we wanted, they would make their home available to us in the

same way. I remember feeling hurt almost betrayed that David and Barbara could leave us, but we accepted Andrew and Ann's generous offer. Andrew and Ann's family owned a large estate with several family homes on it together with a burgeoning complex of homes and flats for elderly residents. The estate grounds were huge. There was space to explore, a river running through it, a ruined mansion, courtyards and old stables. To us, it was freedom. It gave us space to develop our sense of community, faith and connectedness. Our time together on the estate went on for about two years. Meanwhile, the main youth group began to grow. Some lads from a 'deprived' area a few miles away from the church building began to roll up. Now 18, I began to wonder about whether we could begin to be to them what these couples had been to us. They came with the rest of us up to the estate on a few occasions, camping out in the summer. They then began kipping over occasionally at my family home – sleeping in the lounge with the rest of us upstairs. One used to wet the sofa regularly; my mum expressed concern for him but didn't seem to mind. Over the next few years, the youth work grew to around 100 young people from different parts of Lanarkshire. It seemed the sense of faith and community which was being developed was meeting a need. I had left school in 1990 with a collection of 'Highers'[8]. I spent the next five years working for the Royal Bank of Scotland: the thought of university (I had looked at doing either Youth and Community Work, Social Work or Applied Theology) didn't appeal in the end – in truth, I didn't think I could do it. Working in the bank gave me some money, I enjoyed some of it, but it was more a means to an end. I spent most of my evenings doing what I really wanted to do – working with young people. It was something intrinsically vocational for me, something deep-rooted I could offer myself relationally to help in various ways.

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[8] The Scottish equivalent of A-Levels.

By this time, David and Barbara had returned from Florida with their toddler son. My sense of vocation grew during 1995. I had to get out of banking and give my life in some way to working with young people. There was some talk about employment with the church, but perhaps that, in hindsight, was too cosseted. Lanarkshire tends to be the type of place where the vast majority of people who are born there, grow up there, work, marry, retire and die there. I wondered about pushing those boundaries. I began looking at church youth work jobs elsewhere. One stood out. Arden Church in Solihull near Birmingham. I applied and was offered the job. This however was a big move and I asked God to give me a sign it could be right. Late at night, watching television and flicking channels, the closing credits for the Scottish Clothes Show (yes there was such a thing) came on. Right at the end, it said 'Filmed in Arden House' – a place I had never heard of. Serendipitous some might say, I rather took it to be the requested sign. I lodged for the first six months with a couple who became (and whom I still regard) as my second parents. This was a church plant of around 60 people in a *very* middle-class area which met in the local school. It had four young people, plus a youth club for 11-14s on a Friday night. I was given a blank canvas with which to develop their youth work. They had arranged for me to work the local school doing assemblies, RE lessons and clubs. Over time, that extended to building relationships with young people during lunchtimes. The school viewed me as an honorary member of staff – I was invited to use the staff room when I liked. Relationships with young people developed. We began setting up groups outside of school. By this time, I was renting a flat, and as the church had no building, the flat was the meeting place. I guess I was replicating what I had known. It was relational. I had learned the art of what Smith and Smith (2008) describe as 'being around, being there, and being wise'. My role was to live a life. I was being paid to spend time with young people, developing a sense of community and inclusiveness with them. To me this was my life, and I

was deeply committed to it. God to me was central to the work, but not in a coercive way. I guess, I was seeking to 'model' something through 'presence', something I would reflect on much more deeply with Dave Bailey years later (Bright and Bailey, 2015). I hadn't been 'trained' in youth work, I just did it.

In 1997, I bought and moved to a maisonette on the High Street of the largest of the three interconnected 'villages' which at the time had a combined population of 30000 people. By then, I was running groups in the local youth centre, which, like so many others built in the aftermath of the Albemarle report, was situated in the school grounds. Groups would also congregate at my house – it became something of a community flat and around a hundred young people would pass through each week. I was engaged in detached work in the local park, ran residentials and continued to work in the school. To me, these were halcyon days, I was living my sense of vocation. Parents (who had no association with the church) would call me up if they were finding things difficult with their teenagers, and there were more than a few occasions when I was invited into family homes to mediate. Another couple had decided to move to South Africa, but their seventeen-year-old son, who I had been working with, didn't want to go. Ian, without my knowledge, asked his parents, who I barely knew, if they would allow me look after him until he turned 18. Given the increased focus on safeguarding, and the lack of any formal agreement between us, I cannot imagine this even being contemplated today; nevertheless, Ian came to live with me for six months.

Between 1995 and 2000, four people came to work with me on a 'year out'. One of them, Claire, later went on to become a Diocesan Youth Officer. Her friend, Ruth, came to visit her, but soon came to visit me – we were married in 1999. That first year of marriage was interesting. Together, we continued to do what I had been doing in the last four years, but it

was clear too my life and priorities were changing, and being called out at 4am in the morning to help a certain young man who had got into some trouble with a drug dealer was making life 'challenging'. Things sadly became difficult in the church. Eventually, people went their own ways and the church closed. I was offered funding to continue for the next three years, but I felt it was (reluctantly) perhaps time for a new challenge. Those years in Solihull had, and continue to have, a profound effect on me. The relationships and shared life with these young people was uniquely special. I feel privileged to have been part of their lives. It is a marker of that, perhaps, that when we go back as a family, a number of them still want to meet up, and many have come to visit us. We have been to weddings and christenings, and, occasionally, some (who are now in their thirties) still contact us to discuss things that are going on for them. So many of them have achieved great things: doctors, singers, actors, musicians (including someone in a well-known band), businesspeople, charity workers… Having worked with these young people ranks alongside having a family as one of my proudest achievements. And, it is perhaps this which represents my quest for vocation in this thesis.

Crash! The move from Solihull to live in Darlington was professionally one of the starkest experiences I have known. Given my somewhat melancholic personality, I think I experienced a considerable period of grief for what we had left behind. We had moved to the North-East to be near Ruth's family. We bought a large terraced house which Ruth spent a year doing up as I went out to work. I had been appointed to be a Young People's Intensive Support Worker with a large regional charity as part of a Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) initiative on the Sherburn Road Estate in Durham. The work, although relational, was *very* different. I was now working with young people who were largely disenfranchised, and who experienced various forms of disadvantage. It was poles apart from my experience in Solihull. Not only were social

conditions entirely different, approaches to work in multi-disciplinary teams with targets were completely alien to me. The year spent in that role was however an invaluable learning experience. I became much more politically aware, I learned to work with other professionals, I learned to reflect more deeply on practice, I learned to think about evidence-bases and performance indicators. It was an experience that was in stark contrast to my work with the church. But then, I did need to break out of the middle-class myopia that had been the last five years of my life to see a different 'real world'. I was part of a multi-disciplinary team which included 'Lifeskills/Entry to Employment (e2e)[9]', employability work, Community Safety and assertive outreach. The team was meant to be founded on complementarity; yet, I was always struck by the irony that the woman who led on Community Safety appeared hell-bent on criminalising the very young people who I was seeking to 'socially include'. In practice, my role included working with young people who were school-refusers, long-term unemployed young adults, those with various substance misuse issues, and those who were homeless. Aspects of the work were activity based, both with the team directly and through networking with other projects including counselling, colleges, Go-Karting, vehicle maintenance, Connexions, schools, youth work and substance misuse programmes. It was here I was introduced to counselling techniques including solution-focussed work, Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP), Motivational Interviewing Techniques (MIT) and the person-centred work of Carl Rogers. This was the year that helped me begin connecting practice with theory. This was the year that brought me so much insight regarding the actualities of so many young people's lives. This was the year that brought into sharp relief that much work with young people outside the church is profoundly different to that inside it. This was the year

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[9] Entry to Employment (E2E) was a government-funded Foundation Learning Tier programme for 16-18-year olds, designed to young people access work, training or further education.

that (for better or ill) began to 'professionalise' me. This was the year that re-shaped my sense of vocation and caused me to realise my future practice was likely to be shaped in a very different way – in a more controlled and almost more clinical fashion. In late 2001, despite having taken on more senior responsibility in assertive outreach, I was aware through 'dipping my toe', that I was experiencing a growing interest in the e2e project run by the organisation. That project advertised a post in Darlington. I applied and was appointed. It was located literally round the corner from my house – less than a hundred steps door to desk. The focus here was different; it was a more formal pedagogy delivered in an informal way. Schemes of work and lesson plans had to be developed and implemented. These young people who had largely not achieved particularly well at school (and who mostly didn't want to be on the project) came to develop their basic (literacy and numeracy), social and employability skills. They worked towards various City and Guilds awards and went on work experience placements with a view to progressing to college, training or employment. Results were, in truth, mixed. The project was subject to the rigmarole of inspection by the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) (later subsumed into OfSted). They visited all the organisation's e2e provision – my session was observed and awarded a '1' ('Outstanding'). Maybe, I thought, I *can* teach. I recognised the increasingly professionalised world which I occupied. I realised I had to get qualified. During those years, I completed a part-time certificate in youth work, teaching qualifications including those for teaching basic skills and a range of counselling skills qualifications, which I saw as integral to helping the young people whom I was working with. I found the counselling courses, which were founded on the work of Carl Rogers, fascinating. During this period, Ruth and I continued to help with church youth work in Darlington. I was aware that the more 'professional' nature of my paid work continued to fulfil much of my sense of vocation, but I also felt somewhat 'straight-jacketed' by it too. It was more

prescriptive, evidenced-based and governmentally-scrutinised than I had known. The imminent arrival of our son, Josh, in 2004 meant in order to support our family, I would need to get work that paid a more 'professional' salary. My days in the voluntary sector were over. At the third time of trying, I managed to get a job teaching Skills for Life and Key Skills at Darlington College. I enjoyed it, especially the earlier years which felt more informal. But, it was also something of a means to an end. I was on a quest now to get better qualified.

Between 2004-6, I studied for a professional Diploma in Counselling. It was a challenging time – theory, skills and in particular personal development caused me to scrutinise much about myself, my past and my beliefs. I perhaps learned more about myself during that period than about other people, and it is here my concern for self-knowledge and 'personal development' in youth work emanates. The substantial part of my negotiated professional placement was to inaugurate a counselling service in a Young Offenders Institute. It was another profound, and at times deeply moving, experience which required intensive clinical supervision. Counselling became a site of 'intimacy' for me - a way to replace the emotional connections I had left behind in my previous youth work. It was deeply connective, yet also boundaried, professional and clinical.

 Youth work however remained my intrinsic passion. I had wanted for some time to study for a professional qualification in youth work in order, somehow, to frame thinking and 'validate' practice. In 2007, at the age of 35 and with our daughter, Abi, expected imminently, I approached Teesside University. The options included a 6 year part-time undergraduate programme. The programme leader, Jonathan Roberts, however had different ideas. He suggested in light of my experience and despite the lack of an undergraduate degree that I join the Master's programme. It was an incredibly intense year. A new-born daughter, full-

time work and the completion of a Master's degree took its toll on my health. I graduated with Distinction and pneumonia. That degree however made me do a number of things. Principally, it made me think more critically about practice in terms of its political construction and in the way which I had practised it.

The degree also helped me to think more critically and sociologically about the world which young people inhabit. In short, it politicised me. By this point, I had become programme leader on a Foundation Degree in Working with Children and Young People. I loved the critical pedagogical space this gave me to try out my own ideas and in which to synthesise critical thought with practice.

Alongside full-time teaching, I had taken up a part-time counselling post in a local primary school. This again brought into sharp relief connections between social conditions and emotional need. Using Rogerian frameworks, I began to offer myself therapeutically in relationship to these children. This process enabled me to consider again notions of the 'use of self' in professional practice, something I had been crystallising during my time on my youth work degree. It raised a few questions I wanted to explore in the present thesis. Firstly, regarding the relational nature of practice and ways in which such practice is constructed. And, secondly, who is this 'self', and how is it we form it in order to virtuously use it?

I enjoyed a year or so off from studying but was keen to develop thinking about counselling in the same way I had afforded to youth work. I completed my MA in 2011. I had been struck by the 'resilience' of the young people who contributed to my youth work dissertation – they appeared strong and resourceful despite their circumstances. This idea caught me again during my time counselling in the primary school. Counselling as catalyst for childhood and

adolescent resilience became my research focus for my dissertation. What emerged as the primary driver in the development of resilience was dedicated relational space with someone willing to be there. Presence, rather than technique. For me this flew in the face of contemporary obsessions with evidence bases and outcomes in both counselling and youth work. A few months later, in addition to being programme leader on the Foundation Degree in Working with Children and Young People, I became module leader on a first-year personal development module for would-be counsellors. My role was to facilitate the personal development journey of fifteen students. The task of the module was to enable the development of Rogerian congruence through self∞Other exploration in the pursuit of personal and professional integration. Their narrative interactions created a (sometimes challenging) pedagogical space for collaborative learning. I was struck by the form, pattern and power of that personal narration and the ways in which it was similar to client processes in therapy. I now see this experience as ontological: people in process as being and becoming. To me, this highlighted a knowledge gap in professional formation of the human service professions. This was further crystallised in relation to youth work by another event. Sitting in an academic board, which encompassed assessments for youth work students, a colleague and former tutor was challenged by the Chair to explain the number of non-submissions on the undergraduate youth work programme they led. Their response, was telling: "I don't even know who some of these students are, they never turn up to my lectures." I remember in that moment thinking 'Who are youth workers?' 'What do we know about them?' 'How well do they know themselves?' "What is the ethical significance of this for practice?" My immediate thought was to contrast this with the counselling students on the 'personal development' module I was teaching, who seemed dedicated to fostering understandings of selfhood.

The founding questions in this thesis originate in the intersections of these experiences, observations and reflections. I hope this passage enables insights regarding my own personal and professional journey and how it has contributed to the development of the thesis.

1.5 Structure of the Thesis

Chapters two and three offer wide ranging analysis of different concepts and motifs that interweave in framing discussion of the empirical data. Chapter Two commences by evaluating the current landscape of practice. It examines youth work's ambiguous status and contested practices and identities. The chapter articulates foundational understandings of youth work as informal education and examines the principles and practices underpinning such an approach. In doing so, it draws together literature that frames youth work as critical pedagogy, before exploring the streams and strands of practice that have informed the Profession's unfolding histories. This work provides context that offers juxtaposition with the current conditions that have emerged under the rubric of neoliberalism which have transformed the character of contemporary practice. In light of these analyses, the chapter loops back to develop further insights regarding youth work as 'border pedagogy'[10] - a key motif in the thesis. It advances to consider discursive trajectories in professionalisation and deprofessionalisation, together with shifts in the contours of professional education. Finally, the chapter develops an outline of literature on governmentality. This is applied to youth work practice in order to develop perceptual insights regarding neoliberal processual mechanisms which shape and influence contemporary practices and professional∞personal subjectivities.

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[10] Border pedagogy is critical pedagogical approach which encourages people to consider and act upon intersubjectivities of difference which create and perpetuate inequalities.

Chapter three draws on sociological and psychological literature in framing discussion of identity. In doing so, it explores postmodern conceptualisations of identity as reflexively constructed processes of structurated individuation[11]. This links to and further enlightens previous analysis of governmentality as a *process* of constructed subjectivity. The following discussion of Allportian-inspired[12] work on group identity processes is applied to ways in which youth work as a profession has coalesced in generating a particular sense of contemporary collectivity. This work links to the power of narrativity in identity making and to the significance of 'vocation', both generally and for the 'people professions' including youth work more specifically. Further discussion regarding the importance of professional formation in the social professions is posited. This acts a precursor to discussion pertaining to the significance 'self-knowledge' in the 'use of self' as a relational ethic in youth work practice.

The Methodology and Methods chapter (4) rationalises development of a new approach to research: *Critical Narrative Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis.* In doing so, it examines the philosophical basis of the approach's constituent elements[13] and the ontological and epistemological ideas underpinning these, and thus argues the appropriateness of a particular methodological synthesis within the thesis. I articulate the abductive approach employed, and the way in which my approach to ethics, sampling, data collection, data analysis and validity were rationalised. The methodological work is enhanced by brief pen portraits of each of the research participants in Chapter 5.

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[11] The postmodern era has seen individuals act increasingly on themselves to foster greater personal agency; however, these processes have been shaped by powerful forces of global capitalism which utilise this '*sense*' of freedom and its correlative sense of personal responsibility for their own ends. In this view, personal agency has become a new structure of oppression.

[12] Gordon Allport was a social psychologist whose work encompassed insights regarding group identities. His work examined the significance of 'in-groups' and 'out-groups' and how people self-classified in relation to different ideas, values, practices etc. and the meaning of these for individual and collective identities.

[13] These being: critical theoretical perspectives (in this instance, Freirean and Foucauldian inspired thought), narrative and life history work and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA).

The interview data are presented and conceptualised in Chapters 6-9. Chapter 6 draws on data developed principally from the first tranche of interviews. This work explores the significance of participants' life histories in shaping their choice of youth work as their occupation. These processes are conceptualised in terms of 'borders' and 'reparative impulse', which can be thought of as ways in which individuals are compelled to address injustices or ensure others' needs are met. This life history work prepares the way for discussion in Chapter 7 relating to ways in which youth workers utilise selfhood in fostering 'learning relationships' (Tiffany, 2001:93) with young people. This empirical work advances insights regarding the 'use of self' in youth work. It attends to the significance practitioners themselves attach to identities and life histories in shaping relational practices with young people and how practitioners attempt to navigate such relationalities in a climate of performativity and control. This leads to discussion regarding the importance of the Aristotelian concept of *phronesis* (practical wisdom) as a virtue and a source of resistance in contemporary youth work practice. Participants' differing experiences of professional qualifying courses are examined in Chapter 8. This work explores respondents' perceptions regarding the influence of ethos and contrasting emphases upon courses of study and the extent to which 'questions of selfhood' were explored in professional formation. The chapter also conveys the views of two youth work academics regarding the pedagogical and ethical significance of including exploration of self and identity in professional qualifying courses. Chapter 9 concludes the presentation of data. This chapter explores participants' perceptions of contemporary practice in a climate driven by neoliberal performativity. This highlights the significance of present conditions upon personal and professional subjectivities. The chapter advances to consider respondents' views regarding the future of youth work. Despite present conditions, a striking sense of hope was conveyed by many. This, I suggest, may risk being a

form of 'cruel optimism' (Berlant, 2011), which alongside other identified technologies of governmentality, keeps youth workers engaged in practices that contribute to the aims of the neoliberal state - aims which continue to oppress both youth workers and young people. This, I contend, represents the antithesis of the Profession's *telos.*

Chapter 10 concludes by developing a summary of the thesis and its emergent conceptualisations. Here, I recognise the rich potential of youth workers' vocational stories as a source of insight for practice. In doing so, I also contend that processes of neoliberal governmentality have assimilated these youth workers' sense of vocation and the life histories undergirding them. I argue that for many youth workers this represents a 'vocational bind'. I conclude by offering a reflective evaluation of the thesis and consider the implications of this work for future research, education and practice. Specifically, this includes a recommendation that professional qualifying youth work programmes attend more specifically and systematically to 'questions of self' in professional formation.

Chapter 2

Contextualising Youth Work: Practices, Profession and Governmentality

2.1 Introduction

Bowers-Brown and Stevens (2010:76) argue a literature review is the 'starting point for a research enquiry'. It presents the opportunity for the researcher 'to engage with, synthesise, and convey understanding of the historical background, contemporary contexts, theoretical underpinnings and terminological bases of the topic' (Dixon, 2013:113). It provides space for the researcher to extract, interpret and critically evaluate work pertinent to the field of study (Hart, 2007; Jesson *et al*, 2012) enabling the research to become situated, and generate conversance with existing work (Walshaw, 2012). Moreover, in analysing the available extant literature, knowledge can be excavated, gaps identified and originality substantiated (Alvesson and Sandberg, 2013; Bowers-Brown and Stevens, 2010). A wide range of literature relating to the research question has been examined using books and journal articles found through academic search engines together with reports found on the Internet. The literature reviewed within this chapter, and the one which follows, will be evaluated, analysed and synthesised in order to demonstrate connections between different elements of the study.

This chapter is in two sections. The first of these generates an overview of youth work by considering debates regarding definitions of practice, together with exploration of its histories and development in the context of the UK. In doing so, the chapter attempts to

explore the meanings attached to youth work practice, and how these may have shifted over time. This work pays attention to different streams, strands and practice traditions, focussing on aspects of its espoused axiological core as a *praxis* committed to informal and critical pedagogies. The chapter further develops ideas on the neoliberal framing of youth work by engaging with governmentality-inspired literature. This prepares the ground for examination of literature relating to identity and vocation in Chapter 3 and provides an analytical lens with which to engage with aspects of participants' narratives in Chapter 9.

2.2.1 Landscapes of Practice: 'Defining' Youth Work

The diversification of 'youth work' including its organisation and utilisation within ever-widening contexts (Jeffs and Smith, 2010) has expanded and some would argue diluted its practices. Defining youth work is therefore no mean task – indeed Trudi Cooper asserts that whilst the production of a simple, delineating definition, although desirable, is not possible due to youth work's lack of '*institutional [and] contextual coherence*' (2018:4, emphasis in original). For Jeffs (2018:29/36) 'Youth work is not a walled well-maintained garden. The fences are ramshackle and intermittent; the borders porous with neighbouring welfare and educational professions who work with young people and often utilise the same techniques... [It] is a long rope comprising many strands; one still unfinished.' This chimes with Duffy (2017a:37) who argues youth work 'defies a bounded definition'. Its breadth of practice, and the range of contexts in which it is situated both internationally and in the UK, therefore render a perception of 'little commonality in the structure, activity and purposes of youth work' (Cooper, T. 2018:4). Youth work is therefore subject to the subjective interpretations of contextual, spatial, national and temporal dynamics. It is little wonder therefore Davies contends that defining youth work 'has *always* been a matter of sometimes fierce debate' (2010a:1, emphasis added). This has led Morciano and Merico (2017:44) to suggest: 'an

investigation into the flexibility and the diversity of youth work seems a more fruitful perspective, instead of trying to definitely establish its distinctive features'. Thus, as Baizerman (1996:161) contends, 'There is no one youth work. Rather there is a family of practices…'

However, despite the challenges engendered by the richness and diversity of youth work's practices, some helpful descriptions (particularly pertaining to its values and principles in practice), around which the majority of the Profession, in the UK, coalesce, do exist.[1] The practise of work with young people may be about many things including nurture and a humanising ethic of care (Baizerman, 1996; Banks, 2010b; Spier and Giles, 2018), welfare (Mizen, 2010), social control (Jeffs and Banks, 2010) or conversion (Green, 2010); yet informal education with young people lies at its espoused axiological core (Jeffs and Smith, 2005; Mahoney, 2001). Informal education is concerned with the natural, yet purposeful use of the everyday in promoting learning through dialogue (Batsleer, 2008; Jeffs and Smith, 2005). It is concerned with exploring and enlarging experience and with promoting democratic relationships through meaningful and freely chosen participation, which addresses young people's concerns (Podd, 2010; Wood *et al*., 2015). Young people's voluntary participation represents a democratic foundation of practice, and means 'they always have considerable control over how (or indeed whether) the youth work engagement proceeds' (Davies, 2010a:3). Informal education emphasises the pre-eminence of learning as a process and

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[1] The discussion I develop here adopts a more 'classical' or 'traditional' view regarding 'definitions' of youth work. This, as I will discuss later, does not however reflect the actualities of all contemporary practice, some of which has become increasingly focussed on targeted and individual case work approaches. Some commentators note the foregrounding of 'classic' youth work risks essentializing and narrowing definitions of what can be classed as authentic youth work, and further separates youth work in its idealised form from actually existing practice (Banks, 2010b; Payne, 2009). Whilst I recognise this tension, I believe discussion of youth work's 'classical' epistemological and pedagogical traditions, much of which continue to underpin current praxis and the Profession's sense of collective identity, is essential.

celebrates 'products' that are not pre-defined in the way much formal education tends to be. It celebrates the possibilities of '[t]alk that can lead anywhere' (Wood *et al*., 2015:55). It rejects the prescribed, prescriptive, didactic 'banking education' critiqued by Freire (1996) in favour of the power and potential of dialogical and egalitarian co-learning through which all participants, including the educator, have the potential to be transformed (Rosseter, 1987). Youth work is therefore grounded in a commitment to relationality and dialogue through which young people are empowered to learn about themselves, others and the world (Batsleer, 2008; Sapin, 2013). The dynamic interplay of relationships between self, peers and youth workers as informal educators are the principal vehicle for this learning, and the gateway to new insights (Blacker, 2010). Shared learning occurs through respectful but challenging 'learning relationships' (Tiffany (2001:93). These practices seek to promote associational ideals that build mutuality, diversity, respect, understanding, awareness and shared action (Bright, 2015; Jeffs and Smith, 2005). Youth work is concerned with engaging young people in a *praxis* of moral philosophizing (Young, 2006), of utilising their lifeworld experiences as the starting point for personal and social learning (Jeffs and Smith, 2005; Tilsen, 2018). It is concerned with enabling young people to deconstruct and reconstruct 'realities', and with empowering participants to locate personal experiences within wider interrelated domains as a means of generating critically thoughtful action (Tilsen, 2018). This enables balances of power and control to be 'tipped in young people's favour' (Davies, 2010a:3), thereby challenging and redressing young people's subaltern social positions (Skott-Myhre, 2009). Youth work therefore holds the potential to empower young people to 'come to voice' (Batsleer, 2008:5) through shaping spheres of reality and influence differently. It is concerned with utilising informal education to engage young people in processes of

conscientization[2] (Freire, 1996), and is thus committed to young people's social and political education (Nicholls, 2012; Rosseter, 1987). And yet, as I shall allude later in this chapter, these rhetorical high ideals have been undermined by advancing neoliberalisation, individualisation and atomisation, and resulted in the erosion of collectivity and critically engaged social and political education in youth work practice (Garacia *et al*., 2015; Nicholls, 2012).

2.2.2 Contextualising Practice: Histories, Traditions, Streams and Strands

This section briefly explores something of the history and development of youth work in relation to juxtaposing purposes of social and educational emancipation and control (Jeffs and Banks, 2010)[3]. Nicholls (2012) posits that the history and traditions of youth work in the UK can be traced back to radical and counter-cultural educational movements such as The Lollards[4] in the middle ages. Nicholls claims youth work is one resultant stream of a 'progressive and reforming movement' (p.227) that advanced egalitarian principles and inclusive and critically engaged education, that began to question the assumptive order of things, firstly within the church, and latterly in wider society. For Nicholls, youth work belongs to a long and subversive tradition of social education which has 'inspired a poetry and practice of rebellion and dissent [which has travelled] down the subsequent ages' (ibid.:228). This he links to the radical liberation theologians in South America, who inspired Freire and other critical pedagogues, and to emergent trade union movements in the UK which fought for

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[2] By conscientization, I mean processes that elicit, through dialogue, reflection and action, new and critically systemic understandings of the processes and roots of oppressions upon the 'social realities' of young people and communities. Conscientization is engendered through dialogue between educator and participants in promoting and valuing education as a shared endeavour. Drawing on critical theory, it encourages participants to 'name the world', and to recognise ways in which they are both oppressed and oppressors.

[3] As Coburn and Gormally (2015:70) note: 'Youth work is often caught between an inclination towards a critical stance that challenges the status quo and one that is compliant with prevailing social discourse'.

[4] The Lollards were a group led by the biblical translator, John Wycliffe. They formed their own schools and undermined the authority of the church by bringing ordinary 'uneducated' people into direct contact with the Bible in their own language.

equality and democratic representation. Youth work, Nicholls argues, is therefore fundamentally entwined within a socialist tradition, which has fought to raise consciousness, develop collectivism and bring about equitable material change.

Another, related, youth work stream arose out of religious and philanthropic concern for the physical, educational and moral welfare of the working poor in the wake of the industrial revolution (Bright, 2015; Jeffs, 1979; Leighton, 1982). This was a period of seismic social change in which agrarian social and family structures were subsumed by mass urbanisation (Davies and Gibson, 1967). This resulted in unprecedented and geographically concentrated poverty, squalor and disease. It is no accident therefore that contemporary youth work in the UK can trace much of its direct history to organisations founded by the concerned middle classes of the day who were alarmed by conditions which the urban poor faced, and the potential of these conditions, if unaddressed, to generate insurrection and 'immoral' contagion. Therefore, whilst some early 'youth work'[5] organisations were concerned with enabling critical thinking and reformist change, others were more concerned with preventing it (Fitzsimons *et al.*, 2011; Jeffs, 2018).

The majority of literature traces youth work's history in the UK back to the late eighteenth century, and in particular the Sunday School movement (Jeffs, 2018; Thompson, 2018), 'which besides religious instruction offered young people leisure activities, welfare services, basic education and meeting places, wherein they might relax with friends and 'caring' adults' (Jeffs, 2018:30). This work became the catalyst for educational and welfare work with young people in other emerging secular and religious organisations. 'Outreach and detached work, clubs, school-based provision, uniformed groups, drop-ins, residential work, sporting and

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[5] The term 'youth work' was not coined in the UK in recognisable fashion until the 1930s.

cultural programmes and more besides were all tried and tested before 1870' (ibid.:30). The 1870 Education Act however represented a watershed for youth work. All children were expected to attend school, where reading, writing and arithmetic were taught on a more comprehensive basis. Rescue and basic education, which hitherto had been the focus of much youth work practice, was replaced by a concern to meet young people's leisure time needs (Jeffs, 1979; Jeffs and Smith, 2010). The economic crash of the 1890s, a growing crisis involving various social problems, and recognition of the limitations of *laissez faire* governance in addressing yawning inequities, engendered a new collectivism. This became the seedbed for the welfare state of the twentieth century (Jeffs, 1979; Nicholls, 2012), and resulted in a *teleological* shift in youth work towards a greater focus on informal education (Jeffs and Smith, 2010). Youth work continued to develop in various ways during the early years of the twentieth century, with the British state involving itself for the first time as a response to concerns regarding juvenile crime during World War One (Bright, 2015; Jeffs, 1979; Jeffs, 2018). It wasn't however until the eve of World War Two when, eager to learn from the lessons of the previous conflict, and be seen to address 'young people as a problematic social category at a time of national crisis' (Bradford, 2007/8:13), the government inaugurated the 'youth service'. This institutionalised networked relationships between existing voluntary, religious and uniformed organisations, and spawned direct state provision via local authorities (Bradford, 2015). This was advanced (although not prioritised in funding) after the war as the welfare state took hold. A demographic bulge, full employment and concomitant youth spending power, together with burgeoning youth subculturalism and young people's perceived moral threat to the established order, provoked the government to set up the Albemarle Committee. Reporting in 1960, Albemarle recommended the significant

expansion of, and investment in, youth services[6], and the professional training of a growing

cadre of youth workers (Bradford, 2007/8, 2015; Jeffs, 2018). The ensuing period perhaps

represents youth work's zenith – a highpoint which grew equally out of educational *and* moral

concerns (emancipating *and* controlling young people in the production of a particular type

of subject). The next major review of youth work, *Youth and Community Work in the 70s,* 'The

Milson-Fairbairn Report' (Department of Education and Science, 1969) represented a fudge

between two sub-committees. One, led by Andrew Fairbairn, advocated closer links between

youth work and schools[7], whilst the other, chaired by Fred Milson, suggested closer links

between youth work and the burgeoning community development sector, which had grown

as a result of a range of post-war influences[8]. These influences included a vision of a 'new

Jerusalem' (Popple, 2013:128) – a more equitable society built on the principles of the welfare

state, the optimism of the 1950s economic and consumer boom, the return of UK nationals

who had practiced community development in the former colonies, and a gnawing concern

that as prosperity grew, some communities continued to be left behind. Moreover, there was

growing concern regarding social fragmentation and ghettoization particularly in areas which

had witnessed considerable migration from the Commonwealth. The state became a key

actor in a field which hitherto had been the preserve of the voluntary sector. This was aided

by the influential Younghusband Report (HMSO, 1959), which framed community

development as a social work methodology. However, others including Reg Batten, viewed it

as a liberating and politicising *praxis* committed to the empowering principles of autonomy,

action and change. Key initiatives including The Urban Programme and The National

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[6] Albermarle resulted in more than three thousand youth centres being built in England and Wales.
[7] This mirrored the ideals of the Kilbrandon Report in Scotland.
[8] Milson-Fairbairn also expressed concern regarding the numbers of 'unattached' young people the youth service was failing to engage. This led to a new focus upon detached and outreach work.

Community Development Project (NCDP), launched in the late 1960s, were harnessed in an attempt to address concerns over increasingly entrenched socio-economic issues and to mitigate the very real threat of social and racial unrest, particularly in communities which had come to bear the brunt of an ensuing recession. Popple (2011, 2013, 2015) notes the programme was based on pathologizing assumptions that individuals, rather than structural conditions were to blame for the socio-economic conditions faced by particular communities. However, practitioners working on the ground began to critique and challenge this worldview, arguing that 'the structural basis of poverty was perpetuated by capitalist relations and by social structures' (Popple, 2015:34). Many of these debates and developments resonated with the politicizing trend taking root in youth work at the time. Growing synergies in theory and practice resulted in many local authorities (and university courses) reconfiguring youth work into youth and community work provision. As Davies (1999) notes, this also reflected the growing rhetoric of promoting lifelong active learning and citizenship.

2.2.3 Youth Work in Changed Social and Political Times (1979-2010)

'All over the world, the forces of neoliberalism are on the march, dismantling the historically guaranteed social provisions provided by the welfare state, defining profit-making and market freedoms as the essence of democracy, while diminishing civil liberties as part of the alleged war on terror' (Giroux, 2011:69).

The conditions in which youth work operates today are vastly different to its early or even more recent history. In the mid-twentieth century, most young people were employed by the age of 15; however, many homes were over-crowded and unheated, and youth clubs provided a different and enjoyable place for young people to associate with people of their own age (Jeffs and Smith, 2010). Changed patterns of social relationships, the extension of time in formal education, technological advancement together with the arrival of home-based entertainments and social media have had a profound impact on traditional youth work

practices and raised doubts, even amongst some of its doyens, regarding whether youth work has any future at all (Jeffs *et al.*, 2019).

Political conditions have also had a profound impact on the nature and character of practice (Taylor *et al.*, 2018). Bunyan and Ord (2012:19) note: '[y]outh work has always been shaped its by wider social, political and economic context'. The election of Margaret Thatcher in 1979 resulted in an epochal rupture, which saw the abandonment of the post-war welfare settlement in favour of unfolding waves of neoliberal economic and social policy. Neoliberalism is a complex and much debated concept, and whilst there is little room to explore its multifacetedness here, its influence in framing both academic debate and practice in youth work is significant. Will Davies (2017:xiv) however offers a helpful definition:

> '[Neoliberalism is] the elevation of market-based principles and techniques of evaluation to the level of state-endorsed norms... [it represents] the disenfranchisement of politics by economics.'

Neoliberalism is premised on privileging market rationalities in maximising wellbeing in all spheres of human activity. It thus opens up every facet of human interaction to the maximisation, measurement and extraction of capital. Under its advanced capitalism, states pursue aggressive reductions in welfare expenditure – perceived as overly-generous - and become proponents of the market, conduiting its ever-deeper penetration, and disciplining its subjects into compliant acceptance of its assumptive rationalities. Neoliberalism focusses on the construction of individuals as units and consumers of production, and represents not only a 'fiscal, but an intellectual form of discipline' (Bright, Pugh and Clarke, 2018:319). It is concerned with disaggregating collectives, and with promoting individualisation in order to responsibilise and mould malleable subjects, thereby inculcating and reproducing the hegemony of its own doctrine through 'powers of freedom' (Rose, 1999a).

Since 1979, governments of all hues have engaged neoliberal technologies in harnessing and governing public goods including health, welfare and education. The Conservative government of 1979-1997 privatised, marketised and deregulated the provision of public goods with an almost evangelical zeal. Such moves not only serve to 'liberalize' systems, but act as a means of inculcating neoliberalism in and through professions (both in terms of the professionals themselves, and in respect of the wider population through the promulgation of compliant provider-customer relationships in every facet of life). Increasingly punitive forms of managerialism or New Public Management (NPM) (Burton, 2013) have accompanied marketisation. These approaches privilege 'economy, efficiency and effectiveness' (Bunyan and Ord, 2012:21) via rationalist and generic models of practice and management that reduce 'quality' to quantification and measurability against externally prescribed benchmarks (Bunyan and Ord, 2012; de St Croix, 2018; Duffy, 2017a). If one organisation is unable, or unwilling to work under these conditions, under market rationalities, another will, and for better 'value' (read more cheaply). In youth work, organisations have been compelled to corporatize and act like the much-vaunted private sector (Buchroth and Husband, 2015; de St Croix, 2015; Sercombe, 2015). Thus, the discourse of NPM correlates with, and enables the state's attempts to make *everything* (including non-market-based institutions) marketable 'so as to render them *market like* or *business like*' (Davies, 2017:xiv emphasis in original).[9] Simultaneously, discourses of performance and efficiency have been synergised to induce an era of performativity which has engendered new forms of governmental control and distrust of professionals (Bunyan and Ord, 2012; de St Croix, 2016, 2018). Taken together, these processes have culminated in the deregulation of youth work practices, undermined its

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[9] There is some argument NPM challenged 'inefficient' forms of youth work, which had failed to move with the times in meeting young people's needs. This, in some instances, resulted in few young people accessing provision. In this view, NPM challenged a perceived misuse of public money.

solidarity and professionality (including collective pay and conditions), and brought about workforce precarization (Nicholls, 2012; de St Croix, 2016; Taylor *et al*., 2018).

Notions of curriculum and outcomes are clearly tied to this performative agenda. The antecedents of this in youth work are located in the 1988 Education Reform Act. This Act imposed curricular and pedagogical constraints on teachers, and measured schools against expected knowledge outcomes. This foreshadowed a series of three ministerial conferences on youth work in the late 1980s and early 1990s, which attempted to discuss and agree questions of curriculum and outcomes in youth work. Predictably, this was broadly resisted by the sector. This resistance, combined with a lack of ministerial clout meant the agenda 'withered on the vine' (Ord, 2016:9). Despite this, the conferences laid the seedbed for the introduction and adoption of increasingly pervasive forms of curricula and explicitly outcomes-based practices in the years following (Davies, 1999; Ord, 2016). These manoeuvres were underpinned by discourses of ensuring 'value' and accountability for public money. The introduction of an OfSTED inspection framework for youth work in 1997 with its focus on service management and outcomes further highlighted this point. Yet, as Davies (1999:141) notes, the prescriptiveness of the framework gave 'little credence to the youth service's person-centred criteria.'

2.2.4 Youth Work under New Labour

Despite these encroachments, Bunyan and Ord (2012:23) note whilst youth work 'suffered neglect' during the Thatcher-Major era, it was left relatively untouched by Thatcherite policy. It was not until the arrival of New Labour in 1997 that the Profession 'experienced directly the impact of neoliberal managerial reforms.' New Labour, although ostensibly still a neoliberal government, sought to curb the excesses of the previous eighteen years of

Thatcherism by discursively promulgating notions of a more equal society. This was matched,

initially at least, by significant social investment. However, this investment was tethered to

'Third Way' discourses of marketisation (via processes of commissioning) and 'best value' - it

mattered little who delivered work on the state's behalf (voluntary or private sector

organisations, or the state itself), as long as it was 'efficiently achieved'. New Labour cast

youth work as a key player its vision of social reformation, particularly in respect of the

eradication of 'social exclusion' - the discursive ill of the age. However, this came at the cost

of compliance with the demands of performativity. Sercombe (2015:45) notes:

> 'The change in the state's role from benefactor to client involved a total shift in the
> logic of youth and community work. As client, government departments now
> purchased products from youth and community work organizations. The fundamental
> product they purchased was not so much a service to young people as *data.* If
> organisations could produce the right kind of data, expressed in reports containing
> approved data sets of appropriately constituted outcomes, then their position as
> suppliers would be confirmed. If they could not, no matter how engaging, inspiring,
> generative or transformative their practice, their survival would be at risk' (emphasis
> in original).

Youth work is grounded in a commitment to engaging with young people in a process-

orientated pedagogy, the outcomes of which are not pre-determinable (Ord, 2016). An

environment increasingly hell-bent on the measurable production of pre-determined

outcomes has therefore proven axiologically challenging and *teleologically* incongruous to

practice (ibid.; Sercombe, 2015). This has been heightened by policy agendas that increasingly

seek to transform youth work into an instrumental and panopticising practice of soft

discipline with young people deemed to be 'at risk' of pregnancy, educational and social

exclusion, substance misuse, criminality and 'NEETness' (de St Croix, 2016; Taylor *et al.*, 2018).

Giroux (2015:214) places these trends in context:

> 'As public space is increasingly commodified and the state becomes more closely
> aligned with capital, politics is defined largely by its policing functions rather than an
> agency for peace and social reform. As the state abandons social investment in health,

education, and the public welfare, it increasingly takes on the functions of an enhanced security or police state, the signs of which are most visible in the increasing use of the state apparatus to spy on and arrest its subjects.'

For Ord (2016), such 'targeted support' exacerbates the demonization and pathologization of young people – particularly those who experience different forms of 'marginalisation' - and represents an enacted discourse of neoliberal disciplinarity. Resultantly, youth work has been transmogrified from a practice that values equal access for all young people to that which is increasingly targeted, and from group-based informal education to individual casework, or what Hall (2013) has described as 'second class social work'. These processes, together with the incremental development of 'partnership' and 'multi-disciplinary practice' through Every Child Matters, the Connexions agenda, 'Youth Matters', early intervention and the eventual integration of services into wider structures of governance, have resulted in the subsumption and homogenisation of youth work within wider 'services', and its erosion as a discrete *praxis* (Bright and Pugh, 2019a; Ord, 2016)[10]. Whilst youth workers' skills in these domains may continue to be valued, hybridisation has resulted in a separation of practice from its axiological and pedagogical foundations, and, contributed to incipient *de*professionalisation (Davies and Taylor, 2019; Jones, 2018; Price, 2018).

2.2.5 2010 and Beyond: Youth Work's Onward Decline?

Yet despite the changes outlined between 1979 and 2010, perhaps worse was to come. The election of the Cameron-led Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition in 2010 in the aftermath of the financial crisis of 2008, witnessed the acceleration of neoliberal policy approaches. This included swingeing cuts to public services, the further deregulation of markets and the much-

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[10] Davies (2010b) notes for example, that bringing youth work under the control of children's trusts in many local authority areas further cemented its position as a mechanism of social control in reaching and working with those young people deemed to be most at risk. In the process, youth work's educational purposes were further corroded. In many instances, youth work is now managed by people from other professional disciplines who have little understanding of its distinctiveness, ethos or approach.

vaunted, and now much-derided, 'Big Society'. Cameron's Big Society vision was for armies of volunteers to get involved in the provision of public services – to open public services up to partnerships with those who they were designed to serve (Ishkanian and Szreter, 2012). The Big Society promulgated an entrepreneurial vision – of opening social and educational provision up to wider marketisation, of transparency and accountability, of social investment and payment by results. The Big Society inculcated a new view of responsible citizenship and re-enforced the neoliberal doctrines of marketisation, competition, privatisation and 'success'. Yet Big Society discourse deliberately obscured entrenched inequalities and further responsibilised neoliberalism's victims for its failures (de St Croix, 2015). Its rhetoric became a 'smokescreen for cuts' (ibid.:59). In the case of youth work, these were significant. Unison (2016) reported that between 2010-16, some £387m was cut from youth service budgets, resulting in the closure of over 600 youth centres, the loss of 139000 youth service places and the abolishment of more than 3500 youth work jobs. The Big Society's flagship programme for young people, National Citizen Service (NCS), a marketised and often subcontracted short-term programme for school leavers with militaristic and nation-building undertones (de St Croix, 2011), is run by a range of public, private and voluntary sector organisations using often-unqualified workers on minimum wage. Damningly, NCS has under-recruited and overspent, and significant questions continue to be raised regarding its efficacy and continuation, particularly in light of the value of year-round local youth services sacrificed in inaugurating it (de St Croix, 2011, 2015, 2016). NCS is situated in the context of wider sectoral concerns – of continuing cuts, competition, targets and targeting – processes of market fundamentalism that 'increasingly appear at odds with any visible notion of critical education' (Giroux, 2005:216). Youth work in its traditional, associative form has been reduced to all but

a 'rump' (Jeffs, 2015:77)[11]. Yet within this environment youth workers continue to practice as passionate professionals, seeking out spaces to subvert and resist. And, it is in this environment that practitioners' identities continue to be shaped (de St Croix, 2016).

2.2.6 Framing Youth Work as Critical and Border Pedagogies

As noted in the introduction to this chapter, youth work traditions have long been underpinned by a commitment to critical pedagogy. Freire (1996) argued that oppressive and dehumanizing structures of power are hegemonized and legitimized through 'banking education' in which educators deposit instrumentally prescribed knowledge into their students. This positions educators, states and pre-conditioned knowledge in oppressive authority, and further conditions learners as ignorant (Coburn, 2010). For Freire, this results in learners internalizing, assimilating and reproducing their own oppression through a false consciousness that fatalistically accepts the *status quo,* through an engendered 'fear of freedom' (Freire, 1996:28). Freire argued the first stage in surmounting oppression is to 'critically realize its causes' (ibid.:29). This, he described as the process of conscientization – the starting point of which is dialogical engagement that produces co-constructed perceptual changes regarding learners' experiences. For Giroux (2011:21, drawing on Jacoby, 1975), this involves deconstructing and challenging the hegemonic assumptions of presented historical ideals that have given rise to 'social amnesia'.

Freire's critical pedagogy is founded upon a commitment to 'love, humility and faith [through which] dialogue becomes a horizontal relationship [of] mutual trust' (Freire, 1996:72), and by which interlocutors' thinking is transformed from naivety to criticality, and from passivity to

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[11] Jeffs (2015:77) qualifies his point by contending much work continues to flourish in the religious and civil (voluntary sector) spheres: '…whenever discussion of 'a youth work crisis' occurs one should understand that 'crisis' relates almost exclusively to secular units and typically those that were previously fully or partially funded by local authorities'.

emancipatory action. This holds the potential to transform and re-humanize social conditions and relations of power, and possibilise new ways of thinking and being that move people from hopelessness towards hopefulness. This frames critical pedagogy 'as a theoretical resource and as a productive practice' (Giroux, 2011:5) which collectivises resistance and repositions communities from knowledge recipients to 'transformative intellectuals' (Cooper, 2015:49) who develop alternative social imaginaries. This chimes with Coburn and Gormally's (2015:71) description of 'critical youth work' in which 'young people are encouraged to learn by probing common-sense views of the world, to facilitate understanding of justice and injustice, power and oppression, and ultimately to promote social transformation.' As such, critical pedagogy is concerned with transforming thinking from consumption to creation (Giroux, 2011; Smith, 1982) and from parochial naivety towards active global consciousness (Sallah, 2014; Sallah *et al.*, 2018). For Giroux (2011:1/9) critical pedagogy is not simply a moral and political practice:

> 'It also provides tools to unsettle commonsense assumptions, theorize matters of self and social agency, and engage the ever-changing demands and promises of a democratic polity... [it engenders] a politics of educated hope, responsive to the need to think beyond the established narratives of power.'

Following Gramsci, Giroux (2011) argues the inseparability of education, power, ideology, discourse and culture. Education itself is a site of ideological struggle through which existing forms of cultural power are reproduced, or challenged and changed. Giroux (2005) therefore argues the urgent need to harness education differently in remaking society. Critical pedagogy critiques the cultural reproduction of hegemonies, and promotes the reformation of culture through *docta spes*[12]. It is a cultural-shaping practice that engages in the deconstruction of 'realities' and the reconstruction of possibilities (Cho, 2013; Giroux, 2005,

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[12] Educated hope

2011). Indeed, Giroux (2011) has extended this idea, calling its practitioners 'cultural workers' – a cadre of educators and others committed to critically exploring the nature of culture as a site of struggle between oppressive forces and liberating tendencies and the reproduction of these struggles through arts, discourse, economics, histories, media and politics. Critical pedagogy highlights the power of language as a site of struggle, a weapon of critique, and, as articulation of possibility. It is a *praxis* that engages in the hopeful transformation of (inter)subjectivities, collectivities and culture(s) through the refiguration of the relationship between the personal and political. Critical pedagogy is concerned with the 'politics of voice' – with enabling people to name, connect, understand, act upon and transform experiential and stratified conditions of oppression, and their reproduction in different domains (ibid.:73ff). It is, as Freire (2014) named it, a *Pedagogy of Hope.* Yet Giroux is also keen to warn about the dangers of hope. Critical pedagogy without critical action, he contends, risks momentary narcissistic, cathartic relief, which fails to act upon structures of oppression, thereby rendering them unchallenged. It is for this reason, he suggests, critical pedagogy needs to move away from being 'simply a language of critique, and redefine itself as part of a language of transformation' (2005:75). Thus, enabling young people to 'come to voice' – which Batsleer (*op cit.*) contends is one of youth work's core purposes, is a culture-shaping practice, a 'revolutionary gesture' (hooks, 1989:12), and a means by which people are able to understand, act upon and transform intersubjectivities of oppression (Giroux, 2005). For Giroux (2011:64), it is therefore incumbent on educators to develop 'a pedagogy that not only negotiates difference, but takes seriously the imperative to make knowledge meaningful in order that it might become critical and transformative'.

Giroux (2005) metaphorizes critical pedagogy's culture-shaping practices as 'border pedagogy'. Border pedagogy enables people to cross perceptual imaginaries of the self as

intersubjectively positioned by forces of oppression, to reach new, multicentric insights regarding others' oppressed subjectivities, and to collectively act upon these to engender change:

> 'Border *praxis* is fundamentally concerned with metaphoric doorsteps, stepping from one experience or perspective to another and often staying and creating on the limits between experiences. Border *praxis* is about edges, verges, margins, collisions and intersections – all thresholds into new perceptions' (Bolt, 2009:107).

Borders are innumerable and intersecting. They encompass spatial, geographical, class, gender, educational, religious, familial, national, linguistic, cultural, opportunity, political and sexual divisions. Giroux (2005:7) correlates these borders with the configuration of identities, but argues the flux of globalisation renders them permeable and fluid, and thus open to 'emancipatory possibilities'. Border pedagogy enables the possibilities of connectivity, rather than division, and collectivity in the democratic renewal of 'alternative public spheres' (ibid.:14). This reflects the rich potential of hybridity and ambiguity in border literature (Anzaldúa, 2012; Bolt, 2009).

The intersubjectivities of borders are experienced, whether obviously or tacitly, every day. This thesis is interested in youth workers as border pedagogues, and the significance of borders and border crossings as part of their own constructed narratives within different and changing landscapes. For Coburn (2010) and Coburn and Gormally (2017), youth work's foundation in critical pedagogy and the current conditions engendered by neoliberalism render exploration of youth work in the UK as border pedagogy ripe for theoretical and practical development. Coburn and Gormally highlight the rich possibilities for this, not only within youth work as a distinct practice, but also through collaborative practice with other

critically minded professionals. Such work, they contend, holds significant potential in refiguring conditions towards that which is more socio-democratically just. Youth workers in both these senses are border pedagogues. Firstly, their practice engages young people and communities in informal and dialogical pedagogies that enable the exploration of experience, the development of opportunities and the widening of vistas. Secondly, practice as currently configured within different settings, and alongside colleagues from varying organisations and professional backgrounds generates new borders of practice that might be exploited. In both these senses, 'borderlands should be seen as sites for both critical analysis and as potential sources of experimentation, creativity and possibility' (Giroux, 2005:26). Youth workers as border pedagogues are engaged therefore in processes of navigation, negotiation, gaining access, interpretation and exchange, in enabling insight, understanding, joining, action and transformation.

2.2.7 Youth Work: Trajectories of 'Professionalization' and Deprofessionalisation

Although in this thesis, I use the terms 'profession' and 'youth work/youth and community work' interchangeably, there remain significant debates regarding whether youth work can and should be considered a profession, at least as classically defined. Sercombe (2010a) highlights the socially constructed nature of 'youth', 'young people' and 'adolescence' as categories shaped by temporal, cultural and spatial dynamics, and youth work's juxtaposition with other professions' knowledge assertions regarding young people, further complicates youth work's own claim for professional status. Yet youth work's distinctive and coalescing professional assertion is that it prioritises (rhetorically at least), more than any other occupation, young people's rights, agency and freely chosen participation, thus foregrounding them (rather than the state, or any other actor) as the Profession's principal clients (Sercombe, 2010; Coburn, 2011). For Banks (2010a:xi), the growing literature on youth work

and the move towards degree level qualifying status reflect its 'gradual professionalisation', based upon its status as a 'specialist occupation' and 'discipline' (Banks, 2010b:5). However, Banks notes that the fuzziness of its status is 'compounded by the fact that ''youth work' is not internationally recognised as a specialist occupation (and certainly not a profession) in the way that medicine, law, architecture, nursing or social work tend to be, with international professional associations and codes of ethics' (ibid.:5). Likewise, Bradford (2015:23) argues youth work has always been 'characterised by a somewhat ambiguous professionalism.'

Defining the 'professional status' of occupations is subject to a range of different conditions, not least the socio-political legitimacy they are afforded or denuded of at any given time. Indeed, there are continuing debates within youth work as to the meaning and desirability of an ascribed professional status. Some, like Nicholls (2012) and Taylor *et al* (2018) are vociferous in their claims for youth work as a social (and socialist) profession. Others including Jones (2018), whilst recognising youth work demonstrates many professional traits, question whether its inherent informality, hybridity and criticalist tendencies contradict constructed professional ideals. For others, conceptualisations of professionalism are more problematic. Bradford (2007/8, 2015) views professionalism a discursive mechanism of governmentality deployed to ensure compliance and the self-regulation of practice in line with state agendas:

> 'Professions and professional practices are central to the project of government. Indeed, expertise institutionalised in professional form has increased the reach of the state in its capacity to represent social problems in such a way as to make them amenable to governmental practices. As occupational strategy, professionalism has characterised the helping occupations since the war and some aspirant professionals (social workers, health visitors, occupational therapists, and latterly, youth workers) elicited public and political support, so acquiring a mandate to practice within the welfare state. Professionalism is also a power practice, an attempt to achieve closure by producing a commodity whose acquisition and distribution is assiduously monopolised by professionals themselves' (Bradford, 2007/8:22).

However, despite these critiques, Banks (2010b) and Jones (2012, 2018) note its now graduate 'professional' status has elevated youth work, equating its entry requirements to those of recognised cognate professions (e.g. teaching and social work). However, it should also be noted this professional graduate status is not necessarily recognised or required by employers.

Much about youth work's claim for professional status is founded in the Albermarle era (1960s), when the remuneration of youth workers became an increasing phenomenon, displacing decades of what had been a principally voluntary endeavour. Youth work's political foundations, growing professional training and recognition of its social value, together with unionisation represented a particular high point in the afterglow of Albermarle. Albermarle, like the McNair Report (Board of Education, 1944) before it, equated the value of youth work to teaching, and established the Joint Negotiating Committee for pay and conditions in youth work, which many in the Profession have fought tirelessly to maintain in the face of continuous attempts to deregulate practice and remuneration (Nicholls, 2012).

However, despite evidence of facets of professionalization, youth work's status as a profession, although claimed, has never been formally or fully secured. This is highlighted by its failure to gain a statutory footing that would obligate the state to ensure provision for all young people, and by the contended absence of particular characteristics associated with occupations with recognised professional status. Jones (2018) draws on Greenwood's (1957) classic treatise to illustrate this point. Greenwood articulates five traits of the professions as:

1. Having a 'systematic body of theory'

2. Having 'professional authority'

3. Holding control over curriculum and entry to the profession

4. Having a code of ethics

5. Having a developed professional culture, which is likely to include a professional association.

Whilst youth work has developed its own burgeoning knowledge base and ethical codes, agreement regarding whether youth work meets the remaining aspects of this list is less clear. For Jones, youth work lacks professional authority, both in terms of its gravitas within the wider professional sphere and in relation to its engagement with young people, which is characterised by approaches that are more egalitarian. National Occupational Standards and Subject Benchmark Statements provide some consistency in respect of professional formation, gatekeeping and practice, but whilst these represent 'standards', their application is perhaps more subjective. Moreover, whilst many welcome the inauguration of the Institute for Youth Work (IYW, 2018), its register currently remains voluntary, and it has no mechanism to strike youth workers off (Jones, 2018).

More contemporary conceptualisations of 'profession' are perhaps better aligned with youth work's practices and ideals. Models of 'democratic professionalism' developed by Dzur (2008) for example offer a more participatory and egalitarian view of professions as shared practices between workers and 'fellow citizens [which value people's] experiences, expertise and interests' (Banks, 2019:21). For Dzur (2008), such conceptualisations challenge the elitism and self-interest of professions and undermine the insidious logics of exploitative marketisation. In communitarian terms, democratic professionalism enables the co-production of insight and change through the synthesis of occupational knowledge and status with people's 'lived concerns', thus foregrounding the potential of collaborative possibility in generating a renewed and democratically accountable public sphere.

Irrespective of the challenges and debates in relation to *ascribed* professional status, the majority of youth workers consider *themselves* to be professional and hold 'professional' status. This claim is central to many youth workers' sense of professional identity. The sense of professional collectivity that this 'professionality' engenders has underpinned vigorous campaigns to defend youth work, its ideals and youth workers' 'professional' and remunerative status within changing socio-political landscapes over many decades (Nicholls, 2012).

2.2.8 Professional Youth Work Education: Development and Influences

As noted, professional education is a cornerstone of professional formation and practice, and a key concern in this thesis. It seems expedient therefore to provide a brief, albeit incomplete, account of the development of professional training courses. The first training course for youth workers, or youth leaders as they were known, was launched by the National Organisation of Girls' Clubs at Bedford College, London on the 8th October 1915 (Youth and Policy, 2015). Over the following two decades, the voluntary sector and other organisations including the Church of England, advanced youth leadership training, grounding it in the social sciences, education and management (Bradford, 2007/8). In response to the emergency conditions that catalysed Circular 1486, by 1942, the government came to implicitly approve 'youth leadership' courses at five English Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Discussion ensued about the adaption of already established cognate professional courses in social work and teaching; however, it was felt greater specificity needed to be developed (ibid.) Ensuing discussions between the HEIs and the government's Board of Education recognised that the success of youth work provision was dependent upon a combination of the quality of students and courses. The curricular substance of these one-year full-time qualifying courses was developed to include a mixture of social sciences, social philosophy, work with individuals and

groups and management. These continue to be the bedrock of contemporary professional formation (Jones, 2018). The growing recognition of youth work as a career, rather than solely a voluntary activity, led to the proliferation of youth work courses, and tacit state recognition of youth work's status as a 'profession' [13] accessed through qualification (Bradford, 2007/8). Bradford (2015) notes the ensuing McNair Report (Board of Education, 1944) on the training of teachers and youth leaders recognised the value of teaching and youth work as equally valuable professions, based on distinct forms of professional knowledge. McNair recommended youth leader training courses were extended to three years of study, and that they should synthesise a developing canon of codified knowledge, drawn principally from the social sciences, with supervised practice-based experience that promoted practitioner reflection together with expertise in promoting dialogical learning with young people. But for Bradford, McNair was more than tacit recognition of youth work's growing status; it was a professionalizing project that represented the liberal governmentalization of professional identity:

> 'Professional preparation, therefore, entailed the disciplining of the novice professional in ways that reflect youth workers' own subsequent disciplining of young people in their attempts at the formation of responsible citizenship' (Bradford, 2015:26).

Burgeoning post-war welfarism witnessed the professionalization of many 'helping occupations'. This professionalizing project became a key mechanism by which the state blended expertism and bureaucratisation in their attempts to manage 'social problems'. This, for youth work, is represented in Albemarle – the zenith of discursive professionalization and definitive organising. In the few short years following Albemarle, the number of full-time

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[13] Albeit with an ambiguous status and lacking in codified knowledge, and thus able to claim and exercise limited power.

youth workers in England had risen to around 1300, their qualification enabled by the newly

accredited Diploma in youth work, taught through the National College for the Training of

Youth Leaders in Leicester[14]. However, despite the clamour for, and development of, codified

knowledge to underpin youth work's professional claim, the National College foregrounded

'personal development' (Watkins, 1972:7, emphasis in original) over formal knowledge[15]. This

highlights an ethos at the College towards reflective introspection and encouraging

authenticity in the practitioner's 'use of relationships' (ibid.:68). This appears to reflect a

particular 'romantic individualism' (Bradford, 2011:103), pervasive in post-war humanistic

thought, which privileged Rogerian notions of 'authenticity', individual experience and

'personal development' pre-eminently over other modes of knowledge. This approach to

professional education was designed to contribute towards the formation of self-regulating

practitioners, who in turn, would mirror these practices in the production of self-regulating

young people (Bradford, 2009, 2011). Bradford (2015) highlights how training in subsequent

decades vacillated between a pedagogical emphasis on codified, abstract knowledge which

has sought to promote collective professional identity, and personal formation of the

authentic self. The former, notes Bradford, assimilated criticalist interpretations of young

people's subordinated position particularly in relation to classic divisions of class, gender and

race – ideas that have been underpinned by the concomitant influence of critical pedagogy

(Freire, 1996). Youth work's professional claim, Bradford contends, has however been

undermined by its own intermittent shifts towards a preoccupation with personal

authenticity over more criticalist perspectives in professional formation. This, it might be

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[14] It is noteworthy that the minimum age for entry onto the course was 23. Considerable numbers were
classed as mature students (28 plus), and many came from 'non-traditional' academic backgrounds (Watkins,
1972). This has continued to be a feature of professional youth and community work education.
[15] These ideas are examined more fully in relation to professional formation and the 'use of self' in Chapter 3.

argued, feeds into claims of a broader culture of anti-intellectualism in the sector (Seal and Frost, 2014).

In recent decades, the performative impact of neoliberalism on youth work has extended to professional education in the field. The attack by the New Right on the 'public professions' (e.g. teaching, social work and youth and community work) was designed to corrode occupational autonomy and bring workers under diffuse state control (Nicholls, 2012). This agenda was propelled by increasingly panoptical inspection frameworks, which noted a lack of comparability between, and therefore legitimacy of, HEI youth and community work courses. This indicated a lack of consistency regarding professional competency, so undermining the very idea of youth work professionality. Simultaneously, others within the profession argued that youth work had become elitist, self-serving and overly theorised, and had thus reached a point of axiological antithesis. This convergence, concomitant with the rise of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs), resulted in moves towards competency-based assessments in youth work. This represented 'a retreat from [the] abstract knowledge' (Bradford, 2015:33) which underpinned youth work's distinct professional claim. The operationalisation of such competency-based approaches fits with wider processes of performative commodification. Tick-box competency quantifies the neoliberal desire for visible, evaluable and compliant outcomes whilst delegitimizing informal educational processes and critical thinking regarding structures of oppression (Cooper, 2012; de St Croix, 2018; Duffy, 2017a, 2017b). In this way, it might be argued youth work has been sanitized and assimilated in governing young people's lives (Bright and Pugh, 2019a). In privileging the performativity of doing over thinking in professional youth work education, the state has come to condition and de-criticalise a practice once founded in critical pedagogy. Pernicious moves towards reframing the very nature of practice within performative environments have

resulted in the transmogrification of discourses of 'professionalism' towards one of compliance and ascribed knowledge, where narrow agendas and approaches are legitimated under the ideal of professionalism. For Price (2018), this reflects an arc of re-professionalization and de-professionalization of youth practitioners. Where 'youth work' was valued (albeit under a particular New Labour agenda concerned with discourses of 'inclusion'), its status and autonomy have been corroded by successive governments of all hues. Freedom of thought and autonomy of contextually sensitive professional action have been bastardized in favour of a culture of punitive performativity and the pseudo-scientism of measurable and evaluable outcomes (de St Croix, 2018; Giroux, 2011; Ord, 2014, 2016).

2.3 Governmentality and Youth and Community Work

2.3.1 Governmentality: An Overview

Hearn (2012) contends the philosopher Michel Foucault was one of the eminent thinkers of the twentieth century, and perhaps preeminent in his analysis of power. Foucault's work as a philosopher, historian and social theorist influenced thinking in a wide range of disciplines and can be categorised as analysing the influence of power in respect of the development of contemporary subjectivities across different domains. The early part of Foucault's career concerned the utilisation of power via the production of medical and scientific discourses. This was followed by analyses of sexuality and institutions of incarceration, before a final turn towards the end of his life, which examined the processes invoked by contemporary liberal forms of government – in utilising and shaping power. These mentalities of government, or 'governmentalities', are the focus of this section of the thesis, and an analytical lens through which I shall examine aspects of participants' narrative accounts.

Foucault's analysis of governmentality, like his earlier work, assumed a deconstructive epistemology, or genealogical analysis. This was based on the contention that human subjectivity - the relationship of the individual to the self- is enframed by an array of discourses which engender and shape particular forms of reality, making them amenable to deliberation and action. Miller and Rose (2008:7) note that resultant analyses of the technologies of subjectivity include the ontological task of exploring 'the history of individuals' *relations* with themselves and with others' (emphasis in original) – an idea that resonates with the approach adopted in this thesis.

As a result of his ontological-discursive analysis, Foucault rejected what he regarded as the subjectivism of humanism, existentialism and phenomenology. These, he contended, afford a false epistemology of 'presentism', that fails to pay attention to *how* reality is constructed through the historical layering of discourses (Schirato *et al*., 2012). This, Foucault posited, results in human subjectivity being constructed as an ontological fallacy. Rather, as Hearn (2012) notes, Foucault contended that deconstructive genealogical processes hold the potential to illuminate 'realities' differently, and thus speak truth to power in generatively reconstituting and redirecting it. For Foucault, subjectivities and resultant enacted identities are harnessed to affectively and immanently reproduce particular modes of reality that are underpinned by discursively fuelled *epistemes*. It is in deconstructing 'assumptive realities' that agentic possibilities of subjectivity, identities and power become realisable. For Foucault, power itself was benign, and capable of being harnessed for good and ill. Rather than problematizing power itself, Foucault's emphasis was on generating analysis of how power was constituted through 'power-knowledge' relations, in order to better understand its utilisation and potential. These ideas are central to the governmentality thesis developed by Foucault and others who have followed him. Although time and space do not permit a

detailed analysis of governmentality, the following section explores literature pertaining to these ideas and their application to youth work. This generates an analytical lens for the empirical work that follows, particularly that set out in Chapter 9.

Governmentality is the means by which diffuse assemblages of (state-aligned) actors work to tacitly regulate and ultimately promote the self-regulation of human subjectivity and action in line with their own agendas (Hearn, 2012; Miller and Rose, 2008). Governmentality has been described by Foucault (1982:220-1) as the 'conduct of conduct', and by Miller and Rose (2008:5) as 'the engineering of conduct'. Dean (2010) in advancing this description of governmentality as 'conduct' notes a number of ideas. Firstly, that governmentality involves a sense of rationalisation that calculates how government might be conducted or enacted. Secondly, that conduct in its reflexive sense is concerned with self-direction. And, thirdly, it refers in a moral sense, to modes of (normative) behaviour that further reflect forms of self-regulation. The discursive production of morality for the purposes of governmentality reflects processes by which subjects are made to account to external others (and self) for their actions, and represents a technology by which human subjectivity is discursively inculcated in the production of self-governing subjects. This ideal is founded upon a conception of the person as an agent capable of self-observation, self-regulation and self-governance:

> 'Putting these sense of conduct together, governmentality entails any attempt to shape with some degree of deliberation aspects of our behaviour according to particular sets of norms and for a variety of ends. Government in this sense is an undertaking conducted in the plural...' (ibid.:18.).

Under this rubric, governable subjects are not born, but are made through the processes of government (Duffy, 2017a), which Dean (2010:18) describes as:

> '...any more or less calculated and rational activity, undertaken by a multiplicity of authorities and agencies, employing a variety of techniques and forms of knowledge, that seeks to shape conduct by working through the desires, aspirations, interests and

beliefs of various actors, for definite but shifting ends and with a diverse set of relatively unpredictable consequences, effects and outcomes.'

Government is thus enacted through an array of networked actors – 'cogs and levers', that constitute assemblages of 'diverse components, persons, forms of knowledge, technical procedure[s] and modes of judgement and sanctions' (Miller and Rose, 2008:200), designed to inculcate personal, social and professional subjectivities in the production of malleable and self-governing subjects. Government is therefore reckonable as regulating the interconnected entirety of human subjectivity. That is, it harnesses various mechanisms to govern health, wellbeing, sexuality, thoughts, beliefs, and values through subjects' engagement with different institutions e.g. the financial, industrial, educational, media, family, and the 'helping professions' in promoting self-governance through a *sense* of subjectified autonomy. In doing so, governments utilise various technologies in generating particular subjectivities that come to constitute the 'reality' within which human subjects come to recursively and reflexively act on themselves (Dean, 2013). Government, in this view, represents the production and harnessing of 'freedoms' for particular ends. As Dean (2010:20) notes, government refers to 'practices that try to shape, sculpt, mobilize and work *through* the choices, desires, aspirations, needs, wants and lifestyles of individuals and groups' (emphasis added). As Chandler and Reid (2016), Miller and Rose (2008) and Rose (1999b), contend, governmentality therefore constitutes the technologies by which state actors come to inculcate, shape, manage and assimilate the 'locus of freedom', (Dean, 2010:19), indeed very souls of human subjects for particular but diverse ends.

In line with these analyses, Chandler and Reid (2016) reject the idea of *laissez faire* governance, instead viewing contemporary liberal states as subtly interventionist. In line with Thaler and Sunstein (2009), Chandler and Reid contend modern states actively 'nudge' their

citizenry in particular directions by means of generating and managing affective discourses including 'risk', in producing vulnerable, malleable, adaptive and ultimately 'resilient' subjects. In this view, the political is reduced to subtle leverage, and 'the administration of social processes' (ibid.:12) via technical, rationalist, affective and discursive means. Thus, mentalities of government as discursively enacted via diverse mechanisms and related and relational networks of power including those of the state, media and market, fuel, legitimate and assimilate particular desires and modes for specific 'normative' purposes, in reinforcing particular rationalities, 'truths' and 'realities'. Dean (2010) notes governmentality, as process, involves ontological, ascetic, deontological and *teleological* dimensions. The ontological refers to what is to be acted upon, the ascetic, the processes and technologies (moral, managerial, (self-)panoptical, professional, economic, discursive etc.) by which self-disciplining governance is produced, the deontological, the 'moral' subject that results from the process of government, and the *teleological*, the rationalities underpinning processes of governmentality in producing a particular *type* of malleable human subject. For Bassil-Morozow (2015), the production of guilt, shame and fear are key affective-ascetic technologies of governmentality. Processes of government and self-government rely on constructed truths about who we are, and who we ought to become as human beings, which, when enacted, recursively reproduce particular truths and realities. Thus, identity as constructed and enacted is central to governmentality as a technology of power. Dean (2010, 2013) notes truth∞knowledge engages different interrelated rationalities (economic, political, discursive, ethical, affective practical, technical, professional etc.) through a variety of expressive means (including welfare and education) in promulgating particular realities and enacted identities. These modes of reality are legitimated by the assumptive *epistemes* of expertism, scientism and capitalism, and extend to the ways in which professions are

governed and enacted as technologies of governmentality (Duffy, 2017a, 2017b) in 'curing', 'punishing', 'educating', and 'caring' etc. (Dean, 2010:32; Smith, 2014). Thus, as Dean (2013:41) argues, government is not enacted through 'sovereign power, but through the rationality of the governed.'

Governmentality as technologies of self-production generates subjectivities of continuous becoming, in which people are nudged towards opportunities for 'ethical and political self-creation' (Dean, 2013: 94) that are allied to elite agendas. Bröckling (2016:8) describes this as 'subjectification… a conditioning process, in which social shaping and self-shaping merge.' Processes of individualisation generate a sense of ostensible freedom through which states/elites come to exercise subjectivising power in and through 'each and all' in the production of particular totalities, realities and normalised subjectivities (Dean, 2010; Smith, 2014; Miller and Rose, 2008). On an affective level, doubt, uncertainty, risk, vulnerability, guilt, freedom and possibility are deployed as psycho-emotional technologies which frame drives towards continual self-government and self-improvement in the production of self-disciplining, responsibilized and entrepreneurial individuals capable of resilience and adaption to new 'opportunities'. For Chandler and Reid (2016:45), the production of this 'autotelic self', the subject 'capable of self-governance in a world of contingency and radical uncertainty [and who] turns insecurity into self-actualisation: into growth' represents the pinnacle of the governmentality project. Miller and Rose (2008:7), posit these 'technologies of subjectivity' reflect 'the aims, methods, targets, techniques, and criteria in play when individuals judge and evaluate themselves and their lives, [and seek] to master, steer, control, save or improve themselves'. Chandler and Reid (2016:81) argue the autotelic shift represents a transition towards inwardness that subordinates the subject to their own 'will, responsibilising them for their own adaptability and resilience, and rendering the internal life

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of the subject the subject of governance'. These processes separate human subjects and subjectivities from the realities and injustices of the external world that contribute to their precarious subjectification in which 'choice' is reduced to 'blame', in reflecting the discursive prioritisation of reflexive adaptivity over 'material or political transformation' (ibid.:93). These technologies of governmentality thus generate particular individualising ontologies that 'mean there is no shared world that we can relate to' (ibid.:121) or act collectively upon. These claims reflect Bröckling's (2016:9) assertion that, '[s]ubjectification unfolds in a strategic field where the individual is exposed to deliberate, targeted efforts to condition her, while at the same time conditioning herself in a deliberate and targeted way.'

2.3.2 Youth and Community Work - Governmentality and Cruel Optimism: A Tracing

Much concerning these ideas is significant for youth and community work, which has reflected, and continues to reflect, various technologies of governance. Youth and community work as a practice is founded on a professional claim, and a broadly (criticalist-)liberal axiology, which espouses agentic conceptualisations of people and power (Bradford, 2009, 2011). Wider state recognition of youth work's social value, and its gradual 'professionalization' during the twentieth century, took place during a period which was characterised by a particular liberal view of human subjectivity which emphasised individual freedom, self-knowledge, personal development, the potential of self-transformation, and social solidarity and responsibility (Bradford, 2007/8, 2009, 2011, 2015). Bradford (2011:103) argues this 'pervasive romantic and expressive individualism (asserting the pre-eminence of the self and the importance of individual, especially emotional experience) became part of the cultural script of northern European modernity' and continues to be reflected in youth work training and practice. This Rogerian-inspired trend to inwardness and the cultivation of the 'authentic', 'expressive' self, as propagated by the work of the National College for the

training of Youth Leaders in the 1960s, generated a particular youth work 'orthodoxy' (ibid.:108) that became *the* pre-eminent practice ideal. Youth workers were encouraged to engage in 'explicit work on the self' (Bradford, 2009:42) in fostering the capacity for personal insight, and, empathy and acceptance of young people, in replicating these subjectivities in young subjects. It is noteworthy that these notions pertaining to the development of self-understanding in youth work practice and professional formation, as explored elsewhere in this thesis, can, according to Dean's (2010) analysis, be thought of as a technology of governmentality. That is, they are concerned with promoting a form of introspection that blinkers the world beyond, and shapes and directs particular subjectivities in generating 'confessing' 'autonomous' and 'self-responsibilising' individuals, who propagate the same in others. Bradford (2015) contends the dominant liberal configuration of personhood in youth work training and practice juxtaposes the development of abstract, theoretical knowledge in the field, which has drawn on and developed more criticalist ideals. Bradford argues the lack of emphasis placed on more theoretical knowledge, has led to an inability amongst youth workers to argue positions and stake out claims for distinctiveness. It is here that youth work's 'liminality', something Bradford (2011) contends is the Profession's greatest weakness and strength, lies.

The post-welfare rise of neoliberalism reconfigured notions of citizenship from perceived collectivised passive dependency, towards active individualism, with narratives of choice, freedom, fulfilment, responsibility and versatile entrepreneurship promulgated by various state actors. The ideal citizen was recast as actively engaged in maximising and managing opportunities for themselves, with autonomy becoming the mechanism through which power was enacted (Miller and Rose, 2008). These ideas became embedded in youth work, in which managerial, moral and technocratic discourses were advanced in transforming professional

subjectivities (Bradford, 2011). Youth work has perhaps always been a panoptic device of governmentality. However, this appears to have been subtly and aggressively accelerated within contemporary configurations of competitive, multi-agency and integrated activity which have come to represent particular mechanisms of networked governance (Ball and Junemann, 2012). Under this rubric, practitioners are themselves surveyed in the surveillance of young people's lives, and, most particularly in respect of those discoursed as 'at risk'. This resonates with Miller and Rose's (2008:7) claim that governmentality is constituted through 'the web of relations and practices that result in particular ways of governing, [and] particular ways of seeking to shape the conduct of individuals and groups.' Youth work is simultaneously legitimated as an agent and technology of governmentality that claims to enact particular forms of expertise or 'specialised truths' (Miller and Rose, 2008:26) in the production of professional subjectivities, *and* in the production of particular desired/desirable young people and communities. Indeed, it might be argued that the language of its practice has been inculcated for these ends. Youth and community work has prided itself on commitments to 'empowerment', yet, as Chandler and Reid (2016:76) posit, emancipatory language is often used in discourses pertaining to societal interventions that express commitment to transforming its subjects towards greater malleability.

Neoliberal processes of marketization, targets, targeting, integrated practice and professional precarity have thus rendered a particular type of youth worker subjectivity that is amenable to self-panopticising regulation. This results in youth work casting this panoptic stare on to young people as a means of inculcating particular realities and promoting self-regulation in young people's conduct (Bright and Pugh, 2019b; de St Croix, 2016). 'Targets', 'impact' and 'evaluation' are key technologies in this rubric. Whilst some writers and organisations in the field (e.g. Centre for Youth Impact, n.d.; Stuart *et al*., 2015), (and to a lesser degree Cooper,

S. (2018)) argue the value of such approaches as rational and ethical in ensuring the development of practice, public accountability and the effective distribution of limited resources, others posit more critical views. For Duffy (2017a), evaluation has become a key technology of governmentality that has been applied in reshaping youth work subjectivities. Shifts towards targets and evaluation as constituted through moral discourses of 'value for money', and 'the welfare of each and all' (Smith, 2014:13), and enacted via processes of performativity (de St Croix, 2018) have generated *epistemes* of calculability in measuring investment and 'value for money' in relation to visible and immediate returns (Duffy, 2017a). This reflects the obsession of neoliberal governments of all hues in enflaming 'risk' and presenting its management and regulation through the correlatives of resilience and adaptation (Chandler and Reid, 2016). As Duffy (2017a:98) contends, 'A marketised logic of governing, promotes numericisation as a mechanism for transforming the complex social world into a schema which is susceptible to economic analysis and manipulation.' These arguments reflect Miller and Rose's (2008:29) analysis of wider policy domains in which evaluation has become central to the 'programmatic character of governmentality.' For Duffy, the use of numerical data as a means of evaluation is presented and often accepted as value-free, rather than perceived as a mechanism of engendering self-regulation by subjects who view its panopticism as 'rational rather than oppressive' (ibid.:94). In this view, evaluation has become a panoptic technology of governmentality that engenders subjectivities and self-regulating subjects which are self-reproduced 'through the normalisation of particular modes of thought, action and articulation' (ibid.:76). Duffy contends the unfolding technologies of 'positivistic', 'scientific' and 'measurable' evaluation in the social sphere have resulted in a subjectification that now no longer operates solely in the realms of the rational and logical in human subjectivity and decision making, but extends

to the 'visceral' and 'emotional' (ibid.:88). In sum, Duffy argues youth workers have been subjugated by multiple and interconnected 'effect registers', which condition subjectivised ways of thinking, seeing, being and feeling. These frame practices and selfhoods and engender performative self-regulation. These interconnected technologies, Duffy suggests, constitute a 'neuroliberal' re-ordering that reconfigures realities, rationalities and affects (ibid.:103) and are the means by which much contemporary youth work and many contemporary youth workers are made subject to disciplining powers and agendas. Youth work as a technology of governmentality is thus made through the assimilated souls of its practitioners.

2.4 Concluding Comments

This chapter has explored something of the development and meaning of youth work, providing a thumbnail sketch of aspects of its history. It has attempted to articulate youth work's contested professional status, and the significance of this for practice identities. The chapter has considered the *telos* and values of practice as expressed through its espoused commitment to informal and critical pedagogies, and the consequences of political influences on contemporary youth work's practices and identities. It has also examined Foucauldian ideas on governmentality and advanced analytical application of these in respect of youth work in new ways.

These ideas are foundational to the thesis. They provide anchor points in considering how practice is discoursed, perceived and contested by competing actors, and provide a basis for the empirical work in considering the impact of these intersubjectivities on youth work practice and identities.

Chapter 3

Framing Identities: Vocation, Formation and Being.

3.1 Introduction

This chapter, like the last, is presented in two major sections. It extends the work undertaken in Chapter 2 by examining sociological and psychological perspectives on identity and considers the potential meaning and significance of this for youth workers, and youth work in a late capitalist society. Narrative approaches to conceptualising identity are also foregrounded in preparation for related methodological discussion. This is followed by analysis of literature on vocation, formation and profession as related to youth workers' identities and 'use of self'.

3.1.1 Identity.

Questions of constructed and enacted identities are at the heart of this thesis. This not only relates to the (his)stories participants tell about themselves as people, in which the very act of storying becomes a form of identity play, construction, questioning and confirming, but also in respect of professional selfhoods. This is furthered in the dynamic interplay between youth workers' personal and professional selfhoods where personal narratives have come to shape participants' sense of vocation, formation and professional interactions (Turney, 2007). Exploring the importance of the meaning of these dynamics is particularly important at a time of significant change and upheaval in professional purpose and *praxes*. Therefore, the current research also explores ways in which such intersubjectivities are moulded by wider socio-

political forces that shape discourses, hegemonies and practices, which inform the very fabric of respondents' inter-relational being with self and others (Elliott, 2014). An understanding of the way in which youth workers perceive the significance of their enacted identities within an environment that has changed the very character of practice is therefore a central quest in this research. Little work has been undertaken in this regard in the UK (cf Price, 2018[1]; Spence, Devanney and Noonan, 2006). The Methodology chapter will focus in greater depth on narrative and the way it contributes to the construction and maintenance of identity. However, what follows here, whilst articulating the importance of narrative in respect of identity, includes a broader overview regarding issues of identity as developed by some key contemporary thinkers in this field.

3.1.2 Exploring Identity: Sociological Perspectives

At its core, identity is concerned with paradoxes of sameness and difference (Ferguson, 2009; Jenkins, 2014; Lawler, 2014) and structure and agency (Hoggett, 2009). Humans may experience sameness with themselves and others with whom they may self-identify (personally, professionally, socially, sexually, religiously etc.), or those with whom they may be categorised. They also experience difference as expressed both in the unique kernel of individual singularity, as being and becoming across the lifecourse, and in respect of broader categorical differences. Although acted upon and shaped by the social world, the kernel of distinctive *'essence'* is more commonly considered as representing processes of internal self-organisation, either in terms of genetic inheritance, or in more spiritual tones relating to the

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[1] Price's narrative research with youth practitioners *(n=6)* (not all of whom were necessarily qualified youth workers) explored, in depth, the impact of neoliberal policy frameworks upon professional identities and trajectories. It examined ways in which respondents navigated shifting policy demands and the reflexive, moral choices they made as a result. Price reported three broad responses: some pragmatically 'knuckled down', others sought promotion in order to make a difference and others still decided to 'get out'.

individual's unique 'soul'. These 'internal ideas' are traditionally boundaried outside of the social order (Lawler, 2014).

Drawing on Goffman (1968), Lawler (2014) suggests that beyond this kernel of individuality, identity should also be understood as fundamentally social – as self in relation to self, and self in relation to others. She also proposes the importance of 'ego identity' as representing an individual's 'felt sense' of self, and the means of providing identity continuity in a changing world. Likewise, Jenkins (2014) frames identity within three, albeit contrasting interlocking 'orders': the individual (self relating to self), the interactional (self relating to others) and the institutional (self relating to social institutions) (see Figure 3.1).
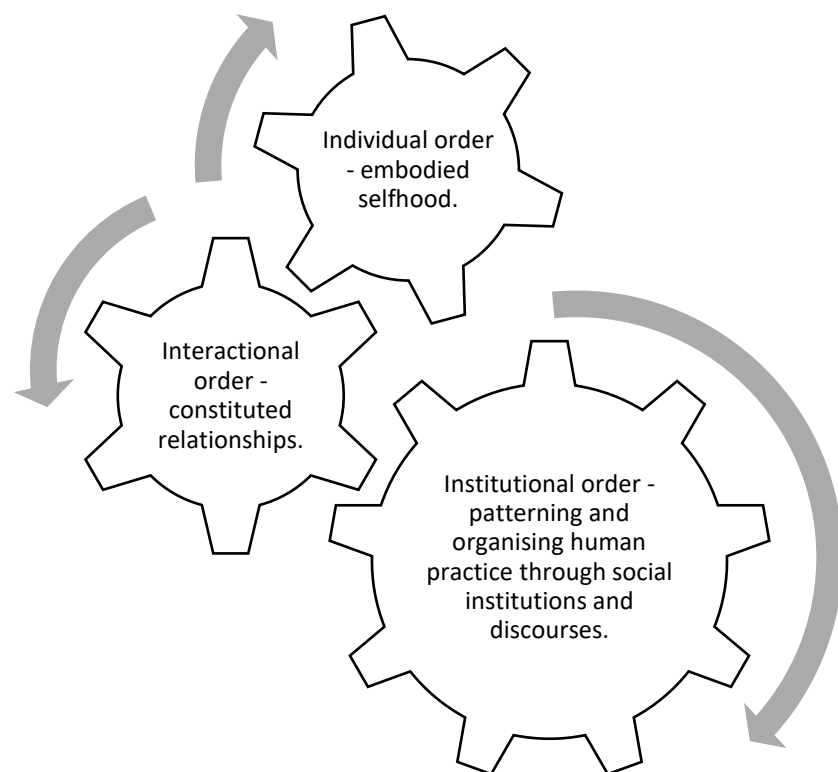
Figure 3.1 Jenkins' Symbolic Interactionist Model of Identity.

Jenkins contends individual and collective identities are axiomatically symbiotic – that each is produced in relation to, and through interaction with, the other. Selfhoods are therefore made via a 'dialectic synthesis of internal and external definitions' (Jenkins, 2014:43) that draw on the dynamic interplay between self∞self∞other/institutional perceptions and relations (Walkerdine and Bansel, 2010). Therefore, as Hoggett (2009:26) notes:

> '...we are always both agent and object... As agents, we are meaning, giving, and imaginative beings who seek to act upon ourselves and others. As objects, we are subject to the agency of others - to some extent shaped by the other, objects of their imaginings and subject to their actions'.

Selfhood at the interactional and institutional levels operates in a 'kind of collective habitus' (Jenkins, 2014:58) in which the individual and collective are largely inextricable. Individual and collective identities are thus reciprocal: they relate to, mutually rely on, and flow in and flow out of each other.

3.1.3 Identity: The Postmodern Turn

'Identity, it seems is the touchstone of the times' (Jenkins, 2014:31).

Whilst questions of meaning have long been central to human thought in a range of disciplines, the postmodern turn towards the exploration and theorization of identity is significant. Lawler (2014:1) contends that the concept of identity is 'slippery', and the contemporary turn to identity questions arises out of its problematization in respect of new and ongoing forces of epochal social change and resultant thought, namely Marxism, feminisms and psychoanalysis that emerged in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. These frameworks have generated forms of language that not only 'carry' meaning, but demand that meaning in relation to identity as a project is made (ibid.:3). More recently, the receding influence of particular socio-cultural structures and conventions, together with the rising tides of globalisation, neoliberalisation, deindustrialisation and new technologies has ushered

in the postmodern era, in which individualization has engendered identity making a life-spanning project (Burkitt, 2008). The fixedness and limitations of particular identities and life trajectories have thus been replaced by the possibility of bricolage and 'reflexive biography' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2009:15) in which the individual is engaged in a continually playful process of 'self-assembly' (Elliott and Lemert, 2009:38). The postmodern turn towards the 'atomisation and privatisation of life' (Bauman, 2009:9) has therefore responsibilised individuals for identity-making within a disciplinary neoliberal frame, and contributed to the erosion of collectivity and the efficacy of the public sphere as a space for critical dialogue. This has engendered disconnection and uncertainty, whilst simultaneously enabling the advancement of capitalism as an individualising force (Elliott and Lemert, 2009). The liquidity of postmodernity (Bauman, 2000) has thus rendered identity-making fluid and contingent, and, without anchor points, subject to erosion. Whilst the solidity of modernity, although in many ways constraining, provided forms of surety and continuance, the postmodern condition has entrenched new structures of freedom (Chandler and Reid, 2016) uncertainty, individualism, precarity and a continual neurosis regarding meaning and questions of identity in which the 'making, reinvention and transformation of selves' (Elliott and Lemert, 2009:58) has become a preoccupation.

Thus, drawing on Sartre[2], Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2009:16) suggest:

> 'People are condemned to individualization. Individualization is a compulsion, albeit a paradoxical one, to create, to stage manage, not only one's own biography but the bonds and networks surrounding it... while constantly adapting to the conditions of the labour market, the education system, the welfare state and so on.'

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[2] Beck and Beck-Gernsheim note Sartre's influence on their thinking, but without referencing specific works.

This reflects the continual need to make sense of all aspects of self in an ever-changing world. However, the liquidity and uncertainty of such processes risk generating a dystopia in which realities are 'cut loose from everything (good and bad) that would anchor us' (Lawler, 2014:4) resulting in identity dissonance:

> 'The self of today thus becomes a kind of DIY survival specialist, imbuing with expansive and polyarchic meanings a world stripped of pre-given significances and traditionalist structures, rules and processes. The individual self in an age of individualization can find only a privatised, contingent kind of foundation to the activities one sustains in the world, which in turn both denies presumptions about traditional ways of doing things and spurs further the self-design and self-construction of all phases of life' (Elliott and Lemert, 2009:49).

However, Lawler (2014) suggests such uncertainties have in fact always existed, but have become increasingly illuminated through the lived and constructed experiences of late modernity. These processes simultaneously produce the possibility of identity as a project of the self with resultant technologies, which come subtly (perhaps) to govern in and through the very 'freedoms' postmodernity has come to generate (Chandler and Reid, 2016). As suggested in the previous chapter, this, in Foucauldian terms, represents the intricately interwoven nature of continually co-produced subjectivities: the relationship between governmentality and identities (Dean, 2010; Elliott, 2014; Rose, 1999a), where the very fabric of selfhood is assimilated through the guise of freedom in the production of a particular type of compliant and malleably disciplined, and disciplining subject. Power and knowledge, discursively conveyed, therefore come to subjugate and assimilate identity, thus illuminating the axiomatic relationship between discourse, *praxes* and identity (Lawler, 2014). This, as I will discuss later in this chapter and in chapter 9, is key to thinking critically about research participants' passionate sense of vocation to youth work.

3.1.4 Exploring Group Identities

Whilst the majority of work in this section has, so far, considered issues of identity at micro (individual-personal) and macro (structural-political) levels, understandings of identity must of course, include meso level analysis regarding the significance of group belonging. In relation to the present research for example, what might it mean for participants to 'belong' collectively to youth work as a profession? What meanings might people attach to this sense of 'belonging' in the present professional climate? What might 'belonging' to the In Defence of Youth Work (*IDYW)*[3] or The Institute for Youth Work mean for practitioners, and their sense of connection to the profession? A raft of social psychology literature spearheaded by the work of Gordon Allport (1954) offers significant insight into questions of group identities. At its core lies the dynamic interrelationship between 'ingroups' and 'outgroups'. People typically classify themselves *in* relation to particular categories, and, in the process, *out* of others (Gaertner and Dovidio, 2005). Resultantly, boundarying, in producing delineations between 'insideness' and 'outsideness' is integral to the processes of generating 'an *us*' (Hoggett, 2009:39, emphasis in original). These ideas regarding the significance of 'insideness' in the formation, maintenance and development of group identities chime with Jenkins (2014:107) who asserts: 'Group identity is the product of *collective internal definition'* (emphasis in original). However, Allportian thinking goes beyond this, to contend group identities are to some degree symbiotically linked to interrelationships with external others. '*We*ness' is therefore simultaneously generated by internal processes of identification (sameness) *and* external categorisations of difference (Jenkins, 2014; Lawler, 2014), each of which is harnessed to maintain and develop the ingroup's sense of coherence and collectivity.

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[3] *IDYW* is a collective set up in the aftermath of cuts to youth services in the 2010 Spending Review. Although it hosts an annual conference, most of its current work happens on a Facebook page. IDYW is premised on defending youth work's traditional principles and practices.

Ingroup identities are perceived to be at their strongest when their numbers are relatively small in comparison to outgroups, and when the ingroup shares a common and homogenously binding set of beliefs regarding itself and its relationship with the world. Following Hegelian thought, it is argued the agonistic struggle for material and symbolic recognition against something other, is integral to the formation, maintenance and development of group identities (Hoggett, 2009; Dovido *et al*., 2005). For Hoggett (2009) loss, or the fear of loss, in relation to history, significance, meaning, achievements, power and influence is central to the constitutive struggle faced by collective subaltern identities. In this view, ingroup identities are configured via variables of internal identification and deprivation, which result in antagonism (or prejudice) towards outgroups. Perceived threats from a more powerful outgroup can therefore crystallise ingroups' sense of resistance and protectionism. This follows the dialecticism of Hegelian thought which contends self-consciousness 'emerges from a struggle for recognition with the other' (Hoggett, 2009:31). This contrasts with Allportian perspectives, which whilst continuing to recognise the significance of relationships to outgroups, tend to emphasise the primacy of ingroups' sense of internal consciences and identities. Resultantly, in the Allportian view, ingroups tend to be *intrinsically* motivated to distinguish themselves positively from their related outgroups (Brown and Zagefa, 2005).

Group-level analysis of collective identities needs to be complemented by consideration of individuals' relationships with the groups they constitute. 'We-ness' is constructed as people connect with others whom they *assume* to be like them (Hoggett, 2009). Group identification tends therefore to be subjective, as people may attach different meanings, and experience contrasting strengths of attachment to shared identification (Brown and Zagefa, 2005). Individuals constitute groups, and groups shape individuals. There can therefore be a dynamic and sometimes fluid interplay in negotiating and enacting relationships between individual

and collective identities. Individuals continuously engage in processes of negotiating and reviewing their belonging to groups. This encompasses the extent to which people identify with (for example) the (sometimes changing) values, beliefs, direction, leadership, demands, needs, priorities and culture of the group, and the extent to which these match, or demand the assimilation of the individual's own needs, desires, beliefs, values, identities etc. over time. The intersubjectivities of belonging to a particular group or community tend therefore to be negotiated by members themselves, and are constituted by the extent to which people identify with the group and its ideals (Jenkins, 2014). Collective identities are therefore socially constructed, and at their most fundamental level exist in the 'minds of those who participate in this construction' (Hoggett, 2009:38). Thus, whilst from an Allportian view, personal and collective identities can powerfully intersect, they tend to remain boundaried and distinct.

3.1.5 Youth Work and Collective Identity in a Postmodern, Neoliberal Landscape

This section considers the application of these different ideas to youth work as a profession. I have sought in the previous chapter to consider youth work as a 'socio-political profession' and to evaluate its current eroded status within UK, particularly within the English policy context. Present sector conditions have induced employment precarity (de St Croix, 2016). This has brought about a new type of professional proteanism (Leach, 2017; Price, 2018) and engendered the type of 'responsive', 'self-made' and 'self-governing', entrepreneurialism described in broader terms by Bröckling (2016), and more specifically in relation to youth work by de St Croix (2015). However, as I have noted earlier in this chapter, many prominent voices in the sector claim youth work is a critically resistant profession. Movements including In Defence of Youth Work (IDYW, 2018) add to this claim. The influence of these

conceptualisations upon aspects of the Profession's present sense of collectivity, identity and culture seem significant.

As noted above, collective identity is concerned with configurations and demarcations of sameness and difference, and the quest for belonging, meaning, association, representation and justice. Wenger (2008a:105) posits: 'There is a profound connection between identity and practice', contending that professional identities are negotiated and reified within communities of practice that enable participants to navigate 'ways of being human' in a given context.   Identities are, therefore, a product of 'lived experience of participation in specific communities' (ibid.:106) and are formed as a result of a dynamic interplay between experience, narration, interpretation, and enculturation. Identities are thus transmitted, negotiated and 'learned' through cultural, symbolic and enacted pedagogies (Eraut, 2008). Professionally, these processes draw upon, and are mediated by, organisational and professional histories, symbols, artefacts, discourses and current conditions in practice ecologies (Wenger, 2008b). These symbols and conditions 'generate a sense of shared [professional] belonging... 'community is itself a symbolic construct upon which people draw, rhetorically and strategically...community membership means sharing with other community members a similar 'sense of things', participation in a common symbolic domain' (Jenkins, 2014:138). Wenger (2008a:107) asserts communities of practice are shaped by the nature of their 'mutual engagement... joint enterprise, and shared repertoire' and by the dynamic interplay between codified and cultural/applied knowledge. It is by these means that *praxis* is transmitted and enacted. However, the decimation of practice and external pressures to undertake work beyond the received wisdom of what youth workers traditionally do, risk corroding forms of culturally enacted knowledge through which practices have traditionally passed. This has resulted in a challenging identity landscape for practitioners. As Price

(2018:55), in drawing on narrative interviews with youth practitioners, notes: 'For some practitioners, in navigating their practice and their developing professionality through such policy terrain, their sense of displacement remains palpable.'

Some newer workers in the field appear less likely to understand and express 'traditional' professional values and *praxes* compared with those who have been in the field longer. Principally, this is because many of the cultural spaces and processes for the transmission of *praxes* have been undermined or disappeared. This is exacerbated by a 'generational gap' – the loss of more experienced workers who have traditionally carried, interpreted and transmitted professional heritages, values and *praxes* to the next generation of practitioners. The loss of collective memory undermines the possibilities of present interpretation and the ethics of future professional identity *praxes*. As Prager (2009:141) puts it: identities and memories 'are not things we think *about,* but things we think *with'* (emphasis in original).

As discussed in the preceding chapter, youth work's ecology is fundamentally influenced by neoliberal policy approaches which have changed its practices and undermined its professionally embodied identity (Taylor at al., 2018). Analysing the impact of neoliberalism more broadly, Elliott, (2014:138) notes: '[T]he disorientating effects of [this] new capitalism means there is little stable ground...to lodge an anchor.' Professional continuation and socialisation are therefore, to some degree at least, subject to wider ecological factors that render meaning and identities fluid, contingent and precarious (Jenkins, 2014). The resultant proteanism generates the possibility of, or, perhaps more accurately demands, flexibility and self-renewal (Leach, 2017; Price, 2018). Yet its processes engender a continual fragmentation that can lead to forms of identity dissonance (Elliott, 2014).

Meanwhile, particular movements including In Defence of Youth Work (IDYW, 2018), Choose Youth (2018) and the Institute for Youth Work (IYW, 2018) have become rallying points in defending and articulating the value of 'traditional' youth work practices, and central to maintaining the visibility and politicisation of the Profession. These organisations have become critical communities of practice in generating debate and enabling the maintenance of professional identities in precarious times. IDYW in particular has engendered a sense of political struggle and contributed to the maintenance of collective identity. Hoggett (2009:93) describes the centrality of identity and emotion work as sources and processes in such contexts:

> '...identity is both a given and something that we acquire and shape. Engagement in political protest and participation in a wider movement or campaign draw upon our preexisiting identities but also provide us with opportunities to acquire new ones and/or shape existing ones in new ways... Movements create collective identities through actions, rituals, and an 'emotional habitus.'

In this vein, Lawler (2014:161) notes 'identity is *always* political... groups of people specifically and explicitly mobilize politically on the basis of shared identities in political formations' (emphasis in original). Jenkins (2014:45) concurs: 'Asserting, defending, imposing or resisting collective identification are all definitively political.' For Hoggett (2009:16), identity politics tends to be founded upon responses to social suffering, where the unequal distribution of resources engenders other forms of experiential oppression and subaltern identities that symptomize 'feelings of humiliation, despair, shame and resentment...There seem to be two primary sources of this suffering – hurt and loss[4].' This, he contends, contributes to collective 'structures of feeling', which draw upon, and point to a felt sense of injustice through which a group's emotions are configured and its identity coalesces.

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[4] It seems that the 'loss' of youth work has been significant to many youth workers. It has evoked different emotions including grief and anger.

Youth work through its foundational commitments to critical pedagogy, working with, and representing young people and campaigning to defend and promote its own practices is very much engaged in its own identity politics. These processes are happening at a time of significant politically-induced decimation and change that have resulted in vicissitudes in the character of English youth work (Taylor *et al*., 2018). This has provoked debates within the Profession regarding what should, and should not, be legitimated as youth work, and catalysed considerable discussion regarding the nature and scope of future practice(s). Thus, youth work's 'identity politics' – a concept Lawler (2014) contends is underpinned by collectivity, sense of inequality and claim for recognition - is not only happening *between* the Profession and external actors, but also *within* the Profession itself. These demarcating processes can be seen as a form of identity boundarying. These boundaries are 'policed' to ensure 'that group members do not step out of line in terms of attitudes, values and mores' (Hoggett, 2009:69).

Movements like IDYW have come to represent the mobilisation of youth work as a professional community, generating a sense of '*we*-ness' (Jenkins, 2014:140) against the onslaught of politically-imposed attempts to divide and conquer the Profession through particular discourses, practices and mechanisms of performativity, evaluation and governance (Duffy, 2017a). This reflects something of the importance of agonistic struggle in the formation and development of group identities outlined above, and resonates with the kind of symbolically oppositional boundaries described by Jenkins (2014:140) who asserts such processes can generate both defensiveness and malleable possibility:

> 'In some cases, the hardening of an apparently 'traditional' identity may actually serve as a smokescreen, behind which substantial change can take place with less conflict and dislocation.'

The impact of the loss of, or threats to, identity where 'the world as it has been known is violently extruded from the self' (Prager, 2009:143) engenders, for some, a kind of continual trauma, and for others a perpetually wistful melancholy in which the past continues to haunt the present (Derrida, 1994). Perhaps the risk for youth work is that current external threats result in the profession entrenching its own identity and practices dogmatically in past.

3.1.6 Identity, Storying and Critical Awareness

'Story gives birth to identity… Story is nothing but beginning; it is eternal beginning, birth… Story is ceaseless emergence.' (Ferguson, 2009:4).

Narrative generates identity. It is a medium, through which life is understood and made sense of - an expressive tool through which we chronologically contextualise and continually reproduce self in relation to the stories of self and others, and the systems in which we are mutually located (Goodson and Gill, 2014; Lawler, 2014). It is through narrative we develop the comparative processes at the core of our individual and collective identity projects. Symbiotically, we engage with processes of dialogical selfhood, both internally and externally – coding and contextually sifting information from our pasts, narratives, biographies and experiences through prisms of reflexive interactions in the individual, interactional and institutional orders in layering new meaning in the ongoing construction of identities (Jenkins, 2014).

Narrativity thus enables identity through a sense of continuation, presence and 'contingency and finitude' (Ferguson, 2009:113), and connects identity as history with being in the present, *and,* as always becoming. Our pasts, expressed through narrative forms of knowing provide critical frames with which to interpret and act upon both present and future (Goodson and Gill, 2014; Price, 2018). Lawler (2014) notes that life and narrative are nested in

understandings of previous events as they unfold. Each new episode as lived, provides a new lens, sometimes corroborative, sometimes contradictory, with which to understand the present and the past. Narrative is therefore a means by which humans generate a sense of experiential unity. 'Narrative, then, suggests movement through time – the movement from the potential to the actual, from what could be to what is, from past to present, from present to future' (ibid.:32). Storying is thus integral to the production and maintenance of identity – a means by which people can understand and explain their lives (ibid.). This aligns with Elliott and Lemert (2009:48) who assert 'the reflexive organisation of the self, demands that people explain themselves and become open to discourse or reflective deliberation – both internally and externally'. Narrative practices therefore provide the possibility of a secure base on which to construct, enact, and reflect upon identity making as 'a never-ending, always incomplete, unfinished and open-ended' (Bauman, 2009:11) yet meaningful *praxis* for individual practitioners and, *collectively* for youth work as a profession.

In this vein, Lawler (2014:33) contends: 'A focus on narrative challenges the concept of the atomized individual and replaces it with a concept of a person enmeshed in – and produced within – webs of social relations.' The storied self must therefore be located in juxtaposition with the storied other. Hence, self and its subjective truths are produced in relation to and with others. The subjectivity of narrated selfhoods is constructed in relation to an array of dynamic interplays between the individual, interactional and institutional orders, which result in the fluid expression of selfhood in different contexts. Narratives are therefore contextual(ised) meaning-making devices – their selection and utilisation, and the language used to express them, is dependent on purpose, audience and time, in generating a desired impression.

Given the threats outlined to youth work's (and youth workers') *telos*, practices and transmitted and enacted identities, generating spaces in which to undertake identity work is crucial (Price, 2018). As can be seen from *'This is Youth Work: Stories from Practice'* (IDYW, 2011), developing and sharing practice narratives are key to this endeavour. The importance of collective identity work is noted by Jenkins (2014:50), who suggests: 'Individually, 'the past' is memory; collectively, it is history.' Similarly, Price (2018:65) argues 'professional narrativity offers an opportunity to reclaim a territory for youth practitioners which reflects the core values embodied in the history of youth work and its practices.'

However, particular dangers should be noted. Drawing on Steedman (1986), Lawler (2014:35) argues the cultural compulsion to narrate results in the turn towards comparability with the stories of others who are less fortunate. The empathic pathos of expressed narratives, through which individuals locate and tell their own stories alongside, and, in comparison to, the individual and collective stories of young people, links the literature on narrative and vocation in arguing that people feel called to, and fulfilled in, doing something to meet the needs of others (Buechner, 1973:95). Such sentiments, of course, run the risk of promulgating discourses of 'otherness', deficit and need (Lawler, 2014) that risk continuing the subjugation and disempowerment of the very groups youth workers seek to emancipate. Indeed, by drawing on Foucauldian frameworks, Lawler (2014:84) suggests the state through the dispersal of power 'works in and through our desires', and thus silently usurps individual and collective senses of vocation and profession for its own purposes. Critical engagement with storying is therefore crucial; it requires an understanding of the complex interrelationships between narrativity, identity and discourse∞governmentality as a means of enabling emancipatory change (Goodson and Gill, 2014), rather than unintentionally re-enforcing structural hegemonies through categorical 'regimes of power/knowledge' (Lawler, 2014:75).

The need in developing narrative-identity work is to 'name' (Freire, 1996) our stories, and to critically refute ways in which narratives – both spoken and silent, may enable the subjugation of self and others. Such awareness is critical to the professions, which, within frameworks of neoliberal governmentality (Dean, 2010, 2013) are given the credence of accountable expertism to diagnose 'disorders' and prescribe and enact solutions (Illich, 1977; Seal and Harris, 2016). Knowledge of this 'game' (Tucker, 2004) and the powerful and assumptive identities it engenders and subjectifies, enables resistance against the 'appropriation' (Lawler, 2014:37) of individual and collective narratives *and* identities and the creation of possibilities of more critical agency.

3.2.1 Exploring Vocation.

Doyle (1999) argues the importance of understanding what vocation might mean for contemporary youth workers, whilst conceding it remains an area that is under-researched and under-theorised. Given the relative paucity of recent literature pertaining directly to youth work as vocation, the focus here will be to examine the idea of vocation more broadly, before considering vocation in the context of the 'human service professions' (e.g. social work and counselling) in order to begin locating what these ideas *might* mean for youth workers.

Work is central to meaning-making and integral to giving humans a sense of purpose (Dik and Duffy, 2009; Steger *et al*, 2010). The idea of work is elucidated by a range of other terms including occupation, profession and vocation. Whilst the notion of occupation might be considered with more extrinsically motivated functions like making money (Hall, 2004), the terms profession and vocation can be argued as carrying greater gravitas in different ways (Banks, 2004). Etymologically, 'vocation' comes from the Latin '*vocare*', 'to call', and can traditionally be traced to some form of religious experience, where one is called by the divine

to live life in a particular way for a particular purpose (Doyle, 1999; Galles and Lenz, 2013; Horne, 1996). This can be seen particularly in the Judeo-Christian tradition both in a range of Biblical narratives (Melinsky, 1992), through church history and in more contemporary experiences where people have responded to a call to monastic life (Dawson, 2005) or ordained or lay ministry (Dewar, 1997). In this way, vocation might be argued as being concerned with a particular 'way of being' (Rogers, 1995) embodiment or living, from which particular actions flow. Vocation can also be viewed as a *process*, of dedication - of being called from something to something else (Dawson, 2005). Vocation is therefore concerned with who we are, who we will become, and the processes of formation that characterise that journey (Doyle, 1999; Melinsky, 1992). Luther and Calvin's reformative-Puritan theology in the sixteenth century did much to challenge the idea of vocation as being solely concerned with the religious life. They articulated the spiritual value of other occupations in the service of God and humanity, an ideal that became the kernel of Weber's 'protestant work ethic' (Dik and Duffy, 2009). Dawson (2005:224) proposes that as a result of:

> 'the rapidly expanding entrepreneurial spirit of the 18th and 19th centuries, the idea of vocation took on an increasingly secular connotation, and occupational work became an increasingly central dimension of human worth and dignity.'

Doyle (1999) further moves the idea of vocation beyond the religious domain, contending people often experience a sense of calling to particular areas of work which mirror their own personal values and ideals. Vocation expresses something of humanity's longing for meaning and significance and represents the fulfilment of human potential (Dewar, 1997). Moreover, Treadgold (1999) and Steger *et al* (2010) argue vocational fulfilment is central to psychological wellbeing. In these ways, the idea of vocation becomes grounded in ethics, of responding to what the individual perceives to be 'the good life' (Banks, 2004; Vernon, 2005).

Psychoanalytically, vocation might be considered a form of projection whereby an individual projects an image of their perceived or desired self onto their work (Adams, 2014), yet herein the challenge of developing reflexive self-awareness (Fromm, 2013) and of ethical work on the self (Bradford, 2007) is paramount. For Dik, Duffy and Eldridge (2009) and Dik and Duffy (2009) vocation is understood in three ways; first as a transcendent experience of call from somewhere beyond the self; second, as the enactment of a particular role through which purpose and meaning are constructed, and third as being concerned with altruistic values which are principally motivated by extending care to others. Vocation as Buechner (1973:95) therefore argues becomes 'the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet.' Dewar (1997:2) extends Buechner's idea contending vocation is 'an activity engaged in for the love of it by which others may be enriched or released: something you do as a freely-chosen expression of your nature and energy, something that expresses the unique essence of yourself'. Thus vocation is an expression of transcendent selves, an outworking of human essence and identity (Galles and Lenz, 2013; May, 2013; Treadgold, 1999) as both being and becoming (McNiff, 2012) and the realisation of human potential (Hall, 2004). Indeed, Banks (2004:166) goes further to suggest enacted vocation leads to the *subsumption* of different selves and generates a unified and integrated configuration of personal and professional identities in which an individual's work is '*morally inseparable* from his or her life' (emphasis added).

Whilst Marx viewed work as alienation, the alternate and more liberating Weberian notion of vocation was one of 'passionate devotion' (Weber, 1918); it is characterised by forms of deeply intrinsic motivation (Galles and Lenz, 2013; Hall, 2004; Steger *et al*, 2010), ideas that resonate with Brew's (1957:112) description of youth work practice as a 'burning love of humanity'.   Renewed interest and nascent, yet limited research in the field of youth work is

evident in this regard. de St Croix's (2013, 2016) research with part-time and volunteer detached youth workers reported respondents' primary reason for practice involvement was their 'love' of youth work and young people. Anderson-Nathe (2010:100) concludes many youth workers feel a call to 'commit their lives to working with and on behalf of young people… [an experience which sustains them] through difficult personal and professional moments'. Clearly, vocation in youth work matters; its rich history, as noted in chapter 2, is founded on the voluntary engagement of philanthropic and socially beneficent pioneers who felt called often as a result of deep religious or social conviction to improve the lot of often 'disadvantaged' young people (Bright, 2015; Davies and Gibson, 1967). However, the relative paucity of coverage relating to vocation in recent literature regarding the 'human services' more generally and in youth work in particular is notable. The loss of vocation as a *concept* (rather than lived experience) might be argued as a result of neoliberal and managerialist discourses that have reduced youth work (amongst other human service professions) to a technicised activity (Bright and Bailey, 2015; Collins, 1991; Davies and Merton, 2009; de St Croix, 2013; Dunne, 2011; Hine, 2009). These discourses have attempted to corrode a sense of calling in educational and caring professions through the promotion of particular forms of professionalization and managerialism (de St Croix, 2013; Doyle, 1999; Ford *et al*, 2005; Jeffs, 2006; Tyler *et al*, 2009). Indeed, Banks (2004:166) questions whether the concept and experience of vocation might be an 'unrealistic ideal' within contemporary climates. This was alarmingly prophesised by Collins (1991:40) who warned 'uncritical acceptance of an ideology of technique' ultimately leads to dehumanisation and crises in professional identities. Collins' critical analysis is a harbinger of contemporary experience wherein vocational resistance is the last bastion against 'technical rationality [in which] efficiency and expertise are secondary to the larger issues of human fulfilment and equality' (p42).

3.2.2 Formation and Professional Socialisation in Practice.

Formation is an ideal drawn from ecclesiology, with particular reference to the preparation and development of those vocationally called to enter particular ministries. Dykstra (1996) powerfully argues the centrality of faith communities in spiritual and ministerial formation, which Lindbeck (1996:287) describes as 'the deep and personally committed appropriation of a comprehensive and coherent outlook on life and the world.' More broadly, but analogously, professional socialisation is considered a continuous process which refers to the 'acquisition of values, attitudes, skills and knowledge pertaining to a profession' (Corneilissen and van Wyk, 2007:826). The journey through 'training' in the helping professions therefore ought to be a *trans*formative one in which individuals experience through a myriad of actions and interactions significant changes on the journey to qualified professional status. In youth work, students experience professional socialisation via engagement with theory, practice (in external agencies), supervision and time spent with more experienced practitioners designed to enable the inherited osmoses of particular professional values, virtues, dispositions and practices (Green, 2009; Reid *et al*, 2008: Lave and Wenger, 1991). Wenger (2008a) locates these processes within broader 'communities of practice' in which 'mutual engagement', 'joint enterprise' and a 'shared repertoire' (p.73) are vital ingredients; and, where preparation and *praxis* are integral to ensuring students 'gain insights into professional ideology, motives and attitudes' (Trede *et al*, 2012:376). These ideas, as noted later, are integral to the development of a healthy and integrated professional identity (Reid *et al*, 2008).

Reid *et al* (2008:730) contend entering a Higher Education programme associated with a particular profession:

> '…can be seen as the start of a trajectory of professional formation, which includes both the appropriation of a body of knowledge and of the history, social practices,

skills and discourses that are part of the respective discipline or profession that is studied.'

Loder (1996) further suggests formation involves a fundamental, developing, mediated and dynamic inter-relationship between subject theory, practice and the person of the professional, while Green (2009:122) argues professional formation 'is the product of a complex mix of character, social, ethical and occupational *formations*' (emphasis added). Such ideas of course draw upon a range of perspectives on human development. In psychodynamic terms, professional formation might be considered as a typology of individuation, synonymous with Eriksonian developmental virtues of hope, will, purpose, competence, fidelity, love, care, and wisdom, which together with necessary crises, characterise broader human development (Erikson, 1963) in which identity, integration and ethical wisdom are ultimate aspirations (Kinsella, 2012).

3.2.3 Formation as a Process of Being, Becoming and Testing

Horne (1996:57) suggests: 'Vocational decisions are to a large extent "private" experiences, which means the person who undergoes them has considerable authority in saying what they are like, and even whether they occur'. Doyle (1999) argues whether the vocational call is experienced dramatically or gradually, the need for testing, formation and mutually affirmative recognition is essential. Dewar's (1997) assertion that all have the capacity to experience a call towards something that enriches others' lives necessitates the question 'What if the call is misinterpreted?' Dewar contends that many people feel called to serve humanity in different ways as a means of gaining *personal* fulfilment; however, this raises further questions regarding loci of motivation; should those who seek to work in the human service professions do so *principally* out of a need for personal gratification (rather than serving others?) whereupon abuses of professional privilege may follow. Raising self-

awareness of these issues and examining motivations in the personal and professional formation of human service professionals is therefore essential.   In ecclesiastical terms, vocation is viewed as an inward conviction from God which is externally discerned and confirmed by the church (Melinsky, 1992). Indeed, Melinsky further argues this idea became increasingly important during, and since, the reformation, whereupon notions of vocation became less boundaried. During this period, many reported a call to a specific task, yet the reformers insisted vocations were tested by the church during a significant period of formation. Such affirmation tests and validates the individual's internal experiencing and acts as a confirmatory commendation from a group (or, in more contemporary experience) professional body, of the individual, to the community (or purpose) they will serve (Doyle, 1999).

However, given the increasingly contractual relationship that exists between students (as fee-paying consumers) and universities (as educational providers), the notion of 'vocational testing' and educators' role as professional gatekeepers is becoming increasingly difficult. Students pay their fees and *expect* to be awarded a degree whether vocational or not (Jeffs and Spence, 2007).

Horne (1996) argues formation risks being confined to forms of surface imitation over deeper forms of character analysis and building, which regrettably result in cursory performativity in professional socialisation processes. Green's (2009) assertions regarding the binary relationship between practitioners' professional and ethical formation raise significant questions regarding performativity and technique which increasingly appear to take precedence over personal engagement in practice (Banks, 2012) and more holistic processes in formation. Such notions highlight fundamental tensions in the *telos* of the welfare

professions. The contemporary political environment of increasing accountability, marketization and austerity further polarises society and creates an environment where the most vulnerable often receive decreasing quality of care. Whilst continuing to decide to practise in this context may sharpen an individual's sense of calling, it does so in a context of austerity and bureaucracy which is the antithesis of vocational purpose (Green, 2009).

In this regard, Horne (1996) argues, vocation, formation and profession ought therefore to be founded on a commitment to, and outworking of, personal integrity. Yet as the word 'integrity' suggests it is incumbent on the individual to be whole, integrated, and complete: the person and practitioner is never wholly divisible; indeed, it is the *person* who responds to the vocational call and becomes the primary instrument of professional practice (Baldwin, 2013; Bright and Hall, 2013; Fusco, 2012; Mandell, 2007; Murphy and Ord, 2013; Rowan and Jacobs, 2011; Woskett, 2011). Building on the work of Tillich (1952), Horne further suggests that such practices draw upon human transcendence which he argues are concerned with 'being', 'identity', 'unity', 'truth' and 'goodness' (Horne, 1996:32). Such integration therefore requires deep and continuously formative capacities for reflexive self-knowledge and understanding.

Floyd (2013:139) develops the idea of vocational formation by suggesting that while professionalism deals with external obligations to others, vocation 'concerns the other side of the coin, the inner life of the professional' (emphasis in original). Vocation therefore involves particular forms of intrapersonal, interpersonal and extrapersonal knowing between the individual and the body of knowledge (life, practices and community) to which the person is called. Dawson's (2005) contention that vocation is driven by a sense of 'moral purpose' resonates with Sapin (2013:16) who asserts youth workers are driven by a gamut of

motivations, 'from a desire to right wrongs and resolve social and political problems to ensuring that others do not have to suffer through similar personal difficulties.'

The interweaving of the personal and the professional in practice is clear, and, must therefore be considered in formation.

3.2.4 Formation: Critical Perspectives

Whilst it might be argued that many youth workers display innate potentials, such capacities need to be nurtured. Whereas in the UK educative practices in these domains are often labelled 'training', a term perhaps more closely associated with behaviourist conformity and performativity (Brown, 2013), the language used elsewhere (in France for example) *'la formation professionnelle'* describes something more co-sculpted, dynamic, human and artistic. Drawing on the work of Sullivan (2005), Jones *et al* (2013) argue professional formation is located in three intersecting apprenticeships: the academic (cognitive and intellectual knowledge), the practical (skills and practice) and the socio-ethical (identity and purpose). This concept is furthered by Trede *et al* (2012:365) who contend universities 'are required to produce graduates who display mastery of theoretical ideas, competence in applying theory in complex workplace settings and professional dispositions that foster ethical and reflective professional practices.' Such ideas clearly relate to formation in youth work whose graduates are concerned with generating and drawing upon critical knowledge with young people and the wider socio-political world they inhabit; engaging in and learning from youth work *praxis*; and, (as this present research suggests to a regrettably lesser extent) work on the 'self' as a genuine, integrated and virtuous agent of ethical practice (Davies and Gibson, 1967; Sercombe, 2010a; 2010b; Young, 2010).

Young (2006, 2010) offers a seminal analysis of youth work's *raison d'etre* - contending its fundamental purpose is to engage young people in intrapersonal and interpersonal moral enquiry regarding the fundamental and existential nature of their own humanity and being in the world. Young contends such work is concerned with facilitating critically reflexive dialogical learning that enables young people to construct, develop and understand their own virtues, values, voice and sense of self, at the very time they are considering who they are and how they should be in the world. The key tenet of youth work Young (2010:96-97) therefore posits is to engage relationally in:

> 'moral enquiry… [a process which] involves looking deeply into our experience and questioning ourselves about our own actions and motives… It is an educational process in the sense of being about learning and a therapeutic process in the sense of seeking to have a positive effect on mind and body.'

Young's position highlights the centrality of youth workers' facilitative role in enabling young people to consider and construct their own values, to determine *their* choices and actions in the formation and expression of *their own* personal identities. Moreover, to some degree, it rejects narrower and more prescriptive consequentialist and deontological frameworks and embraces the expanse of virtue which '*rel[ies] on the integrity of the youth worker'* (Sercombe, 2010a:52 emphasis in original).

These ideas find resonance in the work of Parker Palmer (2000) who argues self-knowledge is integral to educational processes. Moss (2007:9) furthers this by invoking the Delphian oracle of Greek mythology to *'gnothi seauton'* 'know yourself', as a principal concern of the people professions. Floyd (2013) extends this argument by claiming the dyadic relationship between vocation and formation is grounded the fundamental process of 'claiming authentic selfhood' (p141); while Kreber (2013) contends the purpose of university learning is to enable critical, communitarian and existential authenticity - ideas that broadly correlate to Sullivan's

academic, practical and socio-ethical knowledge. In this way, professional education (particularly in the 'helping professions') is fundamentally a socio-ethical endeavour in which self-knowledge and character development should be viewed as legitimate goals (Lewis, 2013).

3.2.5 The Relational Use of Self

The necessity of these processes and the requirement for genuine attention to be paid to a deep and authentic understanding of oneself as a *person* and practitioner is further highlighted in considering the growing ubiquity of the 'use of self' in the helping professions (social work, counselling, nursing and teaching) more generally (Baldwin, 2013; Rowan and Jacobs, 2011; Thompson, 2015; Ward, 2010; Woskett, 2011) and in youth work in particular (Fusco, 2012; Murphy and Ord, 2013; Turney, 2007). The helping or 'people professions' engage the practitioner in particular forms of relationship for particular purposes (broadly, education, health, and support). It might be argued more recently youth work practice has been framed within technicised, managerialist and curative political discourses that have sought to 'fix', and control young people (Bright and Bailey, 2015; Hine, 2009). However, the Profession appears to have made valiant attempts to resist these forms of neoliberal political prescription which seek to undermine its relational *telos*. Forging and enabling relationship must therefore not be debased to a crude utilitarian instrument; rather, it must remain of itself the very essence of practice (Brew, 1957; Davies and Gibson, 1967; Perlman, 1979), the medium through which learning and conscientization is enabled (Blacker, 2010; Freire, 1996; Tiffany, 2001).

In considering relational practice, Thompson (2009:3) contends: 'In working with people, our own self or personality is often used as a tool, a means by which positive change can be

facilitated.' Turney (2007:66) argues the use of self 'refers to the way someone makes intentional use of their own particular knowledge, understanding and experience within a relationship to benefit the person they are working with.' Rowan and Jacobs (2011) posit the use of self is not only located in a practitioner's active disclosure but is more fundamentally concerned with 'inner attitudes and aptitudes' (p3) awareness and critical reflexion. Woskett (2011:11) argues the '*use* of self is evident in the way [practitioners] *extend* aspects of their personality with the intention of *influencing* the client' (emphasis in original); an idea Rowan and Jacobs (2011) label the 'instrumental self'. Indeed, De Witt Baldwin (2013:65) argues the practitioner offers their very 'essence' in enabling and empowering the Other. In the humanistic tradition, the use of self is framed within the practitioner's own congruent 'way of being' in which deep and intuitive knowing of the practitioner's own genuine self is cultivated and conveyed as a means of catalysing self-knowledge, realness and growth in others (Rogers, 1980; Baldwin, 2013). Humanistic positions on self-disclosure however vary. Jougard (1968) as cited by Rowan and Jacobs (2011) argued the synchronicity between congruence and *direct, verbalised* self-disclosure. Rowan and Jacobs themselves contend that therapeutic genuineness, transparency and personal and emotional self-disclosure are therapeutically beneficent. It is this vision of the 'use of self' which Murphy and Ord (2013) espouse in relational youth work practice. Kramer (2013:36) further argues practitioner self-disclosure is an inevitable process in the helping professions, contending that whilst the practitioner may not engage in direct verbalisations of personal material, that:

> '…how we dress, decorate, questions we ask, information we are or are not interested in all reveal our attitudes, philosophy, and lifestyle. Significant events are hard to disguise: marriage, divorce, pregnancy, parenthood, illness, death. And when we try to be a blank screen, we reveal that we are concealing.'

In contrast, Mearns and Thorne (2013) who are viewed by many as the contemporary doyens of the person-centred counselling approach, rationalise congruence as the therapist paying particular and continuous attention to their own stream of consciousness, noting the flow of personal reactions and responses to the client and their material. They suggest practitioners should not deny the thoughts and feelings practice with a given client or group engenders, as this would be tantamount to Janus-like incongruence, but contend practitioners should judiciously and *phronetically* decide what is appropriate to share with clients, and what is appropriate grist for clinical or professional supervision.

3.2.6 The Use of Self: A Critical View

The application of the use of self is not however without potential ethical problems. Hearn (2012) forcibly argues the centrality of relationship in the construction and abuse of power across an array of political and social domains, a concept which Sercombe (2010a:124ff) highlights with regard to various aspects of youth work practice.   Whilst different notions of 'helping' exist in the 'people professions', such relational practices, although profoundly human*e*, remain on different levels, the seat of fundamental power imbalances. Such relationships generate distinctions between teacher and learner, social worker or counsellor and client, service provider and service user and youth worker and young person - each with the potential for distinct power imbalances which are further exacerbated via the very act of 'help-seeking' in which the professional party is deemed the 'expert' (Sercombe, 2010a:124ff).

This critique is advanced when considering the political intentions which influence the provision of services. Rossiter (2007:21) argues that conceptually the use of self remains

'hopelessly embedded in clinical discourses, with their attendant problems of social control through unexamined relations of power'. This gives rise to particular issues concerning the positioning through practice of young people who experience life at the nexus of social and political minoritisation, and, ways in which practice acts as a mechanism of control in the reproduction of inequities (Jeffs and Banks, 2010; Rixon, 2007). The conscientization of such ideas is essential to formation in the people professions and raises fundamental questions regarding the relationship between service-users, professionals and the state, and, the extent to which these dynamics influence individual and collective experiences of vocation and profession. Two key concerns lie at the heart of this issue. Firstly, as Turney (2007) notes the 'use of self' engages the practitioner relationally, within complex ecologies which intertwine the practitioner's personal self (personhood) and professional self with both the service user and wider organisational, social and governmental domains. As a result, the reflective, virtuous practitioner must develop the capacity for self-knowledge on personal *and* socio-political levels, and be able to interpret these selves in the light of the other. Secondly, Rossiter (2007:28-9) implies understandings of self and selfhood within the helping professions have been individually constructed through socio-political mechanisms in such way that divorces conceptions of personal and professional selfhood, thereby enabling the practitioner's abdication of personal responsibility for the state's re-enforcement of injustice and the misuse of power expressed through particular discourses. In doing so, Rossiter rejects the liberal-humanistic idea of selfhood which views the individual as uniquely discrete from society, arguing instead that individual and society are engaged in dynamic processes of co-construction. The implication here is that professionals engage in development that enables them to congruently know themselves as unique individuals, whilst gaining critical awareness of the discourses and forces that have shaped them as both people and professionals. Doing

so generates the capacity for critical reflection on ways in which their professional roles have, and continue to be, constructed by powerful, normative discourses which insidiously re-enforce minoritization via continued state-sanctioned 'othering'. Rossiter further argues such work on both the congruent and constructed self is essential for virtuous formation and critical, ethical professionalism.

3.2.7 Constructing Knowledge of the Self

> 'Sociological theories, for example, tend to emphasise how our sense of self is shaped by one or another institution of cultural form in the larger society, how we build up notions of the self and other selves as a social construction, and how concepts of the self play a central role in the constitution and reproduction of social networks. Psychoanalytic theories, by contrast, put the emphasis on the organisation of our internal worlds, on the emotional conflicts of the identity, and on the power of the individual to create, maintain and transform relations between the self and others' (Elliott, 2008:7).

It is within these arenas and frameworks that 'knowing self' becomes a central task of formation and on-going professional development. Describing the influence of the 'use of self' upon the personal domain, Ward (2010:48ff) invokes Hochschild (1979) to highlight practice in the helping professions engages the practitioner in 'emotional labour' where service-users' experiences and stories become potently intertwined with aspects of practitioners' own. Where painful, unresolved or subconsciously held aspects of practitioners' own narratives or experiences are replayed though similar plotlines and characters from service-users' stories, the potential harm through counteractive transferential dynamics to both practitioner and practice is considerable (Aveline, 2007; Mandell, 2007; Turney, 2007; Ward, 2010). Even when a service-user reminds the practitioner positively of someone from another aspect of their life, the risk remains they generate similar conditional expectations of their relatedness with the service-user to that experienced with the 'other'.

It is here that gaining insight from different professional approaches (in this instance, counselling) to formation may well be useful for youth work. Counselling formation traditionally pays good attention to personal development that examines awareness of the 'I' of the 'personal self'. Johns (2012) posits that when humanistically framed, personal development is concerned with generating intentionality regarding the individual's continuous endeavouring towards knowledge, understanding and acceptance of self and others, whilst psychodynamic formulations emphasise the development of self-awareness and insight in separating and interpreting transferential experiences. Both counselling and youth work are concerned with the professional facilitation of aspects of others' self-knowledge and personal development. Hughes (2009:33) contends personal development is essential in counselling and by inference the wider helping professions as: '

- it contributes to self-awareness and increasing knowledge of gaps in awareness;

- being aware decreases the risk of harm to others;

- it gives a resilience in dealing with problems and dilemmas;

- we should practise what we preach – we ask our clients to reflect on themselves so shouldn't we be able to do this too?

- it can help us take care of ourselves;

- developing personally helps us contribute to our profession.'

For Johns (2012:22-23), the scope of personal development includes: '

1. identifying and exploring the uniqueness and patterning of our own values, attitudes and constructs;

2. the elements in our personal family, relationship and educational history which facilitate or hinder our ability to feel, perceive, relate, or protect/assert ourselves;

3. the balance of our personal and interpersonal strengths and limitations;

4. a sense of our own emotional world, our capacity for intimacy with others and ability to stay separate and appropriately distanced from them;

5. a knowledge of our needs, our fears, our intolerances;

6. our perceptions and responses to the culture, class and belief system in which we live and our attitudes and responses to those who are different;

7. and, perhaps, most significant, our passions and powers, our tendencies, inappropriately, to invade or deprive others.'

This recognition of the significance of 'the personal' attached to professional development in counselling is encouraging. However, it all too often fails to take account of the socio-political. This further prompts questions regarding the critical analysis of socio-political discourses which frame youth work practice (Hine, 2009), in which the self as an agent of state-sponsored practices enacts and re-enforces particular discourses concerning young people through its policies and practices. There is therefore, as I suggest later in the thesis, a need to develop analysis and synthesis of the 'personal' *and* socio-political in professional youth work formation.

Discussion regarding these issues is advanced by others concerned with the significance of vocation and formation, particularly within the social professions. Floyd (2013:140) posits 'we need to subordinate ourselves to service, by looking more deeply inside ourselves.' Moreover, Dunaway (2013:134-5) argues 'higher education, at its best, must be an exploration of one's

life purpose… that gives us a sense of identity…', and Narvaez (2013) that the goal of formation is to enable students to generate an autonomous wisdom through which they critically reflect upon their own moral performance. The development of character which Lewis (2013:21) defines as: 'a living, organic, systemic entity in which knowing, desiring and doing interact and overlap in complex ways' is therefore essential in the helping professions. Who we are in the co-production of 'the good life' matters (Lickona, 2013). The recent emphasis however on technical forms of knowledge (Dunne, 2011; May, 2013; Sullivan, 2013) or what Schön (1983) has described as 'technical rationality' generated by positivist hegemony which is concerned with performativity, regulation and control (Duffy, 2017a; Ellett, 2012) or what Brown (2013:145) describes as 'technocratic efficiency' is unmistakable. This ideal has been further propagated by utilitarian austerity (Blythe, 2015) and resulted in the dominance of technocratic epistemologies which have modulated human interaction in the helping professions to robotic transactionalism. This has reduced 'learning to performance on demand rather than training for mastery of a domain' (Sullivan, 2013:106). Brown (2013:145) offers an alternative vision, contending the academy and professional associations should resist this onslaught and 'set sail in an alternative direction' as a means of recovering humanity in the professions. This ideal is supported by Sullivan who argues passionately for the rebalancing of the apprenticeships – to reconceive the socio-ethical domain in order to more fully accommodate 'the formation of the requisite perspective on work and the self that marks a genuine professional' (ibid.:109). The apparent emphasis in the helping professions on public accountability (Banks, 2012) managerialism (Green, 2009) and technical competence over personal and human(e) interaction, must not however generate *unethical incompetence* in professional formation as its alternative (Clark, 1995).

There remains however a relative paucity in the literature regarding these concerns in youth work education. No education is value free; youth work and youth work education are no exception. Indeed, it might be argued in various ways that these domains are both implicitly and explicitly *value laden* (Banks, 2010; Corney, 2004). Yet as Cooper Bradford (2007) points out, pedagogical space must be given to enable youth work students to explore, consider, intersect and synthesise personal and professional values and identities at a time of continuous flux for the profession. Indeed, Reid *et al* (2008) argue engagement with professional values is integral to student learning and professional socialisation. The contrasting, diametrically opposed positions between professional values and technocratic transactionalism (Schön, 1983) need therefore to be addressed.

3.3.1 Concluding Comments

By drawing together a range of sociological and psychological perspectives, this chapter has prepared the ground for examination of empirical data relating to questions of identity. These are concerns that lie at the heart of this thesis. This new synthesis advances application of thought relating to identity in ways hitherto undeveloped in youth work. By exploring conceptual origins and more contemporary tracings, the chapter has also grappled with questions of vocation, a phenomenon which this research contends lies at the core of many youth workers' motivation to practice, and is broadly underdeveloped in the professional literature. This has led to examination of literature pertaining to professional formation. This work complements the work developed on professional 'training' in chapter 2, but argues differently for the reclamation of something more holistically human. This work casts the *person* of the practitioner at the centre of practice in the 'people professions' and segues into discussion of the 'use of self' in practice, thereby preparing the ground for empirical discussion of this subject.

Chapter 4

Methodology and Methods

4.1 Introduction

The methodology developed in this research draws substantively on Smith, Flowers and Larkin's (2009) conceptualisation of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). This is synthesised with various approaches to narrative research, most notably that proposed by Goodson and Gill (2011, 2014), who posit the critical pedagogical potential of narrative in 'naming' and acting on the world. Whilst IPA offers an effective, step-by-step approach to developing understandings of experiences and phenomena themselves, Braun and Clarke (2013) argued it has tended to pay insufficient attention to the contexts in which experiences occur. In contrast, whilst the narrative work postulated by Goodson and Gill enables exploration of experience in the context of life as lived, facilitating multi-dimensional examination of the influence of life histories and the socio-cultural-political upon experience, it lacks a documented process by which analysis might be developed. The synthesis of narrative and IPA therefore attempts to recognise the greater possibilities of generating more criticalist understandings of experience in the context of life as lived, *and a process* by which this might be enabled. Through this synthesis, I have (tentatively) moved towards the development of *Critical Narrative Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (CNIPA)* as a methodological approach. My own approach to CNIPA draws 'abductively' (see the following discussion on Blaikie, 2008) on the work of Freire and Foucault in framing and developing analyses of participants' experience in context. My intention in the thesis is therefore to generate methodological synthesis by blending the strengths of CNIPA's originating approaches in producing fuller and more conceptually enhanced discussions of participants' experiences *within* the context of their wider personal and professional narratives.

The first part of the chapter therefore explores and justifies the selection and synthesis of IPA and narrative approaches in this thesis. It begins by locating the ontological and epistemological positions underpinning these approaches and their interrelationship with the research question. The chapter evaluates the strengths, limitations and distinctiveness of IPA and narrative work, whilst rationalising a bricolaged approach[1] to addressing the research question holistically. The second part of the chapter considers the meaning and significance of these more philosophically grounded discussions for the present research. This includes discussion of these influences upon processes of data collection, sampling, research ethics, data analysis and (re-)presentation and researcher reflexivity.

4.2.4 Philosophical orientations

Questions of ontology, epistemology and researcher positionality are integral to research. These paradigmatic questions reflect interrelated debates regarding *what* is to be known and *how* it might be known. Braun and Clarke (2013:27ff) describe an ontological continuum which encompasses realist and relativist positions. Realism holds that 'reality is entirely independent of human ways of knowing about it', whilst more relativist conceptualisations enshrine knowledge and knower in a mutual web of interrelatedness. In this view, reality and knowledge are contextually dependent on human interpretation. These broad conceptualisations of reality and knowledge give rise to positivistic (ontological realist) and interpretivist (ontological relativist) paradigms. Interpretivism is however a broad church which encompasses a range of more nuanced positions and approaches. These include social constructionism, social constructivism, phenomenology and critical realist ideas. Critical realism holds that 'real' knowledge of the world is situated both within and 'behind' human subjectivity – that is, that criticalist interpretations in relation, for example, to issues of

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[1] Bricolage refers to the creative synthesis of ideas, approaches and materials in constructing something new (McLeod, 2011).

gender, class and oppression must be critically deconstructed in order to interrogate and challenge more 'surface level' interpretations of the world (Braun and Clarke, 2013; Cresswell, 2013).

Ontological and epistemological questions entwine the worldviews of the researcher and those who participate in research. Whilst the ontological status of much in the physical world tends to be more beyond debate, that which 'exists' in the social world, social relationships, education, politics, class, culture, and in the case of this research, 'vocation' 'identity' and 'youth work' are more abstract (Seale, 2018). In this interpretivist worldview, reality and experience in and of the social world are therefore socially constructed. Meaning is intersubjective, and shaped by context, place, time, life histories and positions, values, beliefs and experiences etc. From this perspective, the social world is immanently made via a dynamically recursive interplay between (inter)action and interpretation. Reality and knowledge are therefore always contingent. In this worldview, being has a dimension of fleetingness about it – it is present in time, but is referent to the past, *and* always in a perpetual state of becoming. Such ideas underpin narrative and phenomenological ontologies and epistemologies. These ideas therefore hold the potential to be a resistant force against singular ways of knowing which have been imposed by positivistic rationalities upon the social world. Positivistic reductionism has been harnessed by neoliberalism in an attempt to inculcate a new hegemony of scientism that reinforces rationalities of 'cause and effect' which underpin, privilege and promulgate market logics (Duffy, 2017a; Goodson and Gill, 2014).

Such ideas lead to discussion of researcher positionality. I have come to the realisation that my own engagement with this subject has become increasingly 'abductive'. By abductive, I mean my 'reading' of my participants' experiences has been informed by my own worldview and by the literature I have read in approaching the research. In this sense, I follow Blaikie (2008:8ff), who contends abductive research is concerned with describing lay social actors' motives, meanings and understandings, and of producing a technical account of these that draws upon and advances

theoretical conceptualisations in the field. The Abductive Research Cycle (Figure 4.1) offers a summary of my process; it should be noted this process tended to flow iteratively forwards *and* backwards between different 'points' on the cycle. This process mirrors that proposed by Pidgeon and Henwood (1994, 1997), who suggest researchers can advance knowledge and develop rich theoretical∞empirical connections and conceptualisations by dialectically and iteratively 'flip-flopping' between empirical data and existing theoretical ideas.

Undoubtedly, these processes have impacted upon my own unfolding relationship with the research. Perhaps naively, I commenced this project with a more purist phenomenological view – that I could attempt somehow to understand the essence of my participants' experiences as *they* lived them. This original ideal was furthered by my training and practice as a Rogerian-based counsellor - a therapeutic approach founded upon a liberal-humanistic axiology, which emphasises the transcendent possibility of empathy in enabling self∞other knowledge and growth. This phenomenological worldview remains central to my personal ontology (by which I mean who I am – my being in the world, or as Heidegger (1962) would put it '*dasein*' – being in context); however, it is not the only influence. I have come as this research has unfolded to recognise the increasing significance of a range of different, and arguably conflicting worldviews upon and within my way of being and 'seeing'. These lenses have come in different ways to impact on my reflexive engagement with the research as it has unfolded. I am aware that each of these worldview *praxes* have developed and changed during the process of the research, and have come, for example, to symbiotically influence what I have read, how I have read it, and my engagement with research participants and their data. These include (but are not limited to) my Christian faith, ongoing voluntary work in a community development project, my professional practice in higher education, a growing sense of personal politicization regarding issues of increasingly entrenched inequality, and a developing conviction regarding the legitimacy of Foucault's governmentality thesis.
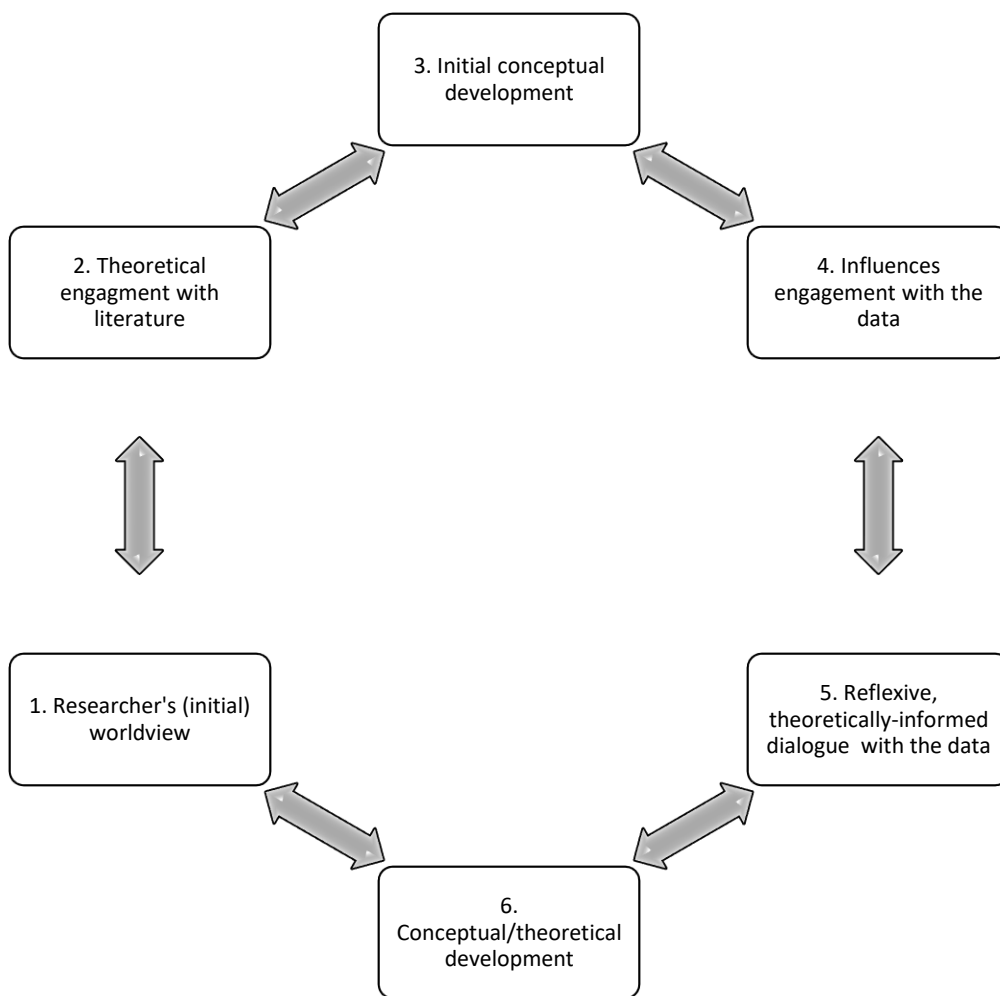
Figure 4.1 Abductive Research 'Cycle' (after Blaikie, 2008)

As noted in Chapter One, the heuristic foundation for this research arose from a confluence of personal experiences which firstly gave rise to particular questions regarding youth workers' motivation or vocation towards practice, and resultantly an even more foundational question regarding *who* youth workers are. The 'experiential' essence of first of these questions lends itself to phenomenological enquiry. As Moustakas (1990:40) suggested, I experienced 'an encompassing puzzlement' regarding youth workers' sense of vocation. I wanted to know whether my own sense of passion was reflected in others' experiences, and to better understand the essence of vocation

itself in the context of youth work practice. Exploration of the topic is therefore very much tied to my own sense of identity and wondering about the (my) world (Flick, 2014; Moustakas, 1990; Sultan, 2018). This sense of quest aligned with Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), a methodology developed in the 1990s by the psychologist, Professor Jonathan Smith, (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). IPA reflects aspects of my own worldview in many ways, and I will attempt to examine its underlying ideas in the following section; however, I soon began to recognise some of its limitations in relation to this study. Firstly, that many of the 'clues' to youth workers' sense of vocation and identity were not always tied to a particular 'phenomenological moment' but were more likely to be enframed within life histories. And, secondly, that 'interpretative' elements within IPA have traditionally at least not reflected more criticalist hermeneutic ideas that inform my own worldview, or that which youth work claims as a profession.

In line with these concerns, McLeod (2011:82) argues qualitative researchers should avoid rigidly imposing pre-determined methodological frameworks onto their research. Rather, he suggests, they ought to be open, reflexive and responsive to the needs of the research as its processes unfold. McLeod posits qualitative research is a multi-skilled craft, and that researchers should envisage themselves as *'bricoleurs',* capable of drawing on different tools, resources and materials in the construction of knowledge. This research therefore bricolages IPA and narrative approaches in particular ways in order to reflect ontological and epistemological concerns that are specific to the context of the thesis. I attempt in the following paragraphs to consider the ideas underpinning these approaches, to develop a synthesis of ideas, and describe their application to the thesis in relation to sampling, data collection, data analysis, validity and ethics.

4.3.1 Phenomenology and IPA

Phenomenology was developed by the German philosopher and psychologist Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), who sought to challenge what he viewed as the reductionism prevalent in behaviourist

psychology during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Husserl believed it was possible to understand experience as essence, and suggested phenomenologists 'go back to things themselves'. Phenomenologists are concerned with consciousness, and how phenomena are configured and experienced within conscious awareness. van Manen (2014:17) equates phenomenology with physics. He contends that whilst physicists are driven by a desire to 'penetrate the cosmic-quantum secrets of the physical world, so phenomenologists are driven by a pathos to discern the primordial secrets of the living meanings of the human world.' Phenomenology therefore focusses upon (the meanings of) life as lived in specific contexts and times. Whilst it affords the opportunity through exploration of essence to understand the subjectivity of the world for different individuals through naming it and reflecting upon it, it should also be noted that for some phenomenologists, the act of naming the world as experienced, changes the very character of 'things' themselves. According to this view, it is therefore incumbent on researchers embracing phenomenological ideals to remain alive to the subtleties and nuances of participants' experiences as lived in order to get as close as possible to phenomena in their subjective, but essential form. van Manen (2014) notes humans spend the majority of their lives between states of 'pre-reflectivity' and 'reflectivity'. Whilst pre-reflectivity refers to the 'ordinariness' of activity and thought as people go about their daily lives, reflectivity occurs when people engage in particular forms of contemplative reflection in order to access and generate conscious meaning. This reflects the aim of phenomenology as describing 'the lived world of everyday experience' (Finlay, 2011:10). Central to these meaning-making endeavours is 'phenomenological reduction'. This involves two interweaving epochal processes. The first, *epoche,* or bracketing, requires that the researcher put aside their own personal and theoretical presuppositions regarding the phenomenon and empathically enter the lifeworld of the phenomenon via research participants' lived experiences of it. The aim here is to enable access to '*things themselves',* thus permitting the researcher 'to

approach the phenomenon in its own terms' (Langdridge, 2017:171). The second *epoche,* involves the researcher understanding the phenomenon in the context of the lived experience of it, thus illuminating the subjective, *lifeworld* meaning of the phenomena as it is culturally and historically situated and understood (Finlay, 2011; Langdridge, 2007; Spinelli, 2005). The second of these epochal processes reflect moves in phenomenological thinking towards the contextualised interpretation of experience as it is lived. As Heidegger, one of Husserl's students contended, humans interpret experiences via particular lenses constructed in the social world, and thus, phenomena are only given meaning via subjective interpretation. Ricoeur (1970) postulated the second *epoche* encompasses hermeneutics of suspicion, which hold the potential to critically illuminate things as they *really* are (Langdridge, 2007). These ideas highlight the hermeneutic turn in phenomenology that has influenced the work of Ricoeur, Gadamer and others, and given rise to particular methodologies including IPA.

4.3.2 IPA – Underpinning Ideas

In line with its hermeneutic phenomenological foundations, IPA 'is an approach which is dedicated to the detailed exploration of personal meaning and lived experience' (Smith and Osborn, 2015:25). It is concerned with generating first person accounts of experiences and events in context, and of enabling the exploration of meaning in participants' personal and social worlds (Braun and Clarke, 2013; Smith and Osborne, 2008; Spinelli, 2005). IPA holds that people are constantly engaged in experiential∞reflective processes. That is, we each have experiences, and attempt to reflect on them through particular worldviews and contexts in order to make sense of them. In line with the present research, Braun and Clarke (2013) note IPA studies are particularly useful in exploring the significance and meaning of life-shaping events and experiences, and in considering the significance of these for identities in context. Whilst respecting the subjectivity of phenomenological experience, the task of IPA is to attempt to understand and express the essential essence of the phenomenon

as it is idiographically experienced. (In this regard, IPA researchers hold to notions of holistic personhood 'that assumes a chain of connection between people's talk, and their thinking and emotional state' (Smith and Osborn, 2015:26)). This phenomenological reduction is generated by means of a 'composite description' (Cresswell, 2013:76) that represents the essence of experience for all participants.

IPA is underpinned by a commitment to phenomenology, hermeneutics (the study of interpretation) and idiography (the study of the particular) (Smith *et al*., 2009). It posits the power and potential of understanding human experience in context, holding that humans' interpretation of experience is key to understandings of the *lifeworld.* IPA recognises access to the *lifeworld* is only ever partial, as it depends upon the accounts research participants relay in respect of their experiences. Moreover, whilst empathic engagement might enable some form of transcendence in understanding another's experience, ultimately, embodied separateness prevents full understanding of another's *lifeworld.* IPA's commitment to Heideggerian phenomenology reflects the social, relational and intersubjective nature of being in the world, and the influence of this *dasein* on experience, interpretation and meaning (Smith *et al*., 2009). According to this view, people are always 'persons in context'. Thus, context is significant in shaping experience and interpretation. The interpretation of experience is an active, rather than passive process. Epistemologically, thinking in IPA is also informed by Sartrean existentialism and symbolic interactionism. These social constructivist ideas suggest human beings not only interpret the world, but are actively engaged in acting on the world in order to shape it. In this view, humans are not only being, they are always, through processes of experience, reflection and action in a perpetual mode of (*active and intentional*) becoming. Such conceptualisations reflect the significance of, and dynamic interrelationship between, meaning (making) and identity past∞present∞future: always reflecting, always being, always becoming. It is

at moments of critical interruption (including, for example, participation in research interviews), that levels of consciousness are raised, experiences are framed, and the possibility of action becomes more deliberate.

The second significant influence on the conceptualisation and *praxis* of IPA research work is idiography. 'Idiography is concerned with the particular' (Smith *et al*., 2009:29), of generating detail that engenders a sense of contextual resonance and internal validity. IPA researchers tend to engage with smaller samples at depth in order to understand 'how particular experiential phenomena (an event, process or relationship) have been understood from the perspective of particular people in a particular context' (ibid.:29). Its commitment to the particular and contingent reflects IPA's subjective onto-epistemological worldview – a position that tentatively affords possible knowledge transferability, but which rejects from the outset any claims towards generalisability.

Thirdly, as noted earlier in this section, IPA is underpinned by a commitment to hermeneutic phenomenology. This holds that persons in context are continually engaged in different forms and levels of conscious reflection. IPA engages a number of different hermeneutic processes. At its simplest, this involves a double hermeneutic of the researcher attempting to interpret the participant's interpretation of their experience. A third hermeneutic layer is added as readers interpret the researcher's secondary level interpretations. Hermeneutic questions are therefore integral to IPA work. In reference to this thesis, these most particularly relate to my own interpretations as a researcher and the abductive influences on these interpretations.

Whilst key methodological writers in the field of IPA discuss secondary hermeneutics, little is articulated regarding engagement with more criticalist worldviews. Smith *et al*. (2009:36) for example contend IPA researchers should firstly engage an empathic hermeneutic in an attempt to understand something of experience as lived, before employing a more interrogative hermeneutic

that 'questions' what participants have said. Yet a lack of 'hermeneutics of suspicion' has rendered much IPA work to this point open to the charge of being two-dimensional. Braun and Clarke (2013:183) suggest IPA's foundation in psychology has resulted in socio-cultural interpretative frames having, as yet, little emphasis in shaping more overtly criticalist hermeneutics. This has resulted in some critique of IPA as engendering overly-descriptive work, with some of its proponents calling for research that embraces more criticalist interpretations (Larkin *et al*., 2006). Some of these tensions have begun to be recognised in social work literature. Houston and Mullan-Jensen (2011) for example, describe the rich possibilities of engaging IPA in researching aspects of social work practice. However, they argue in order for IPA work to reflect truth in context, that researchers must take hermeneutic account of multi-dimensional dynamics (the personal *and* political, the agentic *and* structural) influencing professional social work.

These tensions are not lost on some key contemporary phenomenologists. Langdridge (2017) for example, contends that its onto-epistemological worldview demands that phenomenology generates rich description. However, he also notes the multi-dimensional nature of that 'richness' should take greater critical account of the socio-cultural-political nature of the context in which experience is framed, and that phenomenological research should be 'more attuned to language, power and politics' (p.178). Yet Langdridge also notes that over-imposition of theory upon phenomenological work is contrary to phenomenology itself – resulting in 'truths' as 'things themselves' being distorted, or perhaps not even 'emerging'. Put another way, pre-theorization risks transmogrifying essence; yet conversely, a lack of critical hermeneutics risks caricaturing 'the things', rendering them erroneously decontextualized and mono-dimensional, thus making naming, challenging and changing 'the things', or, in Freirean terms 'the world', less likely. Langdridge contends processes of 'voicing' and of empowering those who are de-voiced, marginalised and

oppressed is central to the phenomenological project. Yet he notes too 'giving voice' also risks essentializing particular cohorts.

Much regarding these ideas resonate with my own approach to the present research. Like Langdridge, I have sought in working with research participants to engage a 'hermeneutic of empathy' that has allowed me to understand at some deeper, transcendent level aspects of my participants lived experiences[234]. This was simultaneously accompanied by a less critical hermeneutic turn. This served two purposes. Firstly, it allowed me to clarify understandings, and secondly, by means of semi-structured dialogue, it enabled me to encourage deeper exploration of pertinent contextual factors[5]. I employed a fuller and more abductive critical hermeneutic in analysing the data, particularly during the generation of themes. Whilst Langdridge cites queer theory and postcolonial theory as contributing to his own *'imaginative hermeneutics of suspicion'* (Langdridge, 2017:178, emphasis in original), my worldview is substantively shaped by Foucauldian and Freirean imaginaries, each of which have come in different ways to critically frame my thinking about participants' *lifeworlds*. Whilst Foucault's perception of phenomenology as holding a 'fixed and absolutist view of human subjectivity' (Schirato, Danaher and Webb, 2012:ix), led to his rejection of it[6], some phenomenological thinkers including Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) have begun to tentatively make suggestions regarding the integration of Foucauldian readings of the world as part of a new hermeneutic turn in IPA:

> 'It seems that IPA does have the potential for links with, in particular Foucauldian discourse analysis, through shared concerns with how context is implicated in the experiences of the individual. While IPA studies provide a detailed experiential account of the person's

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[2] I believe my training and practice as a therapist partly enabled this. Notably, some participants voluntarily offered that they had felt deeply understood and telling and exploring their stories had felt 'like therapy'.
[3] I tended to experience this empathic hermeneutic 'in the moment' during interviews.
[4] It is perhaps noteworthy that Langdridge also practices as a psychotherapist within the humanistic/existential tradition.
[5] I was always aware of particular tensions – of balancing the need to 'probe' to enable deeper discussion, whilst attempting not to 'lead' participants.
[6] Foucault argued phenomenology fails to take account of how subjectivities are historically and discursively shaped

involvement with the context, FDA [Foucauldian Discourse Analysis] offers a critical analysis of the structure of the context itself and thus touches on the resources available to the individual in making sense of their experiences… Given the way that these approaches appear to come to the world in *potentially* complementary forms, it would seem that there is value in a more explicit articulation of the relationship between them' (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009:196, emphases in original).

4.4.1 Theorising Narrative

The preceding section examined initial ideas pertaining to the use of IPA in this thesis, and began alluding to the potential of bricolaged connections with narrative approaches. This part of the chapter explores debates in narrative work, locating the approaches I adopt and integrate within wider frames.

Narrative, it is argued, is a universal preoccupation (Trehar, 2013), through which life is 'constructed and mediated' (Goodson, 2013:3). Ricoeur (1984) contended narrative humanises life as lived; resultantly, humans, writes Cobley (2014:1) 'have a compulsion to narrate'. Bolton (2014:71) suggests: 'We are embedded and enmeshed within the stories and story structures we have created, and which have been created around us…'

Narrative as an academic discipline is most traditionally associated with the field of literary criticism in which analysis of more technical linguistic elements holds sway (Cobley, 2014; Lawler, 2014:26). In more recent years, narrative has moved beyond the domain of language technique to become an area of key ontological and epistemological interest in the social sciences. Much of this interest has arisen out of the connective potential that narratives afford in acting as a bridge between experience and research - they 'carry traces of human lives that we want to understand' (Squire *et al*, 2014:2). Narrative draws upon a range of epistemological and methodological influences in sociology and psychology, thus enabling it to transcend academic categories in the production of

synthesised and interdisciplinary work (Merrill and West, 2009:9ff). It can be argued therefore that narrative holds 'multilevel, dialogic potential' (Squire *et al*, 2014:2).

Its chequered history from academic vanguard in the 1920s, through decline in the middle of the twentieth century to the scaling of new contemporary heights is notable (Goodson and Gill, 2011:18ff). Squire *et al* (2014:3) contend the renewal of narrative epistemologies can be traced to the appearance of post-war liberal-humanistic ideas within sociology and psychology, and the emergence of postmodern and poststructuralist theories. In this vein, Goodson (2014:63-64) contends that we live in an 'age of narrative', yet argues that the scale and typology of the narratives which are held as 'common currency' within western societies have changed significantly in recent decades. Goodson (2014, 2018) argues that the grand narratives of Christianity, Freudian psychology, Marxist thinking, scientific rationalism, national autonomy and fascism which provided social coherence in the modern era have been undermined and all but removed by processes of post-modernisation, resulting in 'seismic challenges for people's identity projects and life politics' (Goodson, 2013:120).

He later notes:

> 'We can then begin to see how grand narratives fell from grace, losing not only scope and aspiration but also our underpinning faith in their general capacity to guide or shape our destiny. From the vortex left after the collapse of the grand narratives, we see the emergence of another kind of narrative, infinitely smaller in scope, often individualised – the personal life story. [These changes] reflect a dramatic change in the scale of human belief and aspiration' (Goodson, 2018:12).

Complexity surrounding the place, role and diversity of narratives is striking; despite the attention paid to it by different a range of academic disciplines, the notion of narrative remains decidedly nebulous and informed by a range of epistemological and theoretical bases (e.g. symbolic interactionism, socio-cultural, Foucaldian, Marxist, Critical Theory, Feminist Theories) (Merrill and

West, 2009:57ff; Andrews *et al*, 2013). Whilst this means theoretical fusion in narrative is rich with possibility, it renders a conclusive definition improbable. However:

> 'These kinds of lived with contradictions in narrative research refer us back to the way in which narrative research's emancipatory aims often *bring together* historically and theoretically rich traditions of narrative work' (Squire *et al*, 2014:8, emphasis added).

Cobley (2014:3ff) suggests all narratives contain particular unifying similarities: story, plot, characters, sequence, space and time. He argues: '...'story' consists of all the events which are to be depicted. 'Plot' is the chain of causation which dictates that these events are somehow linked...' (ibid.:5). Bolton (2014:66) develops these points, defining narrative as:

> 'an account which describes or explains an event, narrated afterwards, bringing together different elements, making a whole, and therefore sense, out of them. An incident is a life-as-lived event, not a narrative: an incident is experienced, a narrative is telling about an incident. A story is a particular kind of narrative generally with characters, in specific place(s), over a period of time, and with plot development of something causing something else.'

Narrative, like phenomenology, must therefore be understood as an interpretation and (re-) construction of experience which is edited in the telling (Cobley, 2014; Goodson, 2013; Goodson and Gill, 2011; Goodson and Sikes, 2001).

4.4.2 Narrative: Epistemologies, Meanings and Struggles

Squire *et al* (2014:4) note, 'despite theoretical differences, there are many convergences between humanistic and poststructuralist traditions within current narrative research'[7]. Most notably, this includes the commitment by many researchers to engage with narrative as a means of generating 'resistance [against] existing structures of power' (ibid.:4). Moreover, both approaches value the history of individual and collective experiencing as integral to their shared epistemology. Yet, it is also important to note distinctions raised by particular nuances. The turn to history in the pursuit of

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[7]This offers further potential connections between IPA, narrative and Foucauldian thinking. I very much see phenomenology, expressed via narrative means, as a humanistically founded praxis, and Foucauldian thinking as a means of generating fuller multi-dimensional understandings of the context in which experience and story are located.

contextualising experience is emphasised by Labovian approaches to narrative. Labovian

approaches privilege the chronological development of stories as a means of generating

understandings of connectivity and causality within participants' accounts (Patterson, 2013). By

contrast, experientially orientated approaches view 'narratives as stories of experience, rather than

events' (Squire *et al*, 2014:47). In this sense, phenomenologically grounded narrative approaches

(which the present research leans towards) perceive events more as variable 'stations' which the

narrator may (or may not) use, reuse, or indeed, reconstitute in the production of their story. In this

tradition, events are therefore viewed as a selective mechanism, and of lesser consequence to the

construction of a meaningful overall narrative that represents the lifeworld experience of the teller

(Squire, 2013). However,

> 'What is shared across both event- and experience-centred narrative research is that there
> are assumed to be individual, internal representations of phenomena – events, thoughts and
> feelings – to which narrative gives external *expression.* Event-centred work assumes that
> these internal and individual representations are more or less constant. Experience-centred
> research stresses that such representations vary drastically over time, and across the
> circumstances within which one lives, so that a single phenomenon may produce very
> different stories, even from the same person' (Squire *et al*., 2014:5-6).

4.4.3 Narratives 'Big' and 'Small'.

Drawing on ideas from critical pedagogy, Goodson and Gill (2014) argue the importance of

contextualising 'small', agentic stories within 'big' stories of structure in order that each illuminates

the other. Such approaches, they contend, hold greater holistic and critical potential. Attention to

'small' stories enables language to be interrogated. From this perspective, narratives are viewed as

performative and expressive devices, which hold the potential to highlight the symbiotic influence

of structural and agentic forces upon human experience (Goodson, 2013). Epistemologically, this

approach to narrative represents a 'psycho-social analysis [that] attempts to give equal importance

to individual and social processes' (Phoenix, 2013:74). In this view, life narratives are shaped by

context, and context by individual and collective agency. Thus, as discussed earlier in relation to IPA, paying attention to contexts in phenomenological narrative work enables the development of a critical hermeneutic that examines the influence of structures upon experience. Punch (2014) argues this is a key feature of narrative research. He contends that whereas some qualitative approaches risk decontextualizing analysis from meaning, narrative pays attention to meaning in its lived context thereby enabling analysis to be idiographically located. Phoenix (2013:73) posits this enables a 'fruitful synthesis' of biography and context which 'attend simultaneously to 'small' and 'big' stories… [in generating] living narrative[s].'

For Tamboukou (2013), narratives are firmly located in, and influenced by, temporality and context. To understand narrative, she suggests, researchers must pay attention to the 'forces of discourse, power and history' (p.88) which exert themselves covertly on constituted human experience. In the same vein, Goodson (2013:5) argues narrative 'need[s] to move from life stories to life histories, from narratives of action to genealogies of context.' Drawing on Foucauldian thinking, Tamboukou argues human experiencing is framed by discourses, shaped over time, through which power is mediated. Those approaching narrative from a post-structuralist framework need to map interconnected discourses and practices. This represents the starting point for the genealogical deconstruction of discourses which influence human storying, thus enabling the potential illumination of dynamics of power as a means of catalysing change. Invoking Gadamer (1977), Goodson and Gill (2011:76) posit narrative should therefore attend to individual and collective 'historical consciousness… [and]… ontological schemes and worldviews'. Similarly, Tamboukou (2013:96) writes: 'the genealogical approach scrutinizes both personal and public narratives for the excavation of distortions and discursively constructed regimes of truth'. Elsewhere, Goodson and Gill argue the:

'importance of reconstructing one's experience within broader social political context[s] (sic) that allows us to actively dissociate our stories from inherited 'scripts' and 'patterns' and to then reconstruct our understanding of self, other and the world and social actions… Narrating lived experience and examining human life as a whole can help us forge a vision of our reality and our purpose in the world, which considers how it was constructed in relation to others, within the wider contexts of our communities and of the social and cultural systems that provide meaning to our existence' (2014:8/35-6).

Narrative, in this sense, seeks to challenge assumed hegemonies, to interrogate the construction of pervasive ideas in order that they might be reversed (Tamboukou, 2013:90). In the Foucauldian tradition, narrative is viewed as symbolic representation of hegemonic discourses and power-knowledge relations. By challenging constructed power relations, narrative becomes an expression of self-authorship through which structural relations of power are acknowledged and conscientized thereby enabling the potential fulfilment of greater human agency. In this latter sense, narrative acts as a 'technology of the self' where agency and emancipation are potentialized 'through active practices of self-formation' (ibid.:93.). These approaches to narrative clearly resonate with youth work's foundations in critical pedagogy.

Thus, by drawing not only on phenomenological approaches to narrative, but by locating and hermeneutically co-interpreting life histories in the context of wider social, political and cultural forces, critical forms of narrative are able to 'understand how personal lives traverse social change' (Squire *et al*, 2014:4). It can be argued therefore that narrative approaches represent a theoretical bricolage which flexibly privileges the integration of nuanced epistemological positions in the co-construction of social knowledge. Squire *et al* go on to suggest that we should thus avoid examining the minutiae of particular epistemological divisions in binary terms. Instead, they raise questions regarding the social co-production of narrative through webs of inter-relatedness, which Goodson (2013:23) notes begins to challenge the highly individualised constructions of selfhood which have been a product of the contemporary Western project. In this sense, narrative is located in and

produced by the relational intersections that exist between the principal narrator (individual research participants) and the other social (and structural) actors that share the speaker's life stage. The researcher as co-narrator, principal interlocutor and critical interpreter, together with other key actors in research participants' stories, and the wider audience to whom stories are re-told, play a key role in how narratives are framed. In this sense, the particular purposes and various potential audiences (e.g. researcher, personal and professional contexts, readers of potential research outputs) undoubtedly influence the social co-production of individual and collective storying (Goodson and Sikes, 2001; Squire *et al*, 2014:6). Actors' engagement with their audiences reflexively influence the way in which their characters are performed. Thus, narrative work concerns the construction and reproduction of identity through memory, mimesis and inter(action). Drawing on frameworks derived by Goffman (1981), Squire *et al* (2014) propose that through narrative we become the characters we narrate. Such a position might present the idea of re-structurating life within the limitations of particular inherited and lived scripts. However, others contend narrative research provides the opportunity to engage in critically 'naming of the world' (Freire, 1996), a means of freeing oneself through critical reimagining, in the pursuit of greater self-determination. At the heart of narrative therefore is the capacity for individual and collective 're-storying' (Goodson and Gill, 2011, 2014). Indeed, Goodson and Sikes (2001:46-7) argue:

> 'When someone tells their story to a life historian, they can be seen to be actively involved in constructing a version of their story and of their life: generally a version which is linear and relatively neat and tidy in a way that real life, or rather lived experience, never is…[imposing] some order, however spurious, because they are concerned to make sense of the things that have happened in order to avoid enosis and anomie…'

In this way, narrative 'allows the narrator to relive, control, transform, (re-)imagine events, to reclaim and construct chosen identities, social interactions and communities' (Gready, 2013:240).

It is perhaps Loots *et al*'s (2013) rhizomatic approach[8], which engenders the greatest pragmatism in dealing with the nuanced dichotomies generated by differing constructions of narrative subjectivity and selfhood. Loots and colleagues juxtapose experientially orientated positions which draw on Ricoeurian frameworks of emplotment through which 'subjectivity [is] conceptualised as a coherent and unified story [in the presentation of] a coherent and contingent organized essential self' (p109). Here, narrative acts as symbolic representation that enables the construction of unitary experience. This idea juxtaposes more culturally orientated positions, which draw upon postmodern, and poststructuralist thought. These latter positions, Loots *et al*. contend, are more concerned with the role of language in narrative in framing experience within wider socio-cultural conditions. Under these conditions, narratives tend to become subject to the scrutiny of theoretical deconstruction, resulting in the potential transmogrification of their essence. They note ways in which narrative identity is developed via performing diverse, delinearised and disjointed representations of experience, which reflect de-centralised constructs of selfhood (Goodson, 2013:20; Riessman, 2002).

> 'The performance of identities includes the way scenes are organized, the grammatical resources employed, and the choices made about social positioning - how narrators position audience, characters, and themselves; and, reciprocally, how the audience positions the narrator. Narrative selfhood is constituted through such performances, within the context of narrating' (Loots at al., 2013:109).

4.4.4 Narrative Possibilities: Knowledge, Purpose and Learning

It would appear therefore that individuals are engaged in the ontological task of identity construction, of being and becoming in and through divergent processes of narration (Lawler,

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[8] Loots *et al* (2013:111) draw on the work of Deleuze and Guitarri to liken narrative work to a rhizome – 'an underground root system, an open decentralized network, which branches out [unpredictably] to all sides'. The rhizome may appear wild and chaotic, but beyond initial appearances is also beautiful, connected and strangely ordered.

2014:24). For Säfström (2012:11-12), the agentic[9] potential of narration challenges the hegemony and fatalism of totalisiation in which possibility is suffocated. In this way, narrative work represents in Foucauldian terms, 'a kind of project of the self' (Lawler, 2014:76). Such a position alludes, (as discussed in the previous chapter), to the liquidity of life in contemporary modernity (Bauman, 2000) in which personal and collective identity is 'stripped [of its] coherence [resulting in] selfhood as a key site of struggle' (Goodson and Gill, 2014:22). In these ways, narratives represent the struggle for individual and collective meaning in the production of 'plans, dreams, plots, missions and purposes… at the intersections of private meaning and public purpose' (Goodson, 2013:4/25). In this way, narrative enables people to 'live with contingency' (Säfström, 2012:11) in the process of constructing possibilities.

Despite its agentic possibilities, Goodson (2014:71) is at pains not to underestimate or deny structures of power within idiographic narratives - a negation he suggests is tantamount to critical naivety which divorces the person's life from the social, political, religious, educational (etc.) forces and discourses which boundary, interpose and impact upon agential narrative construction. The risk of narrative work, Goodson suggests, is that it can act as an 'individualising' and 'de-contextualizing device' (ibid.:72) which excuses engagement with structural forces thereby denying their potential impact. Such a position perpetuates critical naivety, leaving the world 'unnamed' (Freire, 1996). The life story Goodson argues must therefore be 'culturally [socially and temporally] located' in order to generate richer and more critical insight.

Bathmaker (2010:2) re-emphasises this point:

> '...life stories may be a starting point, the initial exploration of a life as lived, but life history grounds these stories of personal experience in their wider social and historical context, and

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[9] I use agency/agentic/agential in the sociological sense – that is the capacity of individuals and groups to be self-directing, independent and autonomous in making their own free choices.

pays attention to social relations of power… [that enable] complex interrelationships to be understood.'

As with discussion earlier in this chapter regarding IPA, Goodson and Sikes (2001) and Goodson (2013) suggest that critical hermeneutic shifts hold the possibility of transforming the intricacies of micro-phenomenological insights toward something of greater significance. This view is furthered by Andrews (2012:35), who posits the potential of connecting stories in the generation of intersubjective learning. As such, Andrews contends narrative acts as a key catalyst in the development of 'other forms of knowledge'. Likewise, Trehar (2013:xiv) argues narrative enables different, 'ordinary', and marginalised voices to be heard in such a way as 'to challenge or trouble established ways of thinking'.

Thus:

> 'The narrative pathway is a creative and formative journey where we consolidate who we are as individuals and communities, find our voice, our place in the world and the story that we belong to and that we are, and where we continue to engage in social actions in our pursuit of being and becoming more fully human' (Goodson and Gill, 2014:98).

In this sense, narratives hold rich potential to enable human flourishing. Connecting with them becomes a virtuous endeavour which promotes learning that goes beyond that which is deterministically cognitive in the pursuit a renewed ontological vision that values the construction of meaning (Goodson and Gill, 2011:114-115). Narrative work can, therefore, be 'profoundly humanizing, particularly when facilitated by empathic listening, critical distance and caring analysis' (Goodson and Gill, 2014:2). Narrative therefore represents a deeply intrapersonal and interpersonal encounter between persons and their world, 'a hermeneutical project at the heart of which lies transformative potential' (Goodson and Gill, 2011:74).

4.4.5 Narrative and Relationality

Goodson and Gill (2011, 2014) clearly highlight ontological and epistemological links between narrative and critical pedagogical *praxis*. This not only concerns the possibility of narrative work as a form of conscientization, but also the significance of relationality, trust and an ethic of care in both domains. This is further highlighted by the claim that:

> 'Narrative encounter involves people meeting and experiencing each other on many intertwined levels; in social relations, personal inter-relationships, the mental, emotional, physical and the spiritual. It also takes place at the level of personal dispositions, beliefs, values, goals, commitment and aspirations. This whole-person aspect has often been neglected in understanding narrative research' (ibid.:81).

The potential for emotional and transcendent experiencing within narrative through interpersonal encounter is powerful. Yet, as Macmurray (1961) has argued, emotion and reason are deeply entwined. Learning of this nature holds the potential to be deeply transformative, valuing the personhood of each individual in their entirety by interconnecting the phenomenology of selfhood with experiences of the socio-political. Narrative therefore can be thought of as 'reciprocal pedagogy' through which one relationally enters another's 'mind, emotions, and spirit as well as values, worldviews, traditions, and moral and personal dilemmas' (Goodson and Gill, 2011:125). Thus critical narrative affords the opportunity not only in Freirean terms to 'name the world', but to name the self' (Goodson and Gill, 2014:15) in symbiotic relation to that world, thereby re-engendering virtue[10] and critical purpose.

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[10] Goodson and Gill (2014:15) argue their approach is 'not just directed at, as Paulo Freire put it 'naming the world', but is to strive for 'naming the self', and in doing so, knowing our narrative. Learning is therefore about cultivating qualities and virtues that are progressive, creative and life-enhancing. Emergent qualities in our human civilisation, feeding back as the framework supporting our being and acting in the world'

Narrative learning therefore reconnects mutuality in human wellbeing and challenges narrow, oppressive, hierarchical and performative constructions of 'learning' in the pursuit of more holistic and human ideals. The parallels between narrative work and youth work are therefore striking; it is the potentiality of this epistemological fusion, which offers a unifying feature in this thesis.

4.5.1 Methodology: Rationalization and Reflexivity

The preceding discussion outlined the different approaches to IPA and narrative that contribute to the methodological bricolage in this work. Given that these methodologies can be harnessed to generate critical and holistic understandings of phenomena in context, and are concerned with fostering insights regarding issues of identity, these research approaches appear well aligned with the focus of this thesis. Indeed, Smith *et al*. (2009:162) note:

> 'One of the interesting things to emerge from the growing corpus of IPA studies is how often identity becomes a central concern... much IPA work is around identity changes associated with major life transitions. In one sense this is not surprising. If one embarks on an in-depth inductive qualitative study of a topic, which has a considerable existential moment, as is often the case in IPA research, then it is quite likely that the participant will link the substantive topic of concern to their sense of self/identity.'

Likewise, Griffin and May (2018:527) offer helpful comparisons between narrative and IPA approaches. They contend that procedural differences aside, both are concerned with studying the meanings attached to first-person accounts as set within 'social, political and cultural contexts'.

As noted, the heuristic foundation of this research is located in the confluence of my own personal and professional experiencing – from which I became interested in understanding the phenomenon

of 'vocation' as it might be experienced by fellow youth workers. Vocation as *phenomenon* aligns well with an IPA analysis; however, for me, it became important not only to understand vocation in its own terms, but also to attempt to locate it within the context of people's wider and continuing life histories. Whilst fundamentally, I am interested in my participants' phenomenological storying of vocation in the context of their life narratives, and of locating the socio-cultural meanings that participants ascribe to their own histories (Phoenix, 2013; Squire, 2013), I am to some lesser degree interested in causal links between different life events (Patterson, 2013)[11] that have informed respondents' vocational choices. I am aware too of the diverse ways in which people have retold aspects of their life stories in response to the broad scope of my initial interview question[12]. Some participants produced their stories in 'phenomenological overview', some in a highly structured and sequential style, and others still in a rather more chaotic, experimental and interwoven fashion akin to the rhizomatic ideals expressed by Loots *et al.*, (2013).

Phenomenological and narrative ideas are significant to my own worldview; however, I became concerned about the potentially myopic hermeneutic scope within some of these approaches. Specifically, I began to wonder about the 'I' in IPA. Although, I feel encouraged by a nascent dialogue regarding particular hermeneutic frames in IPA, I find myself drawn not only to understand participants' interpretations of their experiences in their own terms (what I would describe as the 'first hermeneutic'), but also to consider the abductive nature of my own interpretations - in other words, to consider the frames through which I engage in the second or 'double' hermeneutic. It seems unsatisfactory to me to claim reflexivity as some form of 'neutrality'. Rather, I see reflexivity as expressive of an abductively dialogical relationship with participants and their data. I concur

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[11] This idea refers to the Labovian approaches to narrative outlined briefly earlier in the chapter.
[12] 'Please tell me the story of your life and how it happened - perhaps the most effective way to do this would be to start from birth and work chronologically to the present day. I'd ask you to feel as free to tell me as much about your life in detail as you feel able. I will try not to interrupt, but rather listen and give you the space to speak.'

therefore with Etherington (2004:83) who posits reflexivity is grounded in 'transparency [regarding] the impact of the researcher' on the research. Griffin and May (2018:527) contend 'both [IPA and narrative] acknowledge that the researcher, as audience, and as orator, impacts on the research process in a variety of ways, yet this is not wholly viewed as problematic but rather something to be systematically and reflexively analysed by the researcher.' Of course, I recognise that does not mean I simply have *carte blanche* to impose my own worldviews onto the data, but rather analysis represents a co-productive activity between researcher and participants. Whilst I have attempted continually, in engaging with participants' (self-interpreted) lifeworlds, to lay aside my own pre-suppositions in order to engage empathically with their narratives, my own worldviews, have inevitably informed interpretative frames through which the data has been 'filtered'. As noted, these abductive processes include the influence of the literature I have reviewed (and my own subjective worldview reading of it), especially that relating to debates regarding youth work professionality, upon the research process. More broadly, as noted earlier, Freirean and Foucauldian ideas are central to my own worldview, and these have undoubtedly influenced my engagement with different facets of the research as it has unfolded. The former aligns well with youth work's epistemology, and with Goodson and Gill's (2011, 2014) conceptualisation of narrative as critical pedagogy. As discussed earlier in this chapter, Goodson and Gill posit the importance of locating phenomenological narrativity within wider socio-political structures of oppression, and argue its potential as a catalyst for conscientization and change. Foucault's governmentality thesis is also foundational to my worldview, and to my analysis of the data. Foucauldian governmentality posits that the modern neoliberal state governs through the 'soft power' of discourses and subjectivities – that it creates, stirs and harnesses particular human desires in generating a *sense* of freedom, through which it governs its subjects (Dean, 2010; Rose, 1999b). Or, as Chandler and Reid (2016:11) put it 'the task of neoliberal government lies in the inculcation of the agency of the

governed'. Foucault (2002 [1969]) posited truer understandings of subjectivities are generated through archaeologies or excavations. The role of the research analyst is to work to deconstruct layers of 'reality' produced by means of enacted discourses in order to 'reveal' different truths and possibilities. These Freirean and Foucauldian approaches, which constitute what Ricoeur (1970) calls a 'hermeneutics of suspicion' are embedded in the 'I' of my approach to IPA data analysis. This relates particularly to my reading of participants' experiences of enacted vocation in a period of neoliberal austerity that has resulted in the decimation of youth work as a professional practice. This idea is central to the genealogical deconstruction of my participants' life stories - of understanding how the state has come to assimilate, or 'govern the soul' (Rose, 1999b) of youth work and youth workers (see Chapter 9).

4.6.1 Sampling

Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) and Smith and Osborn (2015) contend that those engaging with IPA should develop a sampling approach that reflects its phenomenological and idiographic ideals. Therefore, samples should be developed purposively on the basis of people being able to directly reflect upon the phenomenon under investigation. In addition, whilst there is 'no right answer to the question of sample size' (Smith *et al.*, 2009:51), it should normally be relatively small (3-6 participants, depending on the focus of the question) in order to enable depth explorations and 'thick' descriptions. They note, 'IPA researchers usually try to find a fairly homogenous sample, for whom the research question will be meaningful' (ibid.:49).

I have sought broadly, to apply these ideals to this research. With a degree of trepidation, and fearing I would have little or no interest in my research from the field, I approached different networks (The Professional Association of Lecturers in Youth and Community Work (PALYCW/TAG),

In Defence of Youth Work, and three geographically convenient Youth Work Units)[13] in the spring of 2015 to advertise my research and request participant contributions. The emails to these organisations included a participant information sheet and consent form (Appendix A), together with details of ethical approval from Durham University. The information and consent form included research parameters and eligibility criteria, which indicated respondents should hold, or be studying towards a professional qualifying award in youth work, and secondly, that participants should be in some form of continuing practice related to youth work. The inclusion of those studying for professional qualifying awards was rationalised in order to further the spread of experience and to gain insights from those about to enter the field at a time of significant change. The information provided expressed my interest in exploring potential participants' life histories, the factors that may have 'drawn' them to youth work practice, their experiences of professional qualifying education and of contemporary practice within shifting policy environments. I recognise that certain people who felt they connected with the language employed and who felt they had a story to tell may have been more likely to respond. In line with IPA's idiographic foundations, I therefore make no claim towards generalisability or that my data is in any way 'representative' (as classically defined) of the youth work field. I was however astounded by the response. Within a few weeks, some 25 people had come forward to express their interest in contributing to the research. Based on a research supervision discussion, each of these people was subsequently approached by email or telephone for further information as a means of attempting to ensure some level of diversity in the final sample[14]. These additional questions asked potential participants:

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[13] North East Youth Work Unit (Youth Focus North East) (the area where I live), Yorkshire and Humber Youth Work Unit (the area where I work) and West Midlands Youth Work Unit (Youth Focus, West Midlands), the area where I used to live and work, and where a number of family and friends continue to live.

[14] I explained to potential participants the need for further information in order to ensure greater diversity in the sample. Each person was happy to supply this information.

- Their age

- How they self-identified in terms of ethnicity and religious beliefs,

- How long they had been qualified as youth and community work practitioners,

- Which institution they had studied at, or were studying at,

- The level of their professionally qualifying award (Diploma in Higher Education (Dip HE), undergraduate degree or postgraduate award),

- The sectors (local authority, voluntary, social enterprise, religious) in which they had practiced

As a result of this process, it became apparent, that three respondents did not hold, nor were not studying towards professional qualifying awards, and were therefore ineligible to participate. It was also noticeable that none of the initial respondents self-identified as coming from a BAME heritage, or as Muslim, this despite the known existence of a number of Muslim youth work projects, Muslim youth workers and The Muslim Youth Work Foundation. Concerns regarding a lack of diversity were explored in research supervision, and, as result, more targeted approaches were made to colleagues in the field, whom it was felt may hold gatekeeper access to further potential participants. Happily, three further participants came forward thus enabling greater diversity in the sample. This however meant the sample size again became rather larger than was desirable or manageable. I began work to rationalise the number of participants based on gender and the range of factors outlined in the bulleted list above. The approach I employed was not 'systematic' but attempted to select a cohort based upon a breadth of characteristics including gender and consideration of the questions outlined in the bulleted list above. As a result of this process, sixteen people were asked to take part in the research. As I will discuss in the following section, I intended to interview participants three separate occasions. I felt it right to retain a larger sample size in case participants dropped

out. Remarkably, none of my participants left the process, each completing all three interviews, resulting in a considerable amount of data.

I also wanted to gain the insights of fellow-academics regarding the professional formation of students. I therefore approached colleagues at two Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) whom I knew taught modules that enable students to explore aspects of their own formative experiences as means of understanding professional motivation and 'personal development' in practice, to ask if they would contribute to the research. Both these colleagues agreed to do so. Brief pen portraits of all 18 participants can be found in Chapter 5.

4.7.1 Data collection

As noted in Chapter One, the overall research question has been broken down into seven overarching objectives which reflect the principal aims of the research. Broadly, these objectives reflect the interrelationship between three major ideas, or narrative periods. The first period relates to participants' life histories leading up to their decision to become a youth worker. The second is concerned with how respondents bring themselves to practice, and how this has may have been informed by their experiences of professional formation. The third attempts to explore how participants experience contemporary practice during a time of austerity and change, together with the meanings that might be attributed to this, and the impact of these conditions on respondents' professional and personal identities. Therefore, in an attempt to enable time to explore these ideas and generate depth in the data, I rationalised meeting each respondent on three separate occasions. (Table 4.1 maps how the research objectives were configured across the three interviews.)

Originally, I had planned to execute empirical elements of the research sequentially, by carrying out, transcribing and analysing each participant's first interview, before repeating, in turn, this process in respect of second, and then final interviews. I had rationalised this approach would allow me to share my observations with participants regarding their preceding interviews as a means of

developing validity and continuity in the research. I had thought, rather naively, this would be possible to complete in around 12 months. The reality was, however, rather different. Time and work deadlines together with issues of participant availability, and a fear on my part, that respondents may lose interest, resulting in a lack of sufficient data, led to a rather different approach.[15] Interviews were often recorded, listened to and transcribed[16], but not always formally analysed before the subsequent interview took place. As a result, the research was broadly configured around a sustained period of data collection (between April 2015 and July 2016), followed by a subsequent period of data analysis. This meant the research was perhaps 'less structured' than I had originally anticipated. Despite this, I feel a deep sense of appreciation regarding the rich data which participants shared with me.

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[15] I also attempted to manage visits to research participants by meeting those who lived in particular geographical areas within similar timescales. In some instances, diary clashes meant interviews could only be conducted by Skype (*n=5/50*).

[16] The majority of my interviews were professionally transcribed by an external company.

Table 4.1 Mapping Empirical Research Objectives to Interviews

Interview Engagement	1	2	3
	1. To explore and understand youth workers' life narratives and life histories	3. To explore and analyse youth workers' perceptions and experiences of personal and professional formation.	6. To analyse how youth work practitioners experience the realities of professional practice within contemporary policy climates, and how such experiences influence personal and professional identities
Coverage of Identified Research Objective	2. To explore how youth workers' personal narratives have influenced their vocational choices		
	4. To examine how youth workers understand and construct their identities		
	5. To consider how youth workers understand and employ their 'use of self' in professional practice (this was principally focussed upon in second interviews)		
			7 To investigate the extent to which these issues (of self and identity) are (or should be) attended to in professional formation.

Interviews are perhaps the key method of data collection in IPA and narrative enquiry. Whilst IPA research tends to suggest the use of a semi-structured approach as a means of generating a balance between consistency and flexibility, narrative work leans more towards open and unstructured interviewing, or as Goodson (2013:36) puts it, 'a vow of silence'. Whilst bricolaging narrative and IPA approaches, the focus on life histories, meant I tended to lean towards a more minimalist, but engaged approach to interviewing during first interviews. Some participants appeared to appreciate the openness of this space, others seemed however to find it a little unnerving. In the case of the latter, I offered some further structure as a means of encouraging exploration of stories. Whilst

narrative and storying remained key to interviews two and three, these interviews adopted a more semi-structured approach, which reflected the ideals laid out by Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) in respect of IPA. My approach throughout has been to see interviewing as a 'conversation with a purpose' (ibid.:57). Building rapport with participants is integral to qualitative interviewing; I am aware I consciously (and sometimes unconsciously) drew upon my practice as a youth worker and as a therapist in enabling me to build an effective 'research alliance' (Gabriel, 2009) in 'being with', and 'attending to' my participants' narratives and experiences and their semantic and latent meanings (Flick, 2014). The interview schedule was prepared with a view to enabling flexibility, whilst encouraging and providing opportunity for participants to explore their stories and experiences in depth. I sought therefore in my approach to facilitate an expansive, but focussed and detailed exploration of participants' lifeworlds, which allowed movement 'between sequences which are primarily narrative and descriptive, and those where the participant is more analytic or evaluative' (Smith *et al.*, 2009:59). This was enabled by offering participants an overview of the focus of each respective interview at the start, whilst re-assuring them of the space to explore their stories and experiences freely within those boundaries. My approach attempted to facilitate participants in exploring their stories in contextual breadth and in detailed focus, and in this sense, questions were patterned from the broad to the specific and back again. The indicative interview schedule is detailed in Appendix B; however, it should be noted my approach to the interviews was perhaps more flexible and conversational than the tone of the schedule might indicate.

Two of the first people to come forward, agreed to participate as pilot interviewees. One of these was a colleague working in a different university (who I didn't know prior to the research). The other, was a former colleague who I had been close friends with, but who I had not seen in fifteen years, who had seen my call for participants via a regional youth work unit[17]. These interviews allowed me

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[17] I did not know any of the other participants prior to the research.

to 'try out' and become more familiar with the interview schedule. I am grateful to these colleagues

for their suggestions, which led to minor tweaks in questions. However, given that little substantive

changed in terms of interview design, I decided to include the pilot interviews in the study.

Interviews varied in length. The first, life-history orientated interviews, ranged from 48-97 minutes

(mean: 73), the second set ranged from 52-100 minutes (mean: 63) with the final interviews tending

to be shorter, ranging from 29 to 80 minutes (mean: 46).

4.8.1 Research ethics

> 'Ethics is a fluid internalised and vital part of our everyday lives, where the personal and professional are intertwined. It is about how we act in the world on the basis of what we value and believe' (Proctor and Keys, 2013:422).

Ethical practice in research is underpinned by a commitment to particular professional and personal

values. Many 'professional subject bodies' within the UK academy (e.g. British, Sociological

Association, British Educational Research Association, British Psychological Association) have

developed ethical codes for research which are founded upon the principles that emerged as a result

of the Nuremberg trials. These codes attempt to strike a balance between the advancement of

human knowledge and a commitment to ensuring research does not engender harm to participants

(Ransome, 2013). At the core of these ideas is an obligation to respect the fundamental integrity of

participants' humanity, and to protect them from harm.   It can be argued however that ethical

protocols in research have, of late, been influenced by an increasingly protectionist stance. Many

HEIs appear to have become risk averse in their approach to research ethics, a concern precipitated

by fears of litigation, threats to institutional reputations (Punch, 2014) and the introduction of new

legislation including General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). This has led to a shift in culture

regarding research ethics, with some unhelpfully viewing ethics boards perfunctorily as a 'hurdle to

be passed' (Farrimond, 2013). Developing a more virtue-based perspective, and following Guillemin

and Gillam (2004), Farrimond (2013) contends such forms of 'procedural ethics' ought to be viewed

as a preparatory in enabling social researchers to consider and actively mitigate potential ethical quandaries. Such ideas need to take into account the dynamic interplay between the research topic, the methodology employed, the researcher's experience, the relative 'vulnerability' of research participants, and the potential risks (and opportunities) these combinations may engender (Bright, 2013). Thus, 'preparatory ethics', as its name suggests, should be seen as a means to prepare ethically for research, and, as a basis for ongoing reflection in ethical research practice. These ideas have been integral to my own ethical commitment and approach to the present research. I found the ethical approval process helpful not only in considering risks, but in enabling me to think ethically about the research throughout.

My approach has also been influenced by professional, ethical and research codes of practice within the professional disciplines to which I belong. Whilst youth work does not have an ethical code for research *per se*, two recognised ethical codes (National Youth Agency, 2004; Institute for Youth Work, 2018) underpin its practices. Counselling has both an ethical framework for practice (BACP, 2018) and for research (BACP, 2019). Each of these express, in different ways, principles of human value and dignity, which reflect my own axiological commitments, and which I trust I have been able to embody in this research. In particular, the BACP's *Ethical Framework for the Counselling Professions* (BACP, 2018) with its expressed commitment to trustworthiness, the promotion of participant autonomy in deciding the basis of their involvement, beneficence, non-maleficence, justice and self-respect have underpinned my approach to this work. I also found the British Sociological Association's (BSA) *Statement of Ethical Practice* (BSA, 2017) useful in re-iterating issues relating to participant wellbeing and researcher responsibility.

I have sought, not only in my Research Information and Consent Sheet but also in dialogue with participants, to be transparent in outlining the nature of, and my approach to, the research, and in

articulating possibilities in terms of potential research outputs and likely timescales in order that

respondents were able to make *informed* choices about their participation.

Sikes (2012:123) argues:

> 'Researching, writing about and re-presenting lives carries a heavy ethical burden... This is
> because individual and specific people, their various and varying roles, relationships,
> identities, experiences, perceptions, aims and motivations are central to both all aspects of
> the research endeavour and to the substantive focus of that research. As a result, and
> compared with investigations which seek to generalise rather than to concentrate on the
> particular, the consequences of unethical research and writing practices on the part of
> [biographical] and narrative researchers can be more immediate and personal and ultimately
> may be more damaging...'

This quote summarises the quandaries and ethical responsibilities, which face narrative researchers.

I attempt in the following paragraphs to address these issues, albeit briefly.

Whilst I have not set out deliberately to investigate *directly* anything of a particularly 'sensitive'

nature, I have, as Guillemin and Gillam (2004) suggested, been aware of the potency of seemingly

innocuous questions to bring about distress. I was also acutely aware that asking respondents to

recount aspects of their lives might have been painful or difficult for some. As such, I ensured

participants were aware that they could, if they wished, refuse to answer specific questions, without

any prejudice on my part. I have also been continually aware that narrative approaches to research

can represent an 'intervention and interruption in the participant's life' (Goodson and Gill, 2011:29),

and the significance of this in respect of people's sense of identity. Narrative work potentially affords

opportunities for respondents to take stock of life and change direction; however, these processes

can also represent surprise, rupture and even distress for which participants may not be prepared.

Although I approached research interviews with this awareness, and in some instances witnessed

these effects[18] to some degree, participants did not express anything that caused me undue concern regarding their wellbeing[19].

In line with specific methodological ethical advice (Goodson and Sikes, 2001; Sikes, 2012, 2018), I have sought continually to consider issues of power and privilege in narrative research – that despite my espoused attempts towards an egalitarian approach with research participants, I as the 'inquirer', held a place of particular power in the research. That is, I was aware of the questions I was likely to ask, and the types of responses I might expect, or validate, whilst participants were not. This is further underlined by the highly relational nature of my professional background as a counsellor and youth worker, through which I hold particular wherewithals or forms of professional and relational capital by which I am able to 'extract' information. This 'use of self' has undoubtedly aided the research. However, I have continually had to hold in awareness the need to use these skills for beneficent, rather than exploitative or deceptive means.

Moreover, whilst I have been encouraged that a number of participants have expressed their gratitude for the research as a space to explore and think, (with some, as noted previously, even articulating that it was 'like therapy')[20], I have been aware of managing issues of potential duality as researcher and 'therapist'. This has been especially the case in respect of people's explorations of their own life histories – an activity and a process that particularly resonates with my experience as a therapist. In this sense, I have been aware that the 'research alliance' I have experienced with my co-researchers has engendered particular fruits *and* tensions. I concur therefore with Etherington (2004:226) who suggests: 'Being in reflexive relationships with our participants creates a level of intimacy that might invite them to reveal previously unarticulated, deeply personal stories.'

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[18] Namely surprise, articulation of new awareness, and, in one or two instances a commitment towards change.
[19] Had I become concerned, I would have explored possible support options with participants.
[20] This is something which Goodson and Gill (2011:29) note is a common phenomenon in narrative research.

Over the course of three sessions, I developed a certain connection with people. I feel privileged that research participants allowed me a window into their lives, and it is my hope I honour the fiduciary trust they placed in me in doing so. As Finlay and Evans (2009a:159) note: 'In addition to respecting and protecting the dignity of the co-researcher, relational ethics demands that we recognize the interconnection between researcher and researched, and our wider communities.' This idea resonates on a number of different levels. Heuristically, in approaching this topic, I wanted to more deeply understand aspects of my own experiences, through understanding and comparing these with those of others (Moustakas, 1990; Sultan, 2018). In this sense, participants' accounts entwine with aspects of my own. This places a particular duty on me to represent their accounts truthfully and sensitively, yet with a level of analytical insight that attempts to advance knowledge and conceptualisations regarding youth work and youth workers' lives. I am also aware of these connections on a professional level. Issues of positionality and reflexivity are integral to research ethics. In pursuing an 'insider' qualitative approach that articulates particular socio-political ideas regarding youth work as a profession, my own onto-epistemological position is one that is concerned with attempting to speak critically to issues that impact upon both youth workers and youth work. This, as Ransome (2013) notes, significantly affects the ethics of conceptualising, developing, executing and presenting research. Furthermore, whilst commitments to promoting anonymity have been integral to this research[21], because youth work in England is a relatively 'small' and 'tight-knit' professional community in which people, and their stories, are often 'known', I have never offered or assured participants of confidentiality. However, when issues of particular sensitivity were discussed in interviews, on certain occasions I returned to participants to clarify whether they were happy to include this data in the research. As part of my commitment to ethical research practice, I have ensured participant information and data has, at all times, been recorded,

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[21] Participants were asked to select pseudonyms

transcribed, analysed and stored safely within password-protected systems, which comply with the requirements of ethical approval.

4.9.1 Data analysis

Murray (2015) is among a number of writers who notes there is no single, agreed, or unified framework for analysing narrative data. Similarly, Smith *et al* (2009) contend that IPA ought to be expansive, and researchers' approach to it flexible. In light of this commitment to flexibility, Smith and colleagues do however offer a framework for analysing data. They view this not as a step-by-step recipe, but rather as a facilitative tool, underpinned by IPA's ideals, that enables researchers to engage rigorously, yet adaptably with their data. Having found this framework useful in previous research, and judging it provides a solid basis for data analysis, I have broadly adopted its principles in approaching the present data. In common with many qualitative approaches, and in line with Smith *et al*'s suggestion, I firstly immersed myself in the recorded and transcribed data, listening to, and reading each interview and transcript, often on a number of occasions. This allowed me to develop a deeper understanding of the essence of participants' experiences. Having immersed myself in an interview, I began the process of coding each transcript in turn. In the majority of cases, this meant 'working across' each participant's interviews. This allowed me to gain an overall sense of each respondent's narrative. In other cases, in which not all participant interviews had been completed, I worked with the data available at the time. This meant that in some instances, a series of 'first' interviews were analysed, meaning I sometimes initially worked 'down' the data. This process allowed me to gain a sense of the overarching themes prevalent in participants' life histories.

In order to triangulate and build a sense of validity in the data, I ensured that by the end of the analytical process, I had checked *across* each participant's account in order to ensure a sense of overall narrative cohesion*, and down* each of the first, second, and third interviews in turn in order

to validate the themes emerging from each 'tranche' of the data. Smith *et al* suggest a three-column template for data analysis: 'Original Transcript', 'Exploratory Comments' and 'Emergent Themes'. In addition, I added a fourth column 'Reflexive Commentary' to my own template (see Appendix C as an example). I did this as a means of noting and bracketing off connections between the transcript under analysis and previously analysed work, and as a means of noting conceptual connections to the literature I was engaging with, and indeed, to aspects of my own experiencing. Following Smith *et al*, my approach to initial coding involved adopting simultaneously dual positions. Firstly, it involved noting semantic and latent meaning in attempting to remain phenomenologically focussed on each portion of the interview as it unfolded. Secondly, it involved noting connections between aspects of each transcript and the wider data, and the influence of context upon participants' experiences. In this respect, I attempted to develop empathic and hermeneutic connections with the data as my engagement with it unfolded. This resonates with Smith *et al*. (2009:84) who suggest:

> '...as you move through the transcript, you are likely to comment on similarities and differences, echoes, amplifications, and contradictions in what the person is saying[22]. It is important to engage in analytic dialogue with each line of transcript, asking questions of what the word, phrase, sentence means to you, and attempting to check what it means for the participant.'

In line with Smith *et al*'s suggestion, coding the data involved a blend of descriptive, linguistic and conceptual commentary. Descriptive coding refers the describing what is happening in participants' lifeworlds – 'factually', experientially, sequentially, relationally, emotionally etc. Linguistic coding refers to the use and significance of language *and* latent meaning. Conceptual coding is concerned with more interpretative frames - of interrogating the data by dialoguing with it, and in making connections with existing conceptual lenses.

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[22] And between what different participants say.

Stylistically, given the amount of data I engaged with over a longer, sustained period, I tended to develop longer, more 'narrative' codes (see Appendix C). This allowed me to develop context and ensure each data item was more accessible and easily remembered when I returned to it. After coding each interview, I would return to it and develop shorter and more dispersed 'codes' that attempted to represent what was happening in a larger portion of the data. These became initial candidate themes within each interview. These initial themes were then clustered together as a means of generating emergent themes in each interview. This process was repeated sequentially for each of the participants' interviews. Upon completion of this exercise, candidate themes for each participant were placed in tabular form (see Appendix D), and I began the process of connecting thematic motifs across the dataset. Smith *et al.* (2009:96) refer to this process as 'abstraction', 'a basic form of identifying patterns between emergent themes and developing a sense of what can be called a 'super-ordinate' theme. It involves putting like with like and developing a new name for the cluster.' They note that the gradual and iterative process of working with emergent and subsequently superordinate themes results in a shift in analytical focus as the analyst 'attempts to reduce the volume of detail' (ibid.:91). Given the relatively large amount of data I found myself working with, and my commitment to understanding experience in the context of story, on completion of initial coding and theming, I returned (again) to 'work across' contributors' interviews in order to produce a detailed thematic summary of each participant's account. This process produced a narrativized case study account of each participant's experiences, which blended a re-telling of their stories including extracted illustrative quotes, with my own personal and analytical dialogue with each case. These case studies (each of which were around 6000 words in length) became summaries of each contributor's account and represented an important staging post in the data analysis, enabling manageability and further internal triangulation of the data. The conceptual dialogue at this point also enabled the development and enhancement of abstract conceptualisation

in the data – and the creation of the overarching motifs or master-conceptual themes discussed in the following chapters. The final stage involved (re-)turning to work 'down' the data (taking interview one, interview two and interview three in turn) as means of final thematic iteration and validation. During this process, I remained aware of the tensions between phenomenological representation and conceptual analysis. Smith *et al* note, in this regard, that researchers can risk 'be[ing] too cautious, producing analyses that are too descriptive' (ibid.:103). This challenge chimes with the various criticalist approaches to narrative discussed earlier in this chapter, which inform my own worldview, and which frame the interpretative processes in this research.

These processes and ideas play a significant role in the ways in which I have gathered, analysed, conceptualised and represented the data. As noted in my discussion of sampling, the sample size in this thesis is substantial for an IPA study. This has presented challenges in relation to data analysis and representation. However, Smith *et al* (2009:107) helpfully note: 'Studies with larger samples require considerable skill in retaining an idiographic focus on the individual voice at the same time as making claims for the larger group.' They suggest researchers working with larger cohorts will engage in 'summarizing, condensing and illustrating what [they] consider the main themes to be... By limiting the number of quotes which may be presented, it forces the analyst/author to be more confident in their account of the analysis and not to rely on (or hide behind) multiple quotes' (ibid.:114/116). These ideas have informed how I have chosen to represent the data in the chapters that follow. I have sought in adopting, developing and using vignettes to present and (re-)interpret data, which I hope is in some way representative of the collective essence of participants' accounts. I do so, trusting it generates a sense of nuance, whilst recognising it can in no way represent the entirety of every aspect of my participants' storied experiences.

> 'The validity of research corresponds to the degree to which it is accepted as sound, legitimate and authoritative by people with an interest in the research findings' (Yardley, 2015:257).

Finlay and Evans (2009b:58ff) posit four principles - rigour, relevance, resonance and reflexivity which they hold as essential to the development and assessment of validity in qualitative research. They argue these ideas underpin, and relate to the credibility, transferability/ applicability, dependability and confirmability of research. 'Rigour', they suggest, refers to the demonstrable extent to which research has been effectively and systematically managed. Relevance relates to the 'value of the research in terms of its applicability and contribution' (ibid:.61) in respect of developing knowledge regarding facets of the social world, together with ways in which it brings about potential change, and the extent to which 'co-researchers [have] gained some comfort from being listened to and heard' (ibid.:61). Resonance, they contend, reflects the ways in which research vividly and affectively 'taps into emotional, artistic and/or spiritual dimensions' (ibid.:62), and the extent to which the findings resonate with, or disturb readers' perceptions of their own experiences and worldviews. Fourthly, they argue the centrality of reflexivity – the researcher's openness and own self-awareness regarding issues of positionality and (inter-)subjectivity during the research process, and the potential impact of these upon the research.

Yardley (2015) expresses four different, but related concepts that she views as a means to evaluate the validity of qualitative work. Firstly, she suggests '[g]ood qualitative research must show that it is sensitive to the perspective and socio-cultural context of participants' (ibid.:265) – this relates to the ways in which the research is designed, and the data, gathered, analysed and represented. In drawing on Yardley's framework as a model for developing validity in IPA studies, Smith *et al* (2009) suggest that sensitivity to context also encompasses ensuring participant voices are heard, and demonstration of rigour in the applied analysis of conceptual-theoretical and methodological ideas.

Secondly, 'commitment and rigour' is concerned with ensuring the research has been executed thoroughly, with sufficient depth and breadth, and in a way that makes a contribution to knowledge in the field (Yardley, 2015). This, Yardley argues can be demonstrated via 'theoretical sophistication... or through an empathic understanding of participants' perspectives resulting from extensive in-depth engagement with the topic' (ibid.:266). In relation to IPA studies, Smith *et al* (2009) suggest this second criterion can be established through showing attentiveness to participants and their narratives in data collection and analysis. Thirdly, Yardley (2015) suggests the coherence and transparency of a piece of research reflects the extent to which the study makes sense as a whole, and the capacity of the researcher to demonstrate how they have (flexibly and judiciously) applied methodological frameworks in executing their work. Finally, Yardley argues validity can be assessed by the significance, impact and applicability of research in developing theory and bringing about real-world change. Procedurally, I have sought to reflect these ideas by developing the internal validity of the work by triangulating both 'across' and 'down' the research sample in order to develop a sense of representativeness and coherence in the thesis. I have sought to make connections with existing literature and related conceptual work in the field as a means of engendering synthesis and attempting to advance knowledge. I trust too my exploration of methodological theory and discussion of its application to the present research demonstrates both rigour and clarity. In these ways, I have found the validative frameworks outlined by Finlay and Evans, Yardley and Smith *et al*. influential and re-affirming, and trust I am able to speak with authority, humility and clarity about my interpretations of participants' contextualised lifeworld experiences in the chapters that follow.

4.11 Concluding Comments

In this chapter, I have sought to contextualise and locate my methodological choices within wider philosophical debates regarding the nature of reality and knowledge. I have explored facets of, and

discussions regarding, phenomenology and narrative research, and rationalised bricolaging IPA and narrative approaches as a means of understanding and critically contextualising research participants' lifeworld experiences. I have attempted to explicate the significance of my own worldviews upon the hermeneutic processes, and to articulate ways in which these have come to shape my reflexive, dialogical engagement with the study, in framing it in a critically abductive fashion. This led me to discuss the application of these underpinning ideas in relation to the research design, data collection and analysis, and to consider the significance of these ideas in respect of sampling, research ethics and validity. This broader hermeneutic synthesis has led to the development of a potential new research methodology, which draws on the rich potential of phenomenological approaches in order to frame experiences more fully within critical approaches to narrative.

Chapter 5

Participant Pen Portraits

5.1 Introduction

In advancing methodological discussion, and in preparation for the presentation and discussion of analysed data, a brief pen portrait of each research participant, is developed in this chapter. These portraits draw principally on data generated during the first interviews, and from each participant's collated 'case study' (see Chapter 4). These are brief accounts of key elements of respondents' life histories. They include reference to participants' early life, family, education, work experience, pathways into youth work and current practice. A table containing an abbreviated overview of each participant can be found in Appendix E.

As indicated earlier, names have been changed, and unique or identifying features have been disguised.

Table 5.1 Participant Overview

5.1.1 Adele

Adele was born in the 1990s to a middle-class family in the south of England. Despite its relative affluence, Adele's upbringing was challenging. Although her dad was "always on good money and mum had her own business", Adele, who was born with Foetal Alcohol Syndrome, "always got the vibe that something wasn't right". She described her dad as emotionally detached and physically inexpressive. As her parents' marriage came under increasing pressure, Adele, who was the youngest of four siblings, was regularly taken out of school by her mum on Thursdays, disappearing until the following Monday to the family's caravan. Her parents split up when she was 11, and Adele, out of pity and concern for her mum's worsening alcoholism, was the only one of her siblings who decided to live with her. This meant moving from a large affluent household to: "a two bedroomed really crammed thing with nothing, no money. I'd started to go to school with holes in all my clothes, had you know hardly any money because she just drank all day every day." Adele's experience of school also changed: going from a school that embraced and encouraged an aspirational culture, to one where pupils despised it. Viewed by her new peers as "posh", Adele was bullied from day one. She learned to adapt and survive by becoming a "very mouthy, very gobby, not very nice person", who ended up bullying others. Despite being relatively clever, Adele, disengaged educationally, becoming disruptive in class. Yet no one knew, or even asked about the realities of what she was dealing with at home. She left school with C+ GCSEs to study Health and Social Care at college. It was here that Adele's tutors began to discuss with her the idea of youth work, a job she had never

heard of, as a potential career option. Since graduating, Adele, has worked for the local authority in the area where she grew up.

5.1.2 Alfie

Alfie was born in the early 1960s. He has an older and younger sister. He grew up in a city in the north of England, where he continues to live and work. He described his family as traditional, working-class, but aspirational. Although his family did not have materially as much as others in the area, he reported having "... a nice upbringing" ". The community he lived in was close-knit. He attended a "nice" primary school. He was average academically, but not particularly engaged. Yet, Alfie recounted the sense of sociality school gave him. Alfie actively tried to fail his 11+ exam in order that he could go to secondary school with his friends. Aged 14, he described the world opening up to him. Public transport enabled him to meet friends from across the city, and he became heavily involved in youth clubs and the local music scene, both of which were vibrant at the time. On leaving school, he took up a joinery apprenticeship. He recounted how his apprenticeship not only taught him skills, but was a "real kind of education... learning about life and learning about other people, that you work around and how it all fits in." The end of his apprenticeship coincided with the Falklands conflict. During this time, he developed more critical perspectives regarding nationalism, racism, militarisation, capitalism and injustice that awakened his leftist socio-political worldview, and which eventually saw him become actively involved in anti-fascist groups. On completing his apprenticeship, Alfie worked briefly for a building company before travelling around Europe, returning to set up a family company. Alfie began to mentor the firm's apprentices, and in the process began to realise and enjoy the sense of connection and value this brought him, not only in helping his apprentices learn a trade, but in helping them with life issues. His love of this work led him into part-time youth work, and eventually to completing a professionally qualifying DipHE in youth and community work in the early 2000s. Since qualifying, Alfie has worked in a number of

centre-based and detached youth work roles, later joining the city's Youth Offending Team, where at the time the research was conducted, he had been a senior manager for a number of years.

5.1.3 Annie

Annie was brought up in the home of her millworker grandfather and her grandmother who was a nurse. Family life was loving, but they knew poverty. Her mum married Annie's step-dad, a divorcee, who proved to be something of an entrepreneur, and who slowly elevated the family's status. Annie was successful at school. She became head girl at primary school and achieved academically at secondary school, where she became increasingly aware of issues of injustice. This was highlighted further when she was selected to join an elite state-sponsored college, where her position as one of only a handful of council-estate students was juxtaposed with the majority of her wealthier peers. One of her teacher's stories of life on a kibbutz, inspired a 17-year-old Annie to travel to Israel do the same. This experience opened her mind to different worldviews, solidifying her views regarding the importance and possibilities of community. Her time in the kibbutz also brought issues of poverty and inequality into sharper focus. After a year working with the Racial Equality Commission, and encouraged by her step-dad, Annie set up her own successful business. Yet she felt something was missing – she wanted to find a career that enabled her to live out her values and to give something back. A friend who was a youth worker encouraged her to think about youth work, and after volunteering and part-time work, Annie decided to study for a professional-qualifying DipHE, from which she graduated in 1996. Since qualifying, Annie has worked in a range of youth and community work roles in her hometown local authority, and, as of the final interview, had been a youth work Locality Manager for ten years.

5.1.4 Charlie

Born in southern England in the mid-1980s, Charlie was brought up in a middle-class Christian family. Charlie's dad is a water engineer, and his mum, who stayed home for much of Charlie and his elder sister's childhood later trained as an Anglican vicar. The family spent two years working in Uganda, where his dad supported the development of regional infrastructure. Like another participant, Elsa, Charlie recounted the strangeness of being a white family living in the local community, while having servants and a strangely elevated status. The family returned to the UK when Charlie was around six years old, settling in a town in the English Midlands. He enjoyed primary school, and did well at secondary school, gaining good GCSEs. Yet he felt disdain for the rigid institutionalisation his school came to represent. He chose A-Levels in more creative subjects; however, around this time, he started to enjoy greater freedom, and paid decreasing attention to his studies, which resulted in A Level results that disappointed him. Following his interest in outdoor pursuits, he chose to study for a degree in Outdoor Education. He decided however not to study the final year of the programme, instead using the next couple of years to work seasonally at an Irish outdoor centre. While there, Charlie went on a journey that reframed his faith, but he became dissatisfied with the lack of sustained relational contact with young people, who would come and go each week. These processes, and a chance conversation with an Irish TV producer, led to him study for a youth and community work degree at an English university, which he completed in 2011. Upon graduating, Charlie became manager of a voluntary sector detached youth work project in the north of England. At the point of the final interview, Charlie was preparing to leave this role to take up a new position in the field elsewhere in the country.

5.1.5 Chris

Chris was born in a large town in the north-east of England in the late 1960s. She was brought up in a working-class household that she described as typical of the area. Chris spent lots of time at her grandparents' house, but without her dad, who was never welcome. Her parents usually had little or no money and struggled to pay the rent on their small, terraced house. She loved primary school, but recalled playing truant one day, an event that led to police involvement and being shamed in front of the rest of the school. This experience left her feeling humiliated. Chris cited this as key in her decision to eventually pursue a career in youth and community work, a profession she sees as giving voice and dignity to people. Meeting a careers advisor in her final year of secondary also proved critical. Chris harboured ambitions of being a doctor but was scoffed at by the advisor who suggested she perhaps ought to consider nursing instead. As a result, she disengaged in her final year. After leaving school, she joined the local authority, working in the administration and payroll department, eventually working in the section that supported youth and community work. Her first foray into youth work came when she covered for colleagues who were sick. This was something Chris loved, and she soon found herself regularly volunteering, and eventually working as a part-time youth worker. Colleagues began to recognise how good a youth worker Chris was, and suggested she study for a professional qualification. She completed her DipHE in the early 1990s, returning to finish a degree top-up some twenty years later. Since qualifying, Chris has worked in a range of youth and community roles with the local authority. Since the decimation of the local authority's provision, Chris has moved into the voluntary sector, where she now leads a youth work organisation that is committed to enabling young people's voice and participation.

5.1.6 Elsa

Elsa was born in the mid-1960s in a rural area near a town in the English Midlands. Elsa described her family as "middle-class. The family moved to Nigeria for eighteen months when Elsa was a child. She recounted her life there vividly, recalling the adventure and learning this experience afforded her. Returning to England, the family built their own house in a small village. Growing up, she was afforded what she now considers incredible amount of freedom. Aged 14, she was allowed to go on long-distance cycling and camping trips on her own. Academically, Elsa was a bright and inquisitive child, who was well-liked by her teachers. Elsa's transition to secondary school was a "bit of a jolt". Whilst she had been praised for her academic intelligence at primary school, she was castigated as "posh" by her new peers. As a result, Elsa found it difficult to make friends. Elsa left school with good O and A levels and considered studying at Oxbridge. However, she found the environment on visit days "pretentious", and as a result, became increasingly anti-elitist in her views. Instead, she decided to go to university in the city where she now lives. She recounted how studying philosophy as part of her degree began to open up the world to her in new ways. One module that encompassed ideas regarding nineteenth century conceptualisations of community, had a profound influence on her, and left her feeling that she needed to find ways to make a difference. After university, Elsa felt a vocational void: "I didn't want to do a meaningless job really. I wanted to do something with meaning that was about people and helping people." One of her friends suggested she might consider exploring youth work. This led her to contact the head of the local youth service, who offered Elsa voluntary work in a youth centre. Elsa completed her part-time award in youth work, before deciding to study for a professionally qualifying postgraduate award, which she completed in the early 2000s. Since then, she has worked in a variety of local authority roles, most substantively in a young people's advice and wellbeing centre, which although under threat, is where she continued to work at the time of the final interview.

5.1.7 Freya

Freya was born in West Yorkshire in the late 1980s. She identified as "Black". Aged 6, her dad won a substantial amount of money on the National Lottery, resulting in a move to a more affluent area nearby. However, her dad squandered much of the money, becoming an alcoholic. This led to her parents arguing, and Freya's mum taking Freya and her sister to a "rough area" nearby to live with one of her mum's friends. Her mum remarried; however, her step-dad became a heroin addict. Freya recounted feeling "voiceless" during this time. Freya's mum, who had since given birth to two other children, struggled to cope. Freya became, and to some extent remains, the family's mother figure - an "instinct" that influences her practice as a youth worker. Freya recalled being made to feel different at school, especially when she moved to an all-White school in the more affluent area where they lived after the lottery win. Although she was happy the school tried to include, her, she felt uncomfortable that her 'differences' as a Black child were pointed out. Moving school again, Freya no longer wanted to the be the 'target' of difference and started "picking on other people". At first, this was an act, but as her behaviour became legitimated by her peers, she created a reputation she had to live up to. These behavioural patterns continued into secondary school, where she began to turn her behaviour towards defending people from bullying, gaining a reputation as someone who "genuinely cares for people." Although she had no experience of youth work herself as a young person, her Year 11 work experience in a youth centre, proved seminal. She recounted feeling at home in this environment where she could be herself in her interactions with young people. After school, she went on to study Public Services at college. After falling unexpectedly pregnant, aged 19, Freya's relationship with her partner turned violent, resulting in them splitting up. She decided to return to college to study sports leadership. She loved the practical elements of this course, working with children and young people. Wanting to take her work with young people

further, she applied to study a youth and community work degree, which she completed on the day of the final interview.

5.1.8 Jane

Jane was born in a market town in the north of England in the late 1960s. An only child, her mum worked in a factory and her dad as a secondary school teacher. She described her childhood as "idyllic", and her experience of primary school as "lovely, inclusive and very secure". Growing up, Jane was particularly close to her dad, and had a natural aptitude for sport and music. Jane's transition to secondary school was something of a "shock to the system". At times, she felt isolated, but she cited this experience, and in particular the support she received from a teacher who "saved" her, as significant to her own pathway into youth and community work. Jane was bullied at secondary school. This experience shattered her illusion of a "chocolate box world", but it taught her how to "survive", and motivated her towards wanting to understand people and challenge injustices. Jane started to disengage educationally, going from top to lower sets in all her subjects. This was exacerbated by her teachers who told her she "would amount to nothing... was useless... a waste of time." Studying hard in the last three months of school, she passed all her O-Levels. Her experiences of education, and a recognition that its "impact ripples out for decades and decades", together with her own very positive experiences of youth work as a teenager, became significant drivers in her vocational pathway. After school, Jane began volunteering, in a youth club, eventually becoming a part-time worker. The loss of her mum brought a new focus for Jane, and she decided, after a year of traveling around Australasia, to study for a degree in youth and community work. On qualifying, she became a neighbourhood youth worker for a local authority in the south of England, subsequently moving to the English Midlands whereupon she took up various voluntary and paid roles in the field. During this period, she studied for an MA, and at the time of conducting the interviews was teaching youth and community work in a university.

5.1.9 Johnny

Johnny was born in the mid-1960s in a deprived area of a northern English city. He perceived his life as "normal", typical of growing up in one of the city's "notorious housing estates" at that time. His dad, who was a problem drinker, worked intermittently as a labourer, whilst his mum worked in a factory and supplemented the family's income by working as a mobile hairdresser. Johnny recalled, that despite its challenges, the estate had a strong sense of community. Aged 11, Johnny's family moved from their flat to a council house just off the estate. At the same time, Johnny moved schools. He described his experience of school and the local area at the time as "profoundly violent". Changing schools also opened up the world to Johnny. Meeting new people enabled him to begin to see the world beyond the close confines of his own estate. New friendships were formed around the emergent punk scene - something that gave him a visceral and connective means of self-expression. At the same time, as soldiers who lived on the estate returned on leave, he began to critically question British involvement on the Island of Ireland. Whilst at primary school, his inquisitiveness was praised, at secondary school, his questions regarding this and other social issues were viewed as insolence. However, he warmly recounted his Art teacher's ability to build relationships with his pupils, and how he inspired Johnny to express himself. On leaving school, he immersed himself in various sub-cultural scenes in the city. Through music, he began volunteering in a community development project, and was encouraged to apply for a part-time youth work role, eventually completing a professional qualifying DipHE award. Since qualifying, he has worked in various roles, and at the final interview, had been manager of a long-established voluntary sector project for a number of years.

Kenan grew up in a large "West Indian" family of 13 siblings. Kenan's dad wasn't around much, and it transpired after his death that he had had another family. Kenan's mum, who held the family together whilst training to be a nurse, had arrived from the West Indies during the Windrush. She moved her ever-growing family around various towns and cities across the length of England, eventually settling in one place when Kenan was 7 years old. Shortly after starting school, and following an IQ test, Kenan was offered a scholarship at a regional boarding school where he would spend much of the following seven years. He revelled in having the run of the big county house where the school was situated. Outdoor learning and week-long school trips to different places, including abroad, were normal pedagogical practices. The school encouraged Kenan academically, and on his return home, it became apparent he was streets ahead of his peers. His time at boarding school ended around the age of 12. Moving back to the city meant adjusting educationally as well as coming to terms with his identity as a "Black", working-class adolescent.

I In his late teens moved back to another city where the family had lived and where relatives remained. Here, Kenan became increasingly involved in gang activity, witnessing the shooting of a friend who was sat next to him in a car. On another occasion, he was caught up in an altercation with a group of 15 white males who attempted to stab him. Kenan managed to turn the knife on his assailant. But by not admitting any culpability, he ended up spending time in a young offender institution – an experience that left him with a profound distrust of systems and authority. Within days, he witnessed the suicide of a fellow inmate. This led him to become an advocate for his peers. After his release, Kenan built up his own business, which found different ways to support young people and the community; however, he found himself back in prison after being "fitted up" for refusing, on moral grounds, to provide particular information to the police. Back in prison, he again took on various welfare and advocacy roles, this time, being paid to do so. While there, he studied

for various qualifications including a degree, and, on his release, began working, initially voluntarily, with the Probation Service. The head of the local probation team saw Kenan's potential and put him in touch with a lecturer in youth and community work whom she knew. Kenan applied for and was accepted on to the course. Interviews with Kenan were conducted during his final year of study.

5.1.11 Louise

Louise was born in the late 1980s near a city in the north of England. Growing up, she had little to do with her dad who she described as "troublesome." She recounted her childhood as a time of "freedom", and of living in working class areas that had a real sense of community. Working in the pub trade, meant her family moved around quite a lot. Resultantly, Louise attended three different primary schools, where she was "easily distracted" and ended up in trouble "quite a bit". Louise's view of her secondary education was 'functional' – school was there to be completed. It was here however that her interest in youth work began. She started to compare her own experiences of life and growing up with those of her peers, many of whom came from "troublesome backgrounds" and who were living with abuse or impacted by crime. Outside of school, Louise was involved in performing arts. Through this, she began mentoring two 14-year-old girls who were rather disengaged from the group's activities. Her relationship with them helped the girls to participate more fully. It was a process that developed her interest in youth work. After school, she worked in various office jobs for a while, before becoming pregnant in her late teens. She felt judged at the parents' group she joined at her local SureStart Centre and was left frustrated that it failed to meet her needs as a young mum. As a result, she worked with SureStart to set up a separate group for other young mums. This venture eventually led to the constitution of a separate organisation that went on to work at a strategic level with other organisations in the city. This experience refuelled Louise's passion to develop similar work with young people and communities. A discussion with a youth worker who worked for a partner organisation, led to Louise eventually studying for a youth

and community work degree. The final interview took place with Louise in the weeks leading up to the completion of her course.

5.1.12 Naseem

Naseem was born in a northern city in the 1980s. Her family is Muslim and of Indian heritage. She viewed the complexity of these aspects of her identity as richly integral to her youth work practice. The family's cornershop was both central to the rhythm of family life and to the local community. Naseem described the daily interactions in the shop in rich narrative terms – as the setting for unfolding storylines, and as a backdrop for a very close-knit local community, a place where people would not only come for shopping, but to give and receive help and support. The shop gave the family a particular status in the local community, and Naseem an appreciation for the richness and diversity of community - ideals that continue to influence her practice as a youth and community worker. However, her identity as a British Indian-Muslim rendered her 'different' and resulted in bullying at school. Despite this, school was broadly a rewarding and happy experience, where she was able to flourish in creative subjects. She recalled how praise from teachers in specific subjects motivated her to learn more. After school, she attended at foundation course at Art College, before going to university to study Theatre Design - each experiences which broadened her horizons in different ways. Theatre and art allowed Naseem to explore and express her curiosity regarding people's stories, a fascination which continues to inform her youth and community work practice. Naseem worked for a while as a self-employed theatre designer, before 'discovering' youth work in the late 2000s, whereupon she decided to study locally for a post-graduate, professional qualifying award. At the time of the interviews, Naseem had two part-time jobs in the field. One of these roles continued to draw on her experiences of theatre and the creative arts in enabling women from an Asian community to tell and collate their own life histories.

Nikki grew up in the 1970s and 1980s on a working-class social housing estate in the north-east of England. Poverty impacted her aspirations and outlook on life, and indeed, those of the rest of her estate too. She described an environment in which everyone knew and looked after each other, but which was very parochial in its outlook. In many senses, the estate was the entirety of life for its residents. Her dad worked on the shipyards, and her recollections of deindustrialisation and industrial action during the Thatcher era were poignant. At primary school, she was bright and creative. However, in moving to secondary school, her capabilities were not taken into account. The reputation of the area where she lived, meant that without consultation, teachers placed Nikki in lower sets. As a result, she disengaged. Despite the sense of community, life on the estate was "tough". But it was here she encountered youth work for the first time. Although enjoyable, she later came to view her experience of youth work as an exercise in containment. The youth centre was attached to the school. Many of the workers were teachers who held their own views regarding the young people as pupils, what they were 'capable of' and the perceived limitations of what life on the estate meant for their futures. For Nikki, this personal experience continues to have a profound influence on her own practice. She attempts to recognise and work against any such hegemonies on the estate where she now practices. By the time she was 20, Nikki had two children. Doing "little courses" started to open her horizons. She took a job as a lunchtime supervisor in a secondary school. She and others started to realise how good she was at connecting with teenagers. One of those was a qualified youth worker, who suggested Nikki undertake a part-time course in youth work. After time working as a Teaching Assistant, a job she found to be too structured, Nikki embarked on a Youth and Community Work degree, which she completed in the late 2000s. Since qualifying, she has worked in various roles, and, as of the final interview, had for several years been,

manager of an estate-based voluntary sector youth and community work organisation in her hometown.

5.1.14 Ray

Ray was born in an industrial town in the north-east of England in the mid-1960s. He grew up in a tight-knit, working-class community. His dad was a labourer and his mum worked in various jobs, before becoming a carer for elderly people. His family "weren't very well-off", but he enjoyed being part of a larger extended family, who would spend lots of time together. He recalled hating the first primary school he attended, citing how teachers used to throw board rubbers at pupils. Moving to a new house meant moving school. Ray felt his new school was a more positive experience. Ray enjoyed secondary school more. He tried hard and enjoyed learning, but by his own admission "wasn't [academically] very good" . On leaving school, Ray briefly went on a YTS scheme, before being offered a job in a timber yard - a job he enjoyed in the summer, but which was very hard work in the winter. The closure of the docks in the early 1990s as part of the wider deindustrialisation of the town, meant that many, including Ray lost their jobs. Ray opted to return to college to study for an IT qualification; while there, he began playing football at a local youth centre. A chance conversation during one of those sessions led Ray to volunteer at the centre. This eventually led to some part-time work and a part-time qualification in youth work through the local authority's youth service. Ray loved this work, and a colleague suggested he undertake the full-time professional qualifying DipHE award, which he completed in the late 1990s. Since qualifying, Ray has worked in a variety of roles within different local authorities in the north of England, many of which have focussed on young people's participation. At the time of the research, Ray had been working as a youth worker within a Pupil Referral Unit for a number of years.

5.1.15 Steve

Steve was born in the late 1960s, growing up on the outskirts of a city, in what was the largest council estate in Europe. He was the eldest of three children born to "older" parents whose working-class, community-focussed values had been shaped by their experiences of World War 2. He described his childhood as "great", but relatively "sheltered". He attended an experimental secondary school, which had no uniform and eventually gained a negative reputation. He gained a couple of O-Levels and some CSEs, before starting work aged 16. As a teenager, he joined the Boys' Brigade. This marked his first exposure to any form of youth work, and to his exploration of the Christian faith, both of which have become integral to his life, work and identity. His involvement with music, church, and through them voluntary youth work, grew during his late teens and early twenties, eventually culminating in a 'vocational moment' that saw him move into full-time church-based youth work. Latterly, in his forties, he studied for a degree in youth and community work. At the start of research, Steve was working alongside his wife for a church on a Midlands estate. By the final interview, he was working for a similar project on a social housing estate in a city in southern England.

5.1.16 Tom

Tom was born in the late 1960s to a working-class parents in a city in the English Midlands. His parents' relationship broke down when he was young, and he remembers the stigma of growing up the son of a single mum in the city's Irish-Catholic quarter. The family returned to Ireland, where Tom was raised by his mum and grandparents. School in Ireland was a strict and disciplinary affair at the hands of the Christian Brothers. Aged 9, the family returned, with very few possessions, to the English city where he was born. This return had a profound impact on Tom's social consciousness and in shaping his eventual pathway into youth and community work. The family came to rely on benefits, and he recounted his mum speaking in glowing terms about the support given by local

Labour Party politicians in helping them access the support they needed. The family's continuing poverty meant they regularly hid from debt collectors, sometimes moving around the city and wider region to escape them. This resulted in numerous changes of school for Tom. This transience meant he found it difficult to develop and sustain friendships. These factors, combined with his belief that schools failed to encourage his academic capabilities, meant Tom disengaged in his final years at school, resulting in him leaving with minimal CSEs. He left school with deeply entrenched socialist values, which although he found difficult to articulate, had been shaped by his own experiences and by what he saw in the outside world. Tom found himself entering the world of work during the 1984 miners' strike, travelling across the Midlands with his boss who was an ardent Thatcherite. He became his political interlocutor, enabling Tom to sharpen his thinking. After a succession of other jobs, Tom joined a well-known regional mega-factory, becoming a union rep at the age of 22. This experience broadened Tom's horizons and deepened his political education, allowing him to engage with and advocate for others, whilst challenging authority and pursuing rights and justice. The collapse of the mega-factory in the mid-2000s left Tom at a crossroads. He began volunteering at summer youth work sessions set up to support the locality in the wake of the closure, before being offered some part-time paid work. As this summer programme came to an end, Tom, with the support of experienced youth workers, applied to study for a degree in youth and community work at a local university, which he completed in the late 2000s. Since graduating, Tom has worked in a range of roles within the local authority, and, as of the final interview, was continuing to manage a new multi-million-pound pilot scheme to reduce youth isolation and unemployment through youth work mentoring across the city.

5.2.1 David and Craig

In addition to the sixteen youth and community work practitioners and students interviewed, I wanted to gain colleagues' perspectives regarding the interrelationship between personal and

professional formation on professional qualifying youth and community work programmes. David and Craig are tutors who teach on JNC qualifying programmes at two separate institutions in the North of England. They were selected because their courses include specific modules that engage students in considering via narrative and other means how the confluence of personal-social-political experiences come to shape subjectivities.

5.3 Concluding Comments

This chapter has presented an outline pen portrait of each participant. It provides initial insights into the richness and diversity of participants' life histories and the significance of these in shaping professional journeys, thereby preparing the ground for fuller detailed analysis in the forthcoming chapters.

The Significance of Life Histories: 'Borders', 'Reparative Impulse' and Vocation.

6.1.1 Introduction

As intimated earlier, this and the following three chapters present and discuss the empirical findings. Whilst themes intersect across each participant's interviews, particular motifs are discernible in each interview strand. In order to aid manageability, the themes presented in this, and the following three chapters therefore generally follow the pattern of drawing on data from respective interview tranches with the material from second interviews split across chapters seven and eight. This chapter draws principally on first interviews in exploring participants' accounts of their life histories, pathways into practice and 'sense of vocation' in relation to professional youth and community work. This chapter describes two major motifs arising from my analysis of participants' life history accounts. These refer to the significance of different events and processes in participants' narratives. Each of these is unfolded and later conceptualised. The first is concerned with the influence and significance of 'borders' - the intersections between the physical, familial, class, community, spatial, educational etc. conditions and opportunities afforded, or denied, in participants' life stories. The second, 'reparative impulse' expresses the significance of a commitment to ensure young people should either have access to the services and opportunities respondents themselves enjoyed, or, that young people should be helped in order to avoid some of the challenges and negative experiences participants themselves endured. The chapter concludes by suggesting that, for many participants, youth and community work has been an 'arrival point' or 'natural culmination' that 'makes sense' in the context of their life narratives. And, that it is often border-reparative experiences, which drive their sense of vocation.

6.1.2 The Significance of Life Histories: Meaning, Interpretation and Context.

There is a uniqueness to each participant's life narrative and how it is expressed. Yet there are also some noticeably discernible patterns. Participants cite interwoven formative experiences of family, class, education and community and place as key motifs. Narrative work demands attention is paid to different passages of participants' life histories including representations of formative experiences (Goodson and Sikes, 2001). In the following sections, I draw thematically on participants' accounts of their own biographies. In doing so, I attempt to consider the potential meaning and significance[1] of different motifs in their stories. Sometimes these themes - 'borders' and 'reparative impulse' - appear discretely, and sometimes they interweave within respondents' narratives. It should be noted that participants tended not to express their experiences directly in these terms. However, these motifs, developed through the layered analytical processes[2] (see Smith *et al.*, 2009 and Pidgeon and Henwood, 1994, 1997) outlined in Chapter 4 are deducible across respondents' life history accounts. It is on this basis that I have chosen to present and conceptualise the data.

Given the significant amount of data generated, I make no claims to represent the entirety of participants' experiences as I understand them – there is much more that could be written. Instead, my approach in these chapters is to draw from the richness of different accounts in exploring what I believe to be significant motifs. These themes appear in different ways in the context of each participant's unique life history. Although I have provided brief participant pen portraits in the previous chapter, my approach here is to deliberately re-locate these motifs within participants' life narratives in order to provide proper context.

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[1] In doing so, I aim to explore the experiential significance of these motifs within participants' life histories in addition to generating meta-level conceptual analysis.

[2] This refers to the 'empathic', hermeneutic and abductive processes I employed in treating the data. This involved developing phenomenological understandings and layered hermeneutic interpretations of participants' own experiences in order to eventually move towards abstract conceptualisation via synthesis with the literature.

6.2.1 Intersections: Family, Community and Class - Framing the Significance of Formative Life History Experiences upon Youth and Community Workers' Sense of Vocation

Many of the participants describe the importance of different experiences and forms of community in their life history accounts – of a sense of deep belonging in the context of place, and of a community spirit that expressed itself in people looking out for each other. This motif intersects with other key ideas in contributors' life histories, namely the significance of family, place, education and class background. Sometimes participants spoke about these issues (particularly class) in a direct way, and other times in a more inferred fashion. In approaching the data, it is the analyst's role to report that which is significant to participants and to begin to make some sense of it. It is noticeable that despite not always having asked any direct questions relating to the subject of family, community and education, respondents appear to cite these as key themes. My role here is therefore to produce work that takes account of hermeneutic 'layers' (Smith *et al.*, 2009) that recognise and conceptualise the ways in which participants make sense of their experiences within the context of wider narratives. The idiographic limitations of this work should however be noted. The motifs presented here appear to be significant in the life histories of *these* participants. That is not to say they are significant in the context of the life histories of *all* youth and community workers. Nor is it to claim these motifs are in any way correlative to youth and community workers becoming youth and community workers. There are likely to be many people to who might express these themes as significant in their life histories who do not end up working in the field of youth and community work. However, I would suggest these themes *are* significant to these participants, and it is on this basis they are presented.

For Alfie, growing up in the 1960s and 70s, in an aspirational, working-class area, community provided a sense of security, which allowed him, along with his friends, to develop a sense of

freedom and adventure. For Alfie, life on the edge of a city was characterised by people being in and out of each other's houses and an environment in which parents would look after each other's children. He spoke of this time, and the freedom it represented for him with fondness:

> "[We lived on] a long street and it backed onto playing fields and there was a pond there where we used to go for tadpoling and stuff like that and we used to, to get to it you'd just short cut through people's houses and the families were great they'd just let you go through their gardens to get to the end and go over the little beck and everything and into the back field"

Like Alfie, Steve who grew up in the 1970s, albeit in a more urbanised environment, also described his formative years as "great". A sense of community also permeates Steve's account, although he was allowed to disappear on his bike for hours at a time, he wasn't allowed to "roam the streets". He attributed this observed difference between his experience and that of his friends, to the fact his parents were older than those of his peers and didn't start their family until they were in their mid-thirties. Steve also cited the significance of his parents' experiences of growing up in a particular historical context, and the influence of this on their values, worldview and approach to parenting:

> "My parents lived through the Second World War as children. My dad was evacuated and all that. So, their values were very much set in that time" (Steve).

Ray, who grew up in the 1980s in the shadow of deindustrialisation in the North-East of England, also reported a similar sense of community – albeit one that felt more 'gritty' and working-class. He described close family bonds, both with his immediate and wider family. Typically, much of his childhood was spent playing in the streets or fields or on the nearby beach. He reflected how the sense of freedom he enjoyed is in stark contrast to the more constrained experiences of his own children. As a teenager, his family's move from the terraced streets of the town centre to the "suburbs" where their semi-detached house was situated was a "big jump". But Ray reflected that in some ways this came at a cost – the loss of a more integrated sense of community. The terraced streets where he first grew up became derelict as people moved out or were displaced, and despite attempts at regeneration, he lamented a lost sense of community in the area. Ray recognised the

sense of constancy and nurture offered by his own formative experiences of family, together with the sense of freedom and connection engendered by growing up in a particular place and time, are integral to his own sense of self and how he views his practice in giving young people anchorage and opportunity. It is perhaps significant that Ray now works in a community, surrounded by terraced streets - reminiscent of the ones he described growing up in. A community motif is also significant in other accounts. For example, Johnny who grew up in the gritty west-end of a north-east city recounted a vibrant and culturally diverse community, "of real characters". His description was replete with descriptions of a father who had a "drink problem" and of working-class poverty, yet a community richly acceptant of its own form of multi-cultural diversity. However, despite growing up in a cultural 'melting pot', Johnny, knew little of life beyond the confines of the estate itself. He recalled how moving from a flat to a house around the time when he transferred to secondary school was one of a series of transitions that enabled him to develop a different outlook on life:

> "So, we actually went from living in a block of flats into the street. That's quite interesting because it was just bizarre having your own front door, your own back door, your own garden and overlooking the park, and that was great."

His description of working-class poverty and insularity resonates with Nikki's account. Like Johnny, Nikki grew up in what she now recognises as "poverty":

> "It was just happy but looking back you realise you were poor, but it didn't enter your head because nobody had nowt, so everyone was the same. Nobody had nothing. There was the odd person that really stuck out because they didn't have anything but in general, we were all kind of the same. I never really, really felt poor until years later and I looked back and thought, "You know what? We had absolutely nothing," but I didn't really feel like I was poor."

Nikki's account of her early life history was particularly striking because of the sense of insularity it evoked. She recounted how she, like many people on her estate, knew very little of life beyond it. From her childhood perspective, *everything* happened on the estate – going to school, playing, going to the shops, going to the community centre where she attended the youth club, her dad going to the working men's club – all of it contained in that space. Visits to the town centre were a rarity.

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She reported how bonds between people were close, but how there was a profound distrust of the outside. She reflected on how this sense of entrenchment affected her personally and impacted on the community and its aspirations:

> "Obviously, it does affect you because of the way you behave and then the way you go on and learn and what your aspirations and everything, it just becomes the same. Everyone is the same. I think when everybody's the same they don't feel different. You just do what everybody else does. For me, that was missing in the youth club. I don't ever remember in the youth club I attended as a kid being encouraged to go to college or to push on or go a bit further. I don't even remember conversations about, "If this is what you want to do with your life, how are you going to get there? Who is going to help you?" I don't ever, ever remember anyone challenging that."

Chris, who like Ray, Johnny and Nikki, grew up in the North-East of England during the deindustrialisation of the 1980s, also recounted the significance of family and community in her early life history. Like Nikki, she identifies as "working-class", but unlike Nikki, the geography of life on the terraced streets of a large town engendered an experience that, although close-knit, was in different ways more spatially and affectively open. This, despite similarities in terms of class and poverty in Nikki's and Chris' stories, appears to engender a different, more open outlook in Chris' account of her childhood. Yet there were other dynamics in her early life history she appeared keen to explore. Chris' dad was brought up in a children's home. Her mother's parents, who "came from money", never approved of him, and this caused some conflict in the family. Although her granny would support the family by buying shoes and winter coats, despite her grandparents' wealth, Chris recounted her parents struggling financially:

> "Normally my Mam and Dad were absolutely broke, the rent was £6 a week and my Dad earnt £10, so you know, we grew up with absolutely sod all, in a tiny little two-bedroom terrace flat... My Mam was dead close to me, was very very close to her parents, so we spent lots of time with Gran and Grandpa and it wasn't until I was a teenager that I realised that my Dad was never there and, that's because my Gran never thought my Dad was good enough for my Mam, and she tried to get them, she tried to get my Mam made a ward of court to stop my Dad, because my Mam was a Nurse and she was engaged to a Consultant and she broke off with the Consultant to - because she'd met my Dad, who was a Butcher from a children's home, which didn't suit my Granny at all [laughs]."

Chris' mum knitted many of her clothes as a child, and she recalled how the family relied on produce (and rabbits) raised on the allotment for food. "Gran used to buy our, buy our good stuff and my Mam used to sew and my Mam used to knit. God, everything was knitted, I remember photos of a knitted skirt and top, dear God!"

Despite differences in class background, motifs of family and community, albeit in different ways, are also significant in Elsa's account. She recounted upon returning from Africa, where her family were revered for her father's engineering contribution to a village, how her middle-class experience of growing up in a rural part of the English Midlands afforded her a sense of freedom. Her parents, who she described as "both very practical people", instilled a sense of "self-reliance" in Elsa. Growing up, Elsa was allowed, what she now considers an incredible amount of freedom, being encouraged to go off on long-distance, weeks-long adventures. Yet despite this spatial freedom, she felt constrained in other ways. Living in a small village without a school, or indeed any other children brought its own restrictions and sense of isolation. This became particularly pertinent in Elsa's teenage years when she sometimes experienced particular constraints which were exacerbated by a sense that everyone in the village was watching her and that she was unable to escape, even momentarily, as she would have liked, due to a lack of transport links:

> "...adolescence is kicking against things isn't it really and what I kicked against wasn't that much but it was just, it was I suppose as a girl of fourteen or fifteen years my mum was quite reasonably controlling and other parents weren't quite so controlling and you're kicking against the fact that you live in a village and you can't get anywhere."

Despite enjoying what she described as a "loving childhood", Elsa's experiences of growing up were also influenced by her parents', and particularly her mother's own experiences of childhood:

> "My mum came from a big family with quite an oppressive father I would say and found it not always very easy to sort of be emotionally literate with her children but she's very loving nonetheless."

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Elsa also recounted how, as a teenager, she sometimes felt belittled by her mother, citing one instance in particular where her mother mocked her for her sense of fashion. This experience hurt and silenced her:

> "...you know you've damaged someone's sense of who they are and their style and their individuality and it might not be your style but it's my style. You can't say all that when you're fourteen because you can't articulate anything you just go off in a strop you know or you just sit there silently just biting your tongue and not saying anything."

In her narrative, Elsa noted how her formative experiences of family have influenced both how she relates to her own children in a much more open way, and positively shaped the way she engages emotionally with young people in her practice. It is apparent from Elsa's account that whilst she experienced what might now be considered an unusual degree of freedom in some ways, in other ways, living in a rural area brought about, or perhaps highlighted particular constraints that rendered aspects of her experience of family and community stifling at points. There are clues later in Elsa's narrative that these formative experiences have been integral to her sense of vocation and practice as a youth worker. She expressed a commitment to giving young people a space to explore and be themselves – to affirm their identities in ways in which her own identity was undermined, to promoting young people's sense of capacity, autonomy and possibility in the way she was encouraged by others including her parents and teachers to do.

The narratives represented to this point come from participants who were children and adolescents in the 1960s, 1970s and early 1980s. They are, therefore located in a particular time, places, and in some instances (working) class contexts in which community can be thought of, remembered (or perhaps romanticised) as having particular forms that enjoyed a greater sense of personal and social connectivity. Many participants also suggest this afforded them greater freedom as children to play. It should be noted however that some of the younger research participants who grew up in the later 1980s and thereafter also cited the importance of community in their experiences.

Freya's parents were living in a block of flats in one of the most deprived parts of a Yorkshire city when she was born. She recalled, aged three, moving to a different part of the city. Here, she recounted a vibrant sense of community. Her dad wasn't around much, and when he was, Freya recalled him being emotionally absent. Freya's mum would have her female friends, and their children around to her house "all the time". Freya recalled the significance of a sense of community this instilled in her – that even though they weren't related, the children viewed each other as "cousins" and remain in close contact even today. In retrospect, she now views some of her mum's behaviour in this regard as less than healthy. But she also recounted the significance of community in broader terms in her own life story – how local people from different cultural backgrounds (but principally from the Black community) coalesced around the community centre: "[I remember] going to all the carnivals, all the summer parties, yes it was like that when I was younger..."

Freya described the significance of these different forms of community in respect of becoming a youth worker. She recalled how life with her mum's "girlfriends" involved looking after her own younger siblings and other people's children. This sense of caring for and supporting others, particularly those younger than herself has been and remains significant in her youth work journey and practice. Yet she also recognised the responsibilities she was expected to have as a young person impacted on her:

> "...it's just that support isn't it and I think like for them young people that don't have that support at home, I'm not saying I was badly done to but I know I was lacking something, that sort of somebody to go to when I'm feeling upset and stuff like I want to be that person. So like young people who are isolated or do feel alone or do struggle in social environments and stuff I want to bring them together, I want to get them involved do you know what I mean?"

It seems the foundations of community and care Freya experienced, have engendered a sense of vocation that is grounded in and expressed through a particular reparative impulse to continually make a difference in young people's lives – a passion born out of her own formative experiences.

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However, her sense of passion for practice also appears to be shaped by her appreciation for the wider cultural community she grew up in and the opportunities this afforded her to mix with people, build friendships and learn informally: "I just want to bring it back, I want to bring back like I had my childhood like you know the fun things like that."

Like Freya, Louise, who was born was brought up in different villages on the outskirts of another Yorkshire city, recounted the sense of freedom and community she enjoyed in her childhood and how her mum running the local pub enabled the family to feel part of the village:

> "I remember having lots of families and houses that I could go to and I just played in the street, I don't mean like I was let loose all day kind of thing but you played out, that was, that is my memory. We lived on like a street and it had a big oval there so it was totally safe sort of thing, all the kids were just out all the time snow, rain... so everybody sort of was part of my little life, adults and stuff with it being like a village pub it was almost village ran, it was like a community so there was always somebody popping in our house. I just enjoyed it, I just enjoyed being a kid, I was out on my bike, on my rollerblades, my mum was always in the kitchen cooking.
>
> Freedom? (Graham)
>
> Freedom, absolute freedom and there was no harm in anything; the only real harm that anybody was ever scared of was the corner, the road in front of the pub, that's the only thing you had to be wary of and that was it and there was just fields around you, there was nothing else just all these fields, so it was total freedom yes, do what you want, you go out and you play and that's it and I loved it."

Like Louise, Naseem grew up in a context where her family were at the centre of community life. Naseem was keen to highlight the significance of her cultural identity, and the ways in which it provided, and continues to provide, both personal challenges and rich opportunities for dialogue and learning. She noted how understandings of her own life history are integral to her sense of identity and her practice as a youth and community worker:

> "...my source of material sometimes is in my, my history and I, and often find myself going there to try and learn and think and applying that..."

The navigation of (a split) cultural identity appears central to Naseem's life history. Born into an Indian Muslim family, she has always been aware of the impact of political influences beyond her control on how she is viewed, and indeed, how she sees herself:

> "There is something about, when it comes to this, our culture, our sort of cultural identity and you know, thinking about India and Pakistan and the 1947 partition, it's interesting that something that happened so many years ago, when I wasn't even born, is something that is actually a - something that I have - feel like I've inherited...it's quite defining."

Naseem inferred that her national-religious identity traverses 'cultural norms'. Growing up, she reported being viewed with curiosity within the wider Asian community. She reflected on moments where this curiosity fostered learning for herself and others, but also instances where she and her sisters were the subject of bullying because of perceived differences. These experiences, together with the rhythm of life centred around the family corner shop, have had a profound influence on Naseem's sense of self, and her practice as a youth and community worker: "...personal experiences definitely shape your practice." She suggested that her practice is influenced by a sense, drawn from her own formative experiences of difference, that people have more in common than that which separates them, and where difference does exist, it can be a site of rich dialogical learning. These ideas are central to her practice within the Asian community, where she uses different approaches to enable women of different ages to tell and learn from their own life histories. Naseem described life in the cornershop growing up almost like a stage (an idea that influenced her decision to study Theatre Design at undergraduate level). Naseem reported being very aware growing up of how diverse members of the community interacted with her family and how the shop became not only a place to buy things, but a place to share troubles and get advice. She reflected on how the shop became a hub for the community and how her family were integral to community life:

> "I feel that the value of the corner shop in them days was really significant and I really do feel that it was a place where the general public or the neighbours would come and - not necessarily me because I was quite young at that age - but certainly I'd overhear

> conversations that we did have with my Mum or an older sister, about things that are going on for them or they needed a form - you know, they needed help filling out a form for council tax."

Yet the shop was also a place of mutuality, where the community supported and looked after Naseem and her family in different ways. In her account, Naseem, alluded to rich bonds of community support – informal networks of cooperation. For Naseem, these experiences were integral to her eventual decision to become a youth and community worker and continue to influence how she views her practice as a space for learning, storying, sharing and encouraging people.

Further vignettes regarding the significance of different facets of family, community and class in each participant's formative experiences could be exampled; indeed, these continue to be highlighted in different ways in the following paragraphs. However, given the limitations of space, I turn now to focus on another significant motif in the data – the influence of educational experiences, transitions and professionals.

6.3.1 Reparative impulse: The Influence of Educational Experiences, Transitions and Professionals

Respondents' experiences of education also appear as a significant motif in many accounts. Some contributors spoke warmly about their time in school, others reported more challenging experiences which left different impressions. For several participants, the challenges of transitioning between primary and secondary school seem significant. Some contributors also spoke about the significance of particular adults, often teachers, who gave time, connected, trusted and understood them at key moments as they grew up. These participants infer the importance of these people and their interactions with them both in terms of their formative experiences and as influential in motivating them to work in a profession that understands and engages with young people in the way they themselves had experienced.

Like many participants, Jane reflected on her formative childhood experiences with affection. She described how childhood and primary school were "idyllic" and "surrounded by lots of friends". As with others in the study, Jane cited the experience of transferring to secondary school as significant and challenging. Having been bullied at the start of her time at secondary school, she was left feeling isolated:

> "[Life] stopped being idyllic, and I realised that the world wasn't quite as nice as I had kind of thought it was it wasn't a chocolate box world, and that people could be, horrifically horrible... that was a shock to the system that people were like that. But, I learned to survive, and I learnt to do it you by being able to be very adaptable with people."

Being bullied had a profound impact on Jane, but the support she received from a particular teacher was equally significant to her sense of wanting to help other young people, and on her eventual journey to becoming a youth worker. She noted how these experiences continue to inform her commitment to building resilience in others through her practice:

> "Probably from the injustice of being young, being bullied and having recognise that it only took one person to be my side one person's voice and support to help me get through that, and it was a teacher, but the teacher didn't use a teaching approach, she used an 'I care about you' approach and that person-centred approach... there is a journey that you could fall on one side of the fence of the other and there are certain moments in your life when you can sink or swim and I think there was a hand offered to me that enabled me to swim but it was a personal hand I was quite strong person internally that I would get through it and get through an experience recognise as lots of people who don't get through those experiences, and hit those points, it those fractious points and then unfold and recognise that I would like to work in that field where actually I could have that role that capacity to support a wide range of people."

Annie also recalled the significance of one of her secondary school teachers on her eventual journey into youth work. In particular, she cited how Mr. Norton's recollections of living of a kibbutz inspired her to do likewise for a few months. She recounted Mr Norton speaking about his experiences as a "lightbulb moment":

> "I remember, it was in the fourth year at school, which would be year ten now and saying, "I want to go travelling" and all my other peers were like, "No, we're going to work in the mill" and I remember looking out of my bedroom window thinking I've got to get out of here, I've got to move on, because I'd listened to all these stories about travel and about, you know, the different cultures and once I'd been to Israel there was no turning back then..."

The people she met, the conversations she had, the injustices she witnessed, the political perspectives she became aware of, the sense of community she shared with others each had a profound impact on the 17-year-old Annie, who returned to the UK knowing as a result of her time in the kibbutz that she wanted to work in the helping professions. This became a pathway that would lead, some years later, to a career in youth and community work.

Another participant, Charlie, described the significance of his own educational experiences, amongst a range of other factors, on his own journey into youth work. Charlie spoke warmly about his friendships at school, and of his broadly good relationships with his teachers. Although he did well in his GCSEs, he expressed with some feeling a sense that his own school experience was "institutionalising" and "regimented". These experiences have led him to think critically about contemporary education:

> "I think a lot of young people in this country perhaps lost faith that school is able to get them somewhere. The whole sort of you go to school, get grades, get a job, I think that has become broken for many young people and I think if… I have a lot of questions about how we educate our young people and the way we do it and what is for and the motives behind it."

This critique represents a key personal driver for Charlie in motivating him towards providing a different form of education grounded in relationship and dialogue with young people- something he began to understand and value during his time as an Outdoor Education Instructor.

Many participants highlighted the significance of school in their vocational narratives. Whilst Elsa is no exception to this, she also articulated the importance of a university course in enlivening her imagination regarding society, attributing this, at least in part, to her eventual decision to become

a youth worker. Despite growing up in not a particularly religious family, Elsa became interested in

Christianity as a teenager and set up a Sunday School for children in her village. During her later

teens, she came to think differently about her beliefs, and during the research described herself as

an "atheist". She became disillusioned studying mathematics during her first year at university and

decided to integrate philosophy modules as part of her degree. One particular module proved

seminal:

> "...one of the courses I did on philosophy was nineteenth century English literature and I
> think quite a lot of the ideas from that were quite, like George Eliot I think that was quite
> formative really in the way that it, you know, is religion relevant because actually what
> matters is about community and people and making a church out of your people so that's
> what it's about, it's about community as well the here and now of life on earth really and
> any idea of, and therefore if you're going to do that well then the only other thing that
> religion has is some kind of idea of the afterlife and actually, scientifically, intellectually to
> me that's rubbish. It's just something we tell ourselves to make life seem a bit better, well
> why don't we just concentrate on what we've got here and now so."

Alongside other facets of her experience, studying this course inspired Elsa to want to do something

with her career that would support people and build communities. Although she was unable to

name this at the time, this sense of vocation would eventually lead her towards youth work.

6.3.2 Borders and Reparative Impulse: Processes and Moments of Social, Cultural, Political, and Religious Revelation.

Many participants traced storylines that articulated the significance of particular processes that

have shaped their sense of vocation to youth and community work. Whilst some of these processes

encompassed the educational, their focus tended to be on other dimensions of experience that

engendered awareness that has informed their vocational pathways. In some instances, these

processes were also punctuated by specific 'vocational moments'. The following vignettes highlight

the significance of unfolding social, cultural, political and religious experiences in respondents'

vocational narratives. Later, I will further discuss and conceptualise these in relation to the analytical

motifs of 'borders' and 'reparative impulse' initially outlined in the introduction to the chapter.

For Johnny, the world opened up when he started secondary school. It allowed him to meet people

who lived beyond his own estate for the first time, and to begin to see the world differently. He

recalled his experience of school at that time as profoundly violent:

> "The '70s was really violent. It was awful. Used to have fights with the schools, fights on the
> buses, fights between years, fights between other estates. It was horrific, absolutely horrific.
> When I look back, just fisty-cuffs 24/7. It's like the Beano! You look back, *"How are you
> supposed to survive in that environment?"* You go to secondary school and you're on your
> way to lesson, someone pulls you into toilets and takes your pencils off you and gives you a
> good hiding."

Yet this wasn't the only form of violence he became aware of. Johnny recounted how a growing

awareness of the social and political violence of poverty and the British state's involvement on the

Island of Ireland at the height of 'The Troubles' in the 1970s raised a new consciousness in him that

enabled him to see beyond the immediacy of his own experience in order to understand his, and

the wider world differently. Informed by life on his estate, and his conversations with Irish

neighbours, he began to question things at school. Johnny recounted how these key formative

processes – of critical inquisitiveness and challenging authority - contributed to his eventual decision

to become a youth worker. Despite the violence he described above, secondary school, and the

youth workers he became involved with through voluntary work as a young person, allowed Johnny

to meet new people and begin to see the world differently:

> "[It] opened up my world... I met new friends there and within 18 months everything had
> changed. The whole punk rock thing came along, just got bang into music. Running around
> meeting new people. I started to meet people from the Catholic school, met people from
> [another school]. Sounds mad but me own little life just opened because I met people from
> different schools rather than being cooped up on this tiny little estate. At the bottom where
> we were, bottom of the street where I lived, there was buses going to different schools, so
> you met different people at the bus stop. You created new friendships... What the youth
> workers were doing was getting young people from different areas to meet and talk about

their experiences. So, that was their youth work. The voluntary work was just a tool. We had our own committee and then we started to visit the youth project in Leeds. Within a year, I feel I'd been mixing with people from London, Leeds, the north-east, Northern Ireland..."

These new relationships, together with a growing social awareness, generated a new sense of reality for Johnny. Education wasn't valued on Johnny's estate. A Careers Adviser suggested he should either consider an apprenticeship in the local super-factory that everyone locally knew would soon close or join the army. But soldiers returning to the estate regaling stories of tours in Northern Ireland engendered a new political awareness that meant joining the army was out of the question. Johnny found himself questioning and increasingly resisting the imposition of others' expectations regarding where he should go and what he should do. Careers lessons further awakened his awareness of inequalities he himself was subject to:

> "Probably being younger, seeing poverty, not knowing what poverty was and then all of a sudden thinking, *"Hold on a minute, how come some people have got good jobs and some people have got no jobs? Some people have got money for clothes and other people haven't got money for clothes."*

Whereas his inquisitiveness had been encouraged at primary school, in secondary school when he began to ask questions regarding these issues, he was deemed insolent and slapped down:

> "In my junior school report, there was something about I was always asking questions, and I could go really far, and I was really interested. By the time I got to the high school, if you asked a question you were told off. You weren't allowed to ask questions, so I'd say, *"Why I am not allowed to ask questions?"* then I'd be thrown out of the lesson."

This attrition eventually led to Johnny giving up on school. Yet as with some of the narratives described in the preceding section, one teacher remained a positive and inspiring influence. Johnny remembers his Art teacher as someone who could build brilliant relationships with his pupils and encourage their self-expression:

> "He used to talk to you like a human being. Never judged us. Used to just chat to you. Said, "What do you want to do?" he knew I was into music, I said, "I'd love to do some printing, screen printing." I used to print the Sex Pistols and all that stuff, and used to bring pictures in, photocopy them… He used to show us how to go from taking something from a photograph or a bit of paper or an idea into a print and what you could do with those prints. I absolutely loved it."

Johnny's account blends motifs. His narrative is replete with descriptions of a growing social consciousness brought about through observations and conversations as the world opened up to him, of a gnawing awareness of class divides, inequality and state repression, but also of an appreciation of the expression the punk scene, youth workers and one of his teachers afforded him. This awareness of the significance of the interrelationship between the private and public or personal and structural upon respondents' journeys into youth and community work is also highlighted by others.

Tom's experiences of injustice and marginalisation growing up also appear significant to his motivation to become a youth worker. Like Johnny, Tom appears to have been influenced by an awareness of injustices. These politicised him in particular ways from an early age. As I will describe in the following chapter, Tom views this politicisation to be well aligned with the conscientisation espoused by youth and community work. Tom's experiences of marginalisation arose not only out of growing up in poverty, but also as a result of the stigma of being the son of a single mother in the Irish-Catholic quarter of a city in the English Midlands. After his parents' divorce, and on eventually returning to that city, the family were supported by in different ways by Labour members of the local authority:

> "That always stuck in my mind, you know, and my views from socialism, I think just stems from that. I think almost innate in certain ways, I don't know why, obviously I realised because we come from a poor working-class background. I think that's an innate thing but with the Labour helping us out and that always stuck with me…"

This appreciation, mixed with his experience of stigma had a profound impact on Tom:

> "...we got a council house. Mum sort of struggled, she was a one parent family and in that era she was quite ashamed of it and she used to tell us to hide things and pretend your Dad's dead and we had free dinners and stuff like that and we relied on the council heavily and that's always stayed with me, as a human being."

Although he struggled to articulate them, he left school on the eve of the miners' strike with deeply held socialist views that had been shaped by his formative experiences of growing up. The miners' strike and his own subsequent work as a union shop steward deepened and gave fuller expression to this politicisation through a commitment to collectivism and advocacy – ideals that continue to underpin his practice as a youth worker. The political also blends with the personal in Tom's account. Family difficulties and tragedy have also played their part in his vocational journey:

> "My sister committed suicide in 2000 and she left her son, 12 years of age, who consequently went to Ireland with my Mum and Stepdad, you know, brought him up as best they could and then my partner - well obviously we tried for a family...I've been going with [Jo] for 22 years and we tried to start a family but she had three miscarriages and I think all that - subconsciously, I didn't know at the time, it was driving me to want to work with young people and maybe put something back into society or become like a community or some kind of society or community parent as well.   I'm only articulating it now, but at the time I didn't realise that."

The nexus of political and personal influences is also apparent, albeit in different ways, in others' accounts. For Adele, this is evident in her deeply-held sense that despite her childhood being "materially very comfortable", she was let down by different services which failed to detect, let alone address, the impact of significant changes in circumstances brought about by her parents' separation and her mother's ongoing and "chaotic" alcoholism:

> "...she'd get drunk and just wreck the house which was quite embarrassing so I'd come home from school, clean up the house, clean her up, put her back into bed and go out with my mates, come back and do it all over again… I was going to school, coming home, sorting out mum, going to work, coming home at about one o'clock in the morning and trying to go to sleep at the best of times and then back to school the next day. So again, very chaotic, bit of a whirlwind, played up at school, falling asleep in school, teachers never knew what to do with me … [I was] completely the parent; it was completely reversed, I had to make sure she was fed, she was clothed, I used to have to bath her, I used to have to do everything because she was just too depressed and in a mess to do anything."

The school Adele attended after her parents' separation, was in "complete contrast to what I was used to... you were lucky if you didn't get bottled on the way home." These circumstances meant Adele started to antagonise others as a pre-emptive means of self-defence. She was left feeling isolated and abandoned, but she recognises how these experiences were later significant in her decision to pursue a career in youth work:

> "I chose to do my youth work degree from sitting down with my college course leader and basically said to him I don't know what to do, I don't know what I want to do, I just know that I like to care for people and I like to help people, I want to give young people a voice because I don't think, I didn't have a voice in school, nobody listened to me and nobody actually ever asked me what was going on. The teachers just labelled me as naughty and uncontrollable and just put me in isolation and suspended me for weeks at a time and if somebody had just sat down and said to me what is going on with you, this is not right, what's the matter I probably would've just broke down in tears and told them the whole thing. Not one person asked me in my school what was going on.

> So you felt voiceless? (Graham)

> Completely, I went and told my GP many a time they just put me on antidepressants and when I was having panic attacks they put me on beta medication, again really unhelpful...So I think because of those experiences I wanted to go and do something at university that would help me help teenagers, that was definitely my motivation and at the time...I suppose I was given up on, I don't think people even tried with me and I think one of my motivations is it might just be helping one out of a hundred, but I've still helped one other person."

Indeed, this sense of injustice motivated Adele to return recently to her old school to highlight failings in her own case, using it to secure changes in respect of awareness and referral processes for other young people. There is a real sense in Adele's account of using her own story to challenge different professional practices and represent the needs of young people:

> "...young people are having less and less things available to them and I'll be part of whatever there is to fight for young people to a, have a voice, b, have their rights upheld and c, given a chance at something even if it is going to a youth club, even if it's, it could be as simple as making sure there's a service for them or to make sure their schools are given the correct education, just making sure that young people have the best possible outcomes and if I can have an influence in that then I'll do my best."

Adele views this as part of pursuing "justice" for young people and ensuring they have a voice that is listened to - things she feels she was not afforded when she was growing up.

Each participant's life history is a rich and sometimes complex tapestry of events and processes. Each contains in different ways and to different extents, the interweaving motifs of 'borders' and 'reparation' that I will unfold and conceptualise later in this chapter. I found Kenan's narrative to be perhaps one of the most striking – perhaps because it was the account furthest removed from my own personal experience. The way in which Kenan relayed his story in criss-crossing between different times, events and places added to its complexity and richness. As with other participants, motifs of family, community, place, class and education entangle and remain central to his life narrative. And, whilst I could with good justification have explored Kenan's experiences of these motifs in some depth, the lack of space sadly precludes this. Instead, I want to pay greatest attention in approaching Kenan's story to the significance of reparation in his account, and particularly how this might be understood in terms of his engagement with gang culture and the criminal justice system. Kenan describes growing up in an area that was like a "ghetto" - a place with cultural diversity and close sense of community:

> "You're talking prostitution, murders, robberies…full of West Indians, Irish, Bangladeshis - not so many Pakistanis then - Bangladeshis, a few Polish people."

As a teenager, the cultural demands of his community resulted getting into more regular and serious trouble with the police. This happened in the context of one of his brothers being shot, and others being arrested for gang-related activity. Despite his mum's pleading, aged 16, Kenan moved to another city in northern England where he had lived as a young child and where wider family, who were involved in criminality, remained. It was here his engagement with crime and violence accelerated:

> "I was sat in a car, in [place] and there was four of us sat in a car and this other car has drove past once... then this car has drove back again and then all of a sudden, this guy has pulled a gun out and all I heard was [shooting noise] and I can remember not moving, just closing my eyes and then opened my eyes and the backseat passenger got shot three times...Then it [gang activity] becomes so blasé, you don't even question it no more, so that, it's like it's chipping away at your soul a bit, because your emotions go, so when something happens, you just see it as it happens, just get on with your life and my guy - the guy who got shot, his name was [Y], he died about three days after that."

There is a sense of something deeply reparative in Kenan's youth work that responds to this passage of his narrative. He later articulated aspects of his professional practice in terms of "community", "family" and "mentoring" – things he described deriving from his association with gangs. His later description of practice appears an attempt to regenerate a similar sense of community and connection with and for young people in order to divert them from the pathways he took as a young person himself. Youth work appears therefore to be a practice of cathartic redemption for Kenan.

Aged 17, Kenan was the victim of a racially motivated attack at the hands of 16 white men. In self-defence, he turned a knife on one of his assailants, wounding him. As a result, he ended up in court, but because he would not admit any culpability, he was sent to a Young Offenders Institution (YOI). This left him distrustful of systems, authority and 'justice'.

Life in the YOI had a profound impact on Kenan. Witnessing the suicide of someone on his wing, led him, despite, or perhaps because of his cynicism regarding authority, to take on a range of representative and welfare roles in the prison:

> "I was a listener, I used to listen, so I had people that were - what made me turn into a listener was two nights, the first, second night in jail, somebody hung themselves and it was a guy that had hang himself straight across from me... I found his body and when I found his body I'm walking past going back to my pad and I noticed, I just saw this guy just hanging."

This appears a key vocational moment for Kenan. He recalled at this stage wanting to join a profession that was trusted, would do good in the world and "stand up for the little guy". On his

release, he went back to his gang who treated him with "more love than a lot of the people in the [immediate] family did." However, knowing that violence had "spiralled" during his time in prison, that friends had been killed and others had been incarcerated for lengthy terms, he decided, after a year, to move back to his home city where he commenced a relationship with a young woman and started a family. During this time, he also set up in business (a shop). This, much like Freya's and Naseem's accounts of growing up in their family's pub and shop respectively, allowed Kenan to develop a hub for the community - a "centre point for meetings and people talking". At the same time, Kenan became involved with one of his brothers in supporting young people and the wider community in various ways:

> "So because my brother was like I said a spokesperson for the community up here it was easy for us, so that's when he started doing things, organising, like we'd have a sort of fun day on a Sunday, family fun days and I got more satisfaction from stuff like that and seeing people enjoying themselves and people's parents coming up to me and coming up to us and saying that day you put on was really good, that thing you put on last Sunday with the inflatables and the face painters and the clowns that was fantastic so you get a better response from people... as a family we used to all get involved in the carnival...it's like outreach community work and you're out there, you're getting people [involved] getting the Black community together to focus on one thing to make it the biggest and best as we could."

Young people in particular started to confide in him and express their gratitude for what he was doing for them:

> "...there is no better appreciation than somebody saying I want to be like you."

The tragic death of one of his children led to his conversion to Islam and engagement with lots of reading regarding philosophical and social issues. Through circumstances arising from his unwillingness to disclose information regarding particular groups to the police, Kenan ended up in prison again. While there, he again took on a variety of welfare roles, for which the governor recognised and paid him. On release, he began working voluntarily to support fellow ex-offenders through the probation service, a role that eventually led him to train as a youth worker. Kenan

described youth work as helping him to "balance the scales" - a description emanating from his own personal experiences of injustice and from a commitment, arising from his time in prison, to advocate for others whom the systems he came to so profoundly distrust, ignore.

Tom and Steve's life histories unfold at a similar time in the same city. Although there are significant differences in their narratives, like Tom, Steve, who works as a church-based youth worker on the estate where he lives, also articulates his practice as being akin to community parenthood:

> "...it takes a village to raise a child... I came here on Sunday after church, and came out of the shop and one of the young guys who is around and I know he's an interesting character, and another guy Spud who hangs here you know just engaging them in conversation and they will talk...They understand and converse - talking to Jordan about college, how are you getting on? "I'm fed up" and I'm like well think about this and when you finish this you will be able to do that… I feel I am able to input into his life, perhaps as a parent would you know… I'm not just a youth worker who is at the centre that he goes to, I am his community I talk to him on the street..."

Steve related the significance of this 'parenting' back to the love and support he received from his own parents:

> "I think observing their - feeling their love and the way they were quite real people has affected me as a person. And, definitely I bring that into my youth work."

Steve also cited the importance of his sense of connection with a particular teacher and a Boys' Brigade Leader who demonstrated real trust in him as significant to his professional journey and continuing practice. Whilst these appear important motifs in his story that connect back to others already explored in other contributors' accounts, perhaps more than anything, it is Steve's faith as a Christian that is most central to his narrative. This has given rise to a vocational journey that was punctuated by defining vocational moment. In his early twenties, he and his friends formed a Christian band. He described what the band was about in quite vocational terms:

"[We felt a] sense of calling if you like to reach out to young people and to provide opportunities for young people to respond to guess what was the message of Christianity but more than that to encourage them to get involved in what we were doing."

Steve employed vocational language in other passages of his account that describe a distinct sense of God's call on his life to work with young people that continues to anchor his practice and enable him to articulate what his practice as a youth worker is about:

"You know [young people are] valuable. They matter, and I guess some of that for me comes from I guess my understanding of all what I believe God is about for us. Every individual is valuable and has worth and is loved you know? So, but my youth work at that time was very much from the point I believe for me that God has called to that to work with young people."

Steve's growing sense of vocation appears to have been confirmed by a defining vocational moment. Aged 28, working in an office full-time whilst doing voluntary youth work in his spare time, Steve was in a church service when he felt God speak to him clearly about becoming a youth worker:

"At that moment I had my one and only experience I would say of God speaking to me audibly and he said I want you to work with young people. I felt it, I heard it properly...I could say that my Christian experience has been that I've seen God work and I've had people say things to me that I think God is saying this or I have read the Bible and seen it but this was an audible, proper. I knew it meant I wouldn't be working work in an office anymore. I wanted to be working with young people whatever that meant and as you do as a Christian, I prayed about it I spoke to people about it and, a year later I started working for X Church because doors opened. So, from being employed as an office manager, I was suddenly a churched based youth worker."

A defining moment for you? (Graham)

Oh massively! Massive!"

6.3.3 Summarising Life History Narratives

The narratives presented represent the uniqueness and diversity of different lives lived out in different circumstances, places and times. Yet they also articulate something of the common meaning and significance of formative experiences to these professional youth workers. Whilst attaching individual meanings and emphases to these different facets, each of the participants

spoke in overt and tacit ways about family, education, space, place, class, and opportunity as important dimensions of their own biographies. Some also addressed politics, culture, community and religion as key motifs in their life histories and vocational narratives. For a number of participants, 'reparative impulse' - born out of the (sometimes vicarious) wish to make things right or better for others, appears an important dimension of their accounts. On occasion, this 'reparative' motif appears discretely. More often however, it weaves and intersects with significant other social, cultural and political factors which have come to afford or deny opportunities – the metaphoric 'borders' of life I have alluded to, and will seek to develop, conceptualise and apply in the following section.

6.4 Conceptualising the Significance of Youth and Community Workers' Life Histories: Borders, Reparative Impulse and Vocation

6.4.1 Borders

As highlighted in Chapter 2, the concept of border pedagogy has been posited by theorists like Giroux (2005) as a means of describing a critically engaged approach to education, which enables people to see, understand and act on and beyond their own experiences. Border pedagogy has been advanced and theorized in youth and community work by various UK authors, most notably Coburn (2010) and Coburn and Gormally (2017). My own thinking has also been shaped by these ideas:

> 'Borders are meeting points - sites where assumptions and stereotypes begin to be challenged. By crossing borders, we come to meet, understand, and share others' worlds, and, in doing so, understand ourselves and our place in the world more fully. We are enabled to critically recognise the power, intersubjectivities and oppression of differing privileges and positionalities. Border pedagogy challenges our existing, limited worldviews. It is education' (Bright *et al.*, 2018:207).

In engaging 'borders', as an analytic motif, it seems important to offer a flexible working definition of how I conceptualise its usage in this chapter and beyond:

Borders are sites of possibility and places of exchange, where new languages can be learned and identities located, understood and developed. We cross borders daily in the ways we act, interact and relate with ourselves and others, and, in doing so, we come to new understandings of the world. Dialogue, with self, others, the world, nature, power, politics, and the divine are all border crossings. Such work is axiological, virtuous. It calls us to transcend self, to know beyond, in order to understand the interrelated infinity of I∞Thou∞World (Buber, 2013) more deeply. Border work is continual, reflexive, often unconscious and often non-linear (Bolt, 2009), but when it, or its cumulative processes are made conscious, moments of enlightenment, connection and change tend to occur. Sometimes these process-moments are subtle, sometimes they are dramatic; either way, they can be profound, and shape the direction of lives. Borders can also be challenging, hostile, contingent and contested spaces. They are sites where the power of states is obviated, through discourses of permission and denial, status, and actual and symbolic architectures of control. Borderlands open up vistas of opportunity; yet they are often places of struggle where justice and inclusion must be fought for.

Border pedagogy therefore enables people, through dialogue, to come to fuller and more critical understandings of their own and others' experiences, and to act on these in order to bring about change. Or, as Giroux (2005:20) puts it, border pedagogy is concerned with 'understand[ing] otherness in its own terms, and to further create borderlands in which diverse cultural resources allow for the fashioning of new identities within existing configurations of power.' Often employing narrative, it is engaged in promoting equity and human flourishing. In this way, youth and community workers can be viewed as 'border pedagogues' who facilitate others in considering the meaning, significance and impact of different and intersecting 'borders', for example, between place, space, time, class, culture, (dis-)ability, gender, sexuality, community, education and opportunity etc., and how these are both discoursed and reified (Coburn, 2010; Giroux, 2005).

As I increasingly immersed myself in the data, and in the processes of phenomenological reduction (van Manen, 2014) and abstraction (Smith *et al.*, 2009) and in 'flip-flopping' (Pidgeon and Henwood, 1994, 1997) between the data and broader conceptualisations, I became aware of the importance of different 'border(ed) experiences' in participants' life histories. It seems significant that participants' own life narratives might be conceptualised in such a way that reflects their practice

as informal educators – those who seek to enable others to come to more critical understandings of their own (bordered) experiences. It is also striking that participants, in sharing their life histories, appear to have engaged in the type of identity work that underpins and is produced through narrative (Goodson and Gill, 2011, 2014) and border pedagogy (Giroux, 2005). From the data, it can be argued that participants' formative border experiences appear to be influential in shaping their sense of vocation to youth and community work. For contributors, these bordered experiences represent a myriad of moments, processes and opportunities (both presented and taken or denied) in each of their accounts. These borders are numerous and diverse. They are unique to each life history, yet also hold elements of commonality. In the preceding vignettes, participants discuss how navigating, traversing, (and being denied opportunities to cross) particular personal, social, spatial, community, class-based, national, racial, educational and spiritual borders have each and often in combined ways, been significant to their histories, identities and vocational journeys into youth work. Examples of 'borders' in this chapter are numerous. They include, but are not limited to the cultural and religious borders that have informed Naseem's life history, identity and professional practice; the borders of class and space that constrained Johnny on the housing estate where he grew up, but which he came to understand, challenge and traverse as the world opened up to him through the punk scene; the spatial borders which affectively permeate Nikki's account of life on her estate as a child, and how the close-knit, but parochially-minded attitudes this produced influenced her worldview and ultimately her practice in helping the young people she works with to 'see' the world differently, including through international exchange work. Spatial borders also influence others' accounts. This can be seen not only in the significance that Charlie and Elsa attach to their formative experiences in Africa, but also in the contrasting impact of space and place in Elsa's account of growing up – simultaneously constrained by life in a village, *and* the significant freedom she was allowed at different times to go off exploring. These dynamics continue to

influence Elsa's identity and practice as a youth worker. Although configured in different ways, many participants also spoke at length about the sense of community they experienced growing up. The social, cultural, spatial and class-based borders these represent again appear significant to participants' identities and professional trajectories. Other borders can be seen elsewhere in the data – in Mr Norton's influence on Annie, and how following in his footsteps had a profound impact on Annie's perspectives and ultimately on her sense of vocation to youth and community work. They can be seen too in participants' experiences and conceptualisations regarding questions of class and opportunity – in Tom's passionate narrative of growing up in a working-class and socially stigmatising environment, how these experiences politized him in particular ways and continue to influence his sense of identity, vocation and professional practice. These are just some of the examples of borders that can be seen in the data. Not all have been discussed, or even presented in this chapter. However, I argue the sense of vocation and professional practice of these 'border pedagogues', has been fundamentally shaped by their own formative experiences of 'borders.'

6.4.2 Reparative Impulse

The second analytical motif detectable in the data is 'reparative impulse' (framed interchangeably in this thesis as 'reparation' and 'reparative'). Work on this concept has been developed briefly by Hoggett *et al*. (2006)[1], Hoggett *et al*. (2009) and Banks and Gallagher (2009) in the social work and community development literatures. These authors describe reparative impulses as flowing from an interplay of personal and vicarious dynamics. Hoggett *et al*. (2009:85-6) note how such reparation is 'manifest in the desire to help repair damaged communities, help troubled individuals and families and/or empower those who [do] not have a voice... [and as,] a passionate desire to undo some of the damage that has been done to others.' Hoggett *et al*. suggest those displaying such reparative tendencies are often motivated by the desire to ensure that negative experiences in their own life

histories are avoided or minimised in others' lives. These authors posit that in other cases, people are motivated by personally positive life experiences which drive them towards 'giving back'.

Some participants in the present study described how they have experienced particular forms of *personal* distress, disadvantage or injustice in the context of their own life histories, and how these dynamics have come to shape their worldviews and motivated them towards becoming youth workers. Others articulated how a deep sense of *observed* injustice similarly motivates them. Some spoke of these dynamics from a place of relative 'privilege', and others from spaces of disadvantage and exclusion, and frequently from narratives that express the intersubjective experiences of both. Some accounts inferred a need to repair the damage caused within participants' own personal histories by doing something to challenge the injustices, and cure the pain faced by others. For some respondents, reparation appears to be a (self-)redemptive act, which stems from 'being on the wrong side of the system', and wanting to make things right, or, different for others, and in doing so, right, or different for Self. As such, these reparative experiences and actions are integral to, and deeply entwined with the intersubjectivities of participants' border crossing experiences. Reparation flows from places deep within individual and collective consciousness and is expressed in the data through anger, passion, and vocation (Hoggett *et al*., 2006).

Whilst fragments of reparative impulse can be seen in different ways in each participant's account, particular narratives stand out. Jane's experiences of being bullied and supported by a teacher, left her with a deep sense of wanting to work in a field that would promote justice, support others and enable people to speak out. Adele's experiences of being let down by systems which led to her becoming a non-identified young carer due to her mother's alcoholism, left her feeling isolated and angry as a young person and wanting to work in a profession that would both care for young people and give them a voice. Tom's sense of reparative impulse appears to be motivated by his own experiences of stigma, which eventually led him to work in profession that espouses the promotion

of equity and inclusion. However, it is Kenan's narrative that is perhaps the most striking in terms of its reparative commitment. Like Freya, his account appears to be motivated by contributing to regenerating a sense of community he experienced himself growing up. However, perhaps more profoundly, it is Kenan's involvement with gangs and the criminal justice system, that are integral to his biography. These facets appear key to his motivation to work with 'excluded' young people. He is driven by a desire to tell young people about the realities and consequences of criminal involvement and to encourage them towards alternative paths. His distrust of systems and the voicelessness he experienced, motivated him towards advocacy work both during and after his time in prison. These experiences, along with a sense that his practice represents something personally redemptive, appear to be key 'reparative drivers' for Kenan.

6.4.3 Culmination: Vocation.

The passion with which contributors told and reflected upon their own stories, and the significance of these in relation to their pathways into youth and community work practice is striking. In unfolding their life histories, some participants articulated a growing awareness of wanting to do something that would reflect their experiences and values, yet without having a name for it. In many cases, it appears youth work is a 'natural culmination' or 'arrival point' for participants – a destination that somehow 'makes sense' in the context of their life narratives. However, whilst many of the participants expressed a sense of discovering youth work, others felt youth work found them:

> "I'd say it [youth work] found me, I don't think I found, I don't think I found it I didn't have a name for it" (Kenan).

> "I think youth work has always found me, like it's chased me. It's come from me background to me like, 'This is where you were'" (Nikki).

These quotes infer a particular sense of vocation or calling to youth work. Steve's quotes earlier in this chapter invoke equally vocational language. Other respondents spoke passionately about the significance of youth work in their lives and the sense of vocation, meaning and fulfilment it provides them. Many of these participants also articulated how their practice is a fundamental part of their identity that gives expression to something of who they are:

> "... it's a calling, it is a profession if you like, but I don't think anybody ever goes into youth work with the ambition of 'I'm going to be a millionaire, you know I'm going to have loads of money'... you go into youth work because you've got a passion... and there's something there, there's something that's drawn you to youth work..." (Louise).

> "[Youth work is] vocational, like you've got as a youth worker, a good youth worker you've got to be passionate, it's got to be in you, you've got to want to do it..." (Freya).

> "[It is] sort of inclination of your heart - of like feeling like you want to help people you want to give something back to people" (Charlie).

Clearly, the participants cited here are driven by a passionate commitment to do something 'meaningful' and to contribute to others' lives in some way. These responses resonate with much of the literature on vocation in youth work and beyond. They chime with de St Croix's (2013, 2016) findings which express the passion and commitment of part-time youth workers. They reflect Doyle's (1999) assertion that vocation represents a sense of calling to particular professional practices that mirror the individual's values and ideals. Each also expresses the longing for the meaning, fulfilment and contribution to human potential, underpinning Dewar's (1997) thesis on vocation. Participants' articulation of their 'call' to practice also reflects, in different ways, Dik and Duffy's (2009) three-fold discussion of vocation as transcendence, purpose and altruism. For some respondents, perhaps most notably, Charlie and Steve, vocation is an enactment of something that responds to a call from beyond the self. Secondly, it might be argued that for each of the participants, youth and community work represents, in different ways, a role enactment through which purpose and meaning are constructed. And thirdly, it is a means by which respondents,

express altruism and care towards others. Whilst not exclusively the case, this final categorisation appears most significant to those participants who articulated a strong sense of reparative impulse. Many of the contributors' articulation of their motivation to practice appear resonant with Buechner's (1973:95) classic definition of vocation as: 'the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet.'

Thus, for many of the respondents, youth work has become an 'ontological *praxis*'. That is, a means of expressing and 'using' the essence of their identities for others' benefit. Much of this sense of self and motivation to practice appear to be bound up in participants' unfolding life histories. This is an idea I will explore and connect further in Chapter 7 as I consider participants' practice narratives and how they 'bring self' to their work with young people and communities. In this sense, I argue that youth and community work as an 'ontological *praxis*' is deeply entwinned with notions of identity and vocation. Such conceptualisations link with Dewar's (1997:2) classic description of vocation as 'an activity [that is] engaged in for the love of it by which others may be enriched or released: something you do as a freely-chosen expression of your nature and energy, something that expresses the unique essence of yourself.'

6.5.1 Concluding Comments

This chapter covers significant ground. It attempts to condense and draw meaning from participants' life narratives as they themselves represent them. Research is always a compromise. While I acknowledge that different tracks might have been explored, and different dimensions of people's life histories represented, I have sought to recognise and give meaning to particular patterns that appear across the majority of accounts. This chapter has considered the meanings that might be attached to different facets of respondents' life histories including family, place, community, class, education and culture, in relation to their unfolding narratives and eventual journeys into youth work practice. I have argued these motifs can be conceptualised as 'borders' and reflect notions of

youth and community work as a 'border pedagogy' and its practitioners as 'border pedagogues'. A second key theme - 'reparative impulse', apparent in a number of the narratives, has also been developed. I have contended that whilst these motifs can be viewed in different ways and to different extents in individual accounts, their intertwining dynamics are significant in contributing to participants' often passionately expressed sense of vocation to youth work. Moreover, I have argued that youth work appears to represent a natural arrival point that gives expression to participants' values, which have been shaped by their life histories.

Whilst life history work has been generated with teachers, social workers and counsellors, this account is pathbreaking in youth work. There is significant learning that can be drawn for the Profession in respect of motivations for practice, and the extent to which these are explored in professional formation. This point will be more fully explored in the following chapter.

Exploring the 'The Use of Self: 'Being', *Praxis* and Phronesis.

7.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses ways in which participants describe their 'use of self' in youth work, examining the significance of different dynamics on this dimension of practice. Personal, ethical, spatial and political factors are highlighted. This chapter also considers the influence of participants' life histories on practice and the recursive interrelationship between practitioner identities and 'the use of self'.

7.2.1 Developing Context

As discussed earlier, youth work is considered a practice anchored in relational pedagogy – a distinct informal educational approach by which people develop learning in and through relationships with others. It is a pedagogy grounded in dialogue by which people come to know others, and through others, Self. Through constellations of relatedness, young people and communities are enabled to develop deeper and more critical understandings of the world in order to act on it (Young, 2006). Such relationality has been conceptualised by the philosopher Martin Buber (2013) as the 'I and Thou of our relating'. Youth workers 'bring themselves'[1] to their practice as a means of facilitating relationships and dialogue with the ultimate purpose of fostering learning and change. Although the idea of the 'use of self' can be found in different professional literatures including social work and counselling and psychotherapy, more recently emergent discussion of the 'use of self' has been developed and conceptualised in relation to youth work practice (Fusco, 2012; Murphy and Ord, 2012; Turney, 2007):

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[1] By 'bringing themselves to practice', I mean how practitioners utilise the essence of their personhood in developing what Tiffany (2001:92) describes as 'learning relationships' with young people and communities, through which informal education is catalysed.

'An emphasis on relationship foregrounds the persona and personality of the worker and highlights the need for the thoughtful 'use of self'.... 'Use of self' is a shorthand term and highlights the relation between the personal and professional. It refers to the way someone makes intentional use of their own particular knowledge, understanding and experience within a relationship to benefit the person they are working with... [it conveys] that the individual is, in a sense, a resource for practice: you draw on your own experience, feelings and perceptions to make sense of the world and to frame your understanding of others...' (Turney, 2007:66).

Drawing on the person-centred approach to counselling in discussing the 'use of self' in the context

of youth work practice, Fusco (2012:36) suggests:

'The therapeutic relationship adopted through a person-centered stance is a dynamic interplay of understanding the patient's[2] needs in relation to one's own personal knowledge (lived experiences), professional knowledge (clinical experiences), and propositional knowledge (technical and theoretical knowledge). It is entered into through a complex weaving of practitioner philosophy, knowledge, intuiting, feeling, being, and becoming. The work of the practitioner is not a cognitive endeavor alone; it is self as a feeling, perceiving, and thinking being actively engaged in the co-construction of the relationship. What is known, felt, intuited is done so in a socio-historical context.'

The following definition expresses much of my own understanding of the 'use of self' in youth and

community work practice:

The use of self requires that youth and community workers bring, offer and ultilise selves - naturally yet deliberately - in order that through relationships with young people and communities, they can catalyse the possibility of learning and transformation. This involves practitioners bringing their own personal histories, narratives and experiences, indeed, everything that they are, to each encounter. It is inevitable that youth and community workers' own life experiences and narratives, and how they construct them, will influence both their sense and use of self.

This chapter therefore examines how participants describe the ways in which they utilise selfhoods

relationally in practice and the influence of different contextual factors, including their own life

histories, upon this. The chapter explores how different respondents navigate relational boundaries

in practice and the influence of different contexts upon these. In doing so, it highlights the

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[2] Fusco writes about 'the use of self' in relation to youth work by aligning it with a person-centred stance in therapy. In doing so, she utilises the word 'patient', a term that continues to be used in therapeutic circles, to describe the person with whom a therapist works.

significance of the Aristotelian concept of *phronesis*, or 'practical wisdom' as central to youth work as a relational pedagogy and professional practice:

> *Phronesis* 'is an intellectual virtue that implies ethics. It involves deliberation that is based on values, concerned with practical judgement and informed by reflection. It is pragmatic, variable, context-dependent, and oriented toward action' (Kinsella and Pitman, 2012:1).

I concur with Ord (2016) who contends that *phronesis* is a professional virtue in youth work – that context should inform wisdom in decision making. *Phronesis*, Ord argues, is more appropriate than 'rule bound' approaches that tend to ignore context. *Phronesis* is therefore well aligned with conceptions of professional autonomy and the ethos of youth work practice.

Exploring notions of selfhood, identities and the essence of relationality in professional practice is transcendently challenging. However, such a task holds rich possibilities in uncovering something of *who* youth workers perceive *themselves* to be, and how they view their practice. It is therefore an ontological and axiological task. Moreover, given the shifts and contortions in practice outlined in Chapter 2, it is also an important enterprise. This chapter discusses how the youth workers interviewed, who qualified at different times and through different institutions, and now find themselves practising in different arenas, have come to understand and navigate these fundamental questions of practice and identity.

7.2.2 Chapter Structure

In line with the approach adopted in the preceding chapter, participants' narratives continue to be presented as vignettes. Various themes are discernible between interviewees. Whilst headings are utilised to structure the chapter in line with these ideas, it should be noted that participants' accounts weave across and between motifs. In this regard, vignettes are clustered by the major themes that they contain but are not limited to the thematic headings by which the chapter is structured.

In generating the data presented in this chapter, a number of questions were posed (usually in the second interview), and where necessary discussed and clarified:

- "Can you tell me something about your practice as a youth worker, and how you bring who you are into your practice?"

- "What from your own life history can perhaps be seen in, or as influencing, your professional practice?"

- "Are you familiar with the concept of the 'use of self'? Could you explore that understanding with me, and how it might apply to your practice?"

- "I wonder if there are any specific examples you might share regarding ways in which you have 'used' self in practice?"

Not all these questions were utilised in every instance. This was particularly the case where participants engaged 'naturally' in deep and reflective discussion regarding these facets of their practice.

7.3.1 The Use of Self: Relationality, Identity and Performativity

Many participants expressed the idea of relationships and relationality as fundamental to their practice, albeit in different ways. They also recognised the influence of different personal and professional dynamics on these facets of their practice. This section highlights how respondents' commitment towards deeper forms of relationality in youth work has, in a climate of neoliberal performativity, become a site of personal and professional struggle.

Charlie

Charlie articulated how various internalised scripts have come to shape and generate tension in his sense of professional and relational identity. For Charlie, these seem to arise from his own life history of growing up in a Christian family whose members were deeply committed to helping

others, and from the performative tensions surrounding the Profession that have become increasingly inculcated in his professional imaginary.

Charlie described a deep commitment to relational practice with young people, and yet, despite the espoused richness of that relationality, at points he appeared to struggle to describe this facet of his practice:

> "I'm not quite sure what I do bring to the table, but it's just me and that me has been shaped by many different things, and certain youth work training and youth work theories that have shaped me and that, but it is very hard for me really describe what that process is, and what that means I guess, or I find it very difficult. Like in terms of what am I actually trying to do, I don't know, I don't know if I do know what I'm trying to do sometimes, I think it's just a delight to help people... and to see them grow."

Charlie seemed to express tension between processes of 'in the moment' relationality at the centre of his practice, and his own need for 'outcomes' in validating his work. Charlie recounted how this "was a bit destructive" to his earlier post-qualifying professional work. He expressed how this is something that continues, albeit to a lesser degree, to trouble his practice. Charlie reflected on how his current practice as a detached worker, where, he feels, young people ostensibly hold greater relational power, has challenged his perceptions:

> "…losing that control and that power, that's like...you won't get far as a detached youth worker unless you do that, and if you let that go, some of that ego I guess, but I think I've only recently realised that I probably am quite a controlling person sometimes… [but] detached youth work is as much a personal emptying as anything else."

Relationality and performativity appeared to collide continuously in his account – bringing who he is, investing relationally in young people appears to be a rewarding, yet emotionally costly practice. Yet, for Charlie, like the majority of respondents, youth work practice tends not to be a role he plays, rather it is expressive of who he is:

"I really strive for authenticity in the relationships, and I don't feel like I'm being that different with young people, as I am in any other aspect in my life... maybe this is a faith thing, but I don't see the lines between job and life, they're very blurred...in some ways to bring yourself is inevitable I think, I guess the question is how much you let yourself come through... Coming back to that kind of acting thing, I think people can, you can be a youth worker without really bringing any of yourself maybe, you could bring quite a dry professionalism to it, without much of the humanity, and maybe that's the way policy has gone, it's almost seen as unprofessional to let too much of yourself come in, but in terms of the human aspects of youth work which are essential, it doesn't work unless you bring some of your humanity, or your failed humanity, it feels like it's missing something to me anyway. It feels like it's a false practice as it were, or a disingenuous one maybe...in some ways to bring yourself is inevitable I think, I guess the question is how much you let yourself come through."

Elsa

The deeply held sense of identity regarding the meaning and significance of youth work to respondents' sense of self is extended by Elsa. Although she is now an Advice Worker, which she views as allowing her to go into much greater depth with the issues young people face, Elsa was adamant where her sense of professional identity continues to lie:

"I resolutely consider myself as a youth worker and proudly, even though my job title doesn't really say that anymore."

Elsa described how youth work practice reflects her identity and values – a congruence that allows her to "be who you are" in way no other job afforded her:

"That sort of informality of education suits me and also being who you are...using yourself as a tool resonates with me - that you are who you are doing this work...I don't want there to be a massive discrepancy between who I am as a person and my role as someone that's paid to do a job."

Later in the second interview, Elsa developed and qualified her ideas on the nature and potential of relationality in practice:

"...my professional persona when I'm with young people is close to who I am but it isn't who I am. But occasionally you do manage to connect, and what you call congruence or I guess what people call flow sometimes, is that similar sort of thing, is something that you do find that you reach with young people, where you might have a conversation about something,

especially on a very emotional level, where you are so in flow with them that they totally get what you're saying, and you totally get what they're saying…You're using who you are, without necessarily sharing anything personal but you're just connecting with someone and you're making, they're seeing you as who you are, even though they may not realise it and I think, you're seeing them as who they are as well. So you do get times of that sort of congruence where you're not where the role is as close to you as its going to get…I guess you're just there as someone who understands and listens and gets it and maybe can give you some clarity or self-understanding to a young person, that they come away from it knowing more about themselves and actually understanding more about the situation or how they're feeling, or being able to see things more in perspective. That it's just made a change in some way on a deeper emotional level with them. And it might not be that you have ever had any experience of their situation before, but it might be that it does touch on something that you can really empathise with from your own understanding."

Elsa also noted how in her experience, the way in which she uses self is shaped by wider dynamics including layers of socio-political influence which impact organisations. Elsa, along with other participants, cited the impact of targets and cultures of performativity in limiting the ways in which they bring themselves in relationally meaningful ways to their work with young people. Elsa, amongst others, seemed to infer practitioners have increasingly come to 'filter' selfhood in practice and to engage in more surface and utilitarian forms of interactions with young people. In doing so, she highlighted the challenges practitioners face in enabling managers and other professionals to understand the value of relationality in their practice, particularly in the current climate:

"You feel like you've got to keep reminding people that actually the reason why we are a valuable service is because we make relationships with young people. And that is the key and actually young people, the young people that we want to try and make a difference with as in the targeted ones, and the ones that tick all those boxes in terms of not in education or young parents or teenage mums and people with mental health problems and all those ticky boxes kind of things means that something's more targeted and people are wanting to try and have better outcomes with them. If it was easy to get results with them, I suppose we would be, wouldn't we, in terms of society? So all the reasons why relationships are very important as a basis for, because it's actually relationships that have often been lacking, that is the reason why they're then not functioning very well in society in terms of how we want to people to be in society in general… By having positive relationships with young people, it does restore their ability to trust and to share, and it does give them role modelling so they understand a little bit more about how relationships might work… For some young people actually having a trusting relationship might be a major outcome, but it's very difficult to quantify that."

7.3.2 The Use of Self: Life Histories, Relationality, Ethics and Place

The following section explores the influence of respondents' life histories on their practice, particularly in terms of reparative impulse. Furthermore, it highlights the meaning that belonging to, and practising in a particular 'place', represents in participants' narratives, specifically in relation to engendering cultural capital and a sense of ethical duty to local communities.

Kenan

The 'use of self' also resonates in Kenan's account. He described ways in which he brings his own experiences of bereavement and drug use together with gang activity and the criminal justice system to connect with young people, particularly those who might be deemed 'at risk'. Working in the area in which he grew up and continues to live, enables him to utilise socio-cultural capital in connecting with young people. Kenan described how he tries to get to know young people on their own terms. He cited an example of working with a young man whom his colleagues dismissed as disruptive, and how through taking time to build trust, it came to light that his mum was an alcoholic and he had caring responsibilities for his younger brother, for whom he would often forego food. Kenan expressed a deep commitment to empathy and relationality in his account. He views different facets of his own life history and experience as a key influence on his work and as a resource for practice in enabling and inspiring young people towards resilience and possibility:

> "I'd like to think everything. I'd like to think my upbringing; I'd like to think things that I've been through, things that I've seen, the people that I've been around, the people that I've mixed with, the people that I choose to mix with now. The ideas I've had it's like… I've had two of my own businesses and I've still got one now and I don't know where that's come from; I don't know if… that must have come from me wanting more, or wanting better for myself, you know what I mean?"

Kenan, like others in the study, appeared to embody a deep commitment to know young people, and through relationships to enable them to better know themselves, their worlds and their potentials. He views how he brings himself to practice as a congruent expression of selfhood:

"...what you call a practice and what I call me, I don't think we're that far apart… [it's] literally part of my personality."

Kenan came across as a passionate and even ebullient character. Yet, he described how developing as a reflective practitioner has enabled him to evolve a sense of wisdom regarding how he brings himself to practice in order to enable young people's learning. In doing so, he expressed rich possibilities and inherent tensions regarding congruence and 'role play' in the use of self:

"So, this is what I mean, so that side of me is real and true. But then I know that I have to hold back; so, when I hold back, that's when I start playing a role more, because holding back for me is harder. ... when I'm holding back, I tend to be more tentative, I tend to think about what I'm saying more, … I tend to hit the nail on the head more often, you know what I mean, when I hold back. But when I'm really forward… [I am able] to promote argument or conversation most of the time… But you have to be real to yourself. You can't be real and then play this game as somebody else. You've got to play that game as you, but maybe as a continuum of you; that other you, you know what I mean. Not a totally different character; it's your character, but it's coming out of someone's mouth."

Johnny

Like Kenan, Johnny articulated something of the importance of being 'himself' in his practice. Johnny cited what for him are they key characteristics of relationships in youth work practice – the ability to connect, be genuine and non-judgemental. Yet Johnny was also keen to highlight how living in the small market town where he has worked for many years added different ethical dimensions. Johnny expressed a deep relational commitment to place. Being known there, results in him feeling a deep sense of responsibility to ensure ethical practice that makes a difference, and to ensuring the sustainability of the organisation:

"...they recognise you as part of the fabric of the town, and it's about being accountable and it becomes real; it becomes real."

He contrasted his own experience with a lack of long-term commitment he has seen in others' practice, and argued the importance of committed relationality, particularly in more rural

geographies. He suggested his own commitment has built a culture of trust in the organisation, which has helped it survive and secure funding during challenging times.

Nikki

Nikki's experiences of growing up on a housing estate characterised by a sense of insularity appear significant to her professional practice. She now works on a different estate in the town where she grew up, whilst recognising some similar patterns between the two places. Nikki described how she draws on learning from her own formative experiences in order to challenge people and reveal truths. It is as though her use of self is driven reparatively by a critique of her own experience, which she now uses as a heuristic tool to frame practice. For Nikki, practice appears to be a political act, but not one that is only concerned with naming the external world, but also with recognising and challenging the ways in which people are engaged in self-oppression and perpetual cycles of "infantizing" which engender inertia. Nikki inferred such processes have become enculturated in the locality and feed off and contribute to a rise in populist thinking. She appeared critical of the "aggressive capitalism" she claimed keeps people on the estate poor, but which continually gives just enough to keep them (happily) oppressed and caring little for the possibilities that may lie beyond the borders of the known. Yet despite these concerns, Nikki appeared to remain committed to a relational practice that challenges people. She described this as often a "rockier path", yet one that ultimately enables deeper learning and stronger and more respectful relationships:

> "You can see the difference in the ones that you've had relationships with that have gone through some sort of process than the ones that haven't."

Nikki qualified this by suggesting these young people are more open in their attitudes and to new experiences including the possibility of employment beyond the confines of the estate and town. Her practice has deliberately fostered approaches designed to "broaden horizons" and challenge

perceptions. These have included local intercultural events and foreign exchange trips to countries whose emigrants are blamed for local poverty.

Chris

Like Kenan, Chris viewed the way in which she brings herself to practice as a congruent extension of her own life. She also articulated ways in which her life narrative is fundamental to her practice. A sense of reparative impulse appears integral to Chris' use of self. She noted this was not borne out of a "horrible upbringing" but is rather catalysed by "some distinct moments that were vile." Like Johnny, Chris lives in the community where she practices - indeed, it is the only place she has lived. As a result, many of the young people with whom she works know aspects of her story, which she actively uses to promote learning, inclusion and resilience:

> "So, loads of the young people I work with, know loads about my personal life. Not, you know, not the nitty gritty, but you know, they, they know that, that I was a victim of domestic violence, they know that I've got a number of divorces, they know I've got kids, they know - and they also know that I still come to work every day and function… we used to have women downstairs at the young women's project, when I've done some work with them, who are single mams and a couple of times they'd use me as an example, going well you're a single mam and you cope. I'm like, yes, that, that only works if you know the story, because it wasn't easy, I didn't just flick a switch and become a single mam with my own house and a job. I think sometimes you kind of need to make things real."

Yet, she articulated there are certain personally impactive issues, like domestic violence, that she continues to avoid. However, she recognised she may need to re-evaluate different elements of her practice, particularly in light of moves to more targeted work:

> "I don't do women's work. I work with young people, so I didn't have anything to do with it, so - but actually the more we see, the more we work with some of the, the more targeted cases that we're working, the more you realise that, that almost every case that you're dealing with has some aspect of domestic violence. Think 'oh crikey okay. I'm going to have to rethink about how I feel about that and how I work about that' and it's definitely going to be something that we do more of, so I've had to get my head around it a bit, because I've always stayed well clear of it in - like I've always refused to do any domestic violence training… I don't deny it or avoid it, but I - it would be nicer just to, just leave it where it is."

There are particular reparative refrains, drawn from her own experiences, that appear to drive Chris' work:

> "...and now when I'm working with kids it's about 'I don't want you to wait until you're in your thirties before you realise that you're alright, thank you very much. You're actually alright now and you're entitled to be here...we're all bleeding entitled... We just get convinced, by whatever it is, whether it's family or whether it's society or whether it's some horrible teacher or, or just an underlying self-esteem that was never built up, by domestic violence, you know or whatever it is, that people spend lots, lots of their lives feeling like they have to be, you know, the wallflower … If people had even just an, just an average amount of self-confidence or, or awareness that they're in - that they were entitled to their space. How much more could people do?"

This reflects again her own narrative of experiencing and overcoming the violence of being silenced and of a deep sense of reparation for herself and young people through her practice. This appears to be framed by a belated recognition that she could have done other things with her life and of a belief in enabling human flourishing and potential - something she recognised is driven by a "mothering instinct".

Chris' use of self therefore appears to be shaped by a range of different personal, contextual, organisational and political dynamics, each of which she is required to reflexively negotiate in order to ensure meaningful and ethical practice.

Adele

Formative experiences and reparative impulse also appear to drive Adele's practice and influence how she brings herself to her work. She viewed her own past as being "in the past" and something she cannot change; however, she described how she continues to utilise it in grounding and framing her practice. Adele described drawing on her past to enable young people's learning and development, but is clear, that for her, this never includes direct self-disclosure. However, she recognised a degree of relational reciprocity occurring in some of her interactions with young people:

> "I don't feel like my past is a bad thing, it's made me who I am today, and it's made me be better in myself and it's allowed me to empathise with a lot of people… You can use your own experiences to help young people to understand anything. Of course, we don't ever let young people know our own past, we don't let them know our own experiences… I'm there to help them and some young people who have had a bad past and are going through a lot of things, some of them turn out to be the ones that really try and help other people and then I find sometimes what happens, is then they'd start trying to help me."

At the time of the second interview, Adele was working for a local authority, building volunteer capacity in different localities in the aftermath of the 'Big Society' policy agenda. Whilst she reflected on a sense of honesty and empathy in her interactions with young people, other dynamics were discernible in her account. Perhaps aspects of the image she presented regarding her practice originate in her dad's business background, or are influenced by what might be described as the corporatization of youth work:

> "I turn up to every board meeting in suits and most youth workers are there in trackies, they listen to me more so with a different hat and you have to learn to wear different hats in front of different people. I don't even go round wearing trackies in front of teenagers, I don't, they don't treat me any differently if I turn up in tracksuits or if I turn up in a suit, it's the way you communicate and the way you uphold yourself and the way you approach them is massive."

Adele espoused a committed to ensuring young people have a voice – a commitment that she described as being driven by her own sense of voicelessness when growing up. The practice context and culture she described also appeared to suggest an overwhelming need to ensure young people are "happy". Adele expressed passion for the possibilities of practice as a flexible, open-ended and process-orientated relational pedagogy:

> "…youth work is flexible. Youth work is adapting to what a young person's needs are. It doesn't matter what it is, you don't know what you're going to get when they come through that door. Sometimes it might just be somebody needs help with a chlamydia test and that they feel confident coming to you for that. Sometimes it's just about a life skill that they think that they need, they don't know how to budget, it could be simple things… Sometimes it can take two years, five years for a young person to come through the other end. And I think most youth work is give them the tools to get there… every young person can be helped

and I think it takes time, it takes resource, and it takes commitment and a lot of patience, which unfortunately we don't have any more… It's a long process, it's a costly process apparently, but that's kind of what youth workers do."

7.3.3 The Use of Self: Practitioners' Life Histories and 'Outsider' Identities

The following section explores the significance of respondents' life histories as 'outsiders' and how these have come to influence their sense of identity and their 'use of self' in practice.

Naseem

Naseem also articulated the centrality of her life history and identity to practice:

> "I think something that's really big for me is, is that when you're in any youth and community practice, … is about what you bring and what your history, your identity or story or your interests, what, what you bring to a conversation, what you bring to an interaction."

Her own identity as 'other', particularly within the Asian community, has raised questions and enabled dialogue regarding issues of identity, culture, history and belonging to be articulated. As a result, wider learning and transformation has been catalysed. This capacity for 'border pedagogy' and a quest for learning and insight appear central to Naseem's motivation for practice and are integral to how she uses self in her work:

> "I think that identity is not only heritage and all of that, it's many different things, isn't it and particularly through study and learning more about things like the different social constructs, like class and age and gender and ability and disability and I've found myself questioning things a bit more and I think, I think I bring myself to practice, because I feel that, I feel that I'm quite a curious sort of a person and I feel that I - I think that I ask young people questions that in turn feeds my own curiosity."

Yet Naseem, like other respondents, seemed acutely aware of the importance of contextually appropriate boundaries in her practice, and of the wisdom required to apply these judiciously in different settings. There appeared to be significant elements of Naseem's life history that are played out in her practice. She seemed keenly aware of the importance of authentically bringing herself to

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practice, of the potential vulnerability and reciprocal possibility of doing so, yet also of the potential

of such relationality to overpower interactions, and thus limit learning:

> "Because as a youth and community development worker, you've to build up a relationship, so you've to be yourself and I always - but this word, 'authenticity' is really significant to me, because I feel that - well I don't know, I, I felt that just by being my complete and honest self, if I'm feeling ill one day or if I'm feeling a bit down one day, it's, it's not a bad thing for me to take that to a session, not that I'm going to spill out in the session about what's going on in my life or anything, but, but that in that given moment, that's how I feel and in those interactions there's the possibility for us all to help one another, so I think that's what authenticity means to me, in relation to practice. So yes, I think boundaries is, I think boundaries is important, yes."

Naseem went on to provide an example of the importance of boundaries in her practice, reflecting

on a young girl's request to call her "Baji", or sister, replying:

> "'Oh, you can just call me Naseem, that's fine,' because everyone just knows me as Naseem in, in that, in those settings… I didn't want to sort of shut her down in a way, but I felt that it was really important to, to set a boundary in that moment to say, actually I'm not your sister. I'm not going to be there for you all the time, without saying all of these words. You know, because I think one of the issues in that particular area was this, this thing of young girls not really having, not really having a lot of spaces to go to be able to get out what they needed to get out of, of their systems and be able to talk to people and particularly, you know, they're not - there's certain things they're not going to talk to their parents about, but I think it was really important to me to, to create - to make sure that I put that boundary in place. I think there was also something to do with Asian-ness there and this idea of, you know, I didn't want to become too pally with, with someone who was a participant. Technically, she was a young person, so I didn't want to be, I didn't - you know, I wanted to keep those relationships really professional and - but it's hard, isn't it?"

Tom

The narratives of difference and marginalisation and the resultant sense of critical consciousness which forged Tom's formative experiences seem to continue to influence his worldview and how he brings himself to practice. Class consciousness and a commitment to struggle for social justice appear central to his narrative and identity. These are ideas he finds "invigorating", and which put "fire in the belly". Tom articulated how his practice is grounded in practical politics – of helping young people think critically about, and engage democratically with, issues that impact on them directly - including the closure of youth services:

"I was just trying to relay that to young people and how seriously if they want to keep their local centres that they're going to have to fight for them and this is how you do it, by getting yourself heard. So, I had them all protesting, marching getting petitions at school. I didn't have them they wanted to do it. I just made them aware of certain things… and they would decide then how would I want to go about it and then obviously the unions would also provide some information and then also provide some petition style kind of stuff but they would go away and do the work and then we'd go up and do a protest up town we'd encourage them to write to their local councillors and MPs… So obviously I'm bringing that to the table because that's part of me and it's what I fundamentally believe in."

Tom's political worldview appeared to be expressive of a deeper ethic of care regarding society broadly and young people particularly. Presence, constancy, relationality and congruence as shaped by aspects of his own life and experience seem to be at the core of his practice. He also expressed a commitment to challenging young people in helping them learn:

"Seeing young people with respect and listening to them. Some people can tell you straight. But if you are that way and you're not showing concern then you're not being genuine so being genuine and being real and telling them straight sometimes even if they don't like what it is."

7.3.4 Employing Active Self-Disclosure as an Educational Tool

Respondents articulated different ideas regarding active self-disclosure in practice. The following section briefly explores the accounts of two of the participants who utilise self-disclosure in their work with young people and communities.

Tom

Tom's commitment to enabling young people's learning has extended to deliberate self-disclosure. This has included discussing the circumstances around not having children, and in some instances, his sister's suicide:

"When we're like for instance in deep depth conversations and the young people will ask you more personal questions and I'll make a decision then whether I want to disclose or not… it felt right at the time, you know and it's good for young people to hear that other people have these issues in their life."

Ray

This sense of congruent relationality was also apparent in Ray's account of his practice. Indeed, he seemed critical of youth workers who he has witnessed 'role playing' in a disingenuous way:

> "As a youth worker you've got to be yourself; you can't pretend to be anyone else... I've learned that over the years that you've got to be honest and open with young people if you want to gain their trust… Other youth workers kind of perform or behave when they go into a situation, and sometimes I'm thinking: 'Where did that come from?   That's not the person I was just talking to half an hour ago', you know what I mean?"

Ray described how he utilises self-disclosure as a relational and educative tool - as a means of 'normalising' different life experiences in order to enable young people to see beyond the immediate and towards different possibilities. Citing the significance of Egan's 'Skilled Helper' model[3], he also described how he attempts to provide young people with a role model beyond their families whom they can confide in and learn with and through:

> "Obviously you don't share everything with them, but professionally you share what you need to… [But] I think the experience I've had in life, you know, the passing away of my mother, I mean I share that with any young people that have had a bereavement, you know. I know what it's like to lose someone; I don't know what it's like for them, but obviously I know how upsetting that can be for someone, you know, they do need support… You need to have them skills, don't you, you need to be able to listen to people and show empathy with what they're experiencing."

7.3.5 The Use of Self as 'A Way of Being'

The following section highlights how respondents view youth work practice as fundamental to their identity. The examples cited demonstrate how practice, in many instances, is expressive of *who* practitioners are.

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[3] (Egan, 2001).

Jane

Jane articulated how youth work is expressive of her values and integral to her identity - to the

extent that she sees little delineation between her 'personal and work life':

> "... I don't know where my job starts and ends...it's probably akin if a nurse was out shopping
> and somebody collapsed, they will be the first to walk over and say 'How can I help?' They
> wouldn't switch off and go 'It's 9-to-5 and I'm not on call'; I feel like I've always been on call
> with friends round the estate… it's just me is just the person I am… There's no differentiation
> between the personal and the professional. Sometimes you wish you could turn off because
> you do take your work home with you…"

For Jane, youth work appears to be a way of being in the world that allows her to expressively and

relationally bring herself to practice with people as a means of enabling learning and change. She

described how her use of self draws on her own narrative in empowering others to understand and

navigate their own experiences:

> "I use a lot of my past experience to help work alongside young people. I am never fearful of
> telling them my journey in the times that are right for them so that you know if we've got
> bullying incidents or relationship incidents or whatever they are I am not fearful of sharing
> any of that, because I want to give back and I want to work alongside..."

For Jane, this work appears not only to be personal, but political. She described how through her

practice she seeks to stand with people, to name and speak to power, and to enable people to cross

borders of understanding in locating their experiences within local, national and global spheres. Jane

reflected on how such work often comes at an emotional cost. Yet her sense of passion, fuelled by

her personal experiences and values and entwined with her sense of personal and professional

identity, continues to drive her forward. It is this value base, together with a commitment to

reflectivity, which seems to provide anchorage for her practice. In this way, Jane appeared to

recognise the importance of wisdom and reflexivity in her use of self – of 'uncoupling' emotionality

in particular contexts to enable a more reflective and holistic approach. This holism appears to

extend to an adaptability in the way in which she brings and utilises self within different contexts.

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Rather than seeing this as a form of 'role-play' that somehow denies the authenticity of her personhood, she reflected on how she interacts with different people by drawing on different aspects or personas of her selfhood.

Steve

Likewise, Steve, who works for an estate-based church project, articulated passionately that youth work is not just a job to him, but an integral expression of his identity. Indeed, he repeated the refrain "It's who I am" regarding practice on a number of occasions:

> "...you might have a job that involves youth work but it will never just be a job... working with young people, seeing young people flourish and have opportunity and be encouraged is what I'm about, it's who I am... it's not just about the job - I don't go 'I'm a youth worker today, I'm going to go and stand with those young people and be hip and trendy' because it's not about that. I can be who I am, I don't need to be the trend [that] is going [around] the world, I don't [need] to understand the language or whatever... There's something about: it's who I am- it's being. And that is a real thing, it's exciting... It's being amongst people and being real and it's just, it's who I am... It's this thing about being. We're not youth workers for the sake of it, it's not a job, it's life!"

For Steve, who, like Johnny and Chris, lives in the community where he works, life and practice appeared to be profoundly interconnected. This, he contended generates a different relational dynamic, and necessitates a transparency that engages with young people 'out of hours': "I'm not just a youth worker who is at the centre that he goes to, I am his community, I talk to him on the street." There seems to be a particular relationality to this, a different set of boundaries that are perhaps framed more by virtue than code. His use of self seems both relational and incarnational. Steve seemed aware that his practice can generate vulnerabilities and requires particular wisdom. His worldview also appeared to make him critical of some youth workers for whom he believes practice is "just a job". Steve appeared to critique how the transcendent possibilities of practice in other arenas has been performatively squeezed into something bleakly utilitarian:

"I've met people working for the council or whatever for who it's been a job - their role in the youth service-whether that exists anymore was a job. I don't think you can do that, properly genuinely, because you don't have the heart for it if it's about figures..."

7.3.6 Developing the Use of Self: Relationships, Wisdom and Growth

The following section further highlights how these practitioners understood relationality in youth work. Drawing on the accounts of two student respondents, it frames ways in which these practitioners utilise self as a form of living wisdom.

Louise

Louise's account conveyed a deep sense of humanity and empathic labour in connecting with others' experiences, which might be characterised as a heuristic ethic of care. She articulated how she brings who she is in a congruent fashion to her practice, describing ways in which she draws on and uses her own narrative in her work - utilising self-disclosure where she feels this is appropriate:

> "I think youth work for me, I think the side I've taken out of it quite strongly is supporting, almost the caring side of it, kind of. So like, now I work with young girls that have been in similar situations to myself, young parents, and I think myself comes out in being honest with them, in knowing that I've gone through some of the things that they've gone through and I can relate to them, so I find that works really well. I think just being myself to be honest, I think just being who I am, and not trying to be anybody else, works well with these young people… I'm just there to support them, I think it works really well, so I think it's really important for me to be open and honest, and tell my stories, and just be who I am."

Louise, as a younger practitioner, appeared aware of the influence of young people's ages on her relationships with them. She described how working with children who are closer to her son's age makes her more "mother-like" whilst work with older young people sees her take on the role of a "big sister" and co-learner:

> "... I work with them, I work alongside them, I learn alongside them, so being honest about that when they ask me how to spell something, I'm like 'you know what, I'm not really sure actually, so let's go find a dictionary and we'll find it out', I don't try to be anybody else, I don't try to know everything."

It seems Louise views the way she brings herself to practice as a naturally intuitive and authentic expression of her identity and values - a tool which she now uses in her practice to inspire young people and enable them to learn:

> "I don't ever feel like I'm playing, or I'm trying to be that role model, I just...it sounds really big-headed when I'm saying it, but it's just a natural thing to me… [but] obviously there are certain things you're not going to disclose, and I suppose that goes with your own values and things like that, but I think that depends on the situation."

Louise's description indicated she appeared confident in understanding and navigating personal and ethical boundaries in this regard. This is despite, or perhaps even because of, previously negative experiences at a particular youth centre where she observed youth workers disclosing very personal information about themselves to young people. For Louise, this represented a lack of appropriate boundaries which left her feeling very uncomfortable. Given this experience and the learning she is garnering from her ongoing practice, she recognised a growing awareness regarding the importance of boundaries, and of the emotional labour youth work can entail:

> "I try not to overstep that mark, that parental mark, because what I find then, is then I cross over boundaries into personal from professional, and then that's too much, I've gone too far. I'm thinking about another incident now, and I did have to pull myself back from it, because I did get quite...not emotionally attached in a really strong way, but I was finding myself getting very involved to a point that it was going home with me, and it was a safeguarding issue too, and personally I am a bit of a protector, so my protective instincts come out, and I did sort of have to then have supervision with another worker, and they did sort of say 'no, come on, we do need to take a step back here."

Louise described using learning from the previous practice that so disturbed her, to frame self-disclosure in a way she deems more appropriate. This, she inferred, enables young people to understand aspects of her life and encourages shared authenticity, learning and resilience:

> "I'm open and honest enough with my young people to say 'right today I need my mobile phone out on the side, because I've got a family member that's in hospital and is very ill…"

There is a passion that is apparent in Louise's description of her practice, a commitment not to be bound by the rule-based rigidities of contemporary practice; yet, this sits alongside an acute awareness of ethical concerns.

Freya

Freya, another of the student practitioners, described how her use of self has grown as she has developed in her practice. During her first professional placements, Freya reported she felt unable to truly be herself. She felt that by being restricted to observing and supporting other workers, that she was somehow reduced to playing a role rather allowed to be herself. She described how growing in her professional practice has enabled her to become more "natural" in her relationships with young people, thus permitting her to express her nurturing personality:

> "…as I have got into it, I have sort of known that my characteristics and who I am in normal life has interlinked with my practice. So, as the experience went on and the placements went on and the time went on, I would say, like at home I am just hands on and quite mothering and nurturing."

This has meant young people often seek her out over other workers to share problems. Freya recognised herself as a "fixer" - something that appeared to be framed in different ways within her own life history, yet she reported becoming increasingly aware of the need to manage these tendencies within her practice. Freya expressed that her 'fixing' can risk crossing ethical boundaries and stifle young people's learning and growth. She also recognised it can result in her "taking on too much". This awareness appears to be shaped by a growing sense of personal and professional wisdom:

> "But I am like that in everyday life as well - so it interlinks with practice who I am and my characteristics and just the way I am really, yeah it definitely carries on into my practice. I need just sometimes just let, just step back and just chill out. Not everything is perfect, youth work is not perfect. You are going to get stuff wrong, but I have to accept that."

For Freya, youth work appears to be an emotionally involved practice - one through which she brings herself relationally to engage with young people in meaningful ways. Yet, like other respondents, she inferred the importance of contextually appropriate wisdom in 'using self'.

> "I'd say I am genuine. Obviously as a youth worker you know your boundaries and you know when you are engaging in conversation you have got to. Is that acting when you are leaving out information about some things in your life? I wouldn't really call that acting but in terms of practice and things I am myself and especially, I am an emotional person so I couldn't ever see myself faking to be somebody. I act differently in different situations, but I am always myself and I can't fake what I'm feeling."

7.3.7 The Use of Self: Boundaries, Context and Purpose

This section frames questions of purpose and 'position' in 'utilising self'. Drawing on Alfie's account, it notes the importance of paying attention to context in considering relationality and issues of direct and indirect self-disclosure.

Alfie

Alfie, who has held various youth and community work roles and who now manages a Youth Offending Team, described how his use of self is framed by aspects of his own narrative and vocational pathway and by the context of practice. Specifically, he reflected on the significance of being an apprentice and subsequently having apprentices, and the sense of shared learning about life which this generated. He expressed a commitment to *knowing* young people by listening to, and, relating with them - that by understanding what "makes someone tick… you suddenly find a little lightbulb moment, and you think that's a way in…" His practice in his current YOT role continues to be relationally grounded:

> "…a good worker would come in, get to know the person first, and then decide this is what we've got to do, and this is why we've got to do it, rather than some people have a different approach to turn it on its head and say 'you've got to do this, you've got to do that, now tell us about yourself… Before you do an assessment, you've got to know how to speak the language of communication, you need to know that kind of stuff, you've got to know what makes your person tick, how you're going to communicate with them…"

Alfie argued youth workers should take care not to self-disclose. Yet he also articulated how he has directly utilised aspects of personal experience in practice (e.g. discussing his own experiences of drugs, and, given the context of work with a young man displaying sexually harmful behaviours, appropriate discussion of early sexual experiences, in helping the young person overcome embarrassment in the interaction). Alfie stressed the importance of reflection in relational practice, in order to generate awareness of what workers and young people consciously and unconsciously communicate in and through relationships. In this regard, Alfie argued understanding, negotiating and communicating the purpose of youth work relationships is integral to practice. He contended relationships need to be clearly boundaried in order for practice to be ethical and pedagogically useful:

> "...make sure that you set a clear boundary of what you're there for; you're not there to be their mate...I've seen other youth workers use approaches like that...but that's not what it is, you're offering a service to someone, as much as you might not like to think, because some people are really the other way with youth work, where they don't want to have the responsibility of telling them what to do and everything, which is a bit weird to me, always has been, like if you're going to call yourself a youth worker or a youth mentor or whatever, you've got to have a purpose there, and, and you've got to get that straight with the young person and say what you're here for... any conversation you start with a young person could go off anywhere, couldn't it really? And you've got to have those boundaries in place."

Alfie viewed boundaries as particularly important in youth justice work, where practitioners need to build relationships of purpose and trust in securing outcomes for young people and the wider community, yet which might involve prosecuting or breaching a young person at court. In this regard, Alfie stressed the importance of ensuring his staff use appropriate tools and follow set protocols, and, take time to reflect on their practice in complex environments in which young people might find themselves working with a range of agencies and professionals.

Yet he also viewed other role-specific factors important in framing practice:

"...the job I'm in at the moment being the manager, you've got to be really conscious and careful what you say to people, so I can't be the same person I was when I was a case holder, and as a case holder I couldn't be the same person I was when I was just a support worker, because it's different levels of responsibility. As a support worker you're there to support someone, g*et al*ongside them and help them through their harder times, steer them through and go to the case manager to say when things start going wrong, then the case manager's... got to have a bit more of an authority role, so you're more guarded about yourself..."

7.3.8 The Use of Self: Congruence, Wisdom and Self-Knowledge

This section draws on Annie's account to highlight the importance of practitioner self-knowledge in order to enable relational practices with young people and communities that are congruent, helpful and ethical.

Annie

Annie articulated the interconnections between her personal and professional identities, which she views as "entwined" and as expressive of mutually congruent values. She described how her own life narrative plays a central role in informing the ethos of her practice in inspiring young people and promoting their aspirations. Annie articulated the importance of congruence in youth work practice, extending this to expectations of her team:

> "I often say this to my youth workers – it would worry me if you went home and you weren't the exact kind of same person that you are when you try and resolve issues with young people. Or you're trying to inspire them. And that would worry me because then I'd be thinking 'Well, if you don't really have a good understanding of who you are. And if you don't understand who you are then young people will see through that straight away. And your relationship building might never even take off. Never mind develop'. And I think as well the understanding those professional boundaries has to come within understanding yourself."

Like other participants, Annie appeared to highlight the emotional labour youth work practice can entail, and the importance of wisdom in managing relational boundaries. Yet perhaps most strikingly, Annie appeared most explicit in indicating the importance of practitioner self-knowledge – a theme developed in discussing professional formation in Chapter 8:

"I think first and foremost I think for me in my practice understanding myself is initially I've got to understand how I present myself to different young people in different situations. So I've got to understand how I deal with those things and how I match that up to either the young person or the situation because understanding self is so complex for me because...I have to be so adaptable because of the different needs of different young people."

7.4 Conceptualising Narratives of Practice: Relationships, Resistance and Wisdom

The following sections frame participants' practice narratives in light of the reviewed literature. In particular, this discussion reframes notions of the relational 'use of self' in youth work and further proposes that it might be considered an 'ontological *praxis*'. Moreover, I posit that respondents' accounts of their practice might, in this view, be seen as a means of resistance against the onslaught of more positivistic and reductionist forces that can be seen to influence contemporary practice. I conclude by re-emphasising and attempting to reclaim the significance of *phronesis* and practitioner virtue, over more prescribed ethical codes, in youth work as a relational pedagogy.

7.4.1 The 'Use of Self' as Ontological *Praxis*

Participants' discussions of their 'use of self' reveal contrasting articulations of how practitioners 'bring' and 'utilise' various aspects of selfhood (Koh and Boisen, 2019) in enabling learning, possibilities and transformation. Each narrative demonstrates a passionate commitment to youth work as a relational pedagogy. Each expresses a commitment to empathy and relationality - of connecting with young people in order to know them, and through the connectedness of that relationality for young people to come know themselves, the world and their place within it more fully (Young, 2006). The depth of the descriptions offered reveal respondents' capacity for reflectivity and reflexivity regarding their practice. Many offered rich and thoughtful descriptions of their relational engagements with young people and communities as foundational to their practice. Some respondents also discussed how relational *praxes* have been shaped and influenced by different organisational, spatial, social, and, above all, political dynamics and forces, and how they

have attempted to navigate the challenges resulting from these conditions within divergent ecologies of practice. Their narratives demonstrate a commitment to continue to attempt to transcend the reductionism and performativity that risk reducing relational practices in youth work to something bleakly utilitarian (Duffy, 2017a; de St Croix, 2018). Indeed, some participants expressed keen awareness of how shifts in practice have come to influence such relationality and inferred not only how this has impacted on their sense of professional selfhoods, but also the core of their being.

Youth work appears therefore, for these participants at least, to be no remote, dispassionate or mechanistic practice. Although many appear aware of the growing technicisation and instrumentalisation of practice (or least their encroaching impacts) as framed by the rubrics of neoliberal governmentality (Bright and Pugh, 2019b; de St Croix, 2018; Duffy, 2017a; Duffy, 2017b; Ord, 2016), these practitioners remain deeply committed to, and willing to struggle for, youth work as a relational *praxis* with young people and communities. Indeed, many of the respondents offered articulate discussion of how they willingly and passionately utilise aspects of their selfhood - of their very being - in engaging with others, often at some deeper level, as a means of enabling connection, learning and transformation. This notion of 'working with' young people and communities is a common theme in the professional literature. Belton and Frost (2010) posit that relationality in youth work reflects the facilitative conditions of empathy, congruence and unconditional positive regard underpinning Rogerian approaches to counselling, through which the practitioner relates at some deeper level with others as a means of catalysing learning and transformation. In line with de St Croix's (2016) research, I contend that relationality in youth work is both founded in, and continues to elicit, a deep commitment in practitioners towards their practice. This commitment resonates with notions of vocation explored elsewhere in this thesis.

The present data suggest relationality is often expressive of youth workers' identities and authentic selfhoods (Belton and Frost, 2010; de St Croix, 2016; Ord, 2007). This is consonant with the 'life history' data presented in the preceding chapter which suggests participants' sense of vocation to youth work is often shaped by their formative experiences of 'borders' and/or the generation and outworking of a 'reparative impulse'. Youth work appears integral to participants' identities. For many, their practice is more than a job, it is expressive of *who they are.* In this way, youth work might be thought of as an 'ontological *praxis*...a way to imagine and enact worlds...' (Castillo, 2016:55) through human relatedness. This idea chimes with the *telos* of youth work as a *praxis* grounded in informal and critical pedagogies that promotes learning through relatedness (Tiffany, 2001). Castillo's statement also resonates with Young's (2006, 2010) view of youth work as moral philosophy – as a process of engaging with young people in considering the nature of the(ir) world(s) and how they might act on it/them in order to better it/them. Youth work as 'ontological *praxis*' also reverberates with Giroux's (2005) border pedagogy – through which educators enable people to cross various borders of selfhood, structures and imaginaries in order to develop insight and bring about change. In this sense, practitioners, in utilising self, might be thought of as co-interpreters or tour guides who are engaged in relationships which enable translation, exchange and reimagination of self∞other realties and their enactments.

Yet, youth work as 'ontological *praxis*', is not only concerned with the activity of *'doing'* youth work. For these participants at least, it is perhaps more profoundly an expressive *praxis* of *being.* That is, *being* a youth worker appears integral to many of respondents' identities – it is integral to who they *are* or perceive themselves to *be.* Youth and community work can therefore be thought of as a vocation that allows practitioners to congruently express something of who they *are*. In this regard, I argue respondents appear to be engaged in continuously interweaving *praxes* of personal∞professional selfhoods that are immanently and intricately linked to, and driven by, their

own life histories. Their 'use of self' in connecting and working with young people and communities is thus powerfully connected to and expressive of, what Rogers (1995) described as a 'way of being', or authentic action. In this view, practice is less concerned with performative enactment. Rather, it is something more profoundly relational, and fundamentally tethered to practitioners' very sense of *being*. Despite policy attempts to the contrary, and the pressures some participants articulate in this regard, the 'use of self' is not, and can never become, reduced to merely a technical or utilitarian device employed by practitioners for the purposes of engaging young people towards some outcome or other. Rather, it is a deeply committed relational *praxis* of the self that draws on and aligns practitioners' 'personal knowledge' (life histories, identities and relationalities), 'professional knowledge' and 'propositional knowledge' (theory) (Fusco, 2012:36) in possibilising learning and change. The 'use of self' can therefore be viewed as expressive of a deep ontological, vocational and axiological commitment to young people and society. Often founded in participants' own life histories, participants' 'use of self' conveys a passionately *eudemonic* commitment to enabling young people's learning, development and growth, and to working with young people and others to challenge and ameliorate the structures and conditions that prevent human potential and flourishing. In this sense, it might be argued the 'use of self' is fundamentally tethered not only to practitioners' own life histories, but is also orientated towards a shared vision regarding how society ought to be.

7.4.2 The 'Use of Self': Resistance and Emotional Labour

Respondents' descriptions of their 'use of self' appear therefore to attempt to transcend and resist the present strictures of practice which are located in a landscape of disciplinary neoliberal performativity and conformity. Although I advance an alternative view in Chapter 9, I would contend that many of the research participants continue to seek out spaces to work with young people and communities in ways that resist and usurp neoliberal conditions. Indeed, many respondents

espoused an ongoing commitment to the ideals of informal education: of process over prescription and relationship over outcomes (see also Batsleer, 2008; Jeffs and Smith, 2005). In these ways, many of the participants might be regarded as 'tricksters' (Bassil-Morozow, 2015) - those who continually attempt to push back against and usurp the ever-encroaching socio-political influences that increasingly demand from youth work that which is contrary to its ethos and practices. Respondents' ongoing commitment to critically relational *praxis*, draws on their very sense of selfhood. This however appears to come at a growing personal cost. Practitioners find themselves buffering against disciplinary social, organisational, and above all, political logics which increasingly demand that which is contrary to the *telos* of the profession they joined. The emotional labour which this relationality demands and extracts under such conditions is incalculable (de St Croix, 2016; Hochschild, 2012). Yet, as I will examine (and critique) in Chapter 9, many respondents remain passionately hopeful about the future of their profession.

7.4.3 The 'Use of Self': Ethics, Virtue and *Phronesis.*

Whilst notions of relationality are long-established within the youth work literature and are significant within participants' practice narratives, there are discernible differences between respondents regarding how relationality is navigated and expressed. Some respondents, for example, articulated a willingness to deliberately and directly self-disclose things that had happened to them personally as a means of supporting young people and enabling their learning. Others were adamant this was something they would never do. For Murphy and Ord (2013) this debate juxtaposes discourses of professional intimacy and distance in youth work practice. They suggest notions of 'distance' have emerged as a result of the professionalisation of youth work in which a separation of the 'personal' and 'professional' have been rationalised on ethical grounds. For Murphy and Ord, this represents a paradox between relational congruence and professional distance, claiming an unwillingness to directly self-disclose any personal material in supporting

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young people undermines relational integrity and thus youth work practice itself. Later, Ord (2016), in drawing on Sercombe (2010a), further locates this idea in relation to the importance of 'emotional availability' in youth work. Murphy and Ord (2013) argue that whilst indirect self-disclosure happens continuously through human actions, interactions and symbolic interpretations, that deliberate self-disclosure can be validated on the basis that it improves relational bonds with young people, thereby enabling the development of trust and the possibility of deeper 'learning relationships' (Tiffany, 2001:92). Citing Ord (2007:54), Murphy and Ord (2013:328) posit: 'the boundaries between personal and professional life in youth work are narrower than in other professions. Professional distance can be taken too far to the point that it hinders the ability to build relationships with young people.'

Along with others (Batsleer, 2008; Belton and Frost, 2010; Fusco, 2012; Turney, 2007), Murphy and Ord helpfully link relational practice in youth work with facets of Rogerian approaches to therapy. However, they appear to misinterpret Merry's (1999) work on the person-centred approach when they erroneously claim that congruence *equates to* and *requires* self-disclosure. Although direct self-disclosure in therapy is a contested idea, the assumed wisdom remains that, broadly speaking, it is neither ethical nor desirable (Mearns and Thorne, 2013). Whilst I recognise youth work is not counselling, they remain, in my view cognate professions that draw on and utilise particular forms of emotional connection and relationality that foster the possibility of learning and change. Whilst further debate on the issue of self-disclosure would be useful, it is striking the majority of participants in the present study appear to adopt rather polarised positions on the subject. Each however articulated a compelling rationale in deciding whether direct self-disclosure should, or should not, be utilised in their practice with young people.

Our pasts, and what we know and say about them, can either be a tool to support and enable others' learning, or potential 'baggage' (Turney, 2007:67). Resultantly, Turney suggests the 'use of self'

requires a high degree of practitioner reflexivity and self-knowledge to avoid issues of transference, lack of awareness regarding the impact of our own history, identity and social position which may lead to the misappropriation of power. This is something I explore more fully in relation to professional formation in the following chapter.

A commitment to relationality, and in some cases direct self-disclosure, appears to be a means by which participants continue to resist the apparent onslaught of performative prescriptiveness in youth work practice. In doing so, respondents appear to be maintaining a degree of professional autonomy in an otherwise deprofessionalising environment. For Ord (2014, 2016), this represents the importance of reclaiming and maintaining the centrality of *phronesis* as a counterpoise against onslaught of more prescribed and prescriptive forms of knowledge legitimised by neoliberal policy discourses (Duffy, 2017a). In this regard, Ord (2016) is critical of the credence given to *episteme* (scientific knowledge) and *techne* (objectivised, technical knowledge) that have come to delegitimise more human, contextually-sensitive, process-orientated and reflexively responsive forms of knowledge that have traditionally characterised relationally-founded practice in youth work.

It seems many of the respondents are very aware of the significance of different facets of relationality in practice. Many were able to articulate the centrality of the 'use of self' to their practice and of the importance of reflexivity and *phronesis* in its enactment. Many inferred the importance of working intuitively with young people, engaging in 'reflection in action' (Schön, 1983) in order to work in the moment in ways that are continuously directed towards meeting young people's needs, and in challenging them through informal educational processes. It is through these processes, that 'expertise' gives way to 'experience' and 'reciprocity' (Turney, 2007) in foregrounding the potential flow of greater mutuality in youth work practice. This, for Turney (2007:77), represents the capacity for 'intimacy' in workers' relationships with young people. This,

Turney contends, allows boundaries, which are integral to ethical practice and the promotion of informal learning to be maintained, whilst enabling warmth and bonds of trust between practitioner and young person to be developed in order to promote connection and the possibilities of learning and transformation. For Turney, effective practice needs to be elevated beyond that which is *reflective* and towards that which is *reflexive.* In this sense, she argues practitioners must take account of the different interrelated and shifting contexts in which practice with young people is located. This, she argues includes the contexts of what is happening in different spheres of young people's lives, the organisational context in which practice happens and the socio-political dynamics which impact in interplay on the young person, the practitioner and the organisation. Whilst the 'use of self' can be thought of as something intimately relational, it is undoubtedly influenced by wider dimensions of power (Rossiter, 2007). This brings into sharp relief the importance of youth workers' understandings of the multi-dimensional nature of selfhood as constructed between practitioners and young people. Turney argues such awareness ought to prompt critical insights regarding the influence of the personal – practitioners' (and young people's) life histories and how these have come to shape who they are. But equally, she contends, practitioners should be able to consider and analyse the changing and unfolding nature of social, organisational and political dynamics on young people and themselves as practitioners, and, to consider how these influence the changing nature of relationality in practice. Such ongoing critical awareness is central to youth work as an ontological *praxis*.

These ideas again foreground the importance of *phronesis* as a form of living, reflexive wisdom, or 'discerning judgement' (Dunne, 2011:13). For Dunne, *phronesis* represents a form cumulative wisdom or the 'internal goods' (ibid.:14) a profession develops over time, in orientating itself to the service of others. Whilst in some ways complementary to *episteme* and *techne, phronesis* is also their antagonist – it returns wisdom to that which is profoundly contextual, contingent and human,

over that which is more imposed, prescribed or universalised. Although it might be argued youth work has been increasingly besieged by politicised *epistemes* of positivism and reductionism in the pursuit of performativity (Duffy, 2017a; de St Croix, 2016, 2018), many of the research participants' relational engagements with young people appear to remain within a *phronetic* frame. For many respondents, youth and community work as an 'ontological *praxis*' is one that is profoundly and intuitively reflective of the interweaving of selfhoods. It is for this reason practice is orientated through relationality towards virtue. In this way, research participants' description of their 'use of self' remains something truly human – a riposte to a policy environment which is becoming increasingly dehumanising towards young people and youth work as a profession. Although differing in approach, and the application of boundaries as shaped by personal, spatial and organisational dynamics, each participant spoke passionately about the centrality of relationships with young people in their practice and of the importance of the 'use of self'. Many also articulated a deep sense of wisdom regarding the application of relationalities that paid attention to contexts and to the congruent and virtuous use of relational boundaries in supporting young people and enabling learning.

7.5.1 Concluding Comments

This chapter has explored participants' practice narratives. It has focussed on descriptions of the way in which respondents engage relationally with young people and communities, and, how this is influenced by both personal and wider contextual factors. Whilst existing literature offers speculative theorisation regarding the 'use of self' in youth work, the present chapter furthers discussion empirically. It suggests respondents' life histories and identities are integral to practice, and as such, youth work might be considered an 'ontological *praxis*'. The chapter has highlighted the significance of relationality as a profoundly human practice and as a site of resistance against the fettering effects of prescription and performativity in contemporary youth work. In doing so, it

has articulated the continuing potential of relationality and *phronesis* as practices of virtue in youth work.

Chapter 8

Reflections and Perspectives on Personal and Professional Formation

8.1 Introduction

This chapter examines respondents' experiences of professional qualifying youth and community work awards. It considers participants' experiences of their course of study, and the extent to which these programmes enabled exploration of the influence of different dynamics on their life histories, identities and future professional practices. The chapter also draws on additional interview data with two youth and community work lecturers whose courses include modules that specifically require students to consider and address these issues as part of their professional formation. The chapter concludes by developing discussion and theorisation of these practitioner-tutor perspectives by means of critical synthesis with the reviewed literature.

8.1.2 Developing Context: The 'Use of Self' and Professional Formation

Given the importance of the 'use of self' in youth work practice, as discussed in Chapter 7, and the way in which respondents' selfhoods appear to be shaped and motivated by their own life histories, it seems important to develop an understanding of the extent to which these multi-layered dynamics were attended to in participants' professional formation. This issue is also advanced by Jones *et al's* (2013) discussion of the 'socio-ethical' apprenticeship in professional formation. As noted in Chapter One, in approaching this research, I was fascinated by the extent to which youth workers were enabled to develop 'self-knowledge'. This appeared to me to be in stark contrast with the forms of deep intra-personal knowledge fostered in other 'helping professions' - most notably counselling. Yet in the process of this study, I have come to realise more fully the multi-dimensional

nature of selfhood, and that solely introspective forms of self-knowledge fail to recognise its historical, social, organisational and above all political nature. While I continue to value intrapersonal knowing, I have come to concur with Turney (2007:81), who in writing about advancing from reflectivity to critical reflexivity in the 'use of self' states:

> 'The individualism or 'psychologism' of conventional approaches has been challenged on the grounds that it tends to obscure the broader environment of practice. Workers do not operate in a vacuum: practice is located within the social and often highly charged political context.'

The purpose of the following sections is therefore to consider how participants experienced professional formation on qualifying youth and community work courses, and the extent to which the ethos of different programmes influenced and enabled exploration of selfhood on different levels.

8.2 Chapter Structure

Participant vignettes are collected into two major categories in this chapter. Similar ground is covered in both instances in relation to respondents' perceptions of their professional qualifying programmes. The first collection explores the stories of those respondents whose courses did not contain discernibly explicit or discrete spaces for the types of 'personal development' or 'exploration of self' outlined in Chapter 3. The latter explores the experiences of those respondents for whom such spaces were afforded. As outlined above, this is followed by the presentation of distilled data from interviews with two colleagues who teach on JNC professional qualifying awards, whose courses include specific modules which engage students in such explorations.

In generating the data presented in this chapter, a number of questions were posed during the second interview[1]:

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[1] N.B. the questions posed to each participant varied according to the answers provided.

- I am interested in youth workers' experiences of professional formation. Can you tell me something about your experience of the professional qualifying course you decided to study?

- How would you describe and evaluate the ethos of the course?

- What learning emphases did you experience?

- How do you feel the course enabled you to think about and develop yourself as a person and as a youth work practitioner?

- Were there any particular modules that enabled you to think critically about your own experiences and life story?

- I wonder if you could evaluate your experience of these modules and approaches?

- What, if anything might have been particularly beneficial to you and your development as a practitioner in enabling you to think about yourself as a practitioner?

8.3.1 Reflections on Contrasting Experiences of Professional Qualifying Awards: Ethos, Pedagogy, Identity and Practice

Respondents were invited to articulate what they saw as the ethos of their respective courses of study. Each highlighted different emphases including educational, social justice, psychological, and socio-political influences. Johnny recounted his qualifying course, which he studied during the mid-1980s at a time of considerable social, political and industrial upheaval, was a passionate affair. He reported "hating" the course because of continual arguments, which, on one occasion degenerated into a physical fight between students:

> "...at one point there was a fight between two lads... I mean people did their work, but the conflict within the group was unbelievable."

Johnny reported his course engaged in critical dialogue in deconstructing social and political ideas, but in doing so, he inferred it replaced one set of hegemonic ideas for another, thereby shutting down the very forms of dialogue that are central to professional practice. He recounted no time being allotted to 'personal development' or exploration of his own story.

Like Johnny, Annie described her course (which she completed in the mid-1990s) as consisting of mainly "mature students", but although there was an "edginess" about her peers, the "debate we were allowed to have was quite healthy and encouraging". The course ethos was concerned with "professionalising youth work". Although she recounted one tutor who "started to make me understand theory and how important that was to again understand yourself and your opinions", no specific space was given over to explore selfhood or the significance of life histories, at least in any way that she thought of as being discernible or systematic. However, Annie did recount the usefulness of a counselling skills module, which, as a biproduct, gave her some further insight into selfhood, and greater confidence in relating with young people in practice. Like a number of other participants, Annie described how the course mirrored aspects of the informal educational pedagogy of youth work, through fostering dialogue, debate and learning.

Alfie recalled his time on a professional qualifying course (completed in the early 2000s), with a range of people from different backgrounds, and at a time of significant personal and professional transitioning, as a "watershed moment". He recounted the course including a counselling skills module which allowed some exploration of selfhood, but not the deeper self-reflection he might have anticipated.

Steve was among a number of respondents who articulated how his degree studies (completed in the 2010s) deepened his sense of professional identity. He reported it allowed him to understand more deeply the social conditions that regulate young people's lives, to gain insight into different

approaches and facets of practice, whilst generating theoretical justifications for his own work, and developing capital in dealing with other professionals. He reported the course politicised him, and further animated his commitment to young people's rights, whilst engendering in him greater confidence in debating ideas with others, including young people.

Tutorial groups appear to have enabled Steve to develop a deeper understanding of how particular shadows from his past had come to influence his own sense of personal and professional identity. By engaging reflectively with particular personal and professional questions, Steve reported emerging from his studies with a greater degree of self-acceptance. Although these tutorial groups were not explicitly set aside for the task of 'personal development', Steve suggested they were driven by a commitment to enabling reflective practice via modelled processes of informal education, of learning through interactions with others. Steve reflected on the significance of these tutorials:

> "...when I first heard those phrases [reflective practice] I was like 'Gosh, no, I've got to think about myself! And go deep and that's not what I want to do.' But actually, I've learned so much about myself as a youth worker… You know being challenged to think about why I do what I do how I respond. It has been an amazing experience… I'm a far better youth worker, I believe just for that reason alone, just an understanding of who I am."

Louise expressed how her degree programme (completed in the 2010s) enabled her not only to develop professionally, but also to come to a greater understanding of her own values. Although the course did not offer specific modules that examined selfhood, like others, she described how her course mirrored the dialogical principles of informal education in enabling her to develop a deeper personal understanding that was significant in contributing to her professional formation. She noted how these processes drew to some extent on students' own stories:

> "...it's taught me loads about myself. [Before the course] if you had asked me about my values, about my morals, about ethics, I would have shrugged it off and probably not really known, and I suppose didn't really fully understand what was going on inside of me, like that

sounds really deep...I was quite up and down to my own beliefs and things, and maybe listened and followed what other people would say, and now I feel I've got more headstrong and I know that these are my morals, these are my values."

Louise's description of the course seemed to reflect a commitment to enabling students to think about the developing their sense of themselves and the relationship between their values and actions.

Discovering youth and community work as a profession appeared to be something of an epiphany in some participants' life histories. This seems to be the case for Tom, who applied for and was accepted onto a professional qualifying programme after just a few short months of part-time and voluntary experience. He described himself as a "sponge", desperate to absorb as much learning as possible. The socio-political frames employed on the course aligned with and spoke to his own experiences and worldview, allowing him to see and name the world in new ways:

> "...the content [of the course] changed my life. I always thought I was politically aware and I was decent. But it opened up my eyes...And people asked me 'What was it like?' and the only I way I could describe it is my course at uni was like going to a magic show. You go to a magic show, I don't believe in magic, right. But I know it's a trick. Going to uni took me round the back of the stage and showed me how the trick was done. That's how I used to describe it...I learnt how it all works and the mechanics of it and how it's deployed and how ignorance is bliss and how society likes to keep a lot of people in ignorance..."

Tom reported his experience of the course was not always comfortable. The challenge of learning and thinking differently required him to challenge assumptions; however, this was something he embraced passionately:

> "I just loved it all I absolutely loved it all because I was constantly in a place of uncomfortability...this course strips you down bare, but it doesn't put you back together...Stripping down your thoughts and ideas that you thought you had about how things work or about yourself and how society works and stuff like that...They strip you down because everything you say is wrong. No matter what you say there is always something that is challenged... So, you constantly get used to thinking 'Do I think that, will I think that?' but it's good because you start to think more deeply."

Tom's learning had a profound influence on him. It included weekly, 90-minute, Personal and Professional Group Work sessions, led by one of the course tutors who also had a background in counselling. Tom's description suggests that this was facilitated much like a counselling Personal Development Group but tended to encompass exploration of professional *and* personal issues and concerns. This also generated learning on group work processes that have come to inform Tom's thinking about group dynamics and practices as a signature pedagogy in youth work. Tom seemed to suggest these groups contributed to understandings of self and the significance of this for practice, but that they also generated vulnerabilities:

> "…a lot of people dreaded them because you were exposed. You're sat in a circle and a tutor would facilitate but the tutor never orchestrated; the tutor only facilitated so sometimes we had to sit there. So, the tutor would just sit there and wouldn't say a word and then everyone would be looking at each other – who's going to talk? So as soon as someone talks, I want to talk about my experiences last week and discuss an issue and then we'd talk about – why did you bring that up, what does that effect? So, it was all and then would start analysing each other but it was all about learning group processes… I learnt that you cannot have leadership – it has to be given to you in these kind of environments. But I rejected it and then I had to analyse why I rejected it and I didn't feel worthy of it. I felt that I was really new to the practice. I was a new student; I was a new practitioner. I was still learning my practice before, you know, even the academic side of it because I was learning both at the same time. I was learning my practice and my academic hand in hand whereas some of them on that course had been youth workers for ten or fifteen years. So, I didn't feel that I was worth enough because I thought they had a lot more experience than me and I'm not as good as them. At the time I did think that, and I still probably did until I finished. Where I am now because I'm more experienced in the field I feel a lot more confident it was massive piece of learning, really good reflective practice as well."

Tom contended these groups were significant in developing self-awareness and his understanding of the way in which he brings himself to practice.

Nearly all respondents spoke warmly about their professional qualifying awards. Adele, for a variety of academic and personal reasons, was however, more critical, describing her experience, as "appalling". Adele contended the course (which she completed in the 2010s) failed to recognise the changing realities of practice or model professional pedagogies. She reported that attention to

understanding self was broadly absent from her course. However, this was a facet she thought should have been included, in enabling student practitioners to understand the influence of their life histories on their sense of vocation and professional practice:

> "...a lot of us struggled about that, about your past experiences in your professional capacity, influencing you today... I think that [those] kind[s] of self-explorations are a benefit for a lot of people... it's a massive thing that is desperately needed because people don't just sign up to do things like youth work. People don't just sign up to do social work, people don't just sign up to do Foster Care, unless influences in your life have had a direct impact. It could be that you had a fantastic upbringing and you really want someone else to have that same opportunity, so you foster, or you adopt. It could be that somebody has really good experience of youth work, and they want to then do that for other people. You don't just wake up one day and go, 'Well I was going to work at Sainsbury's but actually I'm going to do social work. Why? No idea really, I just fancy it.' It's not a profession you just fall in to; it doesn't work like that I don't think. There's definite direct personal implications that completely affect why we do our jobs..."

Although Ray expressed a deep sense of gratitude for his course of study (which he completed in the late 1990s), and valued the expertise of his tutors, like Adele, he also articulated his qualifying award paid little attention to questions of participant histories and selfhoods. After qualifying however, he undertook a Counselling Skills award which did allow such explorations. This is something Ray believed enabled his practice as a youth worker to develop further.

Chris described going to university as a mature student as "terrifying". Like Johnny, she described significant cultural changes between her time studying for a professional qualifying diploma (completed in the early 1990s) and a top-up degree some years later. Whilst the university had become more professionalised, the course itself appeared to attract an increasing number of younger students without significant experience of youth work. Chris described the modules on the diploma being driven by a commitment to equality and social justice. She didn't recall the course being particularly political; however, she recognised this perception may have resulted from her own self-confessed lack of political awareness at the time. She reported the diploma did not contain

any 'formal' spaces for personal exploration or development. This however is something she felt would have been useful at this point in her life in enabling her to develop greater personal awareness; however, she also contended that had this been a requirement on the degree top-up, given that she had just left an abusive relationship, it would have more likely have been a damaging experience:

> "I think if it happened when I was there the first time, I might have had that whole realisation that I'm worth my space on the planet a lot earlier, because I think, you know, because it was a lot lot later on than that. The second time probably would have opened a Pandora's Box, because I'd just come out of a horrendous violent relationship, which [laughs] I probably would have spent every session in tears, so that wouldn't have been useful at all.

Jane described the ethos of her qualifying course (completed in the late 1990s) as being driven by a commitment to equality, professionalisation and preparing students for strategic levels of practice. Jane recounted the course being less detailed than the degree programme she later came to teach, but with a greater commitment to utilising informal educational approaches to generate deeper applied learning, than the more lecture-orientated approaches she believes have become prevalent on youth and community work programmes. Jane reflected on the lack of specific attention to practitioners' selfhoods and life histories as a "missed opportunity". Yet as a practitioner-academic, she contended the contemporary emphasis on self-knowledge on the course she teaches has led to a form of introspection that in some instances limits students' capacity to work effectively with others' issues. She reflected on different facets of her own experience in this regard, raising ethical and pedagogical questions about the appropriateness of such an approach:

> "I came out [of my qualifying studies] probably not exploring who I was, but very good at being able to work within a field to support people because I hadn't been personally challenged and had been made to feel fragile, which I think some of course modules do make you feel fragile if there is a fragile person in there... but I also see the benefit if we can get them [youth and community work students] through the process… But I'm not sure if we open Pandora's box, we are not in the position to put all that back...if we unpack their internal dialogue will that enable them to have external dialogue, or will that silence them more."

Charlie described some paradoxes in relation to his own experiences of professional formation on his degree programme (completed in the early 2010s). He seemed to suggest that scope for personal development was, rhetorically at least, embedded across the curriculum. Yet he also noted that he experienced aspects of this as personally instrumental – reflective recordings were more of a tedious task than a means of fostering deeper learning. As a Christian, Charlie also expressed an unease with the humanist values of the course, which, he felt, precluded him to some extent from exploring and articulating his own faith-based values as much as he would have liked:

> "…there were assumptions that were made about faith which I saw from a humanist perspective, but it was taken for granted not to speak out in any situation, it's hard, it is difficult, so I definitely felt that pressure."

Charlie, like Jane and Chris appeared uncertain about the value and appropriateness of explicitly facilitated personal development work and how comfortable he would have felt had this been part of his course:

> "I don't know if anyone going to uni is that willing to do that, I don't know. It's a very deep thing to do, a very painful thing to do, and the far easier thing is to save face and just get through."

Charlie recognised that whilst such work was undertaken informally between students, for him, "…[it] didn't quite happen to the extent or depth it perhaps needed to." However, despite the absence of formally facilitated Personal Development work, Charlie reported he felt "forced", almost as an implicit requirement of the course to: "…dig deep into yourself and dig deep into your attitudes and your beliefs." Yet he suggested the culture of the course left him wrestling with these issues "behind the scenes" and feeling "isolated" as a result.

8.3.2 Participants' Experiences of Discrete 'Personal Development' in Professional Formation

> "…if you don't know yourself and who you are and how you are as a practitioner, how do you know how you are going to change; so they are very important in knowing yourself and

knowing your identity and self-reflecting and growing as a person because without all that there's no point. In youth work you might want to do something and change it and change the world and do this for young people, but if you don't know who you are and know yourself it's pointless isn't it?" (Freya).

Five participants explored their experiences of qualifying courses that paid explicit attention via discrete modules to questions of would-be professionals' personal histories and identities. Whilst for one of these participants, Elsa, this was not part of her *professional* qualifying post-graduate award, she was keen to cite the significance of her experience of this work as part of her *part-time* youth work qualification. Three of the other four participants, Freya, Kenan and Naseem, each studied for their professional qualifying awards at the same institution, which incorporates two undergraduate modules on questions of personal and professional identity into its curriculum. For Naseem, this was attended to as part of a post-graduate module.

Freya and Kenan described how 'personal development' modules were facilitated through group work processes that reflected the pedagogies of youth work practice. Freya noted the way in which the module was facilitated built trust between students, enabling them to learn about themselves through learning about others, and learn about others through learning about Self. For Kenan, these modules were integral to building a "family mentality" on the course. Both noted how these modules enabled them to develop self-knowledge and deepen their capacity for personal and professional reflexivity:

> "that module's also about accepting your identity and accepting how people see you as well; … that module makes you appreciate and accept the good things about you as well which they say people it's harder to accept the good things about you than the negative isn't it, so it were a really important module that one" (Freya).

> "It does give you that third party insight. It makes you think, well wait a minute, I know what I think about myself but if I really think where's that coming from, and what does that entail, and how did I get like that, and how do I feel like that… why did I feel like that then? Where was I living, what was I doing?... Some things you do totally block out. That was the [module] that probably taught me how to reflect and how to how to organise and gather your thoughts; and just sit down and get to know yourself. You've got to learn yourself to know

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how you work… [it was] a good module, but it was just the fact that it didn't seem to last long enough" (Kenan).

For Freya, this module promoted self-insight and self-acceptance in enabling her to 'be' in practice.

This awareness has had specific impacts on her practice:

> "The identity [module] it's like, I think it's more about acceptance and I think to be real and not to be fake and just to be real in what you do you have to accept some things about yourself that you might not want to accept… I'm aware that I always am that person that tries to diffuse a situation; I have had to learn through this course that sometimes you can't always be like that, you have got to let other people grow and you've got to let people overcome their fears as well… because it's not helping them if I always rescue how's everybody else going to grow and also that's me growing as a person realising that I have to step back as well so I'm always growing, I'm not perfect and me realising that not everything is always perfect, realising that is helping me to grow as well but you can't realise that if you don't self-reflect and you can't realise it if you haven't got them, if I hadn't worked on them modules I wouldn't know to do that."

Naseem's professional qualifying study at the same institution also facilitated deeper understandings of personal∞professional selfhoods. She reported, during a particular module, how students were encouraged to examine interconnections between the social and personal in their living histories. Much of what she described appeared to resonate with notions of border pedagogy outlined earlier in the thesis – of exploring self∞other dialectics, positionalities and subjectivities, and how these might be acted on in reshaping understandings and possibilities. Naseem reported this module drew on different sociological and psychological theories in order to develop understandings of selfhood she has applied in developing relational *praxes* in her work.

Although, she had previously completed a counselling skills award, Nikki expressed appreciation for a particular module on her professional qualifying programme (completed in the late 2000s) which utilised principally sociological perspectives in generating understandings of participants' selfhoods:

> "… [It]focus[ed] on you and your life story and how you got to where you were... you did start to question yourself and it was more about why you made some of the choices in your life that you've made… it makes you think that just because it looks good on the outside and

it looks very privileged [people] actually become oppressed within your own class. No matter what class that is you can be very oppressed. So, you start looking at things at different levels. It's not just poor people that were oppressed and anybody can be oppressed for a different reason. It's not just about poverty or what you have or you haven't got. It's much deeper than that..."

Whilst Elsa reported her professional qualifying course lacked any content on 'personal development', something she believed was due to a latent expectation that postgraduate students should already 'know' themselves, she was keen to highlight the significance and importance of this to her part-time youth work award. This course employed the use of individual mentors and a group-centric approach. Elsa reported that sharing and exploring personal material was integral to 'professional' learning. The course was run by a "bolshy" feminist, whose approach Elsa reported valuing:

> "...self-expression and personal development and looking at all of these things, and so the sort of youth work was on any training did explored and pulled on your own personal stuff...So one of the things early on in the training that you did was to choose three experiences from childhood, and really write about them in terms of why you think, how they were important, and why they were important in a practice that you do, and I still have a very clear sense of having done that really and thinking, oh yeah I never thought about these things before... it was always there very much on the table, very explicit, that this is part of who we are and that's, it was almost, proud to be youth workers that this is the discipline that we have, we do think these things are important that we draw from our own personal experiences and we use them..."

8.4.1 Tutors' Perspectives on 'Personal Development' and Life History Work in Youth and Community work Professional Formation.

During the process of the research, I also interviewed two colleagues who teach on JNC qualifying programmes at separate institutions. Their programmes include discrete modules which utilise different approaches to enable students to explore interconnections between personal and professional selfhoods. David, who taught three of the research participants, works on an undergraduate programme that includes two modules, one in the first year and one in the second,

that are dedicated to such explorations. Craig, who previously taught another of the participants, teaches a first-year undergraduate module that asks students to draw on and critically locate aspects of their life histories and experiences through different sociological and psychological perspectives as a means of developing understandings of selfhood.

Both David and Craig articulated the importance of 'personal development' in professional formation. Regarding his programme, David stated: "academic and professional practice and personal development are all equally valued." And Craig commented that "...it's really important for youth workers to critically get to know themselves." Both expressed the idea that developing young people's understanding of selfhood is integral to youth work practice, and that these processes ought to be mirrored in practitioners' professional formation. Indeed, David felt too much is assumed regarding these concerns, and not working with these issues, risks failing to recognise the potential impact of practitioners' own lives and experiences on practice:

> "...personal development is the one where, sometimes the perception that people should have done it, or be gone with it, or do it their own time. There's very little celebration of the fact that people bring so much lived experience with them to the course, and that actually they're not coming as a blank slate."

Craig and David expressed similar rationales and approaches to their work on these modules. Each articulated a commitment to enabling students to explore questions of identity by drawing on different, principally sociological perspectives, that attempt to locate participants' life histories and experiences in the context of categorisation and structuration, and to unfold the potential meanings of these in relation to identities and (future) professional *praxes*:

> "The centre or core would be this idea of self and structure, so this idea of how aware are we of ourselves and how aware are ourselves of the structural organisation of our lives. So, this kind of combination of flow, so the two elements to it would be a critical engagement with the context of lives, and a therapeutic engagement with the understanding of our experiences in life. So how have those experiences formed the way we might read the world, how does that interplay or connect with a critical understanding of how worlds operate. And

so that's the purpose of the module, it's a lot for first year students to get to grips with, but the idea of it is really to start the students on that journey, allowing them to explore themselves, what, how they might be gendered, racialised, classed etc., within the worlds that they've grown up in. And how what they've come to know about the world, may be attached to that, in order for them to be able to engage with some of the theory and practice of youth and community work" (Craig).

"The essential characteristic of it is about identity forms is at the bedrock of having conversations and communications with others. And so, the two parts of this is that you need to know yourself before you know others, and that you need to be able to understand more about other people's context, lived experience and culture, and to be understood. So that these two things align themselves quite well, so the module itself does this see-sawing between the two. Discuss yourself, your own lived experience, building upon the level four module in terms of how you're looking on the course, but this then gives people the option to reach further back. You know, what has made you who you are, and talking about that in various different theoretical frameworks, in terms of the types of hats that people wear, or the type of cultures and domains they come from" (David).

Both Craig and David described pedagogical approaches that mirror the dialogue and informal education of youth and community work practice. Drawing on different theoretical bases, David and Craig outlined how students are encouraged to explore aspects of their own life histories and experiences, with tutors utilising discursive approaches to enable critical interrogation of these, as a means of catalysing insight regarding questions of identity. Craig, in particular, was keen to highlight the view that whilst such modules should not pressurise students to reveal aspects of their lives that are difficult or painful, that professional formation ought to include "safe space[s]" that encourage would-be practitioners to think "therapeutically" about their work as a means of developing empathy and virtue:

"...some youth and community workers don't think therapeutically, I'm probably allowed to say that. And I think we ought to, because I think our ethics of care tend to suggest that we ought to think about this, and concerns about equality. Also, we should think about equality, not just in a macro way, but actually in the way that we live each other's lives and try and learn from each other's lives and change our own lives in order to try and be better people."

8.5.1 Discussion

Youth and community work is a socio-educational activity through which practitioners draw on different aspects of selfhood in order to enable connection, support and learning. The preceding chapters have argued the significance of respondents' life histories in framing an understanding of their sense of vocation to youth and community work practice, and of the ways in which they draw on different facets of self and their own biographies in engaging with young people and communities in order to promote learning and change. The *person* of the youth worker is therefore significant in framing relational, critical and ethical practice. These ideas align with my previous assertion regarding the ways in which youth work might be thought of as an 'ontological *praxis*'. Such ideals re-elevate the potential and humanity of practice. They call for a re-orientation of youth work education from 'training' towards a professional formation that takes account of practitioners as people, whose histories, experiences and identities hold infinite potential, but which need to be understood in order to be utilised beneficently. These claims resonate with Moss (2007:9) who contends those working in the 'people professions' have a *duty* to *know* self:

> '...without an understanding of who we are, we are unlikely to grapple successfully with the issues which perplex us... Unless we know who we are, we are not going to be able to help anyone else at all. Indeed, we are more likely to be a hindrance than a help; a stumbling block rather than an effective signpost to better things.'

These ideas connect with Johns' (2012) assertion that professionals whose work is principally concerned with engaging with others as 'persons in relation' ought, as an ethical imperative, to develop self-knowledge and self-acceptance in order to enable the same in others.

In this view, practitioner selfhoods are powerful, indeed principal 'tools' for practice (Turney, 2007). Understanding selfhood, as nested within different domains, is therefore essential to ensuring the capacity of Self as a resource for practice is maximised ethically for others' benefit. For Fusco (2012:39), such self-understanding is integral to youth workers' capacity to remain 'attuned' in the

development of 'we[ness]'. Young (2006, 2010) argues such relationality is fundamental in enabling young people to develop fuller and reflexive understandings of their own selves in the context of the world. However, for relationality to be beneficial, practitioners' understandings of Self as an 'ontological *praxis*' and 'more knowledgeable other'[2] (Vygotsky, 1962) are paramount. This highlights the significance of 'locating' person∞practitioner selves (Moss, 2007; Turney, 2007). For Turney, this not only represents developing and releasing relational potential, but of also gaining insight regarding and addressing 'shadowside' dynamics – that is to say those aspects of self that are either unknown, denied or repressed, and which bear consciously or unconsciously on practitioners' relationships with young people and communities.

Work of this nature needs to take account not only of the personal and biographical, but also of the intricate and interweaving relationship between practitioners' and young people's unfolding narratives of lives as lived in social, familial, educational, organisational and political domains. As such, self-knowledge is essential to the ongoing development of ethical practice, virtue and *phronesis* in youth work. It is, as Rose (2008) writes, integral to processes of contingently understanding 'self' in relation to 'others'. Elsewhere, Rose (2012:3) describes the pursuit of self-awareness in relational work as the 'struggle to bring into conscious awareness that which has been previously out of sight or on the 'edge of awareness'. Whilst Rose locates her thinking within the 'personal-psychological' domains of psychotherapy, her assertions remain essential to the broader understandings of self outlined above, and integral to promoting authentic *eudemonic praxis* through self∞other awareness (Jones, 2013). Moreover, attending to these concerns recalibrates,

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[2] This is not to frame youth and community workers as 'all knowing others'. Informal education is concerned with the possibility of promoting learning through the critical fusion of ideas. It is a discovery-orientated pedagogy, through which practitioners also have the potential to learn and be transformed. Youth and community workers need to hold their status as 'experts' in young people's lives lightly; however, practitioners need to recognise their status, as those who young people sometimes look up to. This calls them to understand the power of relationality in practice, and take seriously how they continue to develop understandings of selfhood and, in turn, how these contribute to relational 'we-ness' in practice.

for youth and community work, what Sullivan (2005) has described as the three apprenticeships of professional formation: the academic, the practical and the socio-ethical (i.e. that which is concerned with vocation, identity and purpose) (Jones *et al*., 2013)). For Floyd (2013:139), this highlights and reconnects the centrality of the professional∞vocational - that is practitioners' external, social obligations with their 'inner life' as 'two sides of the same coin'.

It is clear from the data, that the majority of participants enjoyed and appreciated their engagement with their professional qualifying courses. Many reported their experiences of professional formation have been integral in shaping their practice and influencing, and, in some cases, confirming their sense of professional identity. Participants articulated how different contextual factors including the place where they studied, the period of time in which their studies took place and tutor influence, together with external professional, social and political factors each contributed to shaping the ethos of courses, and their experiences of them. Many also reflected on how the pedagogy of the courses they studied mirrored the group-focussed, dialogical pedagogy of youth work practice (Belton and Frost, 2010). However, it is also clear that there are differences in respondents' experiences regarding the extent to which they were enabled to explore the significance of different facets of selfhood and their formulation, and the potential meanings and implications of these for the 'use of self' in practice. This raises questions regarding the extent to which 'questions of self' are attended to consistently in professional formation. Some respondents expressed how such ideas were almost incidentally embedded in counselling skills modules or group tutorials. Others suggested these issues were not attended to at all, or, where they were, on reflection, this work lacked the depth that they might have anticipated. A few respondents raised concerns regarding the ethics of such work. Some contended that had this been a requirement of their studies, that at the time, it would likely have been detrimental to them.

In contrast, respondents whose professional formation included exploration of selfhoods and life histories as part of discrete modules, tended to speak enthusiastically about the significance of learning to 'locate self' in professional practice. Following Moss' (2007) invocation, these participants articulated the ongoing importance of framing and developing self-knowledge and self-insight that draws on multiple perspectives. They described the significance of this work in respect of their capacity for relationality, and in enabling them to develop as reflexive practitioners. This is not to claim however that those who did not undertake such work have not developed such capacities in other ways; nonetheless, it does open up debate regarding the extent to which 'questions of self' are, or should be attended to in professional formation. The importance of these questions is re-enforced by David and Craig. In contrast to Jo, the practitioner-academic who was part of the main study, David and Craig each appeared to contend that engaging students with 'questions of self' develops practitioners who are more integrated in their awareness of personal, relational and socio-political concerns. However, each argued passionately that such work must be undertaken in ways that are appropriately sensitive and usefully interrogative in order to ensure both the safety of students and meaningful learning.

These ideas however are not without critique. For some, they represent the potentially risky encroachment of what Foucault viewed as 'confessionality' as a technology of governmentality in the production of particular kinds of professional subjectivities, which, in turn, can be harnessed in order to reproduce similar conditioned subjectivities in young people and communities (Bradford, 2015; Bright and Pugh, 2019b; Turney, 2007). Naming this 'reality' in conjunction with explorations of self is therefore essential in generating dialectic synthesis regarding these concerns. Such an approach would recognise issues of power and subjectivity, whilst facilitating explorations of practitioner selfhoods in enabling youth workers to develop greater awareness of self-in-relation. Placing greater emphasis on this facet of youth workers' 'socio-ethical apprenticeship', holds the

possibility of reclaiming the Profession from the technocratic onslaught that has instrumentalised it in recent years (Duffy, 2017a, de St Croix, 2018), thus enabling it to be reimagined once again as a fundamentally human *praxis.*

Currently, there appears to be a lack of clarity and dialogue regarding professional formation in youth and community work, not least in respect of questions pertaining to practitioners' selfhoods. Debates regarding frameworks that might enable these questions to be addressed are needed in order tackle what appear to be significant curricular inconsistencies. Analysis of the current data suggests that internal (psychological) and external (socio-political) approaches to analysing selfhoods should be employed in (re-)framing understandings of personal∞professional subjectivities in youth and community workers' formation.

Whilst I recognise the concerns of those participants who felt such 'identity work' may have been damaging to them during their studies, I would contend a lack of awareness regarding the significance and impact of different 'life factors', might equally risk being detrimental to relational practices with young people and communities. Such work would however require significant consideration to be given to how it might be facilitated ethically.

8.6.1 Concluding Comments

This chapter has advanced empirical understandings of participants' and tutors' experiences and perceptions of professional formation on qualifying youth and community work awards. Specifically, the chapter has examined the extent to which courses facilitated respondents' explorations of selfhoods. It has noted significant inconsistencies in this regard and argued for the development of a curricular framework that attends to these questions on professional qualifying programmes. This, it is contended, would enable the reclamation of youth and community work as an ethical and human *praxis* that recognises the significance and potential impact of practitioners' 'use of self'.

Chapter 9

Changing Times: Perspectives on Present and Future Practices – Vocation, Passion and Governmentality

9.1 Introduction

This chapter explores respondents' perceptions of the current state of youth work. It describes the impact of present conditions on participants' experiences of practice and their influence on professional and personal identities. The chapter considers respondents' experiences of navigating practice in much-changed environments together with their views on the future prospects for youth work. Drawing on Foucauldian conceptualisations of neoliberal governmentality, it argues participants' sense of vocation not only contributes to sustaining their practice, but also binds and oppresses practitioners in forms and conditions of practice that are contrary to the spirit of the Profession. The chapter concludes by considering the significance of these ideas for the future(s) of youth work.

9.1.2 Developing Context

The last two decades have witnessed significant shifts in youth work practice. These changes have been precipitated by a range of factors, most notably neoliberal policy agendas pursued by post-1997 governments. Whilst New Labour invested heavily in the Profession, its investment was premised on a particular view of what youth work should be. This process included advancing the marketisation of the sector, the formalisation of curriculum, the introduction of targets and targeting and a mantra of partnership, all of which attempted to harness the Profession in tackling

what the New Labour government perceived as the disease of the age: 'social exclusion'. The decade following the financial crash of 2007-8 witnessed Conservative and Conservative-led governments aggressively pursuing the furtherance of neoliberal policy ideals. Austerity was justified on the basis of 'balancing the books' and resulted in significant cuts to public services. This hit youth work (as a 'non-statutory' service) particularly hard. Between 2012-18, more than 760 youth centres were closed and in excess of 4500 youth work jobs lost (Unison, 2018). Many youth workers have witnessed the increasing precaritization of their practice, with their work incrementally cajoled and contorted beyond its core principles and purposes towards 'second class Social Work' (Hall, 2013). These conditions and realities have engendered considerable debate in the Profession regarding its future and the directions that might be taken.

The purpose of the following sections, is therefore, to examine respondents' experiences of these conditions on their practices and identities and to consider how they perceive the future of the Profession. Although some of the data is drawn from second interviews in which participants addressed these topics 'naturally', the majority of what follows is generated from final interviews where the following questions were posed:

1. How do you view contemporary youth and community work and what is happening in the Profession?

2. For you, what agendas are 'driving' practice?

3. Are there ways in which this is different to your previous experiences, or how you imagined professional practice to be?

4. I wonder if there are ways in which these potential changes have re-shaped your identity as a youth and community worker?

5.   Can you tell me how you see the future of youth and community work, and your own future within it?

9.2 Perspectives on the Changed and Changing Nature of Practice

The following sections draw on respondents' narratives regarding the impact of austerity and neoliberal performativity on youth work, and on their professional and personal identities. They describe ways in which participants have come to navigate the various challenges the current climate presents. It contends many face these challenges through what Wylie (2015) has described as 'principled pragmatism'.

Participants highlighted different observations regarding contemporary practice. Those who had been qualified for longer traced significant shifts in youth work that they saw as altering its fundamental character. This had led some participants to question facets of their professional identity. Elsa, for example, critiqued the "evolution" of practice, and, like other respondents, expressed concern regarding the decimation of youth services and moves towards targets and targeting. She proudly considered herself "old school". Charlie on the other hand, whilst seeming critical of current shifts in practice, appeared to wonder whether some practitioners were engaging in an over-romanticisation of the "good old days". Other respondents were however keen to highlight ways in which practice had become increasingly contorted and controlled. Chris inferred moves in recent years to 'professionalise' practice have been nothing more than a mechanism to manage and regulate youth workers' behaviours in a way that fundamentally dehumanises practice. For Chris, technocratic and panoptical managerialism had undermined her scope to take action based on her professional judgement:

> "I've noticed that increasingly over the last few months, as we're being squeezed here and, and getting some - all sorts of ridiculous rules to follow" (Chris).

She reported, for example, requests from line managers to report her voluntary activity outside of work, ostensibly to ensure a good work-life balance. Yet, it is this voluntary work, which engages with young refugees, rather than her paid employment, which is focussed on targeted interventions, that sustains her sense of passion and professional integrity.

Jane also appeared to agonise over current shifts in practice. Whilst she utilised the language of business to contend youth work must find ways to make itself "marketable", she was equally, and perhaps paradoxically, critical of the 'corporatisation' of practice in and beyond her own organisation. This example is perhaps indicative of a number of paradoxes and tensions respondents described having to navigate in a professional environment that is both changing and precarious.

9.2.1 Youth and Community Work: Misunderstood and Devalued

Youth and community work has become "deskilled and devalued" (Chris).

Several participants argued one of the key issues that has impaired youth work, and led, at least in part, to its precarious position, is a lack of understanding beyond the Profession regarding its core purpose and potential for good. Some appeared to suggest that its flexibility as an approach to working with young people and communities was both its greatest asset and Achilles' heel. Yet whilst Adele recognised the benefits of this flexibility 'on the ground', she was also more critical of what she viewed as the Profession's espoused rigidity regarding its principles:

> "I think if we had got better and if we had been more flexible and updated rather than holding on to the path of what was, we wouldn't have been so harshly cut, we would have been valued a bit more."

Elsa inferred youth work's inability to articulate its value has heightened its susceptibility to be manipulated and resulted in its repositioning as something distinctly at variance with its espoused purposes. Likewise, Tom expressed frustration regarding the lack of understanding other

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professionals have concerning youth work, which, in his view, results in it not being taken seriously. Yet, he, like other respondents including Adele and Steve, viewed this as partly resulting from the Profession's historic inability to coherently express what it does. Jane argued the wider socio-political context had also been significant in rendering changes in practice. She contended recent political debate has been "diluted" and brought about a type of "critical amnesia" regarding the type of society the UK espouses to be. All the while, she contended, the youth work sector has been corroded – and gone from a position of strength, direction and good infrastructure, to one of relative weakness where things are now "scraped together". This devaluation, Annie argued, has resulted in youth work being viewed as a "disposable luxury".

Respondents seemed all too aware of, yet uncertain how to address, paradoxes engendered by current conditions. Tom, for example, highlighted how he loves the "agility" of his current practice in leading a mentoring programme for some of the most disadvantaged young people in a large English city, whilst also lamenting the loss of much of youth work's group-orientated pedagogy. Yet, he was also keen to highlight how the mentoring programme enabled other youth work in the city to be sustained financially. This sense of passionate, but not always comfortable, pragmatism was extended by Johnny who described running a National Citizen Service (NCS) programme and using the 'profits' to provide some breathing space to enable his project to remain open, whilst applying for other funding.

Charlie suggested such processes have led to youth workers working in ways in which they are not always comfortable and resulted in contorted identities. Indeed, this sense of agonization can be seen in different participants' accounts. There was a rupture between the actualities of practice conditions respondents found themselves working in, and their recognition - that things have been, could be and indeed should be better. For respondents about to qualify as practitioners, there was a sense of liminality and bitter-sweetness, as the 'certainties' of being a student-practitioner gave

way to the ambiguities of professional actualities. Louise, in particular, seemed to express a simultaneous excitement about becoming a qualified youth worker, whilst at the same time lamenting the loss of the Profession's traditional principles and practices she had been immersed in as part of her studies. Yet whilst Louise bemoaned a lack of current interest from government for youth work beyond containing young people through actively managing the lives of those deemed at greatest risk, she also passionately expressed a belief in the possibility of arguing again for the rejuvenation of practice, based on its core principles.

9.2.2 Cuts and Case Loads

Many of the research participants offered rich and critical discussion of what they perceived as the squeezing of youth work in uncomfortable directions. Annie, who at the point of interview had been qualified for more than 20 years, traced how shifts in policy by successive governments have changed the character of practice. She described how practice has gone from being highly relational towards increasingly functional; from being founded in group work towards targeted interventions with individuals; and from embracing voluntary participation to something that is now more coercive. Charlie furthered this sense of utilitarianism, suggesting youth work has been harnessed in "shaping young people for a jobs market, shaping young people to become an adult that fits into society, and I think doesn't challenge society." Present conditions appear therefore to have instrumentalised these practitioners' relationships with young people, with workers chasing pre-determined outcomes in order to justify both funding and their jobs. Freya inferred as a result that organisations have become more concerned with chasing funding to survive than working in a person-centred way with young people. This, she suggested, has created practices that are sterile, lacking in critical imagination and devoid of truer professional purpose:

> "In terms of the young people and like critical thinking and letting them have a voice, I don't really see it; I haven't really seen it where the young people are engaging in conversations

and talking about stuff that they want to talk about, everything's still set out, everything's planned…"

Chris argued the emphasis on targeting has had a detrimental impact on the way in which youth work is viewed by professionals and young people:

> "It's all targeted and there isn't much - there's very little element of, of choice for the young person and nothing universal - and I don't doubt that the work with particular, with particular young people will be good, that's fine, but for me, that's not youth work and the other work that we're doing is one-to-one intensive work with young people in the community and again they don't have any choice with that. Sometimes it's part of their YOT [Youth Offending Team] order. It keeps them out of young offender's institutes if they see a youth worker [but] you can imagine that the youth workers in [name of place] love that! It's horrific, [a] horrendous way to treat young people. We just become another council officer."

Many participants expressed concern over the individualising turn that the shift from group work towards targeted work represents. Some inferred this was part of an inherent facet of late-modern capitalism. Johnny described these processes as relating to practice with young people, and in terms of competitive relationships between youth work organisations, as "divide and conquer". For Jane, these moves are tantamount to the very fabric of the Profession being "unpicked", and in her view, represent attempts to undermine the collective common good which youth work espouses as a core value. Johnny described the present situation as "bleak" and how a lack of funding means he has had to significantly reduce the number of sessions his centre offers. It would appear austerity and precarity are being harnessed, as Kenan put it, to force acceptance of "a little [and reducing] piece of the pie." Kenan contended this situation is exacerbated by services for enfranchised adults taking precedence over those for disenfranchised young people. Others articulated frustration and deep sadness at the loss of provision and colleagues' jobs. Ray, for example, noted that in his relatively small local authority 35 of the 50 FTE youth work jobs had been lost since 2010, and that the

introduction of targeted work had fundamentally shifted the purpose of the remaining workers'

roles:

> "They're not youth [workers], they're early intervention workers now…they're given a client
> list and they've got to support those young people, and they can't do anything but that…
> [it's] social work on the cheap... I think a lot of them are a little bit disheartened by what's
> going on…"

Similarly, all workers in Annie's team have been told they now must have a caseload of young

people, to take the pressure off social work teams. The result, Annie feels, is the loss of a safety net

that prevents the need for more intensive forms of intervention. In her view, cutting youth services

may save money in the short-term, but is likely to have a more costly longer-term impact:

> "...it's managing vulnerable [lives:] we are working more and more with the vulnerable
> young people and my fear is if I have to close any of my clubs down, so in my team we could
> work with 300 just normal average run of the mill young people in a week. And now if I have
> to reduce that by half my fear is what's going to happen to those 150, for example, young
> people. There is no prevention there anymore. It's contrary to what they're saying. They're
> saying 'Well, we need you to help us to stop the floodgates opening right at the top. But you
> need to close some of your clubs down'."

9.2.3 Syphoning Skills from Values?

Some respondents described how the appropriation of youth work towards more targeted

interventions has resulted in a profound shift in their practice and sense of professional purpose

and identity. This seems indicative of a significant tension in participants' accounts. Many suggested

they would struggle to describe aspects, or indeed all, of their current practice as youth work in a

recognisable form. However, despite this, they remain committed to working with young people

and utilising youth work *skills* as best as they are able for young people's benefit in the context in

which their practice is now framed. It seems, therefore, many of the research respondents are

caught up in a 'vocational bind'. That is, they recognise they are caught up in a 'game' that utilises

their skills, but does not value the principles or foundational practices from which those skills derive.

Yet their commitment to protecting and working with young people, together with their own professional and financial needs, renders many of them trapped.

Annie articulated this tension eloquently:

> "…it makes me feel really frustrated. But then on the other hand because we gradually have been pushed this way, so you become a kind of, kind of drawn into it. So, one the one hand if I sit back and think about it I'm really annoyed. But then on the other hand when I meet with the vulnerable young people that I'm working with and think 'we all as a team [have] got the skills to help this young person'. I kind of forget that. So, it's only when I sit back or when I'm talking to you when I really then 'Well, this is not what I trained to do.'"

Likewise, Tom expressed how he has transferred his youth work skills into leading a mentoring programme. He recognised whilst this does not represent the type of practice he signed up to, he continues to see this work as a *form of* youth work. He views the mentoring programme with some of the City's most disadvantaged young people as going "to the edge and pulling them back in." However although he remains committed to this work, he is critical of the socio-political conditions that have let young people "slip through the net", and the mechanisms that have rendered youth work, in working with young people in the ways it is required to do, something that it is not. He described wrestling with his conscience in this regard: of being "an agent of the state [whilst looking to promote] the greater good" by providing access to services and support young people would be unlikely to access otherwise. Interestingly, both Tom and Annie recognised the significance of incremental change. Whilst they, among others, reflected on how their practice had become compromised, they didn't feel it was a compromise too far; however, had they foreseen where practice was heading, this may have been a different matter.

Alfie, a senior leader in a Youth Offending Team (YOT), was keen to highlight some of the tensions and benefits of having youth workers as part of his multi-disciplinary team. Whilst he recognised the more structured and explicitly disciplinary and restorative nature of YOT practice, he contended

youth workers help to foreground young people's needs and the context of their lives, thereby counterbalancing the more reductionist processes that standardise young people, particularly in an environment shaped by targets and austerity. In this way, Alfie values what youth workers offer in relating to and "getting through to" young people. Equally, however, he recognised some youth workers have been unable, or unwilling, to compromise their values:

> "We've had people leave who basically can't fit into this. 'I can't do what I want to do anymore and I'm leaving the service and I'm going to go off and do my own thing because I feel downtrodden by it and I can't be the youth worker I want to be.'"

9.2.4 The Social Impact of the 'Loss' of Youth Work

Many respondents were keen to draw attention to the social impact of the 'loss' of youth work. Annie's earlier quote highlights her view that the reduction of youth work provision has, by removing a "safety net", only increased the need for other, more expensive forms of intervention. The false economy of short-term savings, she, and others contended, merely incurs longer-term costs. Freya argued current social conditions, including social and educational pressures and the demise of much youth work provision, has left many young people feeling disenfranchised. She inferred that the failure of the state to enable young people to address more fundamental questions of life satisfaction means that cycles of educational struggle will only continue. Moreover, she argued the intrumentalisation of youth work, which has removed genuine consultation with young people regarding their needs and wishes, has created "barriers between young people and youth workers." Chris developed similar ideas regarding social value, broadly, and in relation to youth work in particular:

> "You know, it's expensive to do things properly… if you look at the, the social cost of things and then the social worth of things, [youth work's] probably not that expensive, but we have a government who's not really interested in working class kids…"

Similarly, Steve inferred the demise of youth and community work is indicative of the state's abandonment of young people and their communities. According to Alfie, it has left a socio-educational gap in young people's lives, which, for some, has resulted in a profound sense of isolation. Adele argued 'The Big Society' agenda of building volunteer capacity in her locality has enabled the development of *some* volunteers who are good at relating with young people, but that they lack much of the knowledge and skills to work with young people in ways that meet their needs and aspirations.

Charlie offered a wider critique regarding the impact of neoliberal policy pursuits upon social wellbeing, contending such rationalities are not socially sustainable:

> "I just feel like the way we're going, and the way we're living our lives is not that positive, it doesn't make us happy and doesn't make us well; so why do we keep pursuing it?"

9.3.1 Professional and Personal Impacts

Respondents also highlighted the significance of current conditions on different facets of their professional practice. Nasseem argued the climate of competition had led to a "survival of the fittest" culture that has resulted in a loss of collaboration between organisations and colleagues. Likewise, Johnny inferred present conditions have rendered a sense of protectionism that has resulted in a reduction in professional synergy, and Nikki that partnerships have become "a paper exercise". Tom contended that government attacks on Joint Negotiating Committee (JNC) professional terms and conditions, which he viewed as a flagship of professional status, represent an erosion of youth work's value and distinctiveness. Similarly, in addressing the dominance of minimum-wage contracts in marketised National Citizen Service (NCS) provision, Chris suggested that the employment of unqualified workers on these terms has significantly corroded the value of youth work as a profession. Whilst few others highlighted these specific concerns, there was,

however, considerable reflection on the significance of present practice conditions in respect of respondents' sense of professional identities. In particular, many expressed a sense in which they felt devalued, isolated, lacking professional understanding, supervision and support and had come to tolerate working in ways that are contrary to their own values:

> "...it does affect your identity. Because you're turning into something that you never signed up for. So, my identity at times if I'm being pushed to do some one-to-one work – I'm thinking 'this is not who I am. I want to do group work.' I don't mind doing one to one, we've always done that. But to be forced to do it kind of, you know, is quite frustrating and will affect my identity without even realising... I suppose what it's doing is making me angry, which I never normally am. So, that's how it's affected my identity I'm coming across at meetings perhaps sometimes even aggressive and it's all just to fight for the principles and practice of youth work. That's all what I'm doing. And I feel like people are just whipping carpet from under [our] feet and saying 'Well, that's not what you can do anymore – this is what you've got to do'" (Annie).

Some participants described other personal implications. Johnny, for example, highlighted how a lack of funding has resulted in him having to reduce his hours, and the personal financial impact of this. There is a similar sense of precarity in different respondents' accounts. Nasseem variously reported working three or four part-time or sessional jobs – taking work when it is available. This left her wondering about future job security. Despite her clear passion and creativity, austerity and precarity are clearly impacting on her:

> "I feel that things are becoming a little bit draining and I know that there's that, there's that, that thing about, you know, getting burnt out and I think a lot of it is around not having certainty and I think that's really hard..."

Whilst Kenan expressed feeling lucky that financial independence allows him to explore different interests in the field, he was keenly aware that colleagues often have little choice regarding the direction of their work. As others put it:

> "...everybody now is so worried about losing their jobs, that we tolerate things that we maybe wouldn't have tolerated years ago, because there was plenty of work...people have their mortgages to pay..." (Chris).

"…as youth workers, they're losing their identity as being someone from the council. And it's quite sad that they're being forced down an avenue that they don't really want to go down, because they want to make a living and they've got to survive. But they love the work they do, and they love working with young people, they do it because they want to help young people, but not necessarily in the agenda that we're currently under" (Ray).

9.4.1 Vocation and Passion that Sustains

Despite these contextual challenges, each espoused a deep and ongoing sense of passion for youth work practice. For many, this passion appeared to emanate from the sense of vocation, congruence and meaning the Profession provides them. This passion is expressed in different ways. It can be seen in the hopefulness and possibilities respondents hold regarding the potential and future of practice (a theme explored later in this chapter). It can also be seen in some respondents' commitment to enabling human flourishing, and the articulation by others of youth work as a form of political resistance, that is often profoundly related to facets of their personal identities. Nasseem, for example, viewed her practice as a response to a government that she perceived as deeply racist and Islamophobic. Tom's practice expressed a commitment towards inclusion and levelling the playing field with young people from disadvantaged backgrounds: "I resist, because that's all I know." Chris expressed how attacks on youth work are "strengthening my resolve" and inferred that whilst much of her paid practice had been assimilated by technocratic, neoliberal agendas, her voluntary work in more traditional fora is "important for my soul." Likewise, Adele reported that many of her former colleagues have set up voluntary sector organisations and social enterprises and commenced volunteering in existing projects out of a desire to be involved in "real youth work." For Steve, this sense of ongoing vocation has led him to move cities to work unpaid on a housing estate in a faith-based project. Steve inferred he viewed this act as a form of subversion against the prevailing norms that have come to discursively characterise more disadvantaged

communities in particular ways. He viewed his change of role as a vocational act that allows him the freedom to practice in ways that are personally and professionally congruent.

Others expressed the significance of vocational ideals in framing ongoing commitments to youth work, even in the face of present conditions:

> "I will be in youth work until I can't work any longer, because there's just nothing else I will ever do, there just won't be, and I have my hopes and dreams of what I'd like to do..." (Louise).

> "I do feel I fight quite a lot in senior manager meetings, but I can't stop fighting and I don't know why, but I can't. Because I could easily just sit back and think 'Well, I've got my pension in two years'. But I don't. I probably won't even finish in two years to be honest with you" (Annie).

> "All the reasons why people go into youth work in the first place, they still exist for people; you know because they want to give something back, because they want to be a role model, because they want to give people positive activities, because they want to keep them off the streets, because they're concerned about damn crime. Because of all those reasons that motivate people to go into youth and community work; and they will all be individuals who will do things in their own way and find things that are more or less important, and they'll take what they need, hopefully, from the sort of ethical base … there will still be some things that they do hold in common, I think. There's something running through the stick of rock, as it were…" (Elsa).

9.5. Passionate Pragmatism: Navigating Practice in a Neoliberal Landscape

> "[Practitioners are engaged in] a big balancing act" (Alfie).

> "That particular question, can you be a youth worker and engage in involuntary activity… involuntary participation. I don't know really. I know that people can do good work in that way, if they come from the right place. At one time I would have said 'no', very much 'no'; now I suppose I say 'I suppose so.' But I say it with sadness really because… I do believe in the ethics of youth work, and what makes youth work tick, but there's a sort of a certain pragmatism; … you know, one gets more pragmatic perhaps as one gets older" (Elsa).

The following sections explore ways in which respondents have come to navigate the paradoxes rendered by current conditions. Drawing on the sense of continuing passion and vocation outlined above, the following paragraphs contend many research participants engage in multiple processes, some of which might be considered (c)overtly resistant, and others of which might thought of as

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more supine. This highlights the different ways in which respondents attempt to maintain and, in some cases, advance youth work practices and identities.

9.5.1 'In and Against' the System

A number of respondents articulated that it was important, despite "rubs and compromises" (Elsa), to continue in practice. This appeared to be driven by professional concern for young people and society, and by the centrality of youth work to their own storied identities. For some, being in the system in order to attempt to manipulate it as a means of defending and advancing professional values and protecting young people from the system's worst excesses engenders a certain *jouissance*[1]. Whilst a number inferred this, Alfie claimed more directly, that youth workers are able to do things "under the radar". Elsa was also keen to highlight how she views her practice as a form of subversion - of creating and taking opportunities to develop practice that raises "critical consciousness", within her organisation and in direct face-to-face work with young people. She suggested that carving out these spaces allows her to maintain a more congruent sense of professional identity. For Elsa, these moments and processes represent "an anchor point". Elsa rationalised that it is better to be the inside the system as a "critical intermediary" between young people and the state, to challenge the system from within, rather than be beyond it. Similarly, Alfie argued "... if you're not in the system, you can't change [it]." Tom also suggested he remains passionately committed to opposing and interrupting systems from within whenever he can. Jane argued the continuing need to "interface [with systems, whilst] find[ing] more sophisticated ways to work in and against [them]." Likewise, Charlie, who whilst recognising the relative freedom and autonomy practice in a faith-based project has afforded him, described ways in which he remained committed to speaking out for the Profession's values and resisting the encroachment of disciplinary

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[1] *Jouissance* is a term developed in Lacanian psychoanalysis to describe ways in which actors gain pleasure from transgressing or resisting restrictive boundaries and norms.

forms of neoliberal control in his own practice. Other participants appeared to view their contribution to rebuilding grassroots practices as a form of subversive resistance. Chris, for example, cited her practice with a local youth assembly, work with young asylum seekers and redeveloping local professional networks as such examples. Yet respondents also recognised the emotional costs of continual subversion and resistance and of the importance of wisdom and strategic thinking in deciding on courses of action:

> "I used to... just grab things and, you know, get something between your teeth 'I'm going to change this...' Now I'm just like, 'hold on a minute, yes, we'll work with that one, we'll work this one'; and you can think longer term. I think experience teaches you a lot; it doesn't mean you're right all the time, but it teaches you a lot…. [Y]ou don't take things for granted... you're not… what's the word? Expendable" (Johnny).

9.5.2 The Entrepreneurial Practitioner

Participants described other adaptations to present conditions. Some had embraced, (sometimes reluctantly), the notion of the responsible and responsive practitioner who is capable of supplely changing direction in order to ensure the sustainability of their practice. Kenan, for example, spoke optimistically about the future as something to be made and embraced. He has come to view youth work as less of a specific occupation, and more as a broad set of practices through which he believes he will be able to find his "niche". Kenan also noted how some of his student-peers talked about shifting their careers in different directions, including social work, or starting social enterprises, in order that they can be responsive to what is happening in the broader field. Kenan, who has owned companies, expressed his own views regarding how he sees practice:

> "I do believe that youth work is a business and when you look at it I have seen the business side of it and the management side of it is, it is eye-opening; people do get sacked, rules do get changed, funding does get pulled. They give you that, then all of a sudden, we will pull that, you can't do that no more then you're out of work and that's the business side of it. It's alright saying you want to help the community, but when you are getting money thrown at you for a couple of months and then all of a sudden, you're not getting that money no more, then you have to go out and find that money, that's when your business head comes on…

'Right who can I find? Who can we go and get these bursaries off? Who can we get tenders off? What can we do, what can we do to get this money? Right we are going try and get that, we are going to try and get this…' But you have to know where to look and you have to know the right people and you have to know the right process and that's the business side of it. It is easy just sitting there and thinking 'oh the government can take care of it' or just saying 'I am getting a wage it's alright' but as soon as your wage stops coming in, who's going to subsidise that and this is the thing and I have thought about that, do you know what I mean?"

Louise, another of the student practitioners, also spoke of her plans to set up a social enterprise with a friend in order to develop grassroots responses to locally identified need. She contended this would allow her the opportunity to develop practice with creativity and integrity. Entrepreneurship can be seen in other accounts. Nikki described some of the challenges she faces in addressing competing demands in the small, community-based charity she manages:

"…because you want to be a charity. Even though we're a company as well we do sell room hire. We do trade and obviously we have staff so within our assets that's why we employ people. But it is hard, there's more pressure now to become more business-minded and self-sustained and you've got to keep thinking about people. As long as you pull it in and you think 'Why are we doing this – what are we here for in the first place?' and keep thinking about the people and the community, which is hard when your brain's fully occupied with all of these business diagrams and things."

In a further example of 'entrepreneurial practice', Tom expressed passion regarding the agility of his targeted mentoring project both as a means of responding to and engaging with young people, but also as a mechanism for maintaining and amplifying the value of the wider Youth Service in his locality. This he viewed as crucial, at a time of continuing cuts. Whilst he reported that managers in his local authority recognise he and his team are engaged in "borderline social work", he continues to see his practice as a version of youth work, in which personal adaptivity is essential:

"I mean I come into youth work to do youth work, but if I want to stay as a youth worker engaging young people I would have to adapt. I'm not saying I'm a big fan of it, but I can see with the targeted work that I'm doing I can see the benefits as well. So of course I'm all for open access and universal work but there's no funding for it. It's getting less and less, but we are and we should be able to manage to do both because centres will still be there for the evening sessions and the project won't be as tense or as much as it was in the past because

time and effort will have to go to these kinds of projects and fields. It's just the way of the world."

Johnny seemed to view his own adaptivity in delivering an NCS programme as a requirement of the current landscape in which he operates. He inferred a willingness to play 'the short game' in order that he is able to sustain the organisation he manages in the longer term. This adaptivity has also extended to working with a local secondary school on particular projects. Likewise, Chris also described developing and taking different opportunities for funded work in order to sustain her core practice. These have included delivering sessions on British values for local schools, a topic she contended teachers dislike delivering, as well as finding funding in order to set up a local co-operative organisation in order to promote practice that is more congruently aligned with stakeholders' professional values.

Whilst a number of respondents cited examples of how they, or their organisations, had developed entrepreneurial practices, Nasseem appeared to contend this had become a requisite for the profession as a whole: "[We need to] survive and find new ways of becoming sustainable." Likewise, Jane was vociferous in arguing that the profession needs to develop its capacity for "marketability" and adaptivity in order to attract financial support from the state and other stakeholders in order to secure its future.

9.6 Perspectives on the Future: Hopeful Returns and the Proliferation of Practice?

Participants offered various responses regarding how they perceived the future of youth work and their own future within the sector. Many articulated a deeply held hope regarding the renewal of practice based on its traditional values and approaches. Charlie, for example, expressed optimism that the value of youth work "will shine through." Others appeared to temper their optimism by contending the future for youth work is more likely to lie in developing practice in related spheres.

Yet some of this latter category of respondents appeared to express concern regarding the risk of further diluting the values and principles of practice such an approach may bring.

Jane argued whilst the Profession needs to hold on to its values, it should not be bound to its past in exploring different futures. Indeed, she inferred a need to mourn the passing of something in order to "create another story". This, she suggested, is required in order to enable youth work to evolve as it always has done. Yet Jane freely admitted she was uncertain how the future could and should look. Nasseem was keen to imagine a different future for youth work; however, given the challenges she has experienced in her own practice (and that she observes within the wider Profession), she appeared acutely aware of the challenges of doing so. Johnny contended youth work needs to evolve in line with its core values. On a practical level, he viewed encouraging young people to be part of *their* community – a recurring theme in his practice narrative- as integral to this hope. Whilst Freya expressed a sense of optimism regarding the future of the Profession, she indicated she was unsure how change would be brought about, or by whom. Freya suggested the Profession needs to build "something fresh" by taking account of young people's needs and wishes. She argued this would enable youth work to "become more what it's meant to be", and that this can only be achieved through collaborative renewal of practice at a grassroots level:

> "I want to get myself out there and meet new people and make the changes and be the one to make these changes maybe. I don't know whether I am thinking too big or whatever but I don't just want to settle, I don't just want to work in a youth centre for years and years and years, I actually want to make a difference but it is finding them people and getting your heads together and doing it isn't it. Eventually I want my own centre set up and just [get] things happening."

Elsa contended youth work "does have a future... [albeit] a different future". This, she suggested, will result out of a need to address, or at least manage, a mental health "time bomb" amongst young people, and the need to mitigate the economically induced conditions that continue to disproportionately impact upon and blame young people for social ills. Annie also suggested a

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resurgent interest in youth work will, once again, be predicated on moral panics about young

people. Like Elsa, Louise argued that an increasing austerity-engendered need for youth work will

result in a 'turning of the tide'. Louise articulated a sense of personal responsibility to make the case

for that future. Yet, at the time of the final interview, her optimism was tempered by her recognition

that the government of the day lacked interest in youth work beyond "containing" young people.

Tom and Steve also expressed a sense of hope, but one that was contingent on a change of policy

or government:

> "Because of course if you've got no hope, what have you got? So of course, I'm hopeful. I'm hopeful that we can survive until 2020[2], hopefully have a change in government and maybe things might change that way, but that's the only way we're going to survive. Current government is not going to do anything - only make it worse" (Tom)

> "Everything comes round again... I don't think we will build youth centres on estates etc. but, it will come round. There will have to be more funding for youth work projects, and I think government will, whether it's this government or the next, will come to realise something has got to be done about youth work..." (Steve).

Kenan adopted a different view. He suggested there should be an active depreciation[3] of youth work

in order to highlight its social value and encourage investment and "justifiable regulation".

Ultimately however, Kenan was among a number of respondents who contended that the future is

more likely to exist in the utilisation of youth work *skills* in different contexts:

> "I believe skills out-beat settings because my skills will always be there and my skills I can take to any setting. The youth and community setting I don't think it's as basic as we once seen it, I think it has evolved into something else now because it's everywhere...you'll see kids outside the job centre, then you'll see them outside [name of place], then you'll see them in the trainer shop and then you will see them at youth and community clubs and then you will see them at NCS (National Citizen Service) or YTS (Youth Training Scheme) or at The Prince's Trust and they are all there and all over. So it is more of an outreach thing, you have to be able to get your skills, transfer them here, then take your skills here, then take them there...The future... is going to be different for youth workers I think. You have to be more

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[2] At the time of interview, 2020 was the next anticipated election date.
[3] Kenan inferred that actively 'running down' youth work would perhaps highlight its social and educational value and thus lead to greater investment in it longer term.

than a youth worker...I think you need to be a mentor; I think you need to a confidante; I think you need to be also an offender manager" (Kenan).

"...we can provide skilled workers to go and work in a wide range of organisations and this is the added value, and the results that we can help individual young people create for themselves... I don't think traditional youth work will re-evolve but, I think that's also exciting because I think we can actually, we can be more adaptable and move into more diverse areas but with a strong voice. I want us to be in there as a professional - the youth and community worker that can do X, Y, and Z. I want us to be in there at a professional and strategic level actually having a stronger voice for young people and enabling young people to have that voice..." (Jane).

Ray contended that maintaining a strong sense of professional identity is integral to developing practice in wider contexts, whilst hoping for the return of more traditional forms of practice:

"I live in hope that youth services will come back, I don't know under what guise... I think as long as you believe in something, and I think there's still a force out there that are willing for the service to be redeveloped and revitalised, and I think young people would benefit from that....I would like to think that we'd keep the identity to show people that there is value still in having a youth service and having people trained and employed as youth workers. They are flexible, they can work wherever you put them, they have the skills to work with the most challenging young people or the most academic young people. I think as soon as we lose that identity, people say 'oh well, I'm not a youth worker anymore', I think they'll forget the whole idea of what a youth service was in years to come...So as long as youth workers keep the identity and say that 'I'm a youth worker', there's still hope that youth services [will] come back around."

Alfie suggested that whilst policy will turn again towards favouring youth work, this will not represent a return to practice in its traditional guises, and that practitioners need to think about how to evidence the transferability of their skills to cognate arenas. In concurring, Annie argued universities must do more to prepare student practitioners to work in different contexts. Indeed, in this vein, Charlie inferred that youth work needs to locate itself beyond the confines of its own borders and to understand itself as an expression of a wider set of values:

"The Profession is a custodian of timeless values... youth work doesn't own these values, it might bring them together in a unique way, but they are going on elsewhere. youth workers have no monopoly on compassion, or emancipatory education. They can happen anywhere."

Whilst recognising the possibilities of such a 'dispersed' approach, Elsa also expressed concern

regarding it:

> "...people want to use your skills to their own ends. So, they want something doing and they
> see that youth work can do it, so that's what they employ, but they don't necessarily perhaps
> want all of what youth work might involve... Youth and community work has to change to
> survive I think … it's a dichotomy isn't it between using the skills you've got to do some good,
> but keeping hold of the values that you have."

Whilst the majority of participants expressed hopeful optimism regarding the future of practice,

these were not without concern. Jane expressed anxiety regarding the reducing number of people

willing to train as youth and community workers. She suggested this is a direct result of a lack of

uncertainty and clear career structure in the Profession and inferred concern that this represented

a 'downward spiral' that may be difficult to arrest. Adele appeared to concur:

> " I think [youth and community work has] been completely watered down, and so basically
> there's now no need for youth workers, because we don't have youth clubs in a sense, or
> what they were, and I personally see the youth work role completely fizzling out… I think
> what I got in for has gone. Unless you're going to work for a charity that's on a zero-hour
> contract, that you can't even pay your bills on."

9.7.1 Discussion: Toleration Versus Encroaching Assimilation

Participants offered rich descriptions of how shifts in policy have harnessed youth work for

increasingly narrow and punitive means far beyond its espoused purposes. It appears the Profession

has been assimilated as a mechanism of generating 'resilient' but uncritical neoliberal subjects who

are capable of malleable adaption (Chandler and Reid, 2016). Despite these challenges, and in line

with DeVerteuil's (2016:232) claim that, 'staying put is a struggle that ought never to be

underestimated', many inferred they view their ongoing practice as a form of resistance against the

very systems that attempt to erode it. Yet paradoxically, some respondents also seem aware the

compromises they are willing to make in order to 'protect' youth work, are part of the assimilative adaption of practice which threatens to perniciously corrode the very values and practices they seek to defend.

Under the neoliberal rubric, young people and youth workers have become disposable consumables, rather than critical co-creators (Smith, 1982). However, despite participants' recognition of the assimilation of their practice, the vast majority remain committed to work in the field. In many instances, the cost of this hopeful resistance appears to be compromise. This can be seen in participants' discussions of 'which fights to pick', of understanding something of the 'game' in which they are entangled, and how some come to rationalise short-term compromises for the possibility of longer-term gains. Yet in playing this game, counter forces are also in operation. The incremental ratcheting of practice towards agendas of neoliberal performativity and control appears to have engendered a tolerance of conditions and ways of working many participants (and in particular those with longer professional experience) confessed they would not, with foresight, have found tolerable when starting out in practice.

These issues resonate with debates raised by Wylie (2015), who suggests practitioners often find themselves navigating a course between 'romanticism', 'principled pragmatism' and 'managerialism'. Some participants inferred they were increasingly subject to rule-taking managerial approaches; others, sometimes simultaneously, appeared to espouse a more radically resistant (romantic) worldview. However, in the vast majority of cases, it seems respondents attempted to navigate between these positions on a 'tightrope of pragmatism'. The concern of course, is that pragmatism may only provide an illusion of everyday resistance, or slow down, but ultimately enable assimilation.

9.7.2 Youth and Community Workers as Entrepreneurs

This discussion gives rise to an alternative view of such pragmatism - that of the contemporary youth worker as entrepreneur. The entrepreneurial subject is reflexive, malleable and (self)-responsiblised. They have a protean capacity for adaption and survival (Bröckling, 2016). Whilst undoubtedly practice has shifted in this direction, the configuration of youth work subjectivities in this way, risks contributing to the legitimation of the Darwinian conditions which the Profession so often critiques. Youth work has always tended to be viewed as an agile profession, one capable of adaption and of responsiveness in meeting the needs and aspirations of young people and communities. However, the neoliberal conditioning of practice has engendered a climate of performativity, austerity and competition, from which new entrepreneurial subjectivities have been rendered. These can be seen in various places in the data, including Johnny's acceptance of an NCS contract, Tom's mentoring project and Chris' work with schools, each utilised in order to sustain other projects; in Nasseem's acceptance of a range of part-time and sessional roles; and in the way in which many respondents describe utilising their *skills* beyond traditional domains of practice. Indeed, it is here that many participants view the future of practice. This however raises questions regarding whether such work represents the evolution and potential 'rhizomatic proliferation' (Bright and Pugh, 2019c:226) of youth work values and practices beyond their traditional domains, or their further dilution and assimilation.

9.7.3 Vocation and 'Cruel Optimism' as Governmentality

Many research participants in this study appear to express a continuing optimism that is underpinned by their life experiences, the values of youth work and by a deep vocational commitment to professional practice founded in aspects of their own life histories. For many, there is a deep psychic attachment to a practice in which they have invested much of their lives and identities. Perhaps more fundamentally, participants' sense of vocation is underpinned by a deep

commitment to young people, their circumstances, their education and their potential. It is this sense of vocation that appears to have sustained them, and their commitment to practice, despite the decimation of their profession. Yet, perhaps more than this, many participants expressed how they are sustained by a sense of hope and possibility for the future of practice. However, more critical discussion of this continuing commitment, might view participants' sense of vocation and the life narratives it is grounded in, as a technology of governmentality that utilises optimism as a means of (self-)control, which ultimately renders acceptance of the corrosion of professional practice. In this sense, hope and vocation may keep respondents engaged in forms of practice that might be considered largely alien to its traditional forms, but may also be revealed as a form of 'cruel optimism' that represents a '[persistent] attachment to a fantasy' (Berlant, 2011:99). Research participants expressed a vocational attachment to practice, with many articulating a grief for its wider loss, that is juxtaposed with hope and longing for its future. It is here that Berlant's articulation of cruel optimism as a mechanism of governmentality resonates:

> 'Cruel optimism is the condition of maintaining an attachment to a significantly problematic object… [it is] a relation of attachment to compromised conditions of possibility whose realization is discovered either to be impossible, sheer fantasy… or toxic… But if the cruelty of an attachment is experienced by someone/some group, even in a subtle fashion, the fear is that the loss of the promising object itself will defeat the capacity to have any hope about anything' (Berlant, 2011:24).

Miller and Rose (2008:39) argue governmentality is expressed through the capacity of states to 'nudge' actors in the 'right' direction, without 'shattering [the illusion of] their formally autonomous character'. This is something that can undoubtedly be seen in youth work, and in participants' accounts in the present thesis. Hope and optimism keep youth workers tenuously attached to a particular identity, which the state harnesses in utilising practitioners in work that is often not aligned with the Profession's traditional *telos* and approaches. In this view, the neoliberal state has come to assimilate and harness not only respondents' sense of vocation, identity and hopeful

resistance, but also the life histories, pain, oppression, struggle and values in which these are founded.

9.7.4 Conceptualising Potential Futures: 'Death', 'Tricksters' and Renewal

It might be argued that youth work has experienced, or perhaps even continues to experience a 'slow death'. Whether, and what kind of resurrection, or reincarnation might follow, and what, if anything, might be truly worth hoping for, is up for debate. Yet incremental changes to professional practice over the last few decades render it barely recognisable to many in its current form(s). Such changes, for those youth workers who maintain a deep-seated attachment to practice, have undoubtedly generated an incremental perceptual and ontological shift[4]. This means many practitioners may well maintain an attachment to something that no longer visibly exists or are assenting to something they struggle to recognise, and which may be at odds with their values and sense of vocation. As Alfie aptly stated: "...it still exists, but it's not like it exists." Berlant (2011:52) describes this process as:

> '...affective realism, of how people's desires become mediated through attachments to modes of life to which they rarely remember consenting, at least initially... [it is debatable] whether these modes of life actually threaten well-being or provide a seemingly neutral, reliable framework for enduring in the world...'

Yet, whilst hopelessness might be bleakly nihilistic, Berlant (2011:259) argues cycles of 'toxic optimism can suture someone or a world to a cramped and unimaginative space of committed replication, just in case it will be different.'

Youth work may, or may not, be facing its death – but any apocalypse, as Chandler and Reid (2016:158) note, not only represents an end, but involves a revelation that leads to 'a beyond'. In this vein, Allen (2018:48-49), in drawing on Nietzschean and Foucauldian analyses, argues such

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[4] Particularly those who remember more 'traditional' forms of practice.

crises can lead to 'sentimental attachment, approaching hysteria... [and unfounded hope in] decaying architectures.' Educators, Allen contends, need to 'unsettle [their] attachment to education' (p.51), to reveal it for what it has truly become, if necessary letting it die, in order that it might be truly re-imagined. It might be argued that youth work, like education more broadly, operates in the domain of 'fantasmatic logic' (ibid.:57) through which reality is transmogrified in generating simulated illusions, that continue to generate particular subjectivities and delusionary actions that remain rooted in practitioners' sense of vocation and related life histories. Indeed, it might be suggested that vocation is a technology through which governmentality is enacted. Allen argues that whilst such genealogical analyses hold the potential to rupture constructed realities and perturb and shock their subjects, they also afford the potential of new possibilities. As I argue elsewhere (Bright and Pugh, 2019b:68), naming the world in these ways therefore 'ought not to result in fatalistic capitulation'. Rather, such critical interruptions present opportunities for 'imaginative action' (Chandler and Reid, 2016:21) that generate subjectivities and possibilities beyond existing 'knowns'.

These ideas on governmentality and the possibilities of rupture feed into Bassil-Morozow's (2015) 'Trickster' analysis. Bassil-Morozow paints the Trickster as a creative, resistant and anarchic figure who understands and attempts to usurp and exploit the rules of the 'game' by means of critical interruption. Tricksters seek to use both stealth and apparent recklessness to dupe, bend and break systems from within and without, in order to re-fashion them towards more critically agentic possibilities. Their usurpation is committed to 'revers[ing] the hierarchical order' (ibid.:10). By challenging, rejecting and laughing at them, Tricksters reject structures and frameworks as regimes of control. Trickster narratives commence with the protagonist coming to an awareness of feeling trapped, used, and abused by the system. As a result, they engage in sometimes-audacious border crossings, attempting to re-make the maps of their own habitus. Yet despite the anarchic optimism

posited, Bassil-Morozow cautions that Tricksters themselves may be duped into being a mechanism of governmentality – that is whilst they have the potential to bring challenge and change, the transformation they engender risks merely renewing and perpetuating the very systems of oppression they seek to undermine. These debates resonate with Allen's (2018) analysis regarding educators' attachment to education more broadly, and the ways in which the 'radical' can be tamed and assimilated in advancing systems of power. Perhaps in line with these analyses, a more profound 'death' is required in enabling radical social and 'educational' transformation through 'youth and community work'.

9.8 Concluding Comments

This chapter has developed empirical insights regarding how practitioners experience, perceive and respond to the neoliberal conditioning of youth work. Despite the various personal and professional challenges these conditions engender, it seems respondents remain deeply committed to practice. Many respondents appear to rationalise their practice as a form of resistance and subversion. Many also demonstrate 'principled pragmatism' in different ways. For some, this involves making decisions regarding when to actively resist and what they are willing to compromise for wider or longer-term benefits. For others, pragmatism is expressed through developing as 'entrepreneurial practitioners.' The chapter has also engaged with respondents' perceptions regarding potential futures for youth work. Whilst some articulated a continuing hope for the return of practice in more traditionally recognisable forms, others contended the future was more likely to lie in the utilisation of youth work skills within wider domains. The chapter has drawn on Foucauldian-inspired ideas on governmentality in order to develop conceptualisation and critique of these different perspectives. It has contended that whilst vocation and hope sustain practitioners' passion for practice in the face of neoliberal conditioning, that these are paradoxically harnessed by state actors as a means of assimilating youth workers for their own purposes.

Chapter 10

Summary and Conclusion

10.1 Introduction

This final chapter re-articulates the aims of the study, summarises its findings, and considers the significance of these for youth work as a profession. The chapter also develops evaluation of the work undertaken in the thesis, noting the strengths and limitations of the research presented.

10.2 Re-articulating the Aims and Objectives of the Study.

The aim of this thesis was to: 'understand the significance of youth workers' life histories, sense of 'vocation', and experiences of professional formation on professional practice in an era of neoliberal austerity.'

As outlined elsewhere, questions of identity are at the centre of this thesis. It has been driven by a quest to understand what has motivated respondents to become youth workers, how they 'use self' in practice, what their experiences of professional formation have been and how they perceive their own enacted identities within shifting and arguably professionally hostile policy arenas.

10.3 Summary and Conclusions

10.3.1 Overview.

This study has critically examined the biographical experiences of 16 youth workers. It has explored facets of their life histories and the significance of these in shaping their choice of profession. In doing so, it has advanced links between life histories and vocation, whilst seeking to develop critical perspectives regarding the impact of wider social and political ecologies on practice and practitioners' enacted identities.

10.3.2 Original Contributions to Knowledge

The thesis makes a number of original empirical and conceptual contributions to knowledge. Firstly, it advances understandings of youth workers' life histories and the significance of these in shaping their choice of profession. Secondly, it places the person of the practitioner back at the heart of practice and argues youth work is fundamentally a human activity that engages relationality in fostering learning. In doing so, it advances, perhaps for the first time, empirical understandings of the 'use of self' in youth work practice. Thirdly, it examines respondents' experiences of professional formation, and the extent to which questions of identity, as framed through life histories, are attended to in enabling youth workers as informal educators to engage fully and ethically with young people and communities. Fourthly, the thesis advances youth workers' personal experiences regarding the impact of neoliberal policy frameworks on their practices and professional and personal identities, garnering their views on the future of professional practice in England. Bricolaging IPA and narrative with more criticalist[1] interpretive positionalities has also advanced a new methodological approach which combines the rich possibilities of phenomenological insight with lifecourse analysis and Foucauldian and Freirean-inspired thought. Further reflection on these processes is offered later in this chapter.

10.3.3 Developing Novel Theoretical Dialectics

Conceptually, the work on the influence of neoliberalism upon personal∞professional subjectivities is advanced through the synthesis of particular theoretical lenses, which refract

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[1] By 'criticalist', I mean perspectives that draw on ideas from critical theory. In the case of youth work, this includes Freirean ideas, and in this thesis, it encompasses Foucauldian perspectives.

new realities regarding youth work practice, practitioners and identities. Perspectives on identity, border pedagogy and governmentality interweave to generate new assessments of, and theoretical insights regarding, different facets of participants' narratives. I have sought in this process to recognise and synthesise particular dualities. Theoretically, this has included the development of dialectics between Freirean and Foucauldian thought. Whist Freire and Foucault can both be thought of as postmodern thinkers committed to justice, emancipation, empowerment and political identification with oppressed groups, each had significantly different views on the processes and possibilities such a commitment engenders. Drawing on Freire has been integral both to the critically hopeful tradition of 'naming the world' (Freire, 1996, 2014), which underpins youth work *praxis,* and to the thesis itself. It chimes with participants' sense of awakening regarding the nature of the world and their responses to it. This is an awakening that tends to be catalysed by personal and observed injustices – generating a reparative impulse that ignites vocation in seeking to make a difference and bring about equitable change in the world. This can be seen in the deeply affective sense of ethical agency in many participants' accounts - one which draws upon the confluence of their life histories - through which youth work becomes a means of congruent axiological expression. Yet, although these life histories and vocations are framed by a deeply enculturated neoliberalism, the full 'naming' of the neoliberal within participants' accounts appears somehow incomplete. This represents a 'naming' that does not always 'fully 'name' thereby denying or excusing elements of its reality. It is thus a 'naming' that deludes itself in the process of its own actions. This delusion is illuminated by the ways in which participants tended to speak of their ongoing sense of passionate commitment to practice. Yet there seems an inherent tension in this optimism – an aching longing to believe their own words regarding the present and future, yet a nagging doubt, or perhaps muted self-realisation,

regarding the truth of their speech. Many respondents were all too aware of the detrimental impact of neoliberalism upon the *telos* of their work, its precaritizing corrosion of terms and conditions, the loss of group work and voluntary participation as signature pedagogies of their profession, and the damaging predetermination of outcomes over process. And yet, many held on to the belief, perhaps the correct belief, that their work continues to make a difference in the lives of young people and communities – that it somehow buffers young people from the worst excesses of the political system that acts in all-encompassing ways upon their lives. Yet whilst this claim has some resonance with contemporary youth work practice, its timbre is perhaps dulled. This is Berlant's (2011) 'cruel optimism' in full view – amounting to a hitherto 'unnamed' enactment of Foucault's governmentality thesis in youth work and in youth workers' professional∞personal subjectivities. Youth workers remain bound to the *ideals* of practices that are so affectively entwined with their own identities, with their own beliefs about the world and how it is or should be. And yet, they risk remaining tethered, via a plethora of neoliberal technologies, to a view of the world that is discursively and affectively delusionary, to hopes that may (or may not) deliver on their dreams of better futures, for young people, for society, and for themselves as individuals. And they risk doing so while remaining attached to the very systems of diffuse neoliberal governance that cause them to act upon themselves and young people in potentially oppressive ways. This represents the neoliberal manipulation and usurpation of vocation and identities. Youth workers may 'name the world', and doing so might provide momentary cathartic affective and moral relief, but this world risks remaining a world named in delusion.

In this view, I argue that true naming of the world, to act on it as Freire called for, must take enlightened account of the diffuse enactment of parasitically ingrained neoliberal technologies in the entwinned personal∞professional subjectivities of youth workers' lives

and practices. I argue that a significant way in which this can be enabled is through synthesis with other criticalist theories – in this instance, Foucault's governmentality thesis (Chandler and Reid, 2016; Dean, 2010, 2013; Miller and Rose, 2008). In doing so, I contend that I have been able to begin generating a novel dialectic synthesis between these giants of twentieth century educational and social thought in ways that illuminate questions of vocation in youth work and beyond. The integration of Foucault in the thesis in this way, has, I believe, enabled the potential of a truer, fuller, more illuminating 'naming of the world' in the spirit that Freirean pedagogy demands. The significance of these ideas is unpacked further later in the chapter.

10.4 Summary of Findings

10.4.1 Life Histories and Vocation

The interviews reveal a passionate group of youth workers, whose formative experiences have been significant in shaping their values and orientation to youth work practice. Whilst each participant's account is unique, there were noticeable patterns in the data. Two major thematic motifs, 'borders' and 'reparative impulse' were identified and conceptualised in this regard. Whilst in the majority of accounts, one or other of these motifs tended to be more visible, in some instances, both could be seen. Experiences of history, family, class, education, place, faith, culture, community and politics, constellate in different ways in generating the bordered experiences and enacted identities that have led participants towards youth work practice. Some of these borders represented opportunities to be traversed, others were structurally rooted barriers to growth, development and possibility. Each has been significant in forming the tapestry of participants' lives and the learning respondents glean from their

own life experiences. All this links to conceptualisations of youth work as border pedagogy, and its practitioners as part of a cadre of border pedagogues (Coburn, 2010; Giroux, 2005). Whilst work on the significance of 'borders' as a literal and figurative motif in informal education and critical pedagogy has previously been developed (Anzaldúa, 2012; Bolt, 2009; Coburn, 2010; Giroux, 2005, 2011), nothing has hitherto been systematically posited in respect of the significance of borders in the lives of border pedagogues themselves. Undoubtedly, these intersecting experiences have shaped respondents' worldviews and values. For many, the 'discovery' of youth work as a practice has allowed them to give expression to these values and to who they are as people. Youth work, as I have argued, is thus a profoundly 'ontological *praxis*' – one which, at its best and most liberated, is fundamentally expressive of practitioners' 'being'. Understanding the significance of formative border experiences therefore seems integral to understanding youth workers as practitioners and to gaining insights regarding their 'use of self' in practice.

Whilst the influence of borders is discernible in each participant's account, for some, a degree of 'reparative impulse' appears integral to their biographies and sense of vocation. In some cases, this desire for reparation arises out of difficult or damaging formative experiences, which drive participants towards ensuring young people do not go through what they themselves went through, or at least to mitigate the impact of such experiences. For some of these participants, this form of reparative impulse also seemed to represent something personally redemptive. Other participants appeared reparatively motivated by positive formative experiences and observed injustices. This drives these respondents to ensure young people have access to the good opportunities and positive role-models they themselves benefitted from while growing up, and to attempt to address the injustices young people and communities face. This work empirically advances ideas tentatively posited in the social work

and community development literatures (Banks and Gallagher, 2009; Hoggett *et al.*, 2006; Hoggett *et al.*, 2009), but which have not been specifically developed in respect of youth work. In particular, it chimes with Hoggett *et al*'s (2009) assertion that such vocational influences are linked to a desire to make a difference for and with others in advancing opportunities that promote inclusion and justice for the most marginalised, and, in some way, to redress difficult personal experiences. Reparative impulse thus appears to be another important influence on professional motivation, and one that needs to be understood more fully and examined more deeply in professional formation in order to address issues of potential countertransference, 'mission' or 'colonisation'[2].

 The passion with which many participants spoke about their practice and sense of identity as youth workers was striking, and the configured tapestry of each life story seems integral to respondents' passion and sense of vocation. Whilst for many their sense of vocation as youth workers unfolded gradually, others experienced a more sudden epiphany. Either way, it might be argued youth workers' life narratives are a rich and perhaps untapped (or at least under-analysed) resource for a practice that is concerned with learning from and through the relationality of critically located lived experiences (Batsleer, 2008; Freire, 1996; Giroux, 2005, 2011; Tiffany, 2001; Tilsen, 2018).

10.4.2 The Use of Self, *Phronesis* and Professional Formation

These insights feed into discussion of the 'use of self' as fundamentally expressive of the way in which practitioners use their 'being' as the principal tool of relational pedagogy (Fusco, 2012; Murphy and Ord, 2012; Turney, 2007). Changing ecologies of practice play a significant

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[2] By 'mission' and 'colonisation', I mean the undue influence of 'doing practice to people' by way of (in-)advertently 'fixing them'.

role in shaping unfolding expressions of such relationalities, with some respondents noting how increasingly aggressive shifts towards performativity in youth work (de St Croix, 2018; Duffy, 2017a, 2017b) have resulted in compromises in authenticity. These findings resonate with and re-enforce existing research regarding the impact of preordained, outcome-driven neoliberal policy frameworks on the very character of practice, and upon practitioner subjectivities (de St Croix, 2016, 2018; McGimpsey, 2018; Taylor *et al*., 2018). As noted, for Duffy (2017a:103), this represents the very essence of the 'neuroliberal' era in which: 'performance evaluation [is] targeted at producing subjects who have particular emotional, visceral responses to data and orient their practices in reaction to these responses.' Many participants expressed how they feel the pressure of such conditioning. The present thesis thus adds empirical weight to existing literature on these topics.

Other conclusions are also noteworthy. For some respondents, the 'use of self' was impacted by different facets of identity and motivation observable in the interviews: vivid expressions of reparative impulse discernible in the data; belonging to, being responsible for and challenging the communities where they practice; and a commitment to using personal experiences in fostering learning and change can each be seen. The 'use of self' thus involves a way of being with others in enabling learning (Turney, 2007), which gives practical expression to the notion of youth work as an 'ontological *praxis*'. It is however a *praxis* which appears to be subtly and sometimes silently moulded, manipulated and nudged by processes of neoliberal governmentality in which malleable subjectivities[3] are (self-)produced, and ultimately reproduced in others, via the inculcated normalisation of particular discourses,

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[3] This is an idea I summarise again later in the chapter.

values and enacted practices (Bröckling, 2016; Chandler and Reid, 2016; Dean, 2010; Miller and Rose, 2008).

All of this leads to broader discussion regarding ethics and *phronesis* (practical wisdom) in a climate many respondents viewed as becoming increasingly transactional, rule bound and lacking in professional autonomy. These empirical perspectives support analysis of transactionalist neoliberal policy frameworks in which a pursuit of 'certainty' and risk management is privileged via targeted interventions (Duffy, 2017a, 2017b). Under the rubric of *episteme* (scientific knowledge) and *techne* (technical craft), 'inputs' are legitimated on the basis that they produce measurable pre-designated outputs. However, as some participants inferred, this approach is epistemically flawed, as it does not take account of the individuality and humanity of young people, practitioners and practice, nor the context of lives. Neither does it show understanding of the process-orientated and needs-responsive foundation of youth work practice (Ord, 2014). In this, sense, *phronesis* as a form of 'lived', intuitive, context-dependent, process-orientated wisdom, that is cognisant of the multifacetedness of relational interactions in youth work practice, should take precedence over more rigid and rule-bound formulations of 'wisdom' that permeate contemporary discourses of 'professionalism' and their enacted subjectivities. Such ideas have been postulated both broadly in the 'people professions' (Ellett, 2012; Dunne, 2011) and specifically in youth work (Ord, 2014, 2016); however, little has been advanced empirically in respect of the latter. By attempting to 'get inside' facets of relational practice from the perspective of practitioners, this thesis has begun, at least in some small way, to articulate empirically the continuing significance of context-dependent professional wisdom in youth work practice. Indeed, whether conscious or not, I would contend that for some respondents *phronesis* represents a form of resistance against technocracy. Moreover, the 'use of self' might, at least in some

instances in the data, be viewed as a form of relational resistance that remains committed to humanising young people and communities.

Phronesis privileges the particular (Jones *et al*., 2013; Ord, 2014, 2016). Examples can be seen in the way some participants chose to use direct self-disclosure within particular professional contexts as a means of connecting and supporting specific young people with particular issues. Participants' views regarding such an approach were not however universal, with some saying they would never self-disclose and others advocating its 'appropriate' use. This, it would appear, is an area that requires further discussion within the Profession. These discussions not only need to take account of ethical formulations, and *phronesis* as professional wisdom, but also of Foucauldian perspectives which view such confessionality[4] as a mechanism of governmentality in the production of particular subjectivities, which further perpetuate actors' self-production in line with neoliberal goals (Fejes and Nicoll, 2015).

Some participants argued youth workers need to generate advanced self-awareness regarding conscious and unconscious self-disclosure in practice, particularly within multi-disciplinary teams that engage with 'at risk' young people. All of this speaks of practitioners' need to balance authenticity and professional 'boundaries' in fostering ethical practice, learning and self-care. The ways in which youth workers draw directly or indirectly on their own selves and life histories as relational resources for practice should however never become ethically prescribed. Instead, as Fusco (2012) notes relational practice in youth work must remain professionally intuitive and continuously committed to ensuring the flow of

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[4] For Foucault, 'confession', in both its religious sense, and more contemporaneously in its professional sense in fields such as counselling, education, medicine, social work and youth and community work is a technology harnessed to 'expose one's soul' as a means of using 'shame' or the prospect of shame in order to induce self-regulating behaviours aligned to capitalist or elite agendas.

relationality remains *eudemonically* motivated to serve young people[5] and to enable their learning and growth. Such a position reflects the humanity of practice and foregrounds the importance of virtue in youth work as a relational pedagogy (Hart, 2015, 2016). Notwithstanding these ideals, it would seem important that such concerns are considered and addressed as professional ethical frameworks are developed. This would help address potential critiques regarding ways in which the 'use of self' or inappropriate self-disclosure might lead to abuses of power. Moreover, it might also be suggested that youth work organisations develop policies and supportive practices, including, for example, training and the use of supervision, that attempt to ensure appropriate accountability in practitioners' relationships with young people. Such approaches and structures of accountability, when appropriately enacted, may hold the potential to foster more ethically relational practices by developing greater awareness of transferential dynamics wherein practitioners' own histories and 'material' risk detrimentally impacting upon their work with young people.

10.4.3 Self-awareness and Professional Formation.

Advancing *phronetic* practice therefore demands that practitioners continuously develop self∞other∞context knowledge. It is therefore incumbent on youth workers to continually develop enhanced understandings of selfhood and the significance of its enactments in practice on multiple levels. The 'use of self' is informed by various dynamics that have shaped the person of the youth worker. This work on the self requires multi-perceptual awareness to be developed in terms of introspective processes regarding questions of life histories and identities *and* take account of developing and utilising insights regarding the significance of the socio-political in shaping lives and professional practices. In considering the data, it seems

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[5] Rather than practitioners' needs.

that professional qualifying courses have, at least in some instances, failed to address these concerns synergistically, if at all. Some courses appeared to promote personal introspection and the development of 'personal congruence', but without locating biographical experiences and enacted identities socio-politically. For others, the converse seemed true. This reflects decades of oscillation and dysergy between the 'academic' and 'personal' in professional training (Bradford, 2009). Developing multi-level, multi-logic[6] understandings of self, therefore appears critical in enriching and enhancing ethical *praxes*.

Practitioners' life narratives are undoubtedly rich resources for practice as they arc participants towards youth work. However, unnamed, they risk 'shadowsiding' or 'blindsiding' youth workers' relationships with young people. Psychodynamic awareness of unresolved issues, addressing questions of 'vicariousness', 'mission', 'rescue' and 'colonisation' seem important endeavours in ensuring the development of ethical 'learning relationships' (Tiffany, 2001:93) with young people. The lack of clear curriculum guidance regarding practitioner 'self-knowledge' by the National Youth Agency which is responsible for accrediting professional courses is something that must be addressed. This however, as some research participants noted, also requires careful consideration as to how such work is undertaken safely and ethically. The broad omission of personal and socio-political identity work in professional formation reflects and contributes to the contemporary technicisation and dehumanisation of practice. The reclamation and advancement of pedagogies of identity in professional qualifications should enable the development of more critically rounded and critically aware professionals. This work would contribute to enabling the integration of what

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[6]By 'multi-logic', I mean logic that draws on and combines different theoretical ideas regarding selfhood, its formation and reflexive development – perspectives drawn from, for example, psychology, sociology and philosophy.

Sullivan (2005) and Jones *et al*. (2013) contend ought to be the triune basis of professional formation. That is: 'the academic apprenticeship focussed on cognitive or intellectual knowledge, the practical apprenticeship focussed on skill or practice, and the socio-ethical apprenticeship focussed on identity and purpose…' (Jones *et al*., 2013:9).
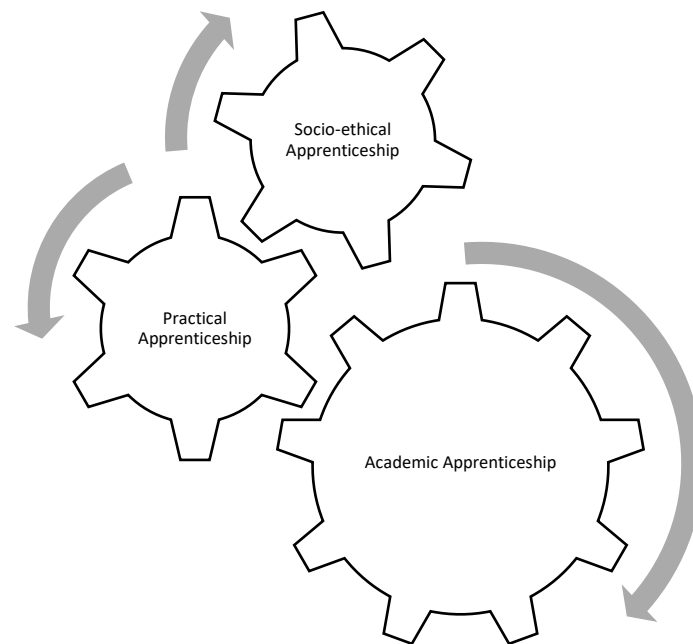
Figure 10.1 Sullivan's (2005) 'Three Apprenticeships of Professional Education'.

Attending to and integrating each of these dimensions within professional formation is necessary in critically reclaiming the humanity of practice and in promoting virtue and *phronesis* in youth work. Whilst professional qualifying courses in the UK tend to give fairly good attention to the types of academic knowledge that have traditionally informed the Profession's thinking and practice[7], and to assessed professional practice that constitutes a 'practical apprenticeship'[8], work that engages future youth work professionals in questions of

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[7]Youth and community work has traditionally utilised knowledge from a range of disciplines including psychology, sociology, education, politics, social policy and management.

[8] On undergraduate qualifying courses this is some 800 hours of assessed practice and on postgraduate qualifying courses 400 hours.

personal histories and identities, is, at best, inconsistent. This is reflected in the very mixed picture participants relayed regarding their own experiences of professional formation. It is clear many of the research participants whose courses did not contain this element of learning in a discernible or systematic way, felt this was, in retrospect, an omission. On the other hand, those whose courses did include such work tended to see its significance and value. Indeed, the tutors interviewed highlighted the significance of youth workers' engagement with young people's identity processes (Young, 2006), and of the ethical need to ensure practitioners undertake their own work in this regard. The significance of 'the critical' also needs to be highlighted here. Following Foucauldian thought on the subjectification of the 'personal' (Bradford, 2009, 2011), youth workers must be enabled not only to trace histories and understand selfhoods on multiple levels, but to recognise that the process of developing such understandings without critical analysis of, and insight into these processes, may render them malleable to the same forces of neoliberal governmentality they may well seek to critique. It might be contended that some of these courses incorporated confessional techniques which could be viewed as inculcating greater malleability through shame-inducement. Indeed, some participants expressed concerns regarding the potential detrimental impact of such approaches in this regard.

10.4.4 Contesting Practices and Identities in an Era of Neoliberal Austerity

These points enable a neat circularity back to the start of the thesis and to questions of vocation and identity, particularly as experienced and enacted in an era of neoliberal austerity. Present conditions have undoubtedly shifted and contorted youth work practice (Bright and Pugh, 2019c; Davies, 2019a; McGimpsey, 2018; Taylor *et al*., 2018). Cuts and precarity have induced a new form of professional malleability that have shaped youth workers' practices and subjectivities. Many respondents described how often significant

changes in professional purpose towards more targeted work together with reconfigurations in organisational structures have left them with a sense of dissonance regarding their practice. The ongoing sense of 'threat' experienced arising from the continuous possibility of further changes has left many second-guessing their futures. There is a sense emanating from the data that many respondents felt compelled to refashion their practices and remake *themselves* in order to adapt to policy requirements and thus remain employable. This sense of precarity was particularly heightened for the small number of respondents who found themselves on short-term contracts. Naseem, who had been working multiple part-time jobs to make ends meet, was particularly keen to highlight the impact of professional precarity on her sense of wellbeing. All of this chimes with Leach (2017) whose work on the impact of neoliberalisation revealed practitioners, who, as a result of feeling overly-responsibilised for their own careers and uncertain about the future, felt a profound need to comply with what was being demanded of them, and to ensure they developed protean capacities. Whilst Leach's work is concerned with those in different roles in the wider children's workforce, the present thesis begins to advance more specific empirical insight regarding the impact of neoliberal processes of governmentality in relation to youth workers' identities and subjectivities. Processes of precarization appear designed to make youth workers more malleable and compliant and less willing to resist, thus enabling their practices to be nudged more easily towards the production of 'good' neoliberal subjects. This aligns with broader discussion regarding the (re-)production of subjectivities in the governmentality literature (Bröckling, 2016; Chandler and Reid, 2016; Dean, 2010, 2013; Miller and Rose, 2008). It also resonates with Price's (2018:55) analysis of youth practitioners' experiences of 'deprofessionalisation', which have left some with a deep sense of 'displacement… [whilst]

[f]or others, their professional fortitude is evident within a pragmatic endurance of a lack of personal-professional congruence.'

It might be argued this malleability is further exacerbated because youth work, as a profession, has tended to embody flexibility in working in the margins (Batsleer, 2020) and 'in between' other professional spaces. This flexibility has enabled it to be creative in its responses in meeting the needs of young people and communities; however, it now appears its flexibility has been turned against it. Youth work is not, and never has been, easily delineable (Cooper, T., 2018; Jeffs, 2018; Morciano and Mercio, 2017). This opens its practices up to significant possibilities. However, it also renders it particularly vulnerable to policy shifts. Tracing histories highlights how youth work is a *praxis* that has always been grounded in espoused, albeit contested, liberationist aims and in values committed to inclusion, equity and democracy. Whilst the rose-tinted nature of historical imaginaries risks painting an illusionary picture of what was (Bright and Pugh, 2019c), there is little doubt the last few decades has wrought fundamental shifts that have changed the ethos, character and outworking of practice in ways that now render it something other (Taylor *et al*., 2018). Competition, performativity and targeted practice in a new era of austerity have undoubtedly engendered professional precarity and squeezed the essence of practice, harnessing and moving it in new and uncomfortable directions (de St Croix, 2016, 2018). Much group work has been replaced by work with individuals; mentoring has replaced informal education; and voluntary engagement has been slowly eroded. Youth work, it would seem, is at odds with itself – uncertain what, or how much to tolerate. It holds on to the past, whilst arguing vociferously for critical pedagogy in the face of an apparently ceaseless regressive onslaught. This, as can be seen in passages of the present data, has engendered a palpable disorientation in the Profession, and, in the process, heightened questions of identity for practitioners. Yet,

these quandaries perhaps signal more than ever, the need for youth workers who are critically personally∞socially∞politically aware in enabling young people and communities to gain insight and act on the world.

Following Giroux (2005) and Coburn (2010), this thesis re-articulates the significance and possibilities of this work as 'border pedagogy' and argues that gaining insight from personal 'borders' should be a key commitment in youth work praxis and formation. This is a commitment that recasts questions of identity at the heart of practice and highlights the possibility of reimagining the significance of such questions as sites of new professional possibilities. As suggested previously, this identity work also demands the renewal of efforts to understand youth work's position as a mechanism of governmentality. Such an approach would enable the Profession to widen its worldview and recognise the discursive processes of power that contribute to shaping its current subjectivities. Renewed efforts are needed in revealing 'truths', their processes of construction and affects in relation to identity praxes in the field.[9] This thesis has contended that youth work has experienced incremental shifts that have recast its ontology. Its professionals have become agents of a diffuse state, who compliantly, and sometimes without recognising it, act on themselves, in order to foster compliance in the young people and communities with which they work. This is the antithesis of the Profession's espoused criticalist axiology. All of this must be highlighted again in professional debate and formation, wherein those working in the field should be encouraged to unpack and consider the significance of their own identities in interaction with others' and

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[9] This follows Foucauldian postulations that enacted subjectivities are influenced in their construction by layers of inherited discourse which are assumed to be real or 'true'. Such subjectivities tend to be constructed via various means by elite actors for their own benefit. Given the significance posited in this thesis regarding practitioners' identities and histories, I argue genealogical approaches which engage in the deconstruction of assumptive realities and constructed subjectivities should be extended to professional qualifying courses in youth and community work.

in respect of what these might mean for their own and others' interactions with various institutions and structures in a world in constant flux.

10.4.5 The Neoliberal Assimilation of Vocation

As outlined, lived experiences of professional precarity represent a particular technology of governmentality in youth work practice. The other, necessary 'side of the coin' in maintaining such subjectivities, is practitioners' passion for work with young people. The present thesis enhances the theoretical work advanced by Doyle (1999) in this regard and further substantiates aspects of de St Croix's (2016) empirical thesis on 'passion' in youth work practice. However, the present work goes further. It suggests that, viewed through a Foucauldian lens, vocation also represents a mechanism utilised by the British neoliberal state to ensure practitioners remain sufficiently attached to practice in order that they act on themselves and young people to (subtly) ensure compliance. This aligns with claims in the governmentality literature that government is constituted *through* the enacted subjectivities of its subjects (Dean, 2010, 2013; Smith, 2014). The combination of vocation and personal and professional precarity appears significant in maintaining participants' commitment to practice. For many participants who expressed discontent at the direction of travel in youth work, the current context appears to be deeply uncomfortable and seems to have induced not inconsiderable soul searching regarding the morality of their own practice. This discontent draws on and contributes to a particular sense of collective identity that has coalesced around organisations like In Defence of Youth Work. Yet despite, (or perhaps because of)[10], the ostensible resistance generated in such spaces, the present data suggests compromises *have* largely, albeit reluctantly, been tolerated. These technologies of attachment seem to be

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[10] My suggestion, in line with Giroux (2005) is that protest and 'venting' can in themselves be technologies of governmentality which enable the diffusion of resistance and the legitimisation of 'compromise'.

further fuelled and facilitated by a renewed hope that the 'tide will turn' (Davies, 2019b). Some participants expressed a belief that it is worth tolerating the present for a better future. Vocation, passion and hope, it would seem, are technologies harnessed to govern youth workers and youth work.

10.4.6 Advancing Perspectives – Governmentality: Vocation, Identity and Hope.

All of this demands deeper insight regarding the processes and impact of the assimilation of vocation. Youth work, as a vocation and practice, seems integral to participants' sense of identity. Formative experiences have undoubtedly been significant to respondents' sense of calling and to the enactment of professional identities. For many, this sense of vocation, borne out of borders and reparation, also appeared to sustain a deep commitment to youth work, even in the face of neoliberal policy agendas which have contorted, controlled and precaritized practice in new and uncomfortable ways. Although the majority of respondents appeared critically aware of how their practice was being reshaped, many, as suggested, seemed reluctantly acceptant of current conditions, believing it is better to be 'inside the system' in order to develop resistance and stand up for young people 'from within'. Many participants appeared to also attribute the current situation, at least in part, to 'non-political factors'. Whilst some blamed the demise of the Profession on its intransigence, others contended its flexibility had rendered it easily malleable to other agendas. Many also felt the Profession had been unable to articulate either what it does or its value in doing it. This unfolding context had significant impacts on respondents' identities, not only professionally, but given the significance of participants' life histories, personally too. Many respondents also recognised the changing character of practice has rendered their relationships with young people increasingly instrumental and utilitarian. Yet despite doing very little 'traditional' youth work, most participants seemed determined to hold on to their identities as youth

workers. A 'vocational bind'[11] seems therefore all too real – respondents remain dedicated to working with young people yet do so in practice environments that seem content to syphon youth work skills away from youth work's core principles. It is a vocational bind that advances neoliberal agendas through a profession that espouses values to the contrary. The dedication to vocation has resulted in economic challenges for some and induced additional forms of self-oppression for others. This represents the neoliberal usurpation of vocation. It is the assimilation of the very essence of respondents' lives and identities, of their life narratives and of the borders and reparative pain that have driven them towards, and keep them dedicated to, serving young people. Whilst many youth workers may sense this affectively in some way, it appears hitherto 'unnamed' as such. Vocation not only sustains commitments to practice now, it renders many youth workers hopeful about the future return of practices that are better aligned with the Profession's values and pedagogy. Others hope that youth work skills will be more fully recognised within broader contexts. For Berlant (2011), such subjectivities represent the attractive delusion of 'cruel optimism': a deeply conditioned and affective attachment to something deeply problematic. Such optimism, she argues, risks merely perpetuating a compromised fantasy. It is a fantasy, so psychically entrenched, that the exposure of truth means its subjects are never likely to be able to hope in anything again (ibid). Whether respondents' commitment to and hopes for youth work is a cruel optimism which represents the continuing usurpation of vocation, and what authentic youth work pedagogy might remain salvageable, are questions for continuing debate.

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[11] By 'vocational' I mean calling; by 'bind', I am inferring a sense of entrapment which is constellated through the various technologies of governmentality noted in this chapter: a passionate commitment to young people and youth and community work founded in respondents' own reparative and bordered experiences; the malleability of youth and community work as a profession; the personal-professional precarity experienced by many participants; and, a sense of hope in a different future, that does just enough to ensure ongoing commitment.

10.5 Reflective Evaluation

This study has focussed on the 'person' of the youth worker. It has been driven by a quest to know who those with whom I share professional status with are. It has been a quest to understand something of what makes them tick, a quest to gain insight from their life histories, a quest to understand the significance of these life histories for their identities and practices with young people and communities and a quest to reimagine the significance of all of this for professional formation. Whilst this type of work has been undertaken in respect of other social professions, very little has been developed in this regard with youth workers (cf Price, 2018). The research task itself has therefore broken new ground. I have sought in this quest to develop a multi-dimensional approach – to adopt and adapt critical approaches that inform (and sometimes tussle for prominence within) my own worldview in order to develop new ways of framing personal∞professional identities. This task is by its very nature political. I have thus sought to illuminate how significant policy shifts that have decimated youth work as a profession and contorted it in uncomfortable directions have not only impacted upon practice, but on the professionals who engage the very essence of their being in fostering the relational learning that is youth work pedagogy.

10.5.1 Reflections on Methodological Dialectics

This multi-dimensional pursuit of insights regarding youth workers' living identities demanded a novel integrated methodological approach. Throughout this process, I have sought to understand the intertwining influences of personal biographies, social realities and political enculturations upon participants' vocational motivations and enacted subjectivities. As noted, my starting point was to begin to understand 'vocation' as a phenomenon. This was a phenomenological pursuit, seeking to understand the meaning of vocation as enframed within participants' motivations to pursue a career as youth workers. As discussed, my

approach of choice was IPA – a methodology that seeks to elucidate phenomena through respondents' hermeneutics of their own phenomenological experiencing. The central question here, in a simplistic sense, might have been 'Tell me why you decided to become a youth worker?' However, I reasoned this would perhaps only reveal 'mono-dimensional truths' – because such a question, whilst pursuing *a* 'phenomenological sense', would risk failing to take direct account of the influence of participants' living histories upon that sense. It was for this reason that I decided to integrate a narrative-biographical approach which sought to trace the significance of particular processes, relationships, movements and events in participants' living histories. This synthesis also worked on a more practical level. Whilst narrative approaches are underpinned by clear (and arguably diverse) epistemologies (Andrews *et al,* 2013), there is little agreement regarding suggested processes of data analysis. In contrast, IPA has a clearly articulated and long-validated data analysis framework. The synthesis of narrative and IPA therefore held both epistemological and practical significance to the work. However, as noted, whilst narrative approaches might include various, more criticalist epistemologies (*ibid.*), hermeneutics within IPA are limited to the participant's and researcher's 'flat' interpretations of phenomena. Such hermeneutic stances risk the caricaturization of phenomena, and, their subjectivisation mono-dimensional and 'untouched'. It is for this reason I rationalised the integration of an additional abductive layer of interpretation - a critical hermeneutic - that took account of the socio-political upon participants' enacted subjectivities. This, as outlined above, in building critical meaning, fused Freirean and Foucauldian thought in attempting to join *with* participants in 'naming the world'. The fusion of IPA and narrative enabled the development of a further dialectic synthesis. Whilst IPA might be argued to point back to the individual and their experience of phenomena, narrative can be thought of as pointing away from, or beyond, the individual to

speak more critically to institutions and social divisions – indeed, to power itself. In this sense, this methodological dialectic builds layers of meaning that speak 'back to' phenomena whilst situating and contextualising them within the socio-political in ways that illuminate them more fully. It thus represents a means of developing fuller self∞other∞socio-political understandings of particular identities and subjectivities. This is an ideal I sought to strive for throughout the research.

I recognise certain epistemological tensions in the approach – but I would contend these tensions do not necessarily represent incompatibilities, rather rich grounds for synthesis in particular fields of study, especially those relating to questions of identity. However, I also recognise that by having so many respondents, I have reached beyond the usual limits of a study of this nature. Having fewer participants would undoubtedly have allowed for fuller and richer presentation of data – and therefore allowed the study to have achieved greater idiographic focus and be more fully expressive of its phenomenological value base.

10.5.2 Reflections on Methodology 'in Action'

Epistemological challenges aside, working with these practitioners over the course of three interviews and several months was a humbling and hugely enriching experience. I feel privileged they shared their life stories with me, including some of the pain and joy they had experienced in different facets of their lives. I am honoured by the trust they placed in me and that they were willing to make themselves vulnerable in sharing their stories, particularly aspects of their biographies that were more personal and challenging. It is this vulnerability and honesty which, I think, makes the data so rich. It illuminates understandings of 'who' youth workers are. Whilst, as with any qualitative inquiry, the interviews might have been differently analysed and configured, or different data excerpts utilised, I believe I have

honoured the essence of participants' accounts. I hope, at least, this is the case. Rich

descriptive data in itself may have been a noble aim. However, as outlined, given youth work's

espoused commitment to criticalist onto-epistemological perspectives that 'name the world',

I was never convinced this would do justice, either to the participants' stories, nor to the

professional values and traditions to which so many of these people have given their lives.

The abductive application of the critical hermeneutic described has, I believe, added a further

dimension to the ontological work of understanding who youth workers are. Whilst this, I

would argue, has elevated analysis and insight, it may have done so in a way that risked

obscuring, misinterpreting or misrepresenting participants' experiences. This has weighed on

me heavily throughout the process but has also served as helpful ballast. I hope my pursuit of

understanding has remained respectful of respondents' biographies as they have shared

them, and I have understood them. As I have recognised above, the sheer scale of the

material generated by the interviews was an issue. At the outset, I was concerned I would

have insufficient data. This was a fear that permeated the early part of the research process.

I sought to have a larger sample to compensate for an anticipated drop-out of participants

over the course of the three interviews. No participants withdrew. This only added to my

sense of feeling honoured that these youth workers were willing to take time out of their busy

schedules to talk with me about their lives and practice. Perhaps it is testament to the value

they placed on the process. A number reported the interviews had been "like therapy". My

approach to interviews was perhaps therefore reflective of my other professional work as a

counsellor. Inasmuch as I did not set out to 'do' interviews in this way, my approach was

perhaps, in Rogerian terms, congruently reflective of who I am and how I engage with people.

However, I became aware of the need to ensure I did not transgress professional boundaries

in such a way that my work with participants went from being "like therapy" to therapy, nor

that I abused my use of 'therapeutic skills' in deceiving participants into disclosing information or going more deeply into their own stories in ways they may not have intended or felt comfortable with. In the majority of instances, I disclosed to participants that I am a trained counsellor and, in all instances, I checked with participants that they remained content to have shared their stories in the manner they had. Inasmuch as this speaks of an authentic dataset, it did leave me with too much material. This, added to the burden of analysis, meant I had to compromise on the presentation of participants' responses in ways I was not always comfortable with. However, this was a more comfortable compromise than removing the responses of some participants entirely.

10.6 Looking Ahead: Implications for Policy, Practice, Education and Research

Of course, all research studies are contingent, and none are ever fully 'complete'. The idiographic nature of this work allows claims only to be made in relation to the people who participated. Whilst I believe the work resonates with my own experiences, and with the limited literature in this field, the findings still need to be tested more widely with the broader Profession through publications arising from the research. It also needs to be noted whilst I hold the work to be 'true' to the views expressed by participants, the picture may well be different had a different set of people volunteered or been selected. Indeed, it might be argued that the 'vocational' language employed in recruiting participants resonated with those who felt they had a vocational story to tell. Whilst I believe the ideas in this thesis hold broader truths, the only authenticable claims that can be made are those emanating from the interviews themselves. Moreover, writing this conclusion as the first UK lock-down linked to the COVID-19 pandemic eased (July 2020)[12], also highlighted the significance of time and

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[12] Indeed, the last few months have been seismic for me on a professional basis. COVID-19 has rendered many changes to our society; this has had significant effects on nearly every facet of life. As a result of COVID, York St

events in shaping and reconfiguring narratives and how they are understood. Setting out on this research project in 2020, even with the same participants, may well have rendered different results. Certainly, the undercurrent of re-emerging interest in youth work that seems to be gathering some pace and is reflected in a growing number of jobs in the sector may well have meant respondents' hopes for the future of youth work would have been different. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown once again what youth work can offer in responding to young people's needs. The challenge will be to articulate its ongoing capacity to help address issues of isolation, poor mental health, un/under-employment and spatial and generational inequalities that have patently been exacerbated in the wake of COVID-19. Perhaps the pandemic is a watershed moment which highlights that the brutality of austerity has not worked. The COVID crisis seems also to have re-sharpened minds regarding what is valuable in making a 'good life'. A desire for connection, relationality and meaning seems to have been re-awakened. Policy makers will hopefully look at youth and community work as key to enabling this flourishing. Indeed, some more progressive local authorities have begun developing frameworks that advance such relational practices.

The pandemic has also accelerated youth work's move towards 'digital hybridity' (Melvin, 2019). This opens up possibilities, but also creates a number of challenges. Digital access cannot be assumed for a significant minority of young people. Some youth workers may also feel they lack the skills to engage in digital spaces (Batsleer *et al*., 2020). Finally, and perhaps most significantly, there are many issues that may need to be addressed in discussing and developing ethical frameworks for this work. The future of youth work does seem different,

John University, where I had spent the last 8 years working, offered employees a voluntary severance package, which I applied for, was granted and accepted. I don't know what the next period of time may bring, but I am excited by the possibilities. The significance of the 'protean self' (Leach, 2017) is not lost on me personally.

more optimistic perhaps, than when I embarked on this research journey. That is not however to say I think the questions I have posed and the lenses I have employed in this thesis reveal truths and challenges that are any less 'real'. Time alone will tell whether the government's commitment to 'levelling up' will be delivered in the aftermath of COVID-19, and whether youth work will be given opportunities to contribute to that future in ways that are acceptable to the Profession's values, and, what all this may mean for practitioners' identities, professional formation and practices.

There is undoubtedly more to research. Specifically, for me, this at present entails arguing for a curriculum shift in professional qualifying courses to include specific work that encourages youth work students to reflect on the significance of their own life histories for professional practice, and to evaluate the impact of this change in professional formation on practice. Advancing this proposal, will require engagement with key colleagues in the field including the Joint Education Training Standards Committee (JETS), that oversees curriculum development and assurance on professional qualifying courses on behalf of the National Youth Agency. It will also involve engagement with colleagues, who are part of the Professional Association of Lecturers in Community and Youth Work (PALCYW) who teach on JNC qualifying courses, in order to present research findings and analysis. Based on these engagements, I hope to contend for the development of consistent, creative and ethical approaches, which draw on different theoretical perspectives, in advancing practitioners' insights regarding the significance of their own life histories and identities on practice within the context of professional formation. If embedded into any future curriculum changes, the impact of this project would then need to be evaluated through further research with practitioner and academic colleagues.

Ongoing research will be required in order to make sense of these concerns. I trust the present thesis, and the research that emanates from it makes an initial contribution to these debates. I hope too that it critically enriches youth workers' understandings of the significance of their own life histories, and the meaning of these in their practice. Ultimately, in doing so, I hope it enables the Profession to advance dynamic and ethical relationalities in fostering learning, inclusion and change.

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Research Information Sheet

My name is Graham Bright, and I am a Senior Lecturer in Childhood and Youth Studies and Youth and Community Work at York St John University. I am currently studying for a PhD at Durham University, under the supervision of Professor Sarah Banks and Dr. Andrew Orton.

The question I am researching is: '**How do youth workers' life experiences and narratives influence practice?'**

The research covers four broad, but inter-related arenas:

1. Youth Workers' life histories.
2. What 'draws' people to become youth workers?
3. Youth Workers' experiences of professionally qualifying education
4. Youth Workers' experiences of contemporary youth work within shifting policy environments.

Despite emergent interest, and a growing number of publications regarding the lives of professionals in related fields, little yet has been published about youth workers' lives: this research endeavors to begin that conversation.

An Invitation to Participate

I am keen to engage with student, newly-qualified and experienced Youth and Community Workers to explore these themes. I would invite you to participate in a series of three, ninety-minute interviews designed to examine, in turn, the themes outlined above. I envisage a collaborative process of working with participants in the collection and analysis of their stories. However, commitment from participants will be limited to the three interviews which will be spread out over a period of twelve to eighteen months. I am happy to meet with you at a location of your choice and at times that are mutually convenient.

Research interviews will be digitally recorded and transcribed. All research material will be securely stored. Transcriptions of each interview can be shared with you either by email, or as part of each subsequent meeting.

Extracts may be included in my thesis (which will be made publically available via an online depository), be used in teaching and research training, and form part of other research outputs. Pseudonyms will be used to protect your identity. Please feel free to tell me about any quotes that you may feel are personally sensitive, or which might identify you in some way. These need not be included in the final thesis.

As part of the third interview, we can take some time together to review your story and to reflect on the material to be included in the thesis in order that you and your story are

represented in fair and ethical way.   Recorded materials will be destroyed within three years of research completion. You can withdraw from the research at any time, and, you are free to refuse to answer any question.

Please feel free to contact me if you would like any further information.

If you would like to participate, I would invite you to email or call me, or complete and return the expression of interest form below.

Graham Bright

QE101 York St John University

Lord Mayor's Walk

York

YO31 7EX

01904 876296 / 07927852038

Or by email to:

g.bright@yorksj.ac.uk

I look forward to hearing from you.

Thanks you for your time.

Please delete as appropriate.

Dear Graham,

I have read the information about your research. I would like to take part/have more information.

Name_____

Please contact me on/at_____ (Telephone)

_____ (Email).

'How do youth workers' life experiences and narratives influence practice?'

CONSENT FORM

Please complete this form as appropriate. You can hand it to me at our first interview, or return it in advance to:

Graham Bright

QE101 York St John University

Lord Mayor's Walk

York

YO31 7EX

Or by email to:

g.bright@yorksj.ac.uk

- I have read the information sheet.
- I agree to participate in a series of three ninety-minute interviews and to these being audio-recorded.
- I understand that this recording will be stored securely and will not be used for purposes other than those outlined, without my consent.
- I am willing for the interview to be transcribed, to form part of your thesis, research outputs and teaching.
- I understand that my name and any identifying features will not be used in publications
- I understand that my name will be listed as a contributor to this project in the acknowledgements, unless I state a preference not to be identified
- I understand that I can refuse to answer any question, and that I am free to leave the research process at any time.

Name………………………………………………………

Signature………………………………………………….

Address……

……………………………………………………

Contact telephone number………………………………………………………………..

Email address…………………………………………………………………………………..

Thanks for your participation.

Interview 1

1. As you know, I am interested in the narratives of youth workers' lives. I wonder if I can ask you to tell me the story of your life and how it happened? Perhaps the most effective way to do this would be to start from birth and work chronologically to the present day. I would like you to feel free to tell me as much about yourself and your life and your experiences as you feel able. I will try not to interrupt, but rather listen and give you the space to speak.

2. As you know, I am interested in the narratives of youth workers' lives. I wonder if I can ask you to tell me the story of your life and how it happened? Perhaps the most effective way to do this would be to start from birth and work chronologically to the present day. I would like you to feel free to tell me as much about yourself and your life and your experiences as you feel able. I will try not to interrupt, but rather listen and give you the space to speak. (Follow up questions) Can you perhaps describe something more regarding what you feel specifically influenced your motivation and decision to become a youth worker? Were there, for example particular factors or experiences from your own life history that played role in that way?

3. How do you view youth work? As a profession? Occupation? Vocation?

4. Do you see a relationship between your identity as a person and as a youth worker? If so, how do you view this? If not, why not?

Interview 2

1. Can you tell me something about your practice as a youth worker, and how you bring who you are into your practice?

2. What from your own life history can be seen in, and, as influencing your professional practice?

3. Are you familiar with the concept of the 'use of self'? (Discuss)

I wonder if there are any specific examples you might share regarding ways in which you have 'used' self in practice?

4. I am interested in youth workers' experiences of professional formation. Can you tell me something about your experience of the professionally qualifying course you decided to study?

5. How would you describe and evaluate the ethos of the course?

a) What learning emphases did you experience?

b) How have these influenced you as a practitioner?

6. How do you feel the course enabled you to think about and develop yourself as a person and as a youth work practitioner?

a) Were these related; and if so, how?

b) Were there any particular modules that enabled you to think critically about your own experiences and life story?

c) (I wonder if you could evaluate your experience of these modules and approaches)

7. What, if anything might have been particularly beneficial to you and your development as a practitioner in enabling you to think about yourself as a practitioner?

Interview 3

1. To this point, we have been thinking about your own story as a practitioner. I wonder whether you see any links between the development of your own story as a practitioner and changes in youth work as a profession?

2. Are there ways in which this is different to your previous experiences, or how you imagined professional practice to be?

3. I wonder if there are ways in which these potential changes have re-shaped your identity as a youth worker?

4. How do you view contemporary youth work?

5. For you, what agendas are 'driving' contemporary youth work practice?

Appendix C: Research Analysis Template (Sample Coding)

Transcript	Exploratory comments	Reflexive commentary	Emerging themes
Well I'm one of three children and I'm the baby. Mum and dad were married [unclear-0:01:32.2] and I was brought up on a council estate in [Place], so I was surrounded by lots of people, lots of families, lots of children. **And [Place] is that about a mile away from here?** Yes, yes not too far away, well it's a large village and my mum and dad separated I think when I was about one and a half. My dad was troublesome and from there on my mum got with my stepdad, so I was brought up quite a happy little child and stuff with a big brother and sister, played out a lot and then we moved to a pub not far from [Place] and I lived there for two years, again surrounded by lots of different people. From there I think I lived with my nana, I'm not sure I might not have done and we've moved around quite a lot. **But locally?** Yes locally, [Place] was the furthest we sort of got, so a home in [Place] and quite close like [Place] so that's quite close to [Place], moved around there, I was at three different primary schools and I don't think too much happened along them lines. I don't see that much of my real dad or his family too much, yes went to secondary school	Youngest of three children Brought up on a council estate surrounded by other families Mum and dad separated when Louise was a toddler Biological dad was troublesome Mum developed relationship with Louise's step-dad A happy childhood with older brother and sister Played out lots Moved to live in a pub Surrounded by people a sense of community Moved after two years to live with Nana It feels to Louise that she moved around, albeit locally quite a bit as a child – almost transient.	I feel the need to check my local geography in order to get some context. I am aware that for some participants that they experienced in different ways a sense of community living when they were children.	Importance of community life growing up A happy, but transient childhood: family and community important

Appendix D: Sample Emergent Themes for Louise

Interview 1	Interview 2	Interview 3
On Being and Becoming: The Influence of Family, Education and Bordered Transitions on Vocational Pathways	**The Use of Self in youth and community work Practice: Power, Process and *Phronesis* in an era of Prescient Performativity.**	**Growing into space: being and becoming a passionate professional**
Pathways into practice: vocational moments and processes.	**Youth work education: learning and developing selfhoods**	**Hopeful Futures: youth work as a necessary, critical and passionate profession**

Name	Gender	Ethnicity	Job roles held during the research.
Adele	Female	White British	Local authority youth worker implementing 'The Big Society' agenda
Alfie	Male	White British	Youth Offending Team manager
Annie	Female	White British	Local authority youth work manager
Charlie	Male	White British	Youth worker with a small Christian charity.
Chris	Female	White British	Youth Worker with a voluntary sector organisation focussing on participation and voice.
Elsa	Female	White British	Youth Advice Worker
Freya	Female	Black British	Undergraduate student on JNC qualifying programme.
Jane	Female	White British	University lecturer in youth and community work
Johnny	Male	White British	Manager of a small, but long-established local youth work charity.
Kenan	Male	Black British	Undergraduate student on JNC qualifying programme.
Louise	Female	White British	Undergraduate student on JNC qualifying programme.
Naseem	Female	British Asian	Working in various part-time community-based roles, mainly with local Asian communities.
Nikki	Female	White British	Manager of a small, but long-established local youth and community work charity.
Ray	Male	White British	Youth worker in a Pupil Referral Unit
Steve	Male	White British	Estate-based youth worker for a parish church and latterly in a similar role in a different locality for a

			Christian charity.
Tom	Male	White British	Manager of a local authority mentoring programme in a large English city.