

**Youth Work..... The Mystery and Magic**

**What could an evidence base for Youth Work look like?**

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I, Tracy Cowle, declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted in substantially the same form for the award of a higher degree elsewhere.

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## **Abstract**

This thesis offers a narrative approach to considering what youth work is, what does and does not constitute youth work and what are the key components that need to be present to legitimise the work with young people as youth work. It questions if youth work even exists in an agreed and definable form and a definition is offered. I have explored and challenged the notion of youth work measurement, curious to understand if youth work can be measured at all, pondering, ethically should we even seek to measure impact and can we ever be sure of the impact of anything on the lives of young people. Specifically addressing the questions: what is youth work? What is impact, in relation to youth work? Should impact be measured in an ethical way congruent with the principles of youth work? How can we measure the impact of youth work? Participants were either youth workers or worked with young people and respond to questionnaires, interviews and a focus group. A narrative enquiry was used to gather data from books, journals, participants, my own practice and I present this thesis as a story, told in everyday language, honouring the stories I have been privileged to hear. The original intention was to create a 'tool' to measure impact, ultimately the tools created are the processes of demonstrating the causal relationship between the youth work activity undertaken and the outcomes and outputs that can be perceived or measured; the stories young people tell 'fills the gap'. This story tussles with many aspects of youth work, the mystery and the magic alongside measurement, evidence and how best to capture impact, the challenge that emerged is how to record the impact without altering the dynamic and intention. Through reflective practice, review and participant engagement this simply distils to the notion that if youth is to be measured and the impact captured, that it must not jeopardise the relationship between youth worker and young people. Youth work is somewhat

mysterious, unique in the individual interactions, but there is the need for a known understanding of what the profession seeks to achieve and the underpinning values and principles. There is indeed magic, this is evident in the stories of those involved. I offer an informed definition of youth work which contributes to the existing literature and that it is the story from practice that fills the causal gap between the activity or intervention and the impact, without the story we cannot know if there is correlation.

*Key Words: Youth work, young people, impact, evidence, measurement, ethics, story, narrative*

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## Contents

Abstract .....	1
Acknowledgements .....	2
Contents .....	4
List of figures .....	8
Figure 1. Voluntary and Statutory Sectors Explained .....	8
Figure 2. The relationship between Outcomes, Young People and Youth Work .....	8
Figure 3. Ideological Approaches in Youth Work .....	8
Figure 4. Ideological Continuum of Youth Work .....	8
Figure 5. Spectrum of Opinion .....	8
Figure 6. Measure v Capture .....	8
Figure 7. Impact v Influence .....	8
Figure 8. Paradigm, Ontology and Epistemology .....	8
Figure 9. Linear Sequence .....	8
Figure 10. Sampling Process .....	8
Figure 11. Continuum of Education .....	8
Figure 12. The Paradigms of Youth Work Education .....	8
Figure 13. Do you Measure Impact? .....	8
Figure 14. Are you happy with how impact is measured? .....	8
List of Diagrams .....	9
Diagram 1. The participants' ideas about the Ideology of Youth Work (focus group) .....	9
List of tables .....	10
Table 1. A demystification and application of terms – My Conceptual Framework .....	10
Table 2. Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities and Threats Analysis .....	10
Table 3. Key Events in the History and Development of Youth Work .....	10
Table 4. Deductive Coding Key (Questionnaires) .....	10
Table 5. Inductive Coding Key (Questionnaires) .....	10
Table 6. The Missing Elements that Make the Practice Youth Work .....	10
Table 7. Youth Work has an Impact When? .....	10
Table 8. Deductive Coding Key (Interviews) .....	10
Table 9. Inductive Coding Key (Interviews) .....	10
Table 10. Deductive Coding Key (Focus Group) .....	10
Table 11. Inductive Coding Key (Focus Group) .....	10

Chapter One: Introduction .....	1
1.1 Setting the Scene.....	1
1.2 Aims of the thesis .....	1
1.3 My Practice Experience .....	3
1.4 Experience of youth work .....	4
1.5 Experience of measuring youth work .....	5
1.6 Personal drivers for the thesis .....	6
1.7 Experience of doing a PhD on youth work .....	7
1.8 Structure and overview of the thesis .....	9
1.9 Contribution to knowledge .....	12
1.10 Outcomes .....	14
Chapter Two: Context .....	15
2.1 Key Concepts .....	15
2.2 The Contested Nature of Youth Work and Measuring Impact .....	19
2.3 Ideology of youth work - Underpinning principles and characteristics of youth work.	20
2.4 The Social Construction of Youth .....	24
2.5 Curriculum .....	29
2.6 The Language of Youth Work Impact Measurement .....	34
2.7 Narratives and Story.....	37
2.8 Summary of the Context .....	41
Chapter Three: Methodological Approach .....	43
3.1 Introduction.....	43
3.2 Research Paradigm.....	47
3.3 Axiology .....	53
3.4 Methodology .....	54
3.5 Methods of Data Collection .....	64
3.6 Analysis .....	78
3.7 Sample Strategy and Scope.....	82
3.8 Ethics .....	83
3.9 Summary .....	86
Chapter Four: Narrative One: My story of practice, a collection of critical reflections.....	87
4.1 Critical Reflection One:.....	91
4.2 Critical Reflection Two: .....	92
4.3 Critical Reflection Three: .....	93
4.4 Critical Reflection Four: .....	96

4.5 Critical Reflection Five:.....	98
4.6 Critical Reflection Six:.....	99
4.7 Critical Reflection Seven:.....	101
4.8 Reflection .....	102
Chapter Five: Narrative Two: A story about the history, politics and policy of Youth Work.	106
5.1 Era One .....	107
5.2 Era Two.....	113
5.3 Era Three .....	117
5.4 Contemporary Studies .....	132
5.5 The Historical and Political Story Timeline.....	133
Chapter Six: Narrative Three: A story about Youth Work, its ideology and underpinning principles and characteristics, based on theoretical analysis and literature.....	143
6.1 What is Youth Work? .....	143
Chapter Seven: Narrative Four: A story about measuring the impact of Youth Work and creating an evidence base, the contemporary debate, based on a theoretical analysis and a literature review.....	159
7.1 Key Terms .....	160
7.2 The contested nature of measurement, impact, and evidence.....	165
7.3 Theory of Change, A logic model .....	166
7.4 The implications of Curriculum .....	167
7.5 Measuring Impact and Creating an Evidence Base for Youth Work .....	168
7.6 The Debate .....	169
7.7 Impact Measurement.....	177
7.8 Youth Work and Youth Development .....	181
7.9 My Position.....	182
Chapter Eight: Narrative Five: A practitioner's story about Youth Work and measuring impact, told by the data from the questionnaires.....	184
8.1 Coding of the Data.....	185
8.2 So, what story does this data tell... ..	188
8.3 Summary .....	214
Chapter Nine: Narrative Six: A practitioner's story about Youth Work and measuring impact, told by the data from the conversations. ....	216
9.1 The Sample .....	217
9.2 Experience of working with young people.....	217
9.3 Coding of the Data.....	217
9.4 Findings .....	219

9.5 Definition of youth work .....	223
9.6 Effectively and meaningfully capturing evidence .....	226
9.7 The concepts of impact and influence .....	229
9.8 What can be measured, how and for what purpose? .....	231
Chapter Ten: Narrative Seven: A practitioner's story about Youth Work and measuring impact, told by the data from the focus group.....	235
10.1 Quotes and Contribution Key.....	236
10.1 The Sample .....	236
10.2 Experience of working with young people.....	237
10.3 The 'pen picture' of the participants.....	237
10.4 Coding of the Data.....	238
10.5 A definition of youth work .....	240
10.6 The Ideology of Youth Work .....	245
10.7 Capturing Evidence and Measuring Impact .....	249
Chapter Eleven: Discussion and Recommendations.....	258
11.1 The Questions Posed.....	261
11.2 The Definition .....	262
11.3 The Process.....	264
11.4 Limitations.....	272
11.5 Recommendations .....	273
Reference list.....	277
Appendices .....	297
Appendix 1.....	298
Appendix 2.....	299
Appendix 3.....	310
Appendix 4.....	311
Appendix 5.....	317
Appendix 6.....	318
Appendix 7.....	321
Appendix 8.....	322
Appendix 9.....	325
Appendix 10.....	326
Appendix 11.....	327
Appendix 12.....	330



### **List of figures**

Figure 1. Voluntary and Statutory Sectors Explained

Figure 2. The relationship between Outcomes, Young People and Youth Work

Figure 3. Ideological Approaches in Youth Work

Figure 4. Ideological Continuum of Youth Work

Figure 5. Spectrum of Opinion

Figure 6. Measure v Capture

Figure 7. Impact v Influence

Figure 8. Paradigm, Ontology and Epistemology

Figure 9. Linear Sequence

Figure 10. Sampling Process

Figure 11. Continuum of Education

Figure 12. The Paradigms of Youth Work Education

Figure 13. Do you Measure Impact?

Figure 14. Are you happy with how impact is measured?

### **List of Diagrams**

Diagram 1. The participants' ideas about the Ideology of Youth Work (focus group)

### **List of tables**

Table 1. A demystification and application of terms – My Conceptual Framework

Table 2. Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities and Threats Analysis

Table 3. Key Events in the History and Development of Youth Work

Table 4. Deductive Coding Key (Questionnaires)

Table 5. Inductive Coding Key (Questionnaires)

Table 6. The Missing Elements that Make the Practice Youth Work

Table 7. Youth Work has an Impact When?

Table 8. Deductive Coding Key (Interviews)

Table 9. Inductive Coding Key (Interviews)

Table 10. Deductive Coding Key (Focus Group)

Table 11. Inductive Coding Key (Focus Group)

## **Chapter One: Introduction**

### **1.1 Setting the Scene**

The purpose of this section is to set the context for the thesis and discuss the rationale for the study. I will briefly introduce the reader to myself, the narrator, you will come to know me better during narrative one when I will share my story of practice and the reflections that I perceive as critical in developing my position for this research.

### **1.2 Aims of the thesis**

The textbooks used for training and education, and the policies that direct practice are clearly documented but offer contrasting views of youth work. What is limited in the body of literature is the lived experience of being a youth worker, engaging with the work, and attempting to measure impact. This research seeks to address this omission by exploring how youth work can be defined in a contemporary professional setting, and how the impact can be measured, with reference to literature and policy. The challenge this thesis addresses is this lack of clarity regarding youth work and therefore the research aims and questions are as follows:

This thesis aims to understand:

1. What is youth work?
2. How can we measure the impact of youth work?

3. How do we record the contribution of youth work in the lives of young people, whilst honouring the ethical foundations for the profession?
4. What could an evidence base for the future of youth work look like.

To provide a full answer to these questions further sub-questions are necessary:

- What work constitutes youth work? (relating to aim 1)
- What are the key components that transform work with young people into youth work? (relating to aim 1)
- Can the impact of youth work be ethically measured? (relating to aim 2)
- Fundamental to this discussion is the question: Does 'youth work' actually exist in an agreed and definable form? (relating to aims 1, 2, 3, and 4)

Together, these questions form the focus of the ensuing literature reviews, participant data collection and discussions.

The research questions will give the opportunity to consider the history of youth work, measurement, impact and evidence, together with looking at how youth work is delivered, measured and how its impact is evidenced in contemporary society. These are the discrete considerations that ultimately need to be woven together to inform a tool, method or guidance for generating an evidence base for youth work practice. It is important to me, to professionals, the sector, funders, family, community, and ultimately young people that there is clarity of process and recognition of impact, to not only to provide evidence, inform future practice and development, but also celebrate success in the moment.

The intended research questions were initially:

1. What is 'youth work' and how is it differentiated from working with young people?

2. What is impact in relation to youth work?
3. What is the evidence base, what can be measured and how?
4. How can impact be measured in an ethical way congruent with the principles of youth work?
5. Does seeking to measure impact interrupt the ability for young people to access a relationship with a youth worker, on the young person's terms?

As the data collection progressed, I acknowledged the questions were too complex and open and as such they were amended to:

1. What is youth work?
2. What would comprise an evidence base for youth work?
3. Can youth work be measured and if so, how?
4. What tools or processes would be appropriate to measure the impact youth work?

For the same reason they were further amended for clarity to:

1. What is youth work'?
2. What is impact, in relation to youth work?
3. Should impact be measured in an ethical way congruent with the principles of youth work?
4. How can we measure the impact of youth work?

### **1.3 My Practice Experience**

I am the narrator of this thesis, and it is important for me to reveal relevant personal and professional experience and reflections, to help the reader understand my position. This

research draws on data collected from a number of sources, including my own practice. In order to give this experience some context, I will draw on my own practice experience from 1986 to present day, and whilst I have had a variety of roles, they have all informed my view of youth work and the impact of the work. I will begin by introducing myself and my life in practice, to the reader.

#### **1.4 Experience of youth work**

From 1986 to 1994 I was a volunteer and part time unqualified youth worker. In 1994 I qualified as a professional youth and community worker and have worked full time, in various settings, since then. Over the three decades of my own practice, I have seen many changes, which I will reflect upon throughout this thesis. As a result of this practice, I speak of myself as belonging to the field of youth work, my use of 'we' refers to myself and other colleague practitioners and academics in youth work.

I have operated as a youth and community worker for over 30 years in both the voluntary and statutory sector (see Figure 1) and more recently as an academic, teaching Youth and Community Work to undergraduate and postgraduate students. I interact with students during their programme of study and also with people in the field of practice. From my own most recent practice, within a voluntary sector organisation and a local authority, and from discussions with students and practitioners. I am aware that there is a growing concern that if youth work is going to not only survive but also celebrate its unique contribution to social justice, informal education and social change, then we must find ways to appropriately

measure the impact. My professional experience has impacted on both the rationale for this thesis and the methods of data collection.

### **1.5 Experience of measuring youth work**

During my professional career I was often in positions in which I had to justify youth work as a viable and important profession, and I had no way of clearly demonstrating the impact of the work. I could provide statistics but nothing that demonstrated the impact of the work on either the statistics or the lives of young people. This led me to a position of recognising the need for a meaningful evidence base. My initial thoughts were that this would be a simple task where we would just start to capture the ways in which our work impacted young people, using a variety of methods. I soon realised that this task would not be so easy, and I observed subtle changes in both youth work practice and young people's engagement when the work, their progress, and outcomes were being measured. I wanted to explore ways in which we can establish an evidence base for practice without interfering with the ethical principle of the delivery. This exploration led me to a reflective process of my own practice and reviews of literature and policy to establish an understanding for youth work and measuring impact, before engaging with practitioners in order to gather evidence from their experience regarding the different stages outlined in the methodology chapter. I made the decision early on that I would not engage with young people as participants during this thesis, this again was informed by my experience in practice, I was not prepared to ask young people to contribute their time, story, and brilliance without anything tangible in return. There may be future stages of research during which I will engage with young people but not at this stage.



### **1.6 Personal drivers for the thesis**

It is my intention here to situate the thesis in my own narrative. And I will consider further my own reflections, in narrative one.

I was encouraged, by managers and funders, to think about how beneficial it was for young people to be able to demonstrate the impact of our work together, in order that they can clearly see their own achievements, this started to convince me that it was important to explore ways to measure the impact of youth work for the benefit of young people. This I did and used a range of tools and awards to capture the starting point, progress and end point. Young people 'achieved' awards (YAA, DofE, AQA), we held celebrations and award ceremonies, young people, managers, parents, funders and councillors seemed happy, and I was congratulated. I drove home considering a job well done, my head and my thinking agreed it was a job well done but my heart and gut were less convinced, but this was ignored. I recognised that somehow measuring the impact of the work was essential as, for too long, youth work was not able to demonstrate its achievements, and as such, was rendered vulnerable when cuts to services were being made.

I had become convinced that measuring the impact of youth work was not only essential for the sustainability of the profession but also in the best interests of young people. However, I felt caught between the contemporary debate regarding measuring impact and defending youth work. Had I sold out? I thought not. I was moving with the times, and I moved more

towards the view that measuring the impact was the right and ethically responsible thing to do.

### **1.7 Experience of doing a PhD on youth work**

My reaction to this PhD was somewhat similar to my reaction to the requirement to measure the impact of the youth work I delivered and managed. My position has changed considerably during the process, initially I was excited to explore with participants how we could establish a tool for ethically measuring the impact; I loved the reading, exploring the views of other practitioners and reflecting on my own experience. I then became overwhelmed by the complexity and enormity of the task and petulantly found there was always a task more important than this PhD. Left to my own devices I put my head in the sand, went into denial and now after a lengthy and significant 'dose of ostrichitus' I am reengaged and questioning my views, the whole foundation of my study, my experience, and my methods. This has been a painful but useful reflective process.

Following the initial review of the literature and the theoretical analysis for this PhD I arrived at a somewhat surprisingly different view: for a time, my PhD felt completely derailed as my view was that rather than finding a way to measure the impact of youth work I was trying to find a way to measure the immeasurable, taking my working definition of youth work the impact could not be measured at all. I could not imagine the possibility of measuring anti-oppressive practice, how 'much' empowerment there has been and whether it can be truly known if a young person is engaging in a voluntary capacity and if they perceive the work to

be on their own terms. In a group project young people will have different needs, assets, desires, and circumstances so therefore the work cannot be entirely person centred. Young people will have different perceptions of desirable wellbeing outcomes and social change, therefore, even if the impact can be measured ethically, it must be on an individual basis.

I believe youth work involves providing young people with access to a relationship with a youth worker on the young person's terms. This study begins with a reflection on the seven critical reflections, reflective accounts from my own practice, that demonstrate the importance of youth work and which I have been privileged to be a part of.

I have a wealth of professional experience, my own stories from practice, documented in critical reflections that provide a position for this PhD which is an opportunity to explore and challenge the notion of measuring the impact of the work and the importance of story as a contribution to my auto-ethnographic approach.

A challenge I have encountered is how to present an accessible narrative whilst 'jumping through the academic hoop' of a PhD. I have chosen to write in 'everyday' language, using plain speaking to ensure this research is accessible to a professional, as well as an academic audience. A fundamental principle of youth work is anti-oppressive practice and liberation and as such I strive to write a thesis that is accessible and engaging, I seek to honour the stories I have been privileged to read and hear.

## **1.8 Structure and overview of the thesis**

### ***1.8.1 Overview of Context***

Ahead of any narrative discussion it was important to set the scene in relation to time and place in the personal and political landscape. Also, to make clear the key concepts that will be discussed throughout this thesis. With the individuals being young people, youth work, impact and evidence and the contested nature of the relationship between youth work and measuring impact, it was important to be clear what my definition of youth work was and its situation within the ideology of the profession. The context also presents a discussion around the socially constructed nature of the concept of youth and the impact of this on the construction of youth work, as well as how this related to my own practice and observation. I reviewed the notion of curriculum as applied to youth work and also the very specific language that is used when discussing the impact measurement for youth work. It was important to also present a context of the use of story and narrative, of the work and the relationship to the thesis.

### ***1.8.2 Overview of Narratives***

It is the intention of the thesis to capture the lived experience through conversations. These conversations will be used to generate and create a narrative enquiry and an evidence base for practice. Person centred dialogue is a basis of the profession and an important principle for this research. This evidence base may prove crucial for a profession that has been, according to the research reviewed, ever changing and under threat.

During narrative one I review my experience as a practitioner through a series of critical reflections, which I will capture as short stories from practice to create a body of practitioner evidence. In doing this, I am joining a conversation that has been going on for years, that being, what is youth work and how can the impact of youth work be measured?

What then follows is a collection of other narratives based on reviews of the written word and in conversations with people, these narratives include: a consideration of the history, politics and policy of youth work over four defined eras; what is youth work, its ideology and principles and characteristics; discussion about measuring the impact of youth work; reports from a practitioner questionnaires; and finally two stories, told by practitioners from individual conversations and during a focus group.

### ***1.8.3 Overview of Methods***

I used narrative enquiry methodology and will capture a number of reflective accounts from my own experience, the literature and policy I have reviewed, the data from stories I have heard from practitioners. I have captured my own story, and those of practitioners.

In order to present a theoretical analysis, three concise literature reviews were carried out; one reviewing the history of youth work, another considering a definition of youth work and the final one considering the impact of youth work and work with young people. My own personal, professional reflections will be added to this analysis along with the voice and story of practitioners. In order to consider the contemporary environment, it was important to review the historical journey of the profession, including my own professional reflections.

#### ***1.8.4 Overview of the discussion***

It is important to consider what youth work actually is and to arrive at a considered working definition which will be achieved in the theoretical analysis and literature review of youth work, narrative three. This will inform the rest of the data collection and analysis.

In order to position youth work in contemporary society it is important to consider the authenticity of youth work, its past, present and future. It is noted in The Historical and Political Story Timeline within narrative two that I consider contemporary society to be from the Transforming Youth Work – resourcing excellent youth services report and the National Occupational Standards of 2002. If it does have a past, present and future, how are these interrelated? A substantial historical record of the policy and theory of youth work exists as can be noted in Narrative Two: A Story about the History, Politics and Policy of youth work. To consider how modern observers come to know what really happened in practice and how this informs current youth work and potentially influences future practice. Youth work exists in policy, textbooks, and journal articles and most significantly in the stories and the lived experiences of those who deliver the youth work with young people. The review of the stories in the literature, policy and from practitioner experience, including my own, all contribute to the data set for this thesis.

### **1.9 Contribution to knowledge**

Since qualifying as a Youth and Community Worker, I have found it a considerable challenge to articulate and demonstrate what youth work is as well as the importance and impact of youth work to other professional colleagues, funders, families, communities and in some cases to young people themselves. I have anecdotal evidence that this is true for other youth work colleagues that I have worked with and managed, as such it is important to me to establish a working definition of youth work.

Through addressing the four questions my research study may lead to the creation of an appropriate 'tool', method, or guidance for gathering an evidence base. This research focuses on how practitioners can develop a robust way to gather practice-based evidence to both justify and inform, whilst remaining congruent with the professional values and principles.

My professional insights and discussions with the Centre for Youth Impact and Brathay Trust's Regional Impact Hub, suggest that the insights gained in this thesis will contribute significantly to the sector.

One of the drivers for the PhD is the dearth of literature that explores lived experiences of practitioners. As a practitioner I have read policies, theory and have been affected by legislation and changing landscapes but few of these developments have been predicated on conversations with youth workers and as such it is important to reveal their voices and opinions.

With regard to the question of measuring the impact of youth work, my own position has changed over the years, initially, based only on my practice experience. I was firmly of the opinion that youth work could not be measured, I accepted that the work in a project or delivery site could be evaluated in order to recognise the success, or otherwise, of the piece of work against predefined aims and objective. I also accepted that on an individual level, it was possible to 'chart the progress' or distance travelled of a young person, again against a predefined aim but I did not accept that the impact of youth work itself could be actually measured.

Through further reflection and sharing stories during supervision I was able to recognise that it was more than the language used that did not sit comfortably with me or my definition, 'measuring the impact' a mathematical and clinical language used to consider a person centred and social process. I was keen to explore, through stories of practice, how we recognise both the mystery and the magic of the profession. I wish to explore how youth workers can 'capture, without manipulation' rather than 'measure' the 'influence' and 'impact', thus honouring the work youth workers do with young people through the narratives created by the reflective stories from practice, my own included. My view and my story is of course subjective and grounded in my life experiences. Just as the stories of others captured in this thesis are also personal and subjective. The stories will collectively provide a basis for understanding the construction of youth work in England in the 2020s.



Over time in practice, I was consistently expected to 'demonstrate' what the project or the service was achieving, how many people were accessing and if money was being well spent. This had little to do with the actual or perceived impact and more to do with measurement and accountability. The agenda was not that of young people, others decided what the success of the work should look like, for example, for young people to gain employment, reduce their drug use, and manage sexual health.

#### **1.10 Outcomes**

The thesis has met its aims in that a method to capture evidence of impact has been identified the story of practitioners and young people involved in youth work, however the idea that the research process would culminate in the creation of a 'tool', method, process, or guidance for measuring impact and gathering evidence or indeed capturing and treasuring the influence as far less complex than originally envisioned. The story of practice would facilitate practitioners in their bid to evidence the power of youth work in a consistent manner rooted in contemporary accepted practice for measuring and evidencing impact; a method that can be adapted and be used to both gather evidence and inform future developments in the simplest of ways through the collection and as appropriate the publication of story.

There has been an impetus to create an evidence base for practice and this piece of work proposes how best to create tools, methods and guidance for measuring impact, which are congruent with the principles of youth work (ethical, anti-oppressive, participative, democratic and person centred practices). This is a piece of research in which The Centre for Youth Impact and the Brathay Trust Regional Youth Work Hub are interested.

## **Chapter Two: Context**

The context, for the study, situates the time and place, both personal and political, and I consider that these concepts that are key to completing the research.

### **2.1 Key Concepts**

I will explore some of the concepts that help identify the landscape I am writing from, such as the contested nature of youth work and measuring impact, the ideology of youth work, its principles and characteristics, the notion of youth and the social construction of youth, the debate about curriculum, language and the measurement of youth work. It is within this context that I offer my working definition of youth work.

#### **2.1.1 *Young People***

For the purpose of this thesis, I am defining young people as aged 13 to 19 years, throughout my career this was the age range referred to as young people. I will consider the less concrete conception of youth and the construction of youth later in this chapter.

#### **2.1.2 *Youth Work***

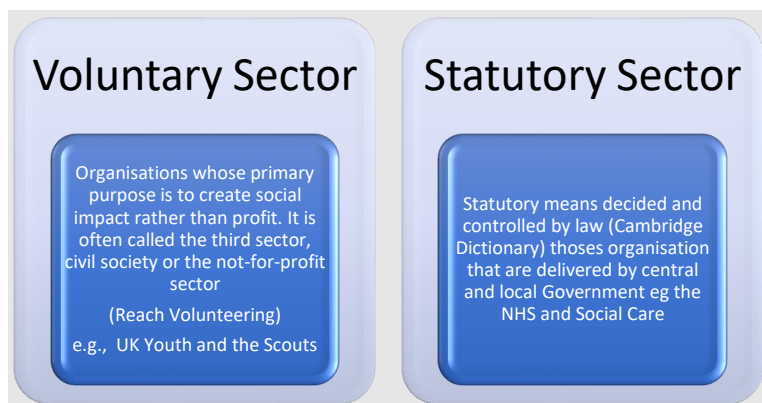
Later on in the thesis I explore the notion of youth work and consider a working definition. The questions ultimately that were posed throughout this thesis are: What is youth work? What is impact, in relation to youth work? Should impact be measured in an ethical way congruent with the principles of youth work? How can we measure the impact of youth work,

whilst ensuring we remain within the values base and definition of youth work. There is an ongoing debate around youth work regarding measuring impact and how to measure evidence. Data will be collected, and this will be explored in later chapters. The challenge may perhaps be summed up in this way:

“Any profession that fails to learn from its past is doomed to repeat its mistakes. Community and youth work has made a huge contribution to the wellbeing of communities but, with a few honorable exceptions, it has failed to produce its own histories. By neglecting to record its successes and its failures, it has left itself vulnerable” (Gilchrist, Jeffs and Spence, 2001, p.7).

This quote is particularly significant to me as, although written in 2001, it speaks to the enduring difficulties found in practice and academia today, and whilst not a question this thesis sought to answer directly, I have considered throughout my career, how we record the contribution of the profession to the lives of young people and communities, whilst honouring the ethical foundations of the work. I have worked in both the statutory and voluntary sector and figure 1 below demonstrates the nuances of the two approaches to delivering youth work.

**Figure 1. – Voluntary Sector and Statutory Sector Explored**



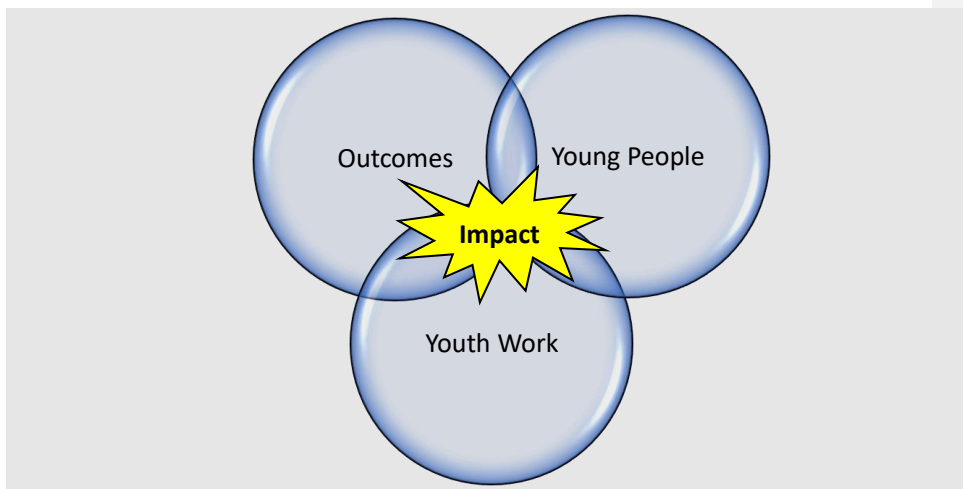
The very fact that the profession of youth work exists suggests the notion of 'youth' exists, it is my intention to explore this and examine if 'youth' can simply be defined as a specific age range, or whether there is a way in which the term and the group of people it applies to are socially constructed.

### ***2.1.3 Impact and evidence***

Through my own practice and from conversations I have had with colleagues working in practice assures me that the contemporary context of youth work, or any work with young people, cannot be discussed without considering impact, methods of evaluation, measurement, and evidence collection. There is a need in this contemporary society to justify the work we do to funders, government, and young people. There is an interesting range of opinions currently being discussed and the essence of this will be captured when gathering data and considering the literature and theoretical analysis on impact, found in Chapter Seven, Narrative Four.

Figure 2 below, illustrates that for impact or influence to be measured then young people, youth work and the outcomes of this work must be evidenced. The challenge for me is to define these terms in a meaningful way, in order that impact can be observed.

**Figure 2. The relationship between Outcomes, Young People and Youth Work**



The historical, political and policy landscape now, as ever, impacts but unique to these times is the impact of COVID-19 and associated restrictions on the work that is delivered and the creative digital responses. This is considered in more depth in Narrative Five.

It is important to note that the range of topics to be considered in the narratives in the following chapters will be introductory rather than complete, given the brevity of this thesis.

This context will briefly explore:

- The contested nature of youth work and measuring impact.
- Ideology of youth work - underpinning principles and characteristics of youth work.

- The social construction of youth.
- Curriculum.
- The Measurement of Youth Work – explored in more depth in Chapter Seven, Narrative Four.

## **2.2 The Contested Nature of Youth Work and Measuring Impact**

Has youth work had its day, or will the profession survive in a contemporary multi-agency environment? The discussion in this section explores the notion that both youth work and how youth work can be measured is contested and difficult to define (Sercombe, 2010) and this section demonstrates the broad and different views and perspectives as well as the nature of the contemporary debate.

It could be argued that youth work should not be measured as this changes the nature of the practice; if the work is truly young person centred and based in a trusted and voluntary relationship, the notion of the intervention being measured in any way interrupts this. This was a view that I once held however, as Trimmer-Platman (2014) notes, the lack of a specific definition of youth work is the issue, one which is easy to explain and understand without being overly prescriptive or complex, without such a definition there is confusion and inconsistency in practice and in how youth work can be measured, "... as a result, there is inevitable ambiguity around youth and community work which would suggest that an important way to strengthen and harmonise the work would be to establish an accessible definition for it" (Trimmer-Platman, 2014, p.35).

Despite the difficulties of definition, I am clear in my own definition of youth work, applied throughout this thesis and explored in Narrative Three, I define youth work as '**....an empowering, informal, person centred process, it is anti-oppressive, voluntary and participative, and the prime concern is the wellbeing and development of young people, alongside social change**'.

### **2.3 Ideology of youth work - Underpinning principles and characteristics of youth work.**

I will consider the principles and characteristics that underpin youth work, arriving at my considered view of the ideology of youth work and why this is deemed contested in the contemporary debate.

From my experience, it is evident that there are three ideological approaches to delivering youth work, it is important to contemplate whether the work is intended to:

- educate young people?
- take care of young people?
- control young people?

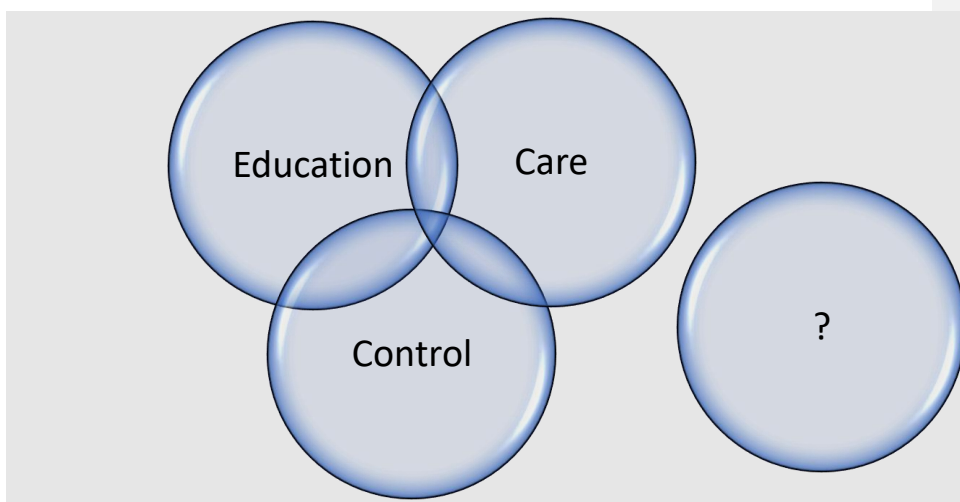
It is therefore vital to reflect whether youth work is engaging with young people for the purpose of bringing about social change or whether it is enforcing social control.

From my review of the literature and policy of youth work throughout Narrative Two and Narrative Three I recognise that youth work could be any combination of the above, I would

suggest that the primary role of youth work is to educate young people, informally, but with elements of care and setting boundaries. However, this education must be considered within the context of young people's lives and development, with the intention of bringing about social change rather than as a means to socially controlling young people in order to mould them into the image society 'expects'.

I invite the reader to contemplate Figure 3 regarding where they would place youth work and to consider whether there are other ideologies and to also contemplate Figure 4, to identify where on the spectrum of social change and social control, youth work could be placed.

**Figure 3. Ideological Approaches in Youth Work**



Ingram and Harris (2001) acknowledge that young people can be considered by society as a threat, this is a perception to challenge, there are however limited responses. I believe that



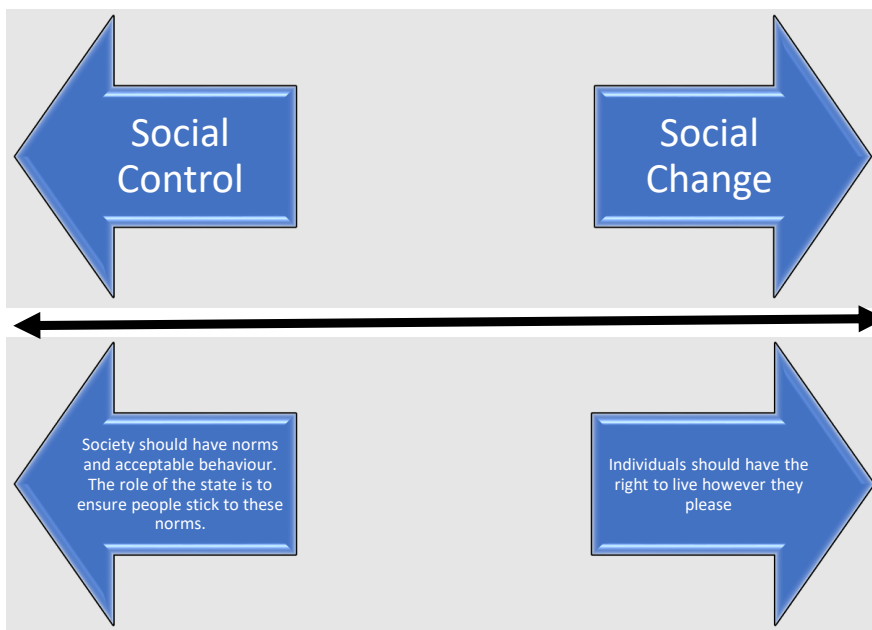
the response to the public perception of young people as a threat falls into the three ideological approaches (Figure 3, above and Figure 4, below), as they differentiate between education (and empowerment) and seeing young people as in some way deficit, vulnerable, broken, at risk in some way and therefore needing welfare, or ensuring control, punishment and conformity through policing.

From my experience, it is clear that, regarding these options, it is informal education that offers the opportunity for growth of the young people (Ingram and Harris, 2001) and that this education in youth work is informal. My experience also informs me that it is vital that young people are given a safe space, with boundaries, to explore their identity, their feelings, and the world in which they live, in order to learn and develop based on their own experience and choices. As such I believe my positioning of youth work 'moves' around Figure 3, depending on the young person or group engaging at that time in the process and up and down the ideological continuum in Figure 4 depending on the circumstances and lived experiences of the young people. This does not mean that it is impossible to have any shared definition or understanding of practice and measurement, just that it is dynamic and contingent on context.

How the notion of youth is constructed will impact on a person's ideological approach to youth work, on a spectrum of either social change or social control, (see Figure 4). Again, the reader is invited to ponder the story and consider where on the spectrum youth work could be placed. I will illustrate my point with an example: if a youth worker is engaging with a young person who is seeking to gain employment but is not able to do so, then the youth worker has a choice in the way they approach this intervention, which could be to work with the individual, or a

group of young people in order to develop their employability skills, improve their CV, provide resources and support them in searching for jobs.... Or the youth worker could engage differently and empower the young person to become more politically active and ask the question of the state, 'Why is youth unemployment so high?' and 'Why are young people finding it difficult to secure employment?', the choice is between a form of social change and social control, supporting the young person to challenge the status quo or to conform to it, or as I would have done, during my days working as a youth worker, consider that it is a bit of both.

**Figure 4: Ideological Continuum of Youth Work**



The ideological approach to youth work explored in Figure 3 sits within the higher level and situated ideological continuum between change and control. I believe youth work must be equally accessible to all young people, regardless as to whether there is a perceived problem, risk or vulnerability. My ideal is also that youth workers should work with all young people, as part of a universal service and, as appropriate, deliver interventions that are targeted towards young people who are vulnerable, at risk or presenting risky behaviour. Figures 3 and 4 pose a number of questions, which I address during the discussion in the focus group.

#### **2.4 The Social Construction of Youth**

As recommended by Morss (2002, P. 51) this section starts with a definition of social construction ensuring its “explanatory weight”. In order to explore whether the term ‘youth’ is a ‘social construct’ it is important to firstly consider what is ‘youth’? and what is ‘social construction’?

During my years in practice, I experienced the very subtle distinction between those who believed the notion of ‘youth’ was:

- a) A time in a person’s life
- b) A biological and physiological phase
- c) A social construct

The National Youth Agency (2021a) recognises that youth work occurs with young people aged between 11 and 25 (13 to 19 for the purpose of this research). How society classes a young person varies, and in my experience, this is usually the teenage years, a time of great flux and

change, biologically, hormonally and physiologically, however, how people experience being young varies greatly and is influenced, in my view, by identity, social factors and constructions.

From my own practice and academic study, I argue that there is an element of biology. The onset of puberty is a biological physiological fact, as Hall recognises in his seminal work in 1904 (Bright, 2015 and Kehily, 2012), adolescence is also a time of great changes, a period of storm and stress, but I argue that it is unhelpful to focus on deficit in a universal way as this suggests that all young people will experience adolescence in the same way and my experience has shown me this is far from the case, it is a rite of passage, yet complex and not linear (Jones, 2009). Coleman (2011) identifies a range of physical developments that take place during adolescence, for example changes in the brain, puberty, maturing sexually and growing physically. It is important to recognise that young people develop in stages, and this may or may not be dictated and standardised by age. When considering being “grown up”, Coleman (2002) recognises that puberty, perhaps the beginning of adolescence, is starting earlier and as young people are staying in education for longer than adolescence potentially ends at an older age. Arnett (2007) prefers the term emerging adulthood, I personally prefer the term youth as it is a recognised identity in present time and not a period of transition from one recognised identity to another, as in childhood and adulthood.

There is much debate regarding the terms adolescence and youth and for the purposes of this thesis I do not wish to dwell on this, rather simply consider that adolescence is a developmental stage in the lifespan of a young person as they grow up, linked to their age and associated expectations, whereas youth is more of a socially constructed term, in that young

people have a social orientation and are a social group of their own choosing, and also because society positions them as such, the notion of youth is socially constructed. As Kehily (2012) notes, youth involves the examination of beliefs, ideas and images of young people, what we know about young people is what is socially constructed and this changes over time. When young people take part in their own lives and engage in their everyday social practices, they are actively making meaning of their lives through experiences, as they exercise agency and engage with the social world. Youth work supports young people to explore who they are and what they choose to engage with.

If we are to 'measure' the 'impact' of the youth work we do with young people then it is important this is based on young people, as individuals, situated in their own lived experiences and not just as members of a homogenous group, with a set of predicated expectations based on age, and, potentially, others' assumptions regarding other identities, such as race, gender, sexuality, poverty and education. Also, it is important to always acknowledge there is a political influence of the social construction (James and Prout, 2007), it is important to be aware that social policy also plays a part in the construction of youth and how society and youth work responds, this is explored further in narrative two when I discuss implications of the policy and politics on youth work.

Whilst consideration of identity development and sub-culture development is beyond the scope of this thesis, it is important to note briefly in this context section that there are many aspects of the social world that impact on the development of young people, their development as individuals and their identity. Young people have indeed socially constructed

themselves and have created cultural identities with moral codes, behavior and a dress code, such as Mods and Rockers, Townies, Chavs and Goths (Kehily, 2013). Cohen (1972) recognised that adults and society do not understand these youth sub-cultures and therefore they become moral panics and rather than seeking to understand young people and their cultural identities they are identified as deviant, potentially leading to a social control intention rather than social change. A cultural perspective considers the traditions of a particular community or group of people, something that can be seen as the everyday social practice of a particular group of people and how they engage with the social world in their everyday lives (Kehily, 2012), young people create their own cultures.

I consider the notion of youth to be socially constructed or at least influenced by society. We all see things differently, we all interpret things differently and our experiences in life help to construct our world view, which is further impacted on by society and our interactions with our world. I reject the idea that young people simply go through particular stages depending on their age and regardless of the environment and influences, whilst recognising that these stages take place in a social world and are therefore inevitably socially constructed.

I do not consider the world, young people or youth work to be objective and therefore scientifically measurable, this view informs my interpretive approach to this research, and this is considered further in the methodology chapter. Societal views of young people and their own views of themselves are far from value free and uninformed by individual and cultural beliefs and this does not exist independently of society and human belief, perception, culture and language.

Young people themselves construct multiple realities and identities to make sense of their world and their journey through their teenage years. There is often a shared language, dress and activity that marks these identities and Hedge (1981) talks of this as youth culture and a form of subculture. Whilst there are identified and socially constructed groups it is noted that young people also individually construct their own world depending on their own lived experiences, a construct that is multi-faceted and unique to them; the 'subjectum' rather than the 'subjectus' where young people are "allowed a certain latitude to creatively produce themselves" (Skott-Myhre, 2008, p. 4), a somewhat phenomenological approach that considers the most important factor is that of experience. This approach suggests that not only do young people create their own reality based on their experiences but also that adults construct their views of young people based on their own experiences that are not necessarily accurate or shared by others. It is clear to me that young people are not all the same, there is difference in relation to gender, poverty, race and class, young people are not a homogenous group (Wylie, 2000) and their different identities, geography, epigenetics and circumstances all play a part in the view of young people. Adults too were once young people and their views come from their historical, socially constructed experiences of being young.

For the purpose of this thesis, I am seeking data from adult participants rather than young people. I believe that the notion of youth is socially constructed by young people themselves and by wider society and for this thesis it is important to be clear regarding what I consider youth to mean, I have, however, decided not to gather data directly from young people. It is for this reason that I look to the National Youth Agency (2021a) as a key and well-respected

national expert on youth policy and youth work, and its role is supporting and informing those who work with young people in England. There are many agencies that define the age range applied to youth, youth work or young people but for the purpose of this thesis I am using the National Youth Agency (2021B) identified age range which is 13 years old to 19 years old as this is generally recognised as the age range of youth work. Having considered the broad context and the ideology of youth work I will now consider the notion of curriculum as a specific area of context, given its significance when considering youth work and impact measurement.

## **2.5 Curriculum**

I am considering the notion of curriculum as part of this context chapter and return to the youth work curriculum when considering the story of youth work in narrative four, when the interface with impact measurement is explored. Again, the term curriculum is referred to throughout this thesis and explored in some detail in the story about history, politics, and policy as one of the critical reflections in the development of youth work. The term curriculum is open to interpretation and in relation to youth work.

Rosseter, in Jeffs and Smith (1987) considers that within education there are teachers and learners, those who are educating and those being educated. Within formal education these roles and the power associated with them is clear, teachers teach, and young people learn, this is how the system has been created. There is the notion of knowledge transfer and the plan and the process is dictated by the curriculum. As Freire (1972) notes, this is a banking style of education, the teacher has the desired knowledge and the pupil is required to absorb



it, in order to be domesticated and learn the predesigned content. In contrast in informal education there is a curriculum, a plan, but this is in the form of Freire's problem posing way of learning, young people seek their own solutions, with support. The power lies with the young people and they present the issues, either by voice or behaviour that they wish to learn about or experience and the youth worker provides a vehicle for this to be facilitated. No education is ever neutral as it is either designed to maintain existing situations, imposing on the people the values and culture of the dominant class and society, or it is designed to liberate people, helping them to become critical, creative, free and active, hence, education is either domesticating or liberating (Freire, 1972). See Figures 3 and 4 which enable the reader to construct their own opinion regarding the purpose and driving focus behind youth work and its ideology, to liberate and lead to social change or to domesticate by means of social control, through education.

Smith (1982) recognised that young people are creators, not consumers, of youth work, and Jeffs and Smith (1999) considered the curriculum as a plan for action that is worked out in advance. Merton and Wylie (2002) are specific in their exploration of curriculum and recognise that if the process of youth work is educational then there is a notion of curriculum that considers actual content, pedagogy, a learning approach and assessment or measurement of impact in some way. The curriculum must include inputs, a process and an outcome. This is too simplistic a notion for youth work, a simple plan for weekly activities will not be sufficient to honour the relationship between youth worker and young person or the deeper goals of youth work such as liberation, emancipation and ending oppression, community engagement, personal development, and development of values. The challenge for any curriculum is finding

a way to measure or to capture these nuances and the genuine unspoken, undocumented impact of youth work, hence this thesis. There are multiple challenges for curriculum and in youth work no single curriculum meets all the needs and aspirations of the young people engaged. The challenge for the youth worker is to engage with the young people and make collective decisions about the curriculum to be delivered. This planning process is an essential element of ensuring young people are at the centre and the work delivered is agreed through dialogue. This can be a long and complex process towards establishing a plan, a curriculum, and a challenge that I encountered in practice relates to not only that the curriculum is measured and recorded but how to capture the impact of involving the young people in these decisions about the curriculum itself.

The main inputs for curriculum came about as a result of ministerial conferences and more latterly in the Transforming Youth work: Resourcing Excellent Youth Services (2002) document, as discussed in more detail during the critical reflection five, in narrative two. Ingram and Harris (2001) recognise that having a curriculum, a plan, is a proactive position and will support work that enables young people to become autonomous, independent people through considered learning opportunities. However, it is vital the plan, the curriculum, starts where young people are on their journey and the learning provided through the curriculum meets these needs. The learning needs to be relevant to their experience and interests, however it can be argued that youth work should be open to improvisation and respond to the day-to-day situations that young people experience (Merton and Wylie, 2002).

Formal educators, teachers in schools, must adhere to the national curriculum (GOV.UK, 2014), which tells them what, when and to some degree how to teach. They implement pre-designed content, tests, and assessments to measure the performance, and indeed perceived success of their students against pre-determined standards, which encourages a focus on the outcomes. Within the dialogue, no consideration is given to the young people and what success may look like to them, as opposed to youth work, which seeks to construct the curriculum with young people, through voluntary participation. On the one hand this enables youth workers to be responsive and flexible in their approach but also it makes the direction of the work and the outcomes potentially less tangible, what is important in this thesis is to consider how there can be an evidence base for curriculum delivered in youth work settings and how the stories of impact can be captured.

Informal education can tell a similar story, and whilst there is no imposed national curriculum (Ord, 2008) the desire for a curriculum has grown over the decades and encouraged a move towards and greater focus on outcomes, accreditation, and impact (Doyle, 2001 in Richardson and Wolfe, 2001). This causes a disparity for youth workers, between building trusted relationships and having conversations with young people, and delivering work as part of a curriculum, in order to meet young people's needs and requirements (Jefferies and Smith, 1999).

There is a tension between those who want to see work with young people continue to be grounded in the principles of informal learning (based on dialogue and connection, exchange and association), and those who want to see a more explicit curriculum which tells those who fund initiatives, and the young people who participate in them, exactly what to expect (Ord,

2004; Merton and Wylie, 2004; Robertson, 2004). Merton and Wylie (2002) are sometimes seen as advocates of a more structured approach to a youth work curriculum (Ord, 2004). On the one hand, Merton and Wylie (2002) acknowledge that it would be foolish for youth workers to try to specify in detail what the outcomes of their work should be. On the other, they argue that youth workers do not embark on a project without any conception of what it is intended to achieve. The workers do have some idea of the attitudes, ideas and understandings on which they expect the young people to draw, as the work progresses (Merton and Wylie, 2004). Informed by my reading and practice I strongly believe that the process of youth work is the curriculum and yet this should be clearly documented as a planned process, with impact measures identified when in dialogue with young people.

The landscape has altered during the duration of writing this thesis and for this purpose I look to Young's (2006) consideration of curriculum and agree that over time the nature of the work and professional responsibilities change. Historically, there was an absence of any form of curriculum and the work was perceived to be all about the relationship and the process. However, if youth workers are serious about supporting young people and indeed surviving in these contemporary times, my experience has informed me that a youth worker has no option but to consider the curriculum, how the work is delivered and to then offer some mechanism to demonstrate impact. Those 'invested', especially young people, should be clear about what is achieved and what success looks like. It is important that a way is found to 'measure' the 'impact' not only of the product but also the process of personal and social development, enabling young people to make informed choices and be in control of their own lives (Young, 2006).

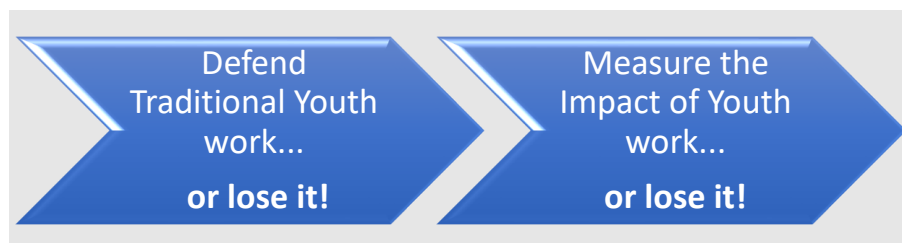
Alongside the curriculum debate is often the consideration of the difference between youth work and youth development, it could be considered that these are just constructed terms and therefore semantics to argue a disparity. Taylor (2017) and Davies (2015) offer a contradiction and suggest a level of 'competition' between what is considered youth work and youth development. It can be argued that youth work is a more organic and fluid approach, a young person centred process curriculum, whilst youth development can imply a different agenda and a more content and product focused curriculum (Ord, 2008). I concur with McNeil (2017) that we need to rethink how valuable it can be to measure the impact of youth work and recognise that no framework or method of measurement can be neutral, as there will always be a level of bias and subjectivity.

Having established my view on a broad context, the construction of youth, the ideology of youth work and specifically curriculum, it is important to explore the language in relation to measurement.

## **2.6 The Language of Youth Work Impact Measurement**

As the term youth work is contested so is the notion of measuring youth work and there is what could be described as a spectrum of opinion (Figure 5) ranging from those who believe that the traditional practice of youth work should be defended at one side of the spectrum, whilst on the other side of the spectrum there are those concerned with measuring youth work impact at the other.

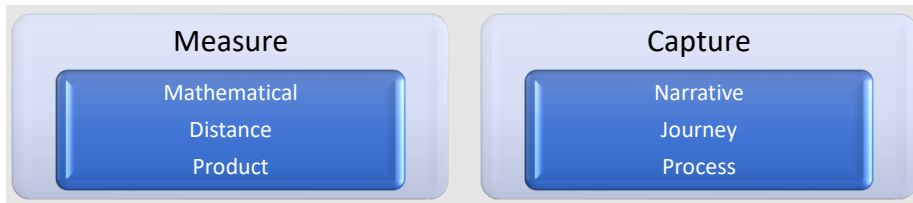
**Figure 5. Spectrum of Opinion**



The question this spectrum poses is, if youth work is to be defended, who is the attacker? The attack potentially comes from those who wish youth work to be measured, the impact recognised, evaluated and held to account. I believe the attack comes from a lack of funding and recognition and the political erosion of universal open youth work and the contemporary 'need' to justify what we do. Change or die, if we as a profession cannot agree a way to measure the impact of our work with young people and within communities my fear is that we will be consumed by targeted work and other services working with young people. The challenge is how to capture the impact, or how to influence in ways that are congruent with the ethical person centred process of youth work.

The story of this whole thesis started with an aim in mind, to discover a way to measure the impact of youth work, as this is the language used in practice. However, I find this language jarring and I prefer considering how we capture the influence of youth work. Figures 6 and 7 explore the nuanced difference in terms. The notion of language is explored in much greater depth in narrative four, and during the focus group discussion, here it is purely introductory and illustrative.

**Figure 6. Measure v Capture**



**Figure 7. Impact v Influence**



Figure 6 suggests that the use of the word capture is more relevant to this study and in line with the notion of story and demonstration of an emergent picture, rather than a snapshot in time. Figure 7 similarly suggests influence and implies a more developmental and person centred direction rather than a predefined impact of a moment in time.

Having provided the means with which to consider the broader context and landscape of youth, youth work ideology, curriculum and language and the contested nature of measurement and evidence, I will now introduce the reader to my approach.

## 2.7 Narratives and Story

We “lead storied lives” (Connelly and Clandinin, p.2, 1990), and we are surrounded by story (Ledwith, 2022) and this thesis enables participants to tell these stories and as the researcher, and narrator, I am describing these stories as narratives of experience as well as views and in studying the narratives I am studying how people experience the world of youth work and the measurement of impact. I am making a narrative inquiry that creates the story. The narrative is the enquiry, and the story is the phenomenon (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990). “Identity itself takes the form of a story” (McAdams, 2001, p. 101), and through the process of reflective practice our understanding and interpretation develops, and youth workers create a narrative identity that is an evolving story. Clendenin and Connelly (1996), discuss the notion of professional knowledge, whilst they argue this in relation to teachers, I apply this to youth work and the way in which the story is created. The context of professional knowledge is generated when a youth worker’s understanding and practice collides with theory and policy, it is this that creates the story and hence my consideration of literature, individual experience, history and policy. The knowledge I am trying to expose through this narrative enquiry was previously unknown and as such started with the questions to prompt exploration and reflection (Goodson, Loveless and Stephens, 2012). As youth workers it is important that we develop a way of listening that enables us to engage in dialogue with young people and allows for critical reflection (Ledwith, 2022).

I am the narrator of the narratives presented in this thesis but the writers of the literature considered, the politicians who have created policy and the participants along with my own reflections have provided the words to tell the story, they are the characters (Connelly and



Clandinin, 1990, McAdams, 2021) that have enabled me to create the plot... 'what is the mystery and the magic of youth work' there is a beginning (The Context, Introduction and Methodology) a middle (The Narratives: Chapters Five to Eleven The Findings and the Data Analysis) and an end (The Conclusion and The Recommendations). I am interested in the temporal and the spatial, and how the story is weaved, as Welty (1979, in Connelly and Clandinin, p.8 1990) remarks "time and place are the two points of reference by which the novel grasps experience", as such it was important to add a geographical boundary to the sample and research and also to capture historical data. There is no hero, no one to be saved, just equal characters with a common goal using different approaches to achieve the desired outcome; for youth work to survive and flourish.

The opportunity to tell story helps make sense of the past, present and the potential future. It was my intention to investigate the past through a review of the history of youth work, to reflect on the present, through my review of literature and engagement with participants, as well as my own reflection and to then to suggest recommendation for future practice (Hayes, Edlmann and Brown, 2019).

Ledwith (2022) recognises the importance of making change, it is important however to be curious and questioning in relation to generate a new, more accurate story that can contradict the status quo. Dialogue and storytelling are important in youth work and offer an opportunity for young people and practitioners alike to make sense of life situations, to consider how we each came to be in the place and situations we find ourselves in and, through a process of reflective practice, distil the learning and reposition as appropriate for the next chapters in

our individual and collective stories. There is a somewhat therapeutic aspect of sharing your story with someone who identifies or listens well and is empathic, it is validating and emancipatory (Gallagher, 2011). In *Defence of Youth Work (IDYW)* recognises the value of story as a resource to evidence and communicate the value of youth work (Storytelling in Youth Work, 2014).

I recognise that some youth workers are well practiced storytellers whilst others are not, and the challenge is to train good storytellers, both youth workers and young people, and also to train those who need to listen to the story and receive the evidence, such as the funders, politicians, parents, commissioners, teachers and anyone who professes to have an interest in the impact of this work. Perhaps the challenge is not to teach people how to tell the story of practice and impact but more how to teach people to listen and understand the nuances at both the micro and macro levels. I was often asked for case studies and challenged the notion that young people were 'cases' to be 'studied' but rather human beings with experiences and stories to tell, it is my view that the 'case studies' dehumanise and shift the focus from the person, there needs to be a less didactic method of storytelling which leaves space to observation, for information to be absorbed, to resonate, with time to pause in order to reflect and process. From my experience there is a lack of value placed on story in youth work as documented in critical reflection two, in narrative one and this is reinforced by people's naive desire for numbers as evidence of impact. Story is the process of youth work, it is fundamentally aligned to practice, and I believe that story needs to be considered evidence and an output of youth work. The enduring challenge of this thesis is how to ethically capture evidence without interrupting the process. However, much of the data suggests that youth

work must be a young person centred process and I fundamentally agree with this, but I consider it important to capture not only stories in practice but also the story of practice. We all have a story, there are stories that are told over and over in families, in friendship groups, in organisations and in communities, these stories convey cultural norms, and I am keen to identify the story and cultural norms of youth work. Clandinin and Connelly (2015) refer to the understandings of school reform in their paper and I can relate clearly to youth work and the recognition that finding a way to measure the impact of youth work is not a situation in which a problem needs to be solved, it is not an issue in isolation, it exists in the wider context of youth work and impact measurement “the landscape is a living place” (Clandinin and Connelly, 2015, p.161) it has a place in history, it is dynamic with interactions taking place. One of the aims of this thesis is to consider if youth work has a future and I must recognise that youth work is about relationships and that people have different stories and perspectives on and of the youth work landscape. I have presented the findings in a way that enables the reader to hear the voice and ponder the story the participants are telling, I did not want to rush to analysis of data (Boncher and Ellis, 2016), I wanted to provide space and time for the reader to deliberate and make connections and thus develop their own narrative and perspective. As such my presentation of findings from the interviews and focus group are written question by question, participant response by participant response. The voice is highlighted in colour to further identify and honour voice.

The process of reflective practice is a fundamental process of good youth work, recognising as Socrates suggests “I cannot teach anybody anything, I can only make them think”, I am aware of this in all aspects of my practice experience as a youth worker working directly with young

people, as a manager of people and as an academic and teacher. It has been important for me to not only reflect on my practice by looking back but also to recognise the challenge of quantifying knowledge in practice as it happens (Schon 2017). Through reflective practice Lave and Wenger (1991) suggest that it is possible to become a different person and I concur with the profound sentiment of this, and whilst I recognise the importance of experience as a basis for learning this must also be coupled with reflection (Ostermann and Kottkamp, 2004), the telling of the story.

## **2.8 Summary of the Context**

It has been important during this context to consider the time and place for the study and the key concepts:

- Young People
- Youth Work
- Impact and evidence
- The Contested Nature of Youth Work and Measuring Impact
- Ideology of Youth work - Underpinning principles and characteristics of Youth Work.
- The Social Construction of Youth
- Curriculum
- The Language of Youth Work Impact Measurement
- Narratives and Story

The next chapter is a consideration of my methodological approach, the approach to generating data and building stories which further explore the concepts considered during the introduction and the context.

## **Chapter Three: Methodological Approach**

### **3.1 Introduction**

A fundamental guiding question in my development of methodology was whether youth work has to be 'thought about' to exist? Sarantakos (2013) view is that "Meanings are not fixed but emerge out of people's interactions with the world. Meanings do not exist before the mind engages them" (Sarantakos 2013, p.38). I concur with this view and consider that youth work exists in the stories of people, and it is these stories that inform practice, evidence generation and impact measurement. I seek to contribute more stories from practice to inform the debate regarding whether the impact of youth work can be measured.

This research is therefore interpretivist, aligned with social constructionism as it seeks to understand different perspectives on youth work. This is also 'applied research' as I sought to widen people's understanding of youth work, acknowledging that this lack of understanding among professionals is a problem (Gray, 2014). The problem perceived is the lack of information and clarity in relation to youth work, evidence and measurement of impact.

The research answers the following four question, following some amendments for clarity:

- 1) What is 'youth work'?
- 2) What is impact, in relation to youth work?
- 3) Should impact be measured in an ethical way congruent with the principles of youth work?
- 4) How can we measure the impact of youth work?

The answers to these questions were explored from the stories of practitioners, gathered, and elicited through conversations, as this is where youth work is understood and from where it

is practised. It was also gathered through the stories of theorists in literature and those of politicians in policy.

I will first identify the central paradigm underpinning the research before considering my ontology, epistemology, axiology, and methodology as this will ultimately lead to a consideration of appropriate methods of data collection.

**Table 1. A demystification and application of terms – My conceptual framework**

Accessible Definitions	My study
<b>Research Paradigm.</b> This refers to how I understand reality, what is the world view, how I will develop knowledge about this reality and how I will collect data and information in order to make meaning and interpretation (Kivunja and Kuyini, 2017).	<b>Interpretivist</b> My world is youth work and measuring the impact of this practice. This research is aligned with <b>social constructionism</b> as it seeks to understand different perspectives on youth work. Tracy (2013) encourages me to consider and select appropriate glasses, there are different glasses that affect how one sees the world.
<b>Ontology.</b> This refers to what exists, in the social world – the nature of reality and what might constitute reality (Gray, 2021)	What about youth work and measuring impact is available to know in the social world of the profession. I believe that what the participants said about youth work is real, from their experience and perspective on their own youth work world. Their reality is a construction. In order to answer my research question, I will interrogate, discuss and analyse the data to construct a contribution of new knowledge and understanding about the nature of youth work and

	measuring impact. The nature of the reality in my research is socially constructed.
<b>Epistemology.</b> This refers to how we gain knowledge of what exists – how we can know anything – the nature of knowledge. What actually is valid knowledge (Gray, 2021)	<b>Constructivist</b> The belief that it is our knowledge of youth work is constructed by people. How can I know about youth work and the impact it can have. I sought to understand youth work better, to investigate the truth, I do recognise that as this is a social construct, I will not be presenting an absolute and agreed truth, I will be presenting a version based on my own professional knowledge and experience, the truth and knowledge will be co-created (Tracy, 2013). It will be constructed based on my own reflections, my review of what I believe is key literature and policy and my engagement with participants through the survey, conversations and focus group.
<b>Axiology.</b> This refers to internal values that influence our perceptions, decisions and actions. It includes ethical and moral stance. What are the right (ethical) actions of a researcher as opposed to the wrong (unethical) issues. A sense of what 'should be'. A theory of values (Hart, 1971), or a philosophy of values (Given, 2008)	What do I value? I value young people having universal access to youth work. Having a voice and the support to make choices about their own lives, without there being any expectation of time scale and outcome.
<b>Methodology.</b>	<b>Narrative Enquiry</b>



<p>This refers to the systematic, theoretical analysis of the methods applied. How I will collect and analyse the data. My design to collect data to find out 'things' and how I came to know them</p>	<p>A narrative enquiry that includes elements of phenomenology through the use of story and ethnography tell my own story of practice and duoethnography (Sawyer and Norris, 2013) as I include a range of participants' views on youth work practice through conversation) in a social context. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) in Clandinin, Steeves and Caine (2013) This presents the opportunity to hear the voice and story of a range of practitioners.</p>
<p><b>Methods of data collection.</b></p> <p>This refers to how information is going to be obtained. How specifically am I going to acquire this knowledge</p>	<p><b>Gathering stories to create narratives:</b></p> <p>My story of practice, a collection of critical Reflection reflections – Autoethnography (1).</p> <p>Based on Theoretical Analysis and Literature Reviews:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A Story about the History, Politics and Policy of Youth Work (2).</li> <li>• A Story about Youth Work, its Ideology and Underpinning principles and characteristic (3).</li> <li>• A Story about Measuring the impact of Youth Work and creating an evidence base, the contemporary debate (4).</li> </ul> <p>A practitioner's story about youth work and measuring impact collected through mixed methods questionnaires (Kumar, 2019) (5).</p> <p>A practitioner's story about youth work and measuring impact collected through interviews (6).</p> <p>A practitioner's story about youth work and measuring impact collected through a focus group (7).</p>

<b>Methods of data analysis.</b> This refers to the process of inspecting, cleaning and transforming data to discover useful findings and suggesting conclusions.	I have created narrative accounts, in that I am the narrator, from considering my own professional reflections, reviewing the stories to be found in literature and policy, reading and hearing the stories of practitioners through a survey, interviews and a focus group. I have created separate narratives and ultimately a collective discussion and interpretive analysis to identify themes and recommendations (Clandinin, 2007).
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### 3.2 Research Paradigm

I am operating within an interpretivist paradigm aligned with social constructionism. recognising that the world is interpreted by the individuals that operate within it and that youth work is socially constructed and understood. It is interpreted differently by youth workers, myself as the researcher and narrator included. Youth work is a value-based profession and as such this research is not value free and the way in which youth work is delivered and understood is contextual (Kivunja and Kuyini, 2017). Contextual in both time and space, two of the dimensions recognised by Clandinin, Steeves and Caine (2013), hence my consideration of history and a geographical boundary to this research.

Youth work is based on social interactions and many changes have been recognised over the history of the practice. A constructionist paradigm is appropriate because I am considering the phenomena of youth work and impact measurement through personal interactions, a view supported by Walliman (p.15, 2006); *“Constructionism... the belief that social phenomena are in a constant state of change because they are totally reliant on social interactions as they take*

*place*". As Burr (2015) recognises, there is not one singular version of reality, and any perceived reality is constructed through active engagement and interpretation of experience. In relation to this study, I recognise that all the constructed realities, as captured in stories, are of equal value and no more or less accurate. I am likely to find that some participants views are congruent with my own views and my own story and potentially many which are not. The emphasis is that the stories are formed by individual knowledge and practice experience, the stories offered are concerned with youth work and impact as they are perceived and interpreted by the individual telling their story, which are inevitably interpreted by myself as the narrator. Burr (2015) recognised that individuals exist in social networks. I consider that youth work as a practice is also a social network, of youth workers, colleagues from different agencies, volunteers, community members, families and most significantly young people themselves. This thesis seeks to add further narrative than that which already exists, as Gergen (2015) acknowledges, we are not limited by what is traditionally thought to be true, what is right or rational. There are norms and customs as well as professional guidance and standards, which are interpreted and reinterpreted over time and within a wider political and historical context. As Burr (2015) recognised "The constructive work that produces us as persons takes place in social interaction of all kinds, and language, as a key constituent of social interaction, is therefore of great importance. Discourse is at the heart of social constructionism" (Burr 2015, p.224). I consider discourse, discussion and seeking people's views and opinions to be at the heart of youth work and I endeavour to capture people's voice through the narrative I create, placing it at the heart of this study.

My worldview, which is similar to Burr (2015), is that meaning does not exist in the world literally, but rather is interpreted and constructed, similarly Walliman (2006) recognises that

*“the view of the world that we see around us is the creation of the mind. This does not mean the world is not real, but rather that we can only experience it personally through our perceptions which are influenced by our preconceptions and beliefs...”* (p.20).

As such, different versions of what is considered youth work may well be written in research studies, journals, books, policy documents and reports, and these may contribute to what youth work actually ‘means’ to individual practitioners and how it is delivered, evidenced and its impact measured.

Whilst I believe that a constructionist paradigm is appropriate for this research project, there are several critiques, primarily that the construction of knowledge is overly subjective and does not account for an accurate perception of reality and therefore is anti-realist (Andrews, 2012). There are a range of perceived definitions of youth work, and if and how youth work should be measured, I do however recognise that these different perceptions enrich the debate, generate conversation, and therefore further construct a practice reality. Therefore, what is presented is a story and suggestions based on perspective and interpretation, much like the custom and practice of youth work, this paradigm does not seek for an objective truth. The challenge I faced, however, was bringing disparate perspectives into something coherent, yet not objective or singular.

### **3.2.1 Ontology**

I considered how, as a constructionist researcher, the nature of truth and reality and how the participants construct this. There is no single reality of truth about the profession of youth work or measuring the impact of the work, it is contested, fluid, individual and collective, the collective voice is presented by myself as the narrator of this thesis. My role as a researcher was to construct a perspective on a youth work reality; youth workers themselves are also engaged in constructing their own views and associated responses (Sheppard, 2004). Each of these perspectives is therefore important to capture in the thesis, hence my use of a variety of methods to collect data, capturing different stories of youth work. The results are reflected back in this thesis as an assemblage of 'truth' (Kivunja and Kuyini, 2015) as interpreted by myself as the researcher. What we see and hear may not be different, but what constitutes youth work and what impact measurement means to people is different. In this sense, I and all the participants approach the world differently (Gergen, 2015).

I am interested in how the participants in this research study interpret youth work, through stories of their practice, I will therefore need to ask people to elicit their version of youth work, gathering evidence and measuring impact regarding their version of reality. As Burr (2015) states the important central element of social constructionism is that the knowledge and understanding that people have is as a result of thought and is not something that can be observed or proven in an external reality, in this respect, people's constructions of youth work cannot be observed but must be elicited through stories, gathered through a variety of methods.

These interpretations, according to Sarantankos (2013), are not only individual but also dynamic. As such, this thesis offers a view of youth work at one particular moment in time. In order to construct a reality of youth work it is essential to include not only a consideration of history and a perceived future but also the views of a range of practitioners who are either youth workers or working with young people in some way, in present time. This range, whilst providing a wider view of a constructed reality, might however mean that the differing views of reality of those who are youth workers may not be evident. It is important to know the profession or role of the participant in order to account for any difference between youth workers and those other professionals or roles. This is considered in the analysis of the questionnaires, interviews and focus group.

### **3.2.2 Epistemology**

Epistemologically, I engaged with a wide range of people to establish where ideas of youth work came from, therefore I need to talk to people hence selecting the narrative method to access their socially constructed versions of their truth. I am concerned with hearing the stories that are a product of experience and how this leads to individual and collective acceptable knowledge in youth work and measuring impact (Walliman, 2006). Different ideas of what youth work is, are revealed in the narratives that make up part of this thesis, but other accounts will exist and inform practitioner views. Epistemology refers to what it means to know (Gray, 2014, p.19) and whilst this can be considered through reviewing the literature, policy and theory, it only offers indications of what is known and much of what is written is open to interpretation and application depending on the meaning ascribed and the setting in which the work is delivered. "... Dewey held that one criterion of experience is community,

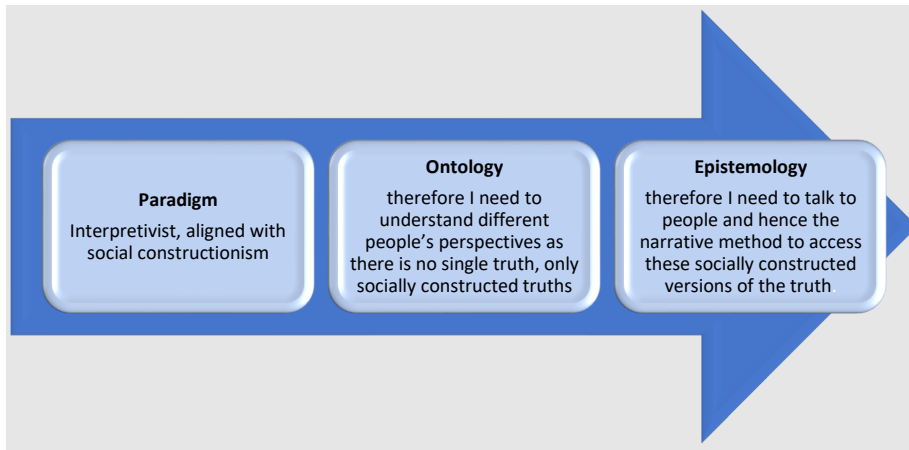
namely, the notion that experiences grow out of other experiences, and experiences lead to further experiences” (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000 p. 2). There is a past, present and future of youth work and it is important to consider all of these aspects when exploring youth work as an informal educational process that can be evidenced and the impact measured. So, I have engaged in conversations, via a survey and verbally, with youth workers and those who work with young people, in order to hear their stories of youth work that are based on their experience from practice and their knowledge of the profession. I have captured my own story of practice through reflecting on my journey and creating a number of critical reflections as well as ‘listening to’ and ‘responding to’ the story told in literature and policy.

### **3.2.3 Paradigm Summary**

My paradigm is that a world view is socially constructed, this leads to the ontological perspective that I need to try to understand different perspectives of youth work as there is no single truth, only socially constructed versions and this then leads to an epistemological position, requiring me to talk to people and hence the narrative method used to access these socially constructed versions of the truth.

Figure 8 below reflects the flow of decision making based on my paradigm choice, this leads me to conder the appropriate methodology and methods of data collection.

**Figure 8. Paradigm, Ontology and Epistemology**



### 3.3 Axiology

Axiology is considered through my own reflections, my choice of critical reflections and the framing of my questions, though I must acknowledge bias both of myself and potentially the participants (Gray, 2021). I am invested as a youth worker in a future of the profession and my judgements are informed by my practice experience, academic study, and critical reflection. This research is bound with my own values, as a youth worker and academic, I am part of the research and will therefore be subjective. (Dudovskiy, 2012)

When considering what should youth work be like, relating to my value stance (Creswell, 2018) I sought guidance from:

- Institute for Youth Work Code of Ethics (2022).
- National Youth Agency Code of Ethics (2004).
- National Youth Agency values statement (2021b)
- Participant ethical and moral codes.
- My personal moral and ethical code.



- For my values as a researcher, I look to the University of Cumbria ethical guidance.

I made a decision early on in my thinking not to include young people in this phase of research as it felt the 'wrong thing to do' based on my practice experience. In practice I was tasked to consult and be in dialogue with young people without a tangible outcome that would benefit them directly, I wanted this thesis to hear the voices of practitioners to secure a position before any engagement with young people. This is a decision I stand by, but I would wish to hear the voices of young people from a future research study, considering both what is youth work and how its impact can be measured and evidenced. I am careful not to identify participants directly and have allocated each a code letter and caution is needed in sharing any findings from my own reflections as I am known in the professional field within the geographical area of the study and it may be possible that readers can identify organisations and also the people referred to within the study.

### **3.4 Methodology**

#### ***3.4.1 Auto-Ethnographic Narrative Enquiry***

This study draws data in diverse ways, from what is already written, from participants and from my own reflections. These reflections provide the lenses through which to construct what is primarily an auto-ethnographic Narrative Enquiry, an evocative approach, enabling me to reflect and connect to my own experiences and the data collected, but also academically and emotionally (Bochner and Ellis, 2016). I have 'thought about' and reflected on my career as a youth worker and academic, both roles I am passionate about and which evoke emotions as a result of my lived experience, my story and the stories told in these pages.

The research question evolved, and all data sources were used to address the questions. The survey provided specific detail that was nuanced, and as the stages of data collection progressed, all data contributed to addressing the questions in a holistic way.

Grbich (2013) suggests that a narrative analysis is one which focuses on the stories told, in the case of this thesis by a range of participants, telling their stories in different ways. Narrative enquiry is a relational methodology (Clandinin, 2016) and youth work is a relational profession, therefore the fit is appropriate. The approach I am taking to my enquiry is that developed by Connelly and Clandinin (1990) and I acknowledge that when experiences are reflected on, they provide the opportunity for education and instruction. Enquiring into the range of stories in this thesis has enabled me to come to some understanding of youth work and impact measurement. This understanding has arisen through a process of collaboration between myself as the narrator and the participants and literature as contributors to create this story, over time and in different places. (Lindsay and Schwind, 2016).

Creswell (2018) helpfully defines the features that determine a narrative. This thesis contains a collection of stories, from my practice, literature, policy, participants, both individually and as part of a focus group and the stories they graciously shared were prompted from an indication of my own story and definition of youth work. Through the questions posed and answered a co-created story emerged, through dialogue, which were then thematically analysed (Riessman, 2008). Through the collection of data, I identified some demographic information in relation to career, role and experience alluding to identity, which presented pen pictures in the data sets.

There is a relational aspect of this enquiry (Clandinin, 2007) and whilst narratives are captured, the stories continue and interact with the ever-changing context within which youth work is occupied. As I am using a narrative approach as a method, I am interested in the stories told and the experiences lived and these are found in the literature, policy and in the data from the participants (Creswell, 2018). Polkinghorne (1988), suggests that our lives are intertwined with narrative, with stories, those we tell and those we hear, helping make sense of our past and anticipating a future, this provided the flow particularly for the focus group when participants shared their past, present and future suggestions in relation to young work and measuring impact.

My research method is narrative enquiry with elements of ethnography as I am considering the social world through story. My methodology is aligned to the delivery of youth work, which is a discursive practice, youth workers engage with young people, each other, families, community members, volunteers, funders, politicians and other professionals. As a youth worker, hearing young people's stories is very important to building a trusting relationship and planning a person centred approach and intervention. This is the approach I have taken when constructing this research. The narratives are informed by interactions between people and are therefore constructed. As such I took a discursive approach to this research and engaged with history, policy, literature, and practitioners (including myself) to reveal multiple narratives and capture an interpretation of the stories. What is presented is a description and narration of feelings and opinions, from the literature and the participants, as such the

findings are presented as a descriptive narrative rather than an analysis of actual facts (Kumar, 2019).

I am interested in storied experience, the stories I was able to analyse in the written documents and policy, my own story and the stories of the participants who contributed to the survey, the interviews, and the focus group. Aspects of my narrative enquiry are informed by an ethnographic approach which contains elements of duoethnography, when engaging with participants and their stories. This method is dialogic as I am engaging in conversation with people and literature in order to investigate meaning (Sawyer and Norris, 2013) and autoethnography, when I am reflecting on my own story. I explore these approaches in more detail below. The stories captured in the written word and the spoken word are all based on the meaning people have built into the story and so that is how I accessed their meanings, by reading and listening to the different stories available. I endeavoured, through my own interpretation, to capture and document how researchers and practitioners construct their view through discussion and dialogue, and such a construct is invariably influenced by family, friends, colleagues, young people and informed by the news, social media, government, policy, and literature.

I enquired about the nature of youth work and how this can be measured, evidence collected, and impact demonstrated. I sought different views and perceptions from: my own practice; literature; policy; and people in different forms of practice and professions, recognising that any data is open to interpretation.

During the narrative enquiry I collected mainly qualitative data, as I am considering the human experience in relation to youth work and impact measurement. The approach is sociocultural (Grbich, 2013) as is concerned with social construction and context, as interpreted by the participants. I have developed a series of narratives that explore how the reality of youth work and measuring impact is perceived and constructed. Based on the research questions I seek to answer I enquired, 'what is known about youth work and impact measurement' and 'how do we come to know it', through stories of history, of practice now and the anticipated future of youth work and impact measurement. This method of research is congruent with the practice of youth work approach, "ethnographers understand our daily activities as a powerful component of how we come to 'know' the world around us" (Carpenter, 2017). I consider the role of ethnography in this thesis during the next section. I wanted to ensure could I 'listen to' and 'hear' multiple stories, including my own. I have placed myself and others in the process of the research and therefore in the thesis created (Clough and Nutbrown, 2002). I was in relationship with my own experience, the participants, the literature reviewed and the phenomenon that is youth work and it was my intention to expose existing knowledge, beliefs, ideas and practice and offer a challenge, through reflection, to the seemingly taken for granted notion that youth work exists and its impact can be measured, and that it can reveal other possibilities and ways of working to ensure that youth work can be known and valued and its future secured (Lindsay and Schwind, 2016).

The data sets, the stories, which I present as a series of narratives, are questions addressed across the data sets:

- Narrative One: My story of practice, a collection of critical reflections (Auto-ethnography). Representing a reflection of the powerful events I remember in practice (Grbich, 2013).
- Narrative Two: A story about the history, politics, and policy of youth work (historical literature and policy review). This is also a duoethnographic approach, what is captured from becoming immersed in this literature review is an analysis of a cultural artefact, as it is a discussion youth work overtime (Norris, Sawyer and Lund, 2016). A chronological study, a description of the developments of youth work (Murray, 2003).
- Narrative Three: A story about youth work, its ideology and underpinning principles and characteristics, based on a theoretical analysis and literature review, again a consideration of a cultural artifact and as such duoethnographic.
- Narrative Four: A story about measuring the impact of youth work and creating an evidence base, the contemporary debate, based on a theoretical analysis and literature review (duoethnography).
- Narrative Five: A practitioner's story about youth work and measuring impact told by the data from the surveys (duoethnography).
- Narrative Six: A practitioner's story about youth work and measuring impact told by the data from the interviews (duoethnography).
- Narrative Seven: A practitioner's story about youth work and measuring impact told by the data from the focus group (duoethnography).

I write ethnographically, it is my intention to separate the presentation of findings, which is my data from the participants' discussions (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2019), which will be considered in a separate chapter in which I will offer a synthesis to data and literature.

Washbrook and Beacon (2022) consider how the voice of young people can be heard, and it is my intention in this thesis to hear and report the voice, the story of practitioners and make recommendations about a next phase of study that can authentically hear the voice of young people.

A narrative enquiry approach is a method of research in youth work and related practice, perhaps due in part to its discursive nature and it is recognised in the following studies:

- Hayes (2021) focused on people's experiences of outdoor learning, through taking time to ask and making time to listen
- Hayes *et. al*, (2022) in a consideration of the importance of intergenerational dialogue at this time of uncertainty
- Douglas *et. al*. (no date) Considered the challenges of narrative enquiry with young people who are at risk, including a conversational approach to interviews.

Before I consider my data collection methods I wish to explore and clarify, for the purpose of this thesis, the notions of narrative and story and to be transparent about the use of ethnography, both autoethnography and duoethnography.

### **3.4.2 Ethnography**

This narrative enquiry has elements of ethnography, there is no participant observation but there is cultural sharing throughout the narratives, and I am using ethnography and an auto ethnographic account of my own practice as a basis for this enquiry using qualitative techniques (Morse, 2016), I will consider both a process and a product (Ellis, Adams, and Bochner, 2011). I consider ethnography to be a form of storytelling, (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2019), as Tracy (2013) acknowledged there is “the ethnography of communication” (p.53). I am inviting participants to speak of their own cultural understanding (Hymes, 1962 in Tracy 2013). If we can understand culture, past and present then there is the possibility to predict cultural future (Griffiths, 2022). As well as my own autoethnographic informal observations of my own practice throughout my career, captured through reflection on critical reflections, I watched and listened as a practitioner; as a researcher I asked questions and listened to others’ stories. (Sheppard, 2004). I do not seek to be invisible; I am part of the story both in terms of my experience directly and my emotional reaction to the narratives created by others, Gray (2014) recognises this as a feminist ethnographical approach. I endeavour to be a radical listener and not just hear the voices in the literature, the policy and from the participants but to pay close attention to the voice and the nuanced story being told in order to honour this as the narrator (Clough and Nutbrown 2002). I will tell aspects of my story from my own professional experience (Lapadat, 2017), hear stories from others and seek to create a narrative enquiry based on human relationships and the context of youth work (Hughes and Pennington, 2016), in essence a collaborative actinography (Chang, Hernandez and Ngunjiri, 2016).



My intention was to record the voice as accurately as possible; I recognise that stories are full of rich and meaningful distortion, I am researching the social world through narratives that are invariably constructed by different interpretations and recognise that my interpretation will result in subjective data and findings (Sheppard, 2004). The participants were invited to take part in interviews and whilst these interviews are guided by myself as the researcher, with predesigned questions these are flexible and I wanted to establish a co-produced conversation (Gray, 2014), this worked well as the participant brought in elements of the experience that I had not considered. Bourgois and Schonberg suggest that ethnography can focus too much on detail and miss the “implications of structures of power and of historical context because the forces have no immediate visibility” (Bourgois and Schonberg, 2009 p.33) I have carefully and thoroughly designed my study to ensure this is not the case. Therefore, I have endeavoured also to consider the historical and political story of youth work and recognise that this is relevant in a contemporary context. To present a critical analysis of the reality of measuring the impact of youth work and how this is imagined by those involved, whilst also questioning how this could be different by challenging the power of government and funders (Denzin, 1999). The study was inductive, with each stage informing the next (Morse, 2016) and as a result there were adaptations along the process and as the data was collected.

I created narratives that permit life-like accounts, that focus on experience, providing a framework and context for making meaning of life situations (Pepper and Wildy, 2009 p.19). I

categorised and coded the data and identified themes that contributed to analysis (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007), recognising as Silverman (2000) does that creating narratives from these interviews is a two-way process, this collectively constructs, co-creates the narrative that together tells the overall story about the mystery and magic of youth work, recognising the limits to the claims I can make.

Throughout my professional and academic experience, reflective practice, dialogue and story have been important to me personally, not only in terms of personal development but also in relation to my professional practice. The stories I have been told have informed my approach, the development of projects, services, and organisations. This thesis, this story that I am creating here is made up of the findings from the narratives and the subsequent discussion, analysis, and recommendations.

I have considered narrative and story from an academic perspective and consider this thesis as a story with a narrative flow, presented a narrative enquiry of youth work, and the measurement of the impact of youth work, it is a personal and intimate study that seeks to build on the wealth of research in this field, in particular by Dr Tania de St Croix, a Senior Lecturer in the Sociology of Youth and Childhood at King's College London, I do not identify or attempt to 'fill a gap' merely add another story. I have chosen to write it in a way that is accessible to both an academic and a professional audience.

### **3.5 Methods of Data Collection**

In order to elicit a range of data I have used five methods of data collection in this thesis. I wanted to ensure I was able to consider historical data as well as contemporary data, and also endeavoured to seek academic and practitioner contributions. The data was collected in a specific sequence and each stage informed the next:

- Ethnographic reflections.
- Scoping literature reviews.
- Survey as a first phase to elicit information.
- Interviews as a second phase to elicit further information.
- Focus Group to consider the data from the previous stages.

#### ***3.5.1 Ethnographic reflections***

Whilst some suggest that an autoethnography approach is not perceived as rigorous enough to stand up to academic scrutiny (Hughes and Pennington, 2017), I consider that this approach is one element of data collection that does, and it is a reflective professional account, supported by other data sets. As an experienced practitioner I have a personal narrative and reflecting on this offers a creative qualitative contribution to my data. "Auto-ethnography continues to occupy an intermediate space we can't quite define yet, a borderland between passion and intellect, analysis and subjectivity" (Denshire, 2014 P.845), I sought to achieve a relationship between the reader and myself as the author. This was an ongoing process, no hard facts or conclusions could be achieved, and I believe that the absence of having to find final conclusions using this method of data collection enabled reflective knowledge to emerge, unconfined by the restrictions of more traditional academic frameworks. Coffey (2017)

encourages the auto ethnographer to take risks and create a vulnerability to establish an authentic account capable of contributing to improved professional practice and outcomes for young people. I will be making use of others' voice and contributions throughout my data collection to explore, challenge and question my own position. There were also elements of duoethnography (Sawyer and Norris, 2013), as I engaged with participants and asked about their professional life experiences to establish multiple understandings of youth work and measuring impact, which could be changed through the process of undertaking the research (Norris, Sawyer and Lund, 2012). I engaged in conversations (Breault, 2014), firstly through the response to the surveys and then through interviews and finally with participants during a focus group. It was during the focus group that the research was most closely aligned to duoethnography. This is consistent with a youth work approach concerned with dialogue through conversation and relationship. I am interested to have conversations to compare experience with my reflective account and create contrapuntal voices and awareness for the multiple narratives (Suter, 2017).

### **3.5.2 Scoping literature reviews**

I carried out three themed and differentiated scoping literature reviews to arrive at a robust and informed position, prior to engaging with participants. During these literature reviews I did not seek to address any one specific question, the exercise was established to consider and map the literature available, the reviews were not systematic and focused on the breadth of the literature available (Rumrill, *et al.*, 2010). As Rumrill, *et al.* (2010) recognised, it is essential for myself as the researcher to become thoroughly familiar with that which already exists within the published literature available in order to carry out my new investigations

within the context of the existing knowledge, however I not only sought to summarise findings but also to identify any gaps (Arksey and O'Malley, 2005). I themed the theoretical analysis of the literature as follows:

- The history, politics, and policy of youth work.
- Youth work, its ideology, and underpinning principles and characteristics.
- Measuring the impact of youth work, creating an evidence base and the contemporary debate.

### **3.5.3 Survey**

Initial participant data collection took the form of a survey, as Ekinci (2015) recognises the survey is part of a data collection set and serves as an aid to further stages of data collection, my survey provided a starting point, a basic data set from which I interrogated participants further through one-to-one interviews and during a focus group.

I gathered this data using a self-completion JISC online survey without any involvement or influence from me as the researcher or any personal interaction (Clough and Nutbrown, 2002). As my sample (see sampling strategy below) is from across a wide geographical area this method is helpful and accessible as an initial stage (Walliman, 2006; Ekinci, 2015). The survey was designed to gather data to inform the questions and process for the later stages of data collection, the interviews and the focus group. The purpose of the survey was to discover information and facts, I invited people who would have the appropriate knowledge to answer the questions (Gray, 2014). I was cautious not to use survey alone as I sought to explore

opinions from people and the phenomena that is youth work, and a survey alone would not allow me to do so (Sheppard, 2004).

The survey (see appendix 6) question design was influenced by previous data collection from my own reflection and the literature and policy reviews. I wanted to gain an insight into people's opinions and practice and the survey offered the opportunity to ask participants directly and to receive the information directly (Denscombe, 2017). The survey provided a somewhat structured data set that I used to inform the questions that I asked during the interviews and focus group, recognising that the participants would interpret the questions differently (Sheppard, 2004).

I sent out a link to an electronic survey to a main contact in each organisation (as documented below) asking if they would circulate within their network. I chose these existing networks as I am confident that members of the networks will respond, will complete the survey in a way that is honest and true for them based on their experience of their work with young people. As Denscombe (2017) suggests, achieving successful data collection at this stage I must consider the capability of the participants, their motivation to respond and co-operate, the topic and how sensitive participants might consider this and also the design of the survey itself. It is my professional opinion, and based in my experience of working with these networks over a number of years, that participants will be capable of answering the questions as they are working with young people. I considered the participants likely to be motivated to contribute to a discussion about youth work and its impact as this is a contemporary and

contested issue, but I perceive that it is not a sensitive topic for people to consider. To achieve the best and most appropriate initial data I carefully considered the design of my survey.

#### **3.5.4 My survey design**

In order to enhance the quality of the potential data from this online questionnaire, I designed a mixed methods survey to collect both qualitative and quantitative data (Boyd, *et al.*, 2019). In order to achieve an accurate and detailed data set, I posed specific questions to elicit quantitative responses that could be numerically counted alongside open questions that were designed for a more narrative answer, as Kumar (2019) acknowledges, as this enables greater accuracy and also has enabled me to offer more meaning, based on the qualitative data, where both methods support the paradigm and offer a greater scope. I chose to use a mixed methods approach to the survey. I selected a sequence of quantitative research and qualitative research in the actual survey with the intention of following on with a qualitative approach in the later stages (Plano, Clark and Ivankova, 2016).

When considering the design of the survey I was mindful of “response burden” (Denscombe, 2017, P.168). I limited the number of questions and offered questions with options to select, as well as the opportunity to add a personal narrative. I was keen to ensure that the questions were appropriate and covered the necessary topics such as youth work, impact measurement and evidence collection and only asked what I considered to be vital questions. In line with the principles of youth work and research ethics, it was important that participants’ contribution at all stages of data collection was voluntary.

Mindful of Denscombe's (2017) warning of survey fatigue and to further ensure I achieved honest and thoughtful responses, I endeavoured to not only make the survey as short as possible but also to make the questions straightforward, easy to answer and not ambiguous, such as offering yes/no/don't know options and the opportunity to select from a list of options, not only to limit survey fatigue but also to make analysis consistent. The completion of the survey must be in some way rewarding or the return rate will be low (Gray, 2014). As such I wanted participants to feel motivated and enthusiastic about their contribution to this research and informing a process of ethically measuring the impact of youth work in line with youth work principles, this is congruent with the approach I would take as a practitioner working with young people as this notion links to my axiology, the approaches and ways of work which I value as a youth worker and as a researcher.

The survey was introduced to the participants as part of my research project investigating the question 'Has Youth work 'had its day' or can Youth work survive in a contemporary multi-agency environment?' The purpose was to consider the nature of youth work, its future, and its impact. I made it clear that I was interested in 'practitioner perspectives' and that I was keen to engage in dialogue on the nature of youth work with 'voices from the field'. (Walliman, 2006).

I asked a mix of closed and open response questions (Walliman, 2006, and Ekinci, 2015). The closed response questions were designed to understand the professional demographics of the participants. My initial questions were closed and were concerned with ethics and consent and then I asked a series of 'fact' finding questions to give some demographic information.



Upon analysis I recognised there was an error and some overlap in the categories I offered, which could have skewed the data, for example the question about the participants' length of time in practice offered options, for example, 5 to 10 years and 10 to 20 years and I can never be sure which option someone with 10 years' experience selected. The next set of questions were concerned with youth work; the predetermined categories are informed by my review of the literature. I asked questions such as these to ensure that if I had not included sufficient options for participants to select from, they had the opportunity to add their own thoughts. I also included open questions to elicit individual responses, the 'how' and 'why' type questions (Gray, 2014), I then included my working definition of youth work 'Youth work is an empowering, informal, person-centered process, it is anti-oppressive, voluntary and participative, and the prime concern is the wellbeing and development of young people alongside social change' and invited participants to offer their own definitions of youth work. I recognise that it may have been difficult for participants to disagree with me if they in any way perceived me as an expert, but as the survey was completed remotely and with the option of complete anonymity, I decided to include my own working definition. I then asked a question to move the consideration of youth work toward considering impact, measurement and evidence, their own views and how their organisation conducts, or not, the recording of evidence and impact. An error in the question again could have skewed the data as throughout I asked about youth work and then in the section interrogating evidence and impact, I asked, 'Do you measure the impact of your work with young people?' and with hindsight I should have asked 'Do you measure the impact of your youth work?' A closing question that was asked invited people to ponder their own definition and consider on what basis they answered the question: Are you a Youth worker?

I took the opportunity to gather some data around the impact of Covid-19 on the work, as this is a contemporary issue that is likely not only to affect the issues youth workers are dealing with but also how youth work is delivered and how impact is measured, and evidence gathered.

I was conscious of the notion that the survey constitutes a “remote conversation” (Brace, p.6. 2018) and tried to ensure that the questions I asked were clear but also recognised that they would be open to participant interpretation and that there is the potential to read the questions from a different perspective. Some of the questions were too open to interpretation and unclear to participants as in their responses some also noted that they did not actually understand the question, clearly, I had no opportunity to offer clarity and elicit a response.

Finally, I invited people to express an interest in the next stages of data collection, recorded the names of those willing to take part in follow-up informal discussions and focus groups and thanked them for their contribution.

### ***3.5.5 Interviews***

Interviews are narrative occasions (Riessman, 2008), the opportunity for individual story telling. I used the data collected from my own auto-ethnographic professional reflections, the literature and policy reviews and the survey stage of data collection to inform the questions for the interviews, which was the next phase of data collection (see Appendix 7 for full interview schedule). The four participants at this stage are a subset of the survey participants,

rather than a new sample. An interview is a recognised tool for making an inquiry into narrative, I listened to the participant's story and I also I contributed to the discussion (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990). Participants took the opportunity, in unprompted and impulsive ways, to tell their story (Riessman, 2008). The interview questions were short and clear (Kvale, 2007) but on occasion I had to offer a more complex clarity to ensure the question was understandable in the context. I wanted to have more flexibility to probe (Walliman, 2006) and explore, with the participant, their emerging story. I wanted some control and to have a set agenda of questions but also to provide flexibility for the participants to talk freely about their experience, views and opinions (Clough and Nutbrown, 2002), in order that I could gain some insight into their lived experience (Gray, 2014). I wanted to capture new knowledge through what Clough and Nutbrown, (2002) refer to as "focused conversations" (p.81) albeit short there was a relationship between myself as the researcher and narrator and the participants, the storytellers.

This stage will be referred to as interviews as I have identified that what is lacking in the body of evidence is the voice of practitioners. I am contributing my own story and the story of my participants, I am endeavouring to add to what already exists and contribute new stories and experience. I sought stories from people, how they perceive youth work and measurement, not the truth, more a "plausible account of the work" as they see it (Silverman, 2000 p. 123), I explored the practices and aspects of the participants' everyday life, in relation to youth work (Skukauskaite, 2012). This is in line with the auto-ethnographic approach and duo ethnographic approach as I was building a dataset from interviews with practitioners, which is also consistent with the dialogue approach in youth work. As such an interview was

perceived to be a helpful method of capturing the participants' lived meanings of their everyday youth work (Kvale, 2007).

Whilst I do consider the survey is a form of conversation (Denscombe, 2017), these actual, verbal, dynamic interviews elicited rich and impromptu data. I recognise this was subjective and that it is impossible to be aware of how the interviewee feels about myself as the interviewer, the process of being interviewed, youth work, the measurement of youth work or the context they are currently working in (Sheppard, 2004). Some sense of feeling was recognised and reported but the questions and the data collected was open to interpretation. This was especially true as the interview participants were either not known or less known to me and it may have been insufficient time for the participants to feel they could openly discuss their feelings (Kvale, 2007). I developed a rapport with the participants, built trust and respect by giving an overview of the research and the process of the conversation, as well as discussing confidentiality, anonymity, and consent (Gray, 2014).

I was keen to ensure that the agenda was not set exclusively by me as a researcher, I conducted a semi structured interview (Walliman, 2006), as I wanted to understand the different agendas of the participants, as such I asked open questions informed by the data from the surveys. These conversations took place online as this method was convenient (Denscombe, 2017).

I also made participants aware that we were talking about youth work and the issue of measuring the impact of this work and as such I designed the elements of the interviews be non-directive, in order that ideas emerged and the direction of the interview was only somewhat shaped by the questions that I, the researcher, already had in mind but I did not want the participants to be stifled by this.

I was keen to explore both the complex and subtle, tacit and implicit phenomena that is youth work therefore I wanted to gather people's opinions, feelings, emotions and experiences. I wanted to understand these in some depth, and I recognised that I was speaking to key players and that I have privileged information available to me as a result of their insights and reflections on their experience of practice, whether that be directly in youth work or in other professions associated with working with young people.

That data from the interviews was rich in both breadth and depth and whilst I endeavoured to elicit consistent meaning, I recognise the data is ambiguous and open to interpretation (Kvale, 2007), when I immersed myself in the interview recordings I realised that in order to make greater sense of what was said I could have asked supplementary questions to interrogate and clarify further.

#### **3.5.6 Focus Group**

The final stage of data collection was the focus group, the combination of focus group, interview and survey is not unusual (Morgan, 1996). Clearly the significant difference between

the survey and the one-to-one interviews is that the data collected here is from a group interaction, as such it was important I acknowledge potential group dynamics and behaviour and the potential for bias (Stewart, 2021). Whilst all the participants in the focus group were known to me, and some to each other, I am confident that they did feel comfortable sharing their views and opinions, felt able to contradict and offer alternative perspectives. I facilitated a focus group, on Microsoft Teams to further consider the research questions and explore with participants, whom I knew better than those I conducted individual interviews with. This process enabled a group discussion and the opportunity for participants to explore their thinking and ideas based on other participants' contributions. The dynamic moved away from one-to-one engagement into group dialogue. I exploited already existing social networks that were known to me (Kamberelis and Dimitriadis, 2013 and Morgan and Scannell, 1998). The focus group took place online and whilst this was not my preferred choice it enabled a wider geographical reach. Morgan (2019) warns of the difficulty of interaction and the use of and observation of nonverbal communication, however all the participants were happy to have their camera on and so we could all see each other so this created an environment much like being together face to face in the same room and the conversation flowed easily, there was however appropriate use of silence which slowed the process down but allowed time for people to be present and reflect (Springett, 2022).

I ensured that I addressed ethical challenges presented by online focus groups and that the participants were happy to share their e-mail address and identity with the other participants, in advance, in order they could be invited into the MSTeams meeting and as Morgan (2019)

notes there needs to be ethical caution around privacy and confidentiality, it was evident that the participants were alone and in a private space but I did not specifically confirm this.

It was essential for me to carefully plan for not only the focus group itself and also to plan for the data to be collected (Morgan, 1997), and whilst I wanted there to be a somewhat free flowing conversation, I structured this discussion to gather data that would help address the remaining curiosities from the previous narratives and help me address the research question.

The questions we considered are:

- Your definition of youth work – what is it?
- The ideology of youth work – what is it for? for example: social change, social control, education, development (or something else?)
- How can we most effectively/meaningfully capture evidence of what we do?
- Can we / should we attempt to measure impact?

These questions are a development from the data collected in my own story, the literature, and the data from the questionnaires and the conversations, rather than a first stage of the process seeking to “reveal what needs to be known” (Morgan, 1997, p.45). I listened to the participants’ stories, but I also contributed to the discussion (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990).

I had a wealth of data from my own story, the literature reviewed and the narratives from the survey and interviews however I wanted to engage in a different way with people I knew better, in order to establish a more collective and dialogistic data set. A focus group allows “for the synergistic building up of data” (Gray, 2014, p. 469) the participants were in

conversation with each other and with myself as the researcher as understanding and opinion may emerge during the discussion. As I have taken a social constructionism perspective, I recognise that the participant in the focus group will, for example, create a version of 'youth work' based on their own experiences and come together to generate a collective view (Stewart *et al.*, 2007), this will be considered in analysis rather than presentation of findings. I concur with Freire (1972) that dialogue is the mechanism to creating a level of critical consciousness (Kamberelis and Dimitriadis, 2013) and recognise that I had an important role as a facilitator during the focus group (Morgan, 2019) whilst being mindful I did not influence the discussion, I did however find myself, on occasion, contributing to this discuss in a way that could have influenced the participants.

As people listen to each other's experiences and opinion this may trigger their own memories and they may reconstruct their own opinions on the topics being considered, I aimed that as each participant spoke and contributed their opinions this would promote ideas and contributions from other participants (Gray, 2012) and whilst this will create a rich and diverse data set it could be difficult to analyse, as such I use inductive and deductive coding (Walliman, 2001 and Saldaña, 2021) to organise and make sense of the data and look for patterns and themes. This is a challenge not only in analysis but also in the reporting of the data, I am keen to honour the voice of the participants and as such I will report individual quotations for the participants and not just attempt to report the sequence of the discussion (Morgan, 2010), not only to ensure credibility but also to honour the participants' words and story of their practice. In order to ensure I immersed myself fully in the data, the story, I took time to report the data before attempting any analysis, as Morgan (2010) suggests the reason is that



reporting of quotations is itself an important part of qualitative research, so I did not want to rush to analysis of the Narrative data sets before the findings had been authentically captured.

I recognise that the data collected during the focus group is limited as it is impossible to be sure how much of the participants' contributions were influenced by the other participants or indeed the group dynamics (Morgan, 1997). As Bloor (2001) recognised the successful outcome of the focus group is somewhat dependent on the group dynamics, recognising that the data collected, and its validity and use is dependent on the environment set and how comfortable participants feel to contribute their ideas, opinions and experience (Stewart *et al.*, 2007). I tried to ensure I created a safe and relaxed atmosphere and set the scene by reminding people about the research, the process, consent and gave the participants the opportunity to introduce themselves.

I am cautious with the claims I make from the analysis of the focus group data alone. The combination of data collection methods has provided a rich and complex data set in each of the Narratives that contains both qualitative and quantitative data (Morgan, 1996), no Narrative contains what might be described as primary, rather, each stage builds an emerging story to be analysed.

### **3.6 Analysis**

I used thematic analysis to draw out the themes from the different narratives that have been created as data set which are a record of people's experience and perceptions and this provided me with a straightforward and accessible process to generate codes (Braun and

Clarke, 2016). I used the approach outlined by Braun and Clarke (2022) as a way guiding me through the different stages and layers of analysis, I liked the idea of mapping the landscape for my data into coded themes, rather than trying to identify specific individual outcomes. I used my professional understanding and the data from previous Narratives to inform a method of coding, whilst recognising that I would be viewing the data through the lens of my own experience and understanding. The themes were something that I, as the researcher, perceived as important about the data in response to the research question (Braun and Clarke 2006). I will follow a modified process identified by Braun and Clarke (2006).

1. Initially I immersed myself in the data, reading and ordering the responses from the surveys and considering the transcription on the data from the interviews and focus group. I listened to the whole recording several times and then question by question to aid me in gaining an overview of the data as a whole and also each data item (Braun and Clarke, 2022) and then to reflect on their answers to the specific questions to establish how these compare to the literature and policy Narratives.
2. I generated my initial codes by considering the written data and the words in the audio – inductively across all of the data sets. This was a challenge as I perceived participants to be using different words to imply a similar sentiment and as such I have to report some implied data in the presentation of my findings rather than exact words used. I approached this coding in a latent way to identify implied, rather than specific, meaning (Braun and Clarke, 2022). This process enabled me to make sense of the stories in relation to my research questions and to create a narrative inquiry.
3. From this initial reading and coding I generated potential themes; the patterns that emerged across the data set led me as the researcher to the construction of themes

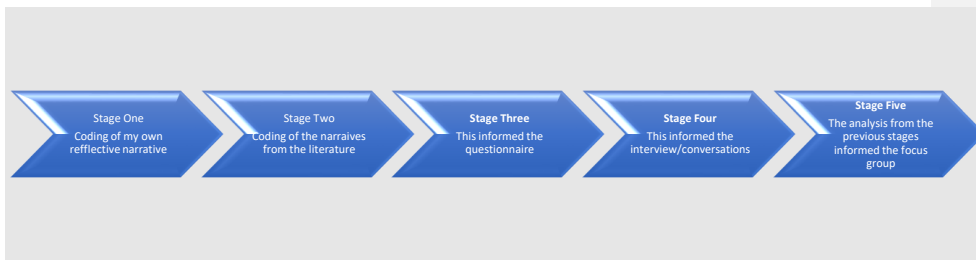
that would support analysis to address the research questions (Braun and Clarke, 2022).

4. As Braun and Clarke (2022) note, it is important to then review and organise the identified themes and during this stage I reviewed the data again and using the themes identified deductively, creating a thematic map by using colours to code the words, and this was consistent across the data sets and with the narrative inquiry.
5. I refined these themes and considered the story of the data, what is it telling me and how does this fit with the overall aim of the thesis and contribute to addressing the questions posed (Braun and Clarke, 2022). I then presented this as findings.
6. Finally, I used this themed and coded data for analysis of the findings, aiming to bring together the reflective process of the previous writing stages into the more formal analysis, using colour coded extracts of the data (Braun and Clarke, 2022).

The participants are telling me their story, I am the narrator, and this thesis is a narrative enquiry constructed as a result of the range of data collection tools. The participants are identified by a letter, because I chose not to use pseudonyms as this may lead a reader to make assumptions and misidentify a participant. The use of letters enabled me to identify participants in this way based on their contribution to the survey and then either the interview or focus group, I use a method of coloured text to identify and differentiate participants more easily within the narrative.

To identify themes in my data I used several processes of coding (Sheppard, 2004). My design is that of a linear sequential approach (Kennedy, 2018; Braun and Clarke, 2019a; Braun and Clarke, 2019b) this can be seen in Figure 9.

**Figure 9. Linear Sequence**



My review of literature and the coding of this data set informed the questions I asked of participants in the survey, which in turn informed the interview/conversation questions and finally the focus group was informed by the previous stages. It was somewhat of an iterative process as I moved between data collection and coding. I have used my own auto ethnographic reflections and practice experience to make sense of the data collected. In order to analyse the breadth and depth of data from different stages I used a process of coding to identify themes and patterns in the data. Medelyan (2020) considers both deductive and inductive approaches to coding. I initially coded my literature review data inductively, I immersed myself in that data with an open mind and looked for patterns and themes in the data, which came out of the literature, policy and participant data. I initially coded the reviews and then the participant data, which I hoped this gave a starting point which enabled me to identify themes, however I recognise that I have interpreted and made assumptions about the data collected. This was followed by a deductive coding process using the codes that emerged at the inductive stage, for example, voluntary participation, informal education and young person centred. I am mindful of bias, I have my views, these are recorded as a data set, but I felt it important to inductively code first to help overcome this. To further support this I used a process of abduction in which I was open to discovering new concepts that could not be

explained by what I thought I knew, or had experienced, I remained open to being surprised by the data (Kennedy, 2018) and how reality is created by the narratives (Braun and Clarke, 2019a and Braun and Clarke, 2019b).

### **3.7 Sample Strategy and Scope**

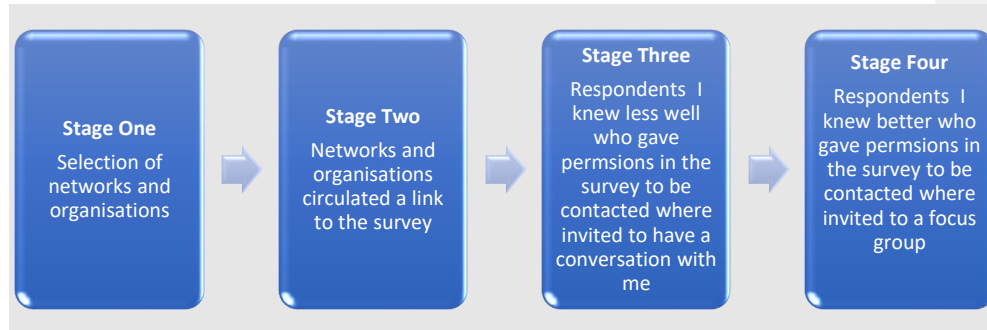
A criterion based purposive sampling strategy (Figure 10) was used (Gray, 2014) to ensure a range of perspectives and stories. The criteria and networks below have been chosen to give a specific geographical boundary, an area I have worked previously and as such I have knowledge of the key youth work organisations and I had contacts within these organisations, for accessing participants, working with young people in different roles and in different sectors. It is envisaged that this sample will give a wide range of views and experience in relation to delivering youth work, gathering evidence and measuring impact. I used a random purposive sampling strategy (Lunenburg and Irby, 2007) to ensure a range of perspectives were accessed but my participants were chosen by random, the only criteria was that they were not people in my immediate close network.

- The geographical area was Northwest England
- Existing Networks contacted: I Contacted ten and these included professional, academic and practice organisations that I will not name, in order to maintain anonymity.
- Professionals and Practitioners contacted via the above networks:
  - Youth workers, paid and voluntary
  - People working with young people
- Sectors covered in the sample:

- Voluntary Sector
- Statutory Sector
- Private Sector
- Education

The sample size is small due to utilising an ethnographic approach (Sheppard, 2004). I have my own account, I aimed to have approximately 20 people complete the survey and then to carry out interviews with practitioners, followed up by a focus group, along with the literature review of the 'stories' from the literature and policy. The literature I reviewed was that of the key authors in youth work and impact measurement and I selected significant policies that are deemed to have shaped youth work.

**Figure 10. Sampling Process**



I was careful at each stage to provide information, acquire consent and maintain anonymity.

### 3.8 Ethics

"The term 'research ethics' refers to the moral principles and actions guiding and shaping research from its inception through to completion" (Economic and Social Research Council

(ESRC), 2021) therefore I am mindful of ethical considerations at every stage of the process as I am as a youth worker, I sought to do no harm as either a researcher or practitioner. My primary consideration is the rights of the participants (Gray, 2014), I sought to do no harm, for the participants to make voluntary and informed consent and have the right to withdraw at any stage without having to give a reason (Frey, 2018; Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007; Silverman 2000), I further ensured no deception, and I preserved anonymity through presentation of the findings.

For each of the three stages of data collection, I asked for a consent form to be completed (see appendix 07 and appendix 10). A specific participant information sheet was also provided (see appendix 08 and appendix 11). Consent was informed by this and verbally during the interviews and in the focus group. Participants were briefed on the purpose and scope of the research and had the opportunity to ask questions and withdraw at any stage. The interviews and focus group were recorded, with consent, and the transcripts shared with the participants and held securely within MS Teams, protected with a password. Although I knew who the participants were at the interview and focus group stage, I ensured the transcripts were anonymised (Gray, 2014).

I consider my approach to ethics as a decision maker, I wish to make decisions as a moral agent (Banks *et al.*, 2012). I will be having conversations with adult practitioners for this research and the main ethical consideration is of consent, confidentiality and anonymity. I will need to pay attention also to how I ethically interpret the voice of the participants at each stage, I need to listen radically to notice and interpret the voice and not just hear the words, and I

need to be honest and faithful in my interpretation, in order to maintain the ethical integrity of this research (Clough and Nutbrown, 2002). Honesty is an essential ethical principle for me across all elements of research practice (Walliman, 2006). Taking an auto ethnographic approach there is caution in the reflective process to ensure no community, organisation or people are identified from within my own personal reflections of practice. It was my intention to demonstrate my points using images from project delivery and in order to protect identities I will describe the photographs and present these as narrative descriptions.

I have been a youth worker for many years in the Northwest of England, and I know a number of the youth workers from my professional contact with them over the years. It seemed unethical to target people I knew, to be respondents for my research therefore I asked key contacts in agencies to send the survey out on my behalf. From the list of those who responded I chose to invite those I did not know to engage with me in the conversations. The uptake from my initial request was low so I resent the request. Finally, in order to acquire an adequate dataset, I contacted others from the list and these were the people I knew more fully. Those who were engaged in the focus group did so voluntarily, however it was acknowledged that there was the potential for me to be viewed in a position of power, not only as the researcher but also as a youth worker with practice and academic experience, this having the potential for participants to feel they had little option to say no to the invitation, or to feel that they could hold an opinion that was contradictory to my own. I invited these people to engage in a focus group to be help over MS Teams. This presented the issue of confidentiality at the invitations stage. In order to gain consent to include participants in the MS Teams invitation, I gained individual consent to enable this to happen ethically. It was only



after I had gained specific consent that I included the individuals in the focus group invitation, as failure to do this could pose a risk to participants by a breach of anonymity and confidentiality (Byrne, 2016). I ensured that ground rules were considered and agreed at the start of the focus group (Gray, 2014).

I received ethical approval 13 June 2016 from the University of Cumbria Ethics Committee. As this study involved the stories of human subjects, a rigorous ethical approval process was undertaken, in liaison with my supervisors, the focus changed from my original intention and the changes were agreed with my supervisors as the studies I undertook were in line with the ethical approval. As a practitioner I also follow an ethical code of practice.

### **3.9 Summary**

I am using interpretivist paradigm, ontology, and epistemology, this aligns with social constructionism. I am creating a narrative enquiry and using methods that help elicit data from participants enabling me to write the collective story. It also fits with my axiological position and values, both personal and professional, I believe in the dialogic, person centred approach that youth work takes and how the voices of participants are essential.

The narratives that follow honour these voices and their contributions. I share my own story before representing the voices in the literature about the history of youth work, youth work ideology and measuring impact, before hearing specifically from research participants who engaged in the survey, the interviews, and the focus group.

Are you sitting comfortably? Well, let the story begin....

#### Chapter Four: Narrative One: My story of practice, a collection of critical reflections

My auto-ethnographic account was informed by a process of critical reflection on my practice. I used the approach adopted by Rolfe, *et al* (2001) by systematically considering 'what' 'so what' then 'now what' in relation to the individual vignettes I selected to include in this thesis. I had many examples that could have been chosen, but the ones that 'made the cut' were those that evoked the strongest emotions and offered a range of examples of youth work practice, and the interaction with measurement and recording impact. It is important to acknowledge that given the nature of this reflection, I am relaying very much on my memory. I have also considered if I actually remember specific reality, or do I remember the stories of reality told at the time of the lived experience. Any memory of events is open to inaccuracy and interpretation and likely selective (Keightley, 2009). I am however confident that these critical reflections authentically represent what I am seeking to communicate, even if I cannot absolutely confirm their accuracy.

Critical Reflection	Memory	Evidence
One: The flip flop brigade	From several conversation over the years in practice, comments made and the perception of youth work and youth workers	No specific evidence beyond my own memory and interpretation
Two: European and Charitable Funding	I believe I have a reliable memory of the requirements of the two funders but this is tempered by my interpretation.	Project reports are led in my own archive of my practice but the specific detail and project records are likely destroyed.
Three: Project Photographs	I remember 2 photographs, as described, or do I? I can't be certain if I remember seeing photographs or hearing stories and	Possibly held in a waterproof box in the cellar of the headquarters of the organisation, however now likely destroyed

	anecdotes that are represented in the description presented	
Four: Trusted relationship in a multi-agency setting	The interpretation on the role and importance of the youth worker and the specific details relay on my memory and interpretation, but also in the narratives of those involved, in particular the youth worker, the one how would be able to offer the most accurate interpretation is however the young person, there details are not known now	Maybe the detail will be in confidential case notes but not likely the significance of the youth workers engagement and relationship
Five: A climbing project	I am relaying on my memory for the interpretation of the conversation and associated response, I am sure the climbing project happened, I remember being this but the rest in nuanced and subjective	Possibly archived records of the funding and sessions sheets, maybe risk assessment but nothing that specifically captures the conversation I had.
Six: Community project and associated challenges	The narrative exists in my memory and the reaction perhaps in the memory of others.	There could be a formal record of meetings or a service level agreement, but I would not be sure, but there will be no evidence of shared data as this was not possible.
Seven: Closure of a service	Factual details and data may exist but the nuance and interpretation rely on my memory which is at best subjective.	There will be formal record of the process of closure and redundancy in minutes of meeting and council papers

The memory work was somewhat mediated as I drew on my own memory support in some instances by evident that exists, such a photographs, electronic notes and documents available in the public domain as well as withing the privacy help project documents and case notes, for the purpose of this reflective process I relied on my memory using Kolb's model of reflection (Kolb, 1984), I has a direct and concrete experience which enable me to argue skills and knowledge but most significantly

provoked feelings, and it was these feeling which I re-experienced during the reflection for this thesis which enabled by to distinguish which are the most relevant vignettes. I was reflecting on my learning through experience rather than other people's abstract ideas and interpretations, the interpretations, and my memories are my own, any accurate to me and offered the opportunity to be reflexive and consider and re consider my own view, values and beliefs about youth work and impact. What is offered is offered is the truth as I know and remember, not an absolute and provable truth but one that is honest and personal.

When I started this PhD, I felt pretty confident with a so-called definition of youth work, I had completed a postgraduate qualification in Community and Youth work and been a practitioner for over 30 years, so I decided I would jot this down as my starting point. Some four years later I arrived at some understanding and ultimately a working definition for this thesis.

***'Youth work is an empowering, informal, person centred process, it is anti-oppressive, voluntary and participative, and the prime concern is the wellbeing and development of young people alongside social change'***

I have worked with young people in a variety of settings over three decades. As a young person I did not access youth work provision, I took part in sports. Reflecting as an adult, I recognise the personal impact of the lack of interaction with youth work. I was encouraged by coaches to focus on the sporting activity and achievement rather than peer interaction, personal and social development, or informal learning in relation to issues faced by young people. As such whilst I became a good hockey player, I had personal and emotional needs that were left unaddressed as a result of the lack of a relationship with a trusted adult.

I had always wanted to work with young people, and I initially did this as a PE teacher. From a young age, I had a strong belief in social justice and equality, and I felt that becoming a teacher was the only option. However, from my own experience of school and formal education I knew that becoming a teacher was not the way I wanted to work but I was not aware of any other job or profession relating to my area of interest. I considered that more informal approaches to working with young people were done by individuals in their spare time, on a voluntary basis, as I had done a scout leader.

Prior to becoming a qualified Youth and Community Worker I had a number of opportunities to work voluntarily, in different ways, with young people in the uniformed sector, voluntary youth work sector and with young people in the outdoors, which led to my interest in informal education and social change through voluntary relationships.

Through my voluntary work and interest in outdoor education I found my way to a professional qualification in Youth and Community Work, and the course of my career was set. I am particularly interested to consider, in this thesis, the notion that youth work exists as a distinct profession with recognised and distinctive elements, that it can be delivered in many settings, including in a multi-disciplinary environment. Also, to consider whether if the impact of youth work can be measured, and if so, should it be measured? If an evidence base for practice can be established, what would this consist of? The challenge is to be congruent with the values of the profession, and consider what is the impact of youth work, and what is an appropriate tool with which to measure it and gather evidence?

This narrative tells a snapshot of my own professional practice through my consideration of seven naturally occurring and relevant critical reflections, over several years of my practice as a youth worker and youth work manager.

#### **4.1 Critical Reflection One:**

Youth workers have been described anecdotally as, 'the flip-flop and shorts brigade' and that all they do is to take young people out for a 'jolly'. My experience over 30 years as a youth work volunteer, practitioner and manager has shown me through my own observations that it has regularly been the case that people from other professions such as social workers, teachers, police officers, and pupil welfare officers, eventually observe the impact of youth work demonstrated through changes in a young person's behaviour and engagement, the young people present what is perceived as less problematic behaviour such as not attending school or committing crimes and more perceived positive behaviours for example completing school work and displaying less aggressive attitudes. This is often associated with a deficit view, that young people are somehow deficient or in need. For example, in the organisation I worked for statistics demonstrated that success has been noted when fewer young people become first time entrants into the criminal justice system, a reduction in teenage pregnancy, a reduction of young people in the care system, a reduction in drug and alcohol use. Whilst there is no doubt that these are indeed potentially positive outcomes for young people and that our work should be about supporting young people to be safe and make informed decisions about their lives, it does assume a deficit approach. A more asset-based measurement of impact could involve the young person not only at the centre of the process but with the measurement tool as part of the youth work process, supporting young people

to capture their learning, development, and transferable skills. How we truly capture the influence of work is a challenge for this thesis. This reflection demonstrates the need for a way to capture the story of impact and the need for an asset-based way of measuring outcomes.

#### **4.2 Critical Reflection Two:**

A specific point of reference for this paper relates to a project I managed in the voluntary sector, which attracted two sources of funding with very different monitoring criteria. One source of funding was European funding matched with a charitable grant, there were vastly different expectations between the funders regarding how the project and the 'spend' needed to be evaluated and recorded.

The European funder had an interest in knowing exactly how the money was spent, they wanted to know who attended in relation to identity categories such as gender and race, whilst the other organisation that provided the grant was interested in the story and impact on the young people and volunteers involved.

The Project attracted significant funding and the 'spend' for one of the funders had to be accounted for and justified and an evidence base needed to be established. I had fifteen lever arch files of statistical data for one funder that 'accounted for' the 'spend' and five, four-page annual reports describing events and outputs of the project, for the other funder. The latter included photographs, participant quotes and was very much 'the story of the project and people's involvement'. The quantitative data was collected by one individual and involved little engagement with participants, it was sent to the funder, filed away and kept as 'proof' for fifteen years, in fireproof boxes in the cellar of the organisation's headquarters. The

qualitative data in the reports was collected in collaboration with the participants. The participants' contributions and stories were vital as it was these that portrayed the human impact of the project. These contributions and stories were shared and celebrated with pride, within the communities and with funders.

Whilst reflecting on this project I recognised that there was quantitative data in order to account for the money spent and the outputs achieved and qualitative data to tell the story of the project. Arguably both are critical but despite the volume and nature of data provided neither approach had captured the impact of the project on the lives of the young people involved and their communities. This realisation, in part, has motivated me to undertake this doctoral research, both funders required information in order to demonstrate some measure of how much was spent, there is however a clear misaligned understanding of what is required to understand the impact on the lives of young people and not simply justify and account for the spend.

#### **4.3 Critical Reflection Three:**

Managing the project reflected on in critical reflection two was a challenge, I was operating in a divided community, and I was challenged to build trusted relationships with volunteer youth workers and members of communities that were in conflict with one another. I was privileged to be invited into the communities to hear the stories of their lived reality, that is how people are experiencing the reality of their lives, not just what they do and take part in, but how they think and feel. The project was developed from these perspectives. I had to tread a careful



and respectful path to ensure I was not seen to be colluding with what was perceived as people on 'different sides'; I had to ensure I honoured the anonymity of people's stories and not share the essence of these too soon and without their consent, similar to the ethical process for this research. I listened and listened some more and eventually we were able to create space for people to come together and start dialogue: to tell their stories and build bridges and alliances.

Whilst it was possible to record this process with dates and names of people I met with, it is only in the dialogue that the real impact of the interventions can be noted. The honesty, hopes, dreams, fears, and vulnerability shared is not for public consumption, but it is here that the impact of trusting relationships can be seen. I cannot 'prove' this, but I feel confidently assured that if the people with whom I was conversing with had been asked to consent to their stories being recorded and shared, then what they said would have been different.

From these conversations and from those I had with volunteers and people in the communities I was able to bring together a committee of people from the different areas to plan projects for the young people in their own locality. These projects initially involved engagement in the different individual communities and over time as trust between people and my courage grew, we started to bring people together, firstly through activities and building towards a more youth work process of voluntary engagement, informal education, and anti-oppressive practice. My personal impact for the project overall is demonstrated by two photographs, one taken at the beginning of bringing together the young people and one

some years later at the end of the project. Sadly, I do not have consent to share these images so I will describe them.

#### ***4.3.1 Image one***

This was a photograph of approximately 40 young people from five different communities from across one town. The communities were different in relation to geography and identity, what united these young people was poverty and a desire to bring about positive change and greater safety in their communities, in order to establish greater social justice for their town.

The young people stood with their peers, friends and workers from their own community, with a look of tension and suspicion on their faces. The young people were dressed and presented very differently, some in traditional religious dress and others in clothing identified with different youth cultures, hair styles and different make up. Most significantly there was a clear distance between the groups of young people.

#### ***4.3.2 Image Two***

Approximately the same 40 young people from the same five different communities. The communities remain different in relation to geography and identity, united still in poverty and a desire for positive change and greater safety in their communities and greater social justice for their town.

The young people stood with their peers and friends with their workers from their town, there was a look of relaxation and hope on the faces of the young people and staff. The young people were still dressed and presented very differently, some in traditional religious dress and others in clothing identified with different youth cultures, hair styles and different make up. Most significantly there was no differentiation or distance between the groups of young people, new friendships and alliances had been formed and a common purpose achieved.

There are many other quantifiable outcomes for this project but for me these images communicate a powerful message, an impact measurement is open to interpretation, to provide robust evidence of impact these images would need to be accompanied by the stories reflecting personal experience.

#### **4.4 Critical Reflection Four:**

I worked in the voluntary and statutory sector for a number of years in a multi-agency setting with young people, who were perceived as vulnerable or at risk in some way by professionals in their lives, these teams included youth workers. As youth workers we perceived this to be a very deficit and narrow view of the young people who had many assets and coping mechanisms, which were disregarded in the name of safeguarding. Many of the young people were capable of making decisions to protect themselves, but services were intent on disempowering them and exerting control over their lives by dictating what was deemed a positive outcome for them, for example a number of GCSEs or a job and what was problematic or unacceptable behaviour, such as not going to school. The challenge for youth workers was

to attempt to not be identified with this oppressive and controlling approach, favouring empowerment and dialogue, with support. We worked alongside police personnel, teachers and others working in a school environment, social workers, pupil welfare officers, NHS staff, drug and alcohol services, sports staff and outdoor educators, in an attempt to create a young person centred approach to working with young people. It was important to work in ways with the young people to support them in any challenges they were experiencing but also to provide positive activities to enable them to engage with their peer group, offering informal education through the youth work process with a trusted adult.

One specific example is of a youth worker engaging, over time, with a young person and developing a positive and trusting relationship. On an occasion when the young person was distressed, in some danger and needing a multi-agency response to protect them, the youth worker found it impossible to secure a young person centred response, that is when the young person's situation and choice is at the centre of the process. The young person did not engage with any person perceived to be in authority and would only communicate with the youth worker with whom they had a trusted relationship. It was a complex situation, and a multiagency response did provide a safe outcome for the young person. On that occasion the relationship with the youth workers and the team was damaged and took time to repair. I felt that it was difficult to identify the impact of the youth work response in this situation let alone measure and document it in some way. It is only in the story of the young person and the youth worker that any authentic influence could be noted, ultimately the youth worker's story was from practice. A story of how a youth worker was the only professional, indeed the only

adult, that the young person would engage with because of their approach. The youth worker was keen to ensure, that whilst they protected the welfare of young person, they facilitated an approach that enabled the young person to have agency in their decision making and that their voice was heard and their wishes considered. Reenforcing, by position, that the impact of youth work is unique to individual situations and the importance of the young person's story.

#### **4.5 Critical Reflection Five:**

I had the privilege of working with a young person who was having a particularly difficult time. They had been questioned by many individuals/authorities regarding what was happening in their lives and how things were at home, school, with siblings, and friends. They struggled to answer and seemed to have little context or voice. I viewed them as one of the saddest people I had ever known. One day, they were stood in their usual spot, by the door of the youth centre, on the margins, watching, I approached them despite knowing how uncomfortable this was for them, and I tried a different question, I simply asked 'what do you like doing?' I was staggered by the response; they did not shuffle from one foot to the other staring at their shoes, then with their usual answer 'dunno', they looked up at me, stood tall and stated clearly that they liked climbing. They looked excited when I said, 'well let's sort some climbing out then for you'. A climbing project was promptly organised, and they engaged weekly and made a real commitment, opened up to youth workers and started to engage in other provision, albeit timidly at first. Life outside the youth work setting stayed much the same and the challenges continued but now this young person had a space for themselves, a safe space in

which to have fun, talk, learn and just be away from the chaos of their lives. I was asked to measure the outcomes from the climbing project to account for the funding, all I needed to document was the number of sessions held, the number of young people in attendance and the youth worker's mileage. The true impact of the project remains undocumented, perhaps even unknown as it exists only in the story of the young person, and my story as an interpretation of what I observed. This thesis is in part to give testimony to what I have witnessed, seen and heard from my privileged position as a youth worker.

Working with this young person encouraged me to consider, what is for me one of the fundamental principles of youth work: for young people to access a relationship with a trusted adult, on their own terms. This young person accessed the relationship with youth workers in a voluntary capacity, by attending the youth centre and engaging in a way that was comfortable for them. Through the climbing project they developed close relationships with the youth workers and discussed more of their personal life, experiences, and fears. Whose agenda are we working to? I am not convinced that it was the young person's, they could only access the centre at certain times and the climbing project, but access to those workers was only once a week for a limited number of weeks, due to funding. I feel it is safe to say that the experiences and interrogations of the young person proved positive and their reframed understanding of what was on offer was acceptable to them.

#### **4.6 Critical Reflection Six:**

I have worked in and managed two multi-disciplinary teams in a local authority that have included Youth Workers, Connexions Personal Advisors, drug and alcohol workers, PCSOs and

young care workers and there have been many tensions between professional approaches. I was privileged to work with a team of paid full time and part time workers and volunteers from the community. I managed a team of workers, employed by a local authority, and we worked with volunteers and community members. The paid staff, and myself in particular were observed with suspicion by the community and suspected of being motivated by money, numbers and targets. The community volunteers perceived that they were working with young people, putting their needs first and that they 'knew best' about what young people needed and wanted. I spent the first two years in the job role building relationships with people in the community, drinking tea and listening to their stories and concerns, this informed how I wanted to carry out my data collection for this research. We established a level of trust and started sharing some resources and working together. The process worked well.... for about four weeks. The community group used our centre, and we provided paid staff to support Friday evening provision; we were in dialogue about what training and support was needed and a positive working relationship was being built. This was shattered when the end of the month came and there was the issue of 'who recorded the data', was it the voluntary sector group, as evidence for their funder, or was it the local authority as a record for a service with funds from the public purse. This conversation did not go well: I was accused (with a myriad of swear words) of not caring about the young people, the community or the people that lived there, I was not interested in positive social change or empowerment and all I cared about was numbers to make me look good. I received a phone call from the community leader informing me that 'hell would freeze over before I got her figures'... well that was the gist of her feelings. Indignantly I expressed how wrong she was. I did care. I did want to hold dear to my youth work principles. However, upon reflection I was horrified to

realise she was right, well almost, the main priority of my work had become data, the number of young people who attended our provision and the demographic in relation to certain indicators. The authority wanted us to be working with young people perceived as at risk or likely to be a 'nuisance' but this is a focus on the young person as deficit, it is a reactive approach rather than seeking to work in protective and preventative ways. My service had become about keeping young people off the streets and supporting them to conform to the expectations of adult decision makers and societal norms.

#### **4.7 Critical Reflection Seven:**

One of the most sustained and challenging periods of my professional career occurred in 2011 and 2012 during a period of redundancy and restructure and ultimately the closure of a service. Initially I managed a large multi-disciplinary team delivering targeted and universal services and as a result of austerity I witnessed, and worse, presided over, the demise of this service. Whilst this was a period of austerity and cuts to a range of services and a contributory factor to the demise of the youth service was that we could not 'prove' the 'worth' of the service. We had a huge number of statistics regarding the amount of young people accessing the services and provision. We knew how many young people were 'case worked', we knew their age, gender, ethnicity and for a number we had statistics about their sexuality, care experience, criminal activity, sexual relationships, and risks. We could acquire data about anti-social behaviour in certain wards at certain times and could make a 'guess' as to its relationship to our provision. Data was available regarding a number of young teenagers becoming pregnant, how many young people were excluded from school, how many young people were in the care or/and criminal justice system. However, there was no information to



'join the dots' that identified the true impact of youth work. There was no evidence that it was young person centred or that it demonstrated the influence of youth work on the young person's life. There were no stories and no person with perceived power who seemed interested in the personal impact. Funders interest was focused on the data, statistics, and accounting for the public purse money. Do not get me wrong, some people, with individual powers, did care about the young people, rather, it was the system of accountability that I perceived to be inflexible. Eventually, the youth service, as I had known it, closed. I moved on to a new role, managing a building and commissioning services to deliver work with young people from said building: the data that I collected related to the number of groups, activities, number of young people and general demographic data. I was no longer a youth worker or a youth service manager. I was a building manager, a data manager and I felt that I had sold out. I lasted two months in that role. I had been made redundant three times and was always given a different job. I always fought to stay, and in the end as I sat in my office, in a very 'swish' purpose built 'empty' youth centre, without a second thought, or a job to go to, I e-mailed my resignation with both relief and regret. Two months later I drove away from youth work and somehow have always felt I left a little part of my professional ethics behind. I perceived that I had stopped advocating for youth work and as such I had inevitably stopped advocating for young people, I had not sold my youth work soul, but I had lost it. This is a feeling that has endured when considering this stage of my career.

#### **4.8 Reflection**

As I reflect upon the seven critical reflections, the questions that remain in my mind are: Are we defining, defending or re-inventing Youth Work? Is it time to reclaim our more radical and

political roots and to 're-wild' youth work rather than seeking to conform to a neoliberal agenda? Do we need to change what we do to survive? Or do we hold steadfast to our principles and ethics and cease to exist? Perhaps we find a new language and a way of demonstrating our impact and influence so that neither extreme is necessary and so that funders, government and most importantly Young People can see the 'journey'. How do we better describe a profession that is about justice, emancipation, and liberation? How do we truly engage with Young People in this dialogue and ensure that they are at the centre of the future? How do we know what Young People actually want? Are we attempting to measure the immeasurable? These questions are addressed through the narrative.

The specific questions, amended through the whole data collection process, I address in the discussion are:

1. What is youth work'?
2. What is impact, in relation to youth work?
3. Should impact be measured in an ethical way congruent with the principles of youth work?
4. How can we measure the impact of youth work?

I have surveyed the landscape of my youth experience with this PhD using a Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis (Pettinger, 2012). I have used a SWOT analysis during service and team reviews, in practice, and have found it to be a useful tool which has translated well to considering my own position writing this thesis.

**Table 2. Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities and Threats Analysis**

<u><b>Strengths</b></u>	<u><b>Weaknesses</b></u>
<p>Length of experience.</p> <p>Variety of experience: social services, health service, uniformed sector, voluntary sector, local authority, education.</p> <p>Roles: volunteer, part time paid, full time paid, management (project and personnel), supervision, teaching.</p> <p>Persistence.</p> <p>One local geographical area - depth of knowledge.</p>	<p>Lack of academic experience.</p> <p>Dyslexia.</p> <p>One local geographical area.</p> <p>Attention to detail.</p> <p>Procrastinating when I don't understand, rather than seeking clarity.</p>
<u><b>Threats</b></u>	<u><b>Opportunities</b></u>
<p>Rapidly changing context and professional environment.</p> <p>Running out of time.</p> <p>Lack of participants for conversations.</p> <p>Lack of understanding of the PhD process and expectations and methodology.</p>	<p>Support available through the disability support services.</p> <p>Access to networks and professional contacts.</p> <p>Experience and professional knowledge of Supervisors in Youth Work and impact measurement.</p>

I have considered my own experience and started to address the research questions but only from my own perspective. What follows are a number of narrative accounts based on my

reviewing of the literature in order to establish a clearer understanding of 'youth work' and of impact, in relation to youth work, considering if impact can be measured in ethical ways congruent with young work before I attempt to answer the research questions in collaboration with participants to ultimately address how can we measure the impact of youth work. As indicated in my methodology, as youth work and the impact of youth work are socially constructed, I now turn to other people's accounts of what it is and could be.

It was important that the details of this section were sanitised and limited before release into the public domain (Grbich, 2013) in order to protect anonymity, acknowledging that if a person was known to me at the time of these reflections, they could be aware of what I was referring to.

## **Chapter Five: Narrative Two: A story about the history, politics and policy of Youth Work**

Previously, during narrative one, I reviewed my practitioner experience through a series of critical reflections, those moments in time when I reflected on events that have significantly shaped my thinking, understanding and practice and in a variety of ways contributed to a consideration of the questions posed. What is presented in this narrative are reflections on a series of critical incidents in the history of youth work, that through my experience and academic studies I believe have shaped the development of the profession and mode of delivery. The reflections presented here create a body of evidence and a narrative of policy, politics and history, in line with the methodology. It was particularly important in this consideration of history to present this as a chronology rather than analysis. Creswell (2018) I reviewed policy documents, reports and academic texts to document a history of youth work, the literature reviewed was to present a chronological (Murray, 2003) narrative rather than offering analysis.

This series of reflections aids understanding regarding the profession having undergone many changes and having experienced external influence from policy, throughout its history regarding how youth work has been defined and changed and how measurement and impact are considered at different times. It is necessary to recognise that throughout history it has been what can be considered ordinary people who have responded to perceived needs to create practice and institutions that not only impact at a local level but can lead to a better world (Gilchrist et al., 2003). The stories also offer some reassurance that the profession is robust, can change, can adapt and can survive, whilst staying true to the fundamental principles, which are considered in Narrative Three: The story of youth work. This historical

and political story will be analysed together with the rest of the stories that form the data set, as part of data analysis.

These significant moments in time will be focused on three key 'eras', centred around the Albemarle Report, which itself will form one of the critical reflections. These eras mark times of great change in the nature and narrative surrounding youth work and take account of the significant reports and policy that have impacted on developments.

- Era One: Pre Albemarle Report Era - early 1800s to late 1950s
- Era Two: Albemarle Report Era - late 1950s to 1970s
- Era Three: Post Albemarle Report Era – 1980s to 2020

This narrative will conclude with a history, politics and policy timeline that will provide a concise summary and analysis since 1939.

## **5.1 Era One**

### ***5.1.1 Critical Reflection One - Early Work with Young Women and Young Men***

I consider that youth work started to emerge from the initiation of the Girls' Clubs, as this is more likely to be more familiar to the ethical standing of youth work and as Nicholls (1997), suggests, it is to the opening of the first Girls Club in 1834, that youth work can be traced. Emerging from the Sunday school movement Jeffs and Spence (2011, p.2) recognised that the most deprived neighbourhoods offered voluntary association, some informal education, leisure activities and were concerned for the welfare of the young people attending.

The initiation of work with young women was closely followed by the establishment of work with young men when, in 1844, the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) was established and considered as a significant point in the history of the profession. Work delivered separately with young men and young women remains a feature of youth work. Smith (2013) notes it is considered that the YMCA could have indeed been the first youth organisation dedicated to work with young people. The work of the YMCA could be categorised as youth work as the organisation was focused on the needs of the young men and offered opportunities to support each other. This aligns with the National Youth Agency's values statement, what is Youth Work (2021a) and the National Youth Agency's Code of Ethics (2004) as the YMCA provided an opportunity to work together to build relationships and provide opportunities for young people to belong and contribute, supported by the YMCA values statement (YMCA, Our Vision and Values). Over time the organisation developed and changed in response to identified needs, and by 1848 their work was aimed at not only considering the spiritual wellbeing of the members but also their mental development. Although the essence of youth work as, generally perceived today, was also not present during this development as the organisation was adult led, evangelical and was aiming to ensure social control and personal development, rather than social change, this is not congruent with my definition, whilst I do acknowledge that there are parallels.

As the era one developed other organisations emerged, these are still evident today. In 1854 the Boys' Brigade (The Boys Brigade, Our History, 2021) was established; whilst the Boys Brigade is a movement for young people, run by volunteers, to provide activities for young

people to learn, there was some concern about the organisation's aims, which focused on "drill, evangelicalism and regimentation" (Smith, 2013).

The Scout movement (Scouts, Our History, 2021) was established in 1908 by Robert Baden-Powell, initially for young men to learn new skills together and in 1909 the Guides for young women was initiated, providing opportunities for the empowerment of girls. Both the Scouts and Guides are uniformed organisations with a somewhat formal curriculum, however, there are the elements of voluntary participation, association and learning through adventure.

These organisations brought young people together for adventure, discipline, evangelism and the opportunity to learn and develop, pre decided and delivered by adults and there was a separation of work for young men and young women and was considered to be the early roots of youth work. The work delivery then and now is valuable work with young people, but it is not youth work as I know and define it.

Many uniformed youth organisations continue to deliver work with young people, this is consistent with my definition and understanding of youth work.

What was critical about this era was its establishment of the value of investing time into young people through adventure, discipline, and evangelism. Providing opportunities for young people to learn and develop was then seen as valid and established the early roots of youth work. The religious connotation when working with young people and the segregation of



young women and men would not, however be recognisable in youth work today as custom and practice. Separate provision can be made available and delivered to young people from across the spectrum of gender and youth work can be delivered by faith-based organisations, but the focus and impact must be young person centred.

### **5.1.2 Critical Reflection Two - The recognition of youth work**

It is noted that “the first official recognition of the need for youth work came in 1918, when a Home Office committee issued a report advising local authorities to take steps to co-ordinate youth work in their areas” (Central Office of Information, 1974 p. 1). This can be considered as the start of youth work being recognised as a professional and legitimate process for working with young people.

It was in the 1920s that the term ‘youth work’ actually emerged, and it was in the title of a publication in 1931, *Methods in Youth Work* (Walkey *et al.*, 1931 - in Alldred *et al.*, 2018). This publication not only mentioned the actual term youth work but also discusses youth work as I recognise it and in line with my definition. This includes working with groups of young people, listening to their needs and concerns, responding to their needs and to their ideas for activities. There is also a note of caution that youth work leadership cannot be standardised and that youth workers must be ‘attractive’ in their approach in order to ensure that young people wish to engage in a voluntary capacity. This is significant as it is the first point in history where the process of youth work and relationships in youth work are assigned importance. My experience has shown me that this is essential in order to ensure that young people will wish to engage voluntarily and form trusting relationships with ‘friendly professionals’.

It is noted that for impact youth work to be captured then workers should not rely on a short-term view, as the impact of the work may only occur long term (Aldred *et al.*, 2018). It is interesting to understand the potential time frame required to measure impact, which then raises the question as to how the impact may be evidenced. Walkey (1931) thought of youth work as long term, which holds warnings today for measuring impact in the short term and how a method can be created to measure the impact on a young person's journey over time.

The inception of the Youth Service in England was in 1939. With the threat of war, youth services for young people started to be organised in order to foster young people's fitness and in 1939 this was recognised in the publication of 'In the Service of Youth Circular' (Circular 1486, 1939). This is not congruent with what I considered regarding my working definition of youth work. This agenda is manipulative and is not young person centred, or concerned with anti-oppressive practice, this is not surprising as the reality is that young men, not young women were potentially being prepared for war. Although, it does suggest association with peers, empowerment, and voluntary participation. This seminal document (Wylie, 2011, p.92) encouraged local authorities to co-ordinate local provision ahead of the Youth Service, after the war publication in 1943 and the 1944 Education Act.

During the early 1940's a number of circulars and pamphlets were produced by the Board of Education as the youth service was established and developed Board of Education (1940a); Board of Education (1940b); Board of Education (1941); Board of Education (1942); Board of

Education (1943a); Board of Education (1943b)). These circulars and pamphlets laid the foundation from which the youth service grew.

During a later, significant period of change government departments produced a number of reports and guidance to support developments and change:

- The Department of Education and Science: Inspectorate of Schools (1960) and the Albemarle report, referred to in the narrative, saw an influx of investment in the youth service.
- The Department of Education and Science (1987) which supported the development of open youth work through activity, supporting personal and social development.
- The Department of Education and Science: Inspectorate of Schools (1988), supported youth workers to develop interagency working from a safeguarding perspective.
- The Department of Education and Science: Inspectorate of Schools (1990) focused on work with the most vulnerable young people and their engagement with youth services.
- The Department for Education and Employment (1998) and the implication that schools were funded at the expense of youth services. Department for Education (2011) demonstrates that youth work is an effective way for working with young people in relation to their development, also to promote debate between those with a vested interest in youth work, including policy makers and a range of practitioners working with young people.
- The Department for Education (2012) which make clear the role and responsibility of local authorities in the delivery of youth work as well as activities and services for young people.

During this period two Acts of parliament were passed that have a significant role in the development of youth work, the Education Act 1996 which advocated for the importance of leisure time activities and the link to wellbeing and the Education and Inspections Act 2006 which further endorsed the link between activity, wellbeing and development.

This was a period of great change that elevated the significance of youth work but with very clear, pre-determined ideas of what 'impact' was desired, moving away from the young person being central in their own lives and youth work process and determining their own definition of desired impact, either in a planned way or identified through retrospective reflection.

#### ***5.1.3 Key points from era one:***

This era saw the inception of a wide range of services for young people, mainly delivered by volunteers providing opportunities for young people to lead and develop skills together. However, these services were mostly aimed at social control rather than social change. The organisations and the delivery of the work were adult led and evangelical in both foundation and intent. Despite the limitation, these services served as the bedrock for the establishment of a more liberal youth service and the development of youth work, this developing narrative will emerge as the reader considers the following eras.

## **5.2 Era Two**

### ***5.2.1 Critical Reflection Three - The Albemarle Report***

In 1958 the then Minister of Education initiated a committee, recognising that whilst the service was being delivered by exceptional and dedicated workers it was “dying on its feet” (Smith and Doyle, 2002 P.1). The committee was to be chaired by the Countess of Albemarle, to consider how the youth service in England could support and engage young people more effectively; following a change in social and industrial conditions and general trends in education, to identify priorities and to advise how best value for money could be achieved (Muirhead, 2020).

The report of this committee, predictably named the Albemarle Report, was published in 1960. This became a landmark report, changing what was considered youth work from thereon. The report initiated a period of increased funding and therefore development of services and venues as well as professionalisation of the workforce. The work developed was young person centred, and engagement was voluntary. The young people engaged in activities chosen and designed by them and that enabled them to associate with their peers. The approach was flexible, yet offered the opportunity for social education and learning, delivered informally (Slovenko and Thompson, 2016). The principled approach to the work endures even if the funding for delivery and training does not. This reflects the key aspects of my own definition of youth work.

During this period, as a result of the Albemarle Report, there was an influx of funding for the creation of large-scale youth provision (Ewen, 1975). What is considered universal, open access youth work grew and developed during the period along with in addition of 3300 youth centres in England over the following ten years (Ritchie and Ord, 2017) and the decades

following continued to see the delivery of youth work as open access, through youth centres in communities, recognising that not every community and young person will require the same approach (Coussée, 2009, p.128). The focus was on the provision provided at the time, rather than the specific impact of the work, or the impact it may specifically have on the lives of young people.

The Albemarle Report recognised that there was not only a lack of venues but also a lack of youth leadership, this initiated training for youth workers and so started the development of youth work as a profession (Clements, 2019). Following on from the Albemarle Report, in 1961, the Joint Negotiating Committee (JNC) was developed and salary scales and the JNC qualification were introduced, to recognise people as qualified youth workers (Holmes, 2008). This introduction was significant in establishing the professionalism of youth workers and the unique nature of youth work. It was assumed at this time that youth work was of benefit and there was little focus on gathering evidence of its impact, as is contemporary practice. However, the challenge then, as now, related to ethically evidencing the impact of such a diverse profession without 'getting in the way' of the young person centred trusted engagement (Muirhead, 2020).

#### ***5.2.2 Critical Reflection Four - Milson, Fairbairn and Thompson Reports***

In 1969, the Youth Service Development Council (YSDC) initiated two sub-committees to consider, firstly, the relationship between the Youth Service, Schools and formal education and secondly, the Youth Service relationship with the wider community and adults (Short, 1969). These committees were chaired by Mr. Andrew Fairbairn and Dr. Fred Milson

respectively. There was some tension between these committees and the situation of a Youth Service, nevertheless, the Milson-Fairbairn Report was produced in 1969, and was considered to be somewhat contradictory. The report established further evidence that yet more extensive training for youth workers was needed, together with a greater emphasis on Youth and Community Work (Smith, 2003). The emphasis of the report was that of social education, and it recognised the contribution that young people made in their own peer groups, community, society and in a political sense. They were recipients of a service provided by adults but were also the creators of provision, community and of their own destiny. The reports, mentioned above, offered further professionalisation and formalisation of youth work. This raised the question regarding whether youth work to be aligned to formal education or community, I argue that youth work is a young person centred practice and as such youth work should not be specifically aligned with either but could be aligned with both, depending on the needs, assets and aspirations of young people and the impact they desire or come to recognise.

### ***5.2.3 Key points from era Two:***

This era was dominated by the Albemarle Report, which emerged following recognition by the Government that the youth service was failing, despite its dedicated, unpaid workforce.

The report was concerned with how more value could be obtained from the money spent on youth work. Following the report's recommendations there was a boom period for youth work which saw an influx of funding, the building of large purpose-built centers, the development of a range of services for young people, and a focus on youth work as a profession, which led to a training programme together with the JNC qualification for youth work. Youth work was

no longer the responsibility of volunteers, and public authorities became more accountable for the delivery of the youth service. The nature of the work also evolved during this period: young people developed more of a political voice; the work became more about social change and community development; and the enduring key principles of youth work were established, many of which are considered more fully in Narrative Three, regarding consideration of youth work.

### **5.3 Era Three**

#### ***5.3.1 Critical Reflection Five - Youth Work Curriculum***

The working definition of curriculum, as applied to youth work, is noted in the Context section of this thesis (see page 29). The notion of curriculum has been a feature of discussion and debate since it was first suggested for youth work in 1975 by John Ewen, who at the time was the head of the National Youth Bureau, which later became the National Youth Agency. It was considered again at a series of ministerial conferences during the late 1980s and into the early 1990s. This led to all local authority youth services in England being required to provide a statement of their intended curriculum for youth work delivery, as such a youth work curriculum could no longer be implied rather it had to be explicitly stated (Ord, 2012). A curriculum for work with young people cannot be considered to imply a curriculum for youth work, this must be designed with or by young people and the impact therefore is naturally occurring.



These three ministerial conferences of the late 80s and early 90s considered the issue of curriculum for youth work, in response to the government's desire to reshape and control youth work and to establish a core curriculum with learning outcomes and performance indicators, the introduction of the notion of and need to record evidence and impact. This sentiment is in line with beliefs that clarity is important, regarding the purpose of the work and the curriculum (Ord, 2016). Having identified the importance of youth work and its need for being more professional, delivery became the next focus. The necessity of a curriculum for youth work was identified as being required, in order to increase the profile and role of informal education, youth work, and to attract funding. During each of the three conferences, the field of youth workers consistently rejected the notion of an imposed curriculum and that the service should be targeted to certain groups of young people, that targets should not be enforced and if the work was to be measured then youth workers should be in control of how any outcomes should be measured (Ord, 2016). When reviewing the literature, it is apparent that the voices of young people were missing within the debates and decisions being made, across all the eras. I consider that it is important that youth work is recognised as a legitimate profession in its own right and not there to just complement statutory services working with young people. Youth work makes a direct, significant contribution through interventions and relationships and should not just be considered as an enhancement to the work of other professionals. The outcome of the conferences recognised youth work as an educational practice without a formal curriculum, but with a view towards performance indicators and a desire to measure outcomes, possibly the beginning of the evidence agenda.

The 'Transforming Youth Work – resourcing excellent youth services' document was published in 2002 by the Department of Education and Skills and is described as a specification for youth services. As the title suggests, the aim of the document was to transform the way in which youth work was delivered. This report pushed towards the notion of success through monitoring outcomes and outputs, monitoring targets, accredited outcomes and recorded outcomes for young people with the emphasis being on outcomes and evidence of the practice rather than the impact on young people's lives. In attempting to support the personal and social development of young people, this shifted the focus of work, from relationship building and working with young people, in peer groups, towards aiming to identify needs and aspirations, towards a case management approach. This approach had a predefined set of external criteria regarding what success would look like, in an attempt to ensure that young people did not become disaffected, leading to the individual and community issues that this could present. It is recognised in Narrative Three, The Story of Youth Work, that the role of a youth worker is to work with the young person where they are situated within their own experience, on their own journey of self-development and that the impact is their own. It is this process that should identify issues to be considered for the work and to determine what success should look like for the young person. The report saw the formalisation of the Youth Work Curriculum, and whilst this was not a national set curriculum, as for formal education, it was to be a locally set curriculum. Whilst the specific curriculum was not set nationally, local authorities did enforce the requirement for there to be a curriculum. The approach I took in practice was to ensure that colleagues involved young people in the creation of the curriculum that would impact on their lives.

The enduring challenge of this research is to measure the outcomes and impact of youth work in ethical, young person centred ways, without getting in the way of the work.

### ***5.3.2 Critical Reflection Six - Policy Developments – Labour***

The general election in 1997 saw a new government and a number of significant reports, for example, Every Child Matters (2004) and Youth Matters (2005), that are directly relevant to the development of youth work and working with young people. This Labour Government, whilst seeming to support a growth in work and opportunities for young people, encouraged a shift away from what youth workers considered youth work to be, to what should be described as working with young people, a subtle but significant distinction. There was a shift from open provision towards a more targeted approach, and this was also evident in my practice, with the expansion of work that targeted young people deemed at risk, or who were vulnerable (Smith, 2013) this determination was made by adults, not the young person themselves. The emphasis was on dealing with young people who were deemed socially excluded and in 1999 the Connexions Service was established, with the initiation of the role of the personal advisor, to support young people in successfully transitioning from school, into further education, training, or employment, it is impossible to identify what a 'successful transition' is and the very nature of a person centered approach would require an individual and bespoke understanding. With the Connexions Service, a valuable service delivering work with young people rather than youth work, there came a rigorous method of recording information about young people, arguably, surveillance, as young people were tracked, for example in relation to status or whether they were in employment, education or training.

In 2002, following an extensive consultation process that I was privileged to be part of, the National Occupational Standards (NOS) for youth work were published and this was considered at the time as something of a Governmental commitment to youth work and a professionalisation of the sector. During the 2000s, a number of reports relevant to youth work in England were published and these are critiqued and summarised, below.

Every Child Matters (ECM): Change for Children (DofES, 2004) began a significant period of change and reform to services for children and young people (Parton, 2008). This emerged as a result of the Lord Laming, Enquiry Report (Laming, 2003). Following the death of Victoria Climbié, children's services were transformed, and the focus became early intervention and prevention. The changes were not only initiated to help safeguard children and young people but also to offer greater, co-ordinated opportunities to support them to reach their full potential (ECM, 2004). The work was to be delivered through universal services and as necessary targeted services for more vulnerable children, or those at risk. There were five ECM outcomes setting out positive aspirations for young people and society, including: health and safety; being able to make positive contributions; enjoying and achieving, with a view to economic wellbeing. These may be viewed as positive aspirations; the changes implemented were designed to enable all children to reach their potential and be safeguarded. This government policy was made law under the 2004 Children Act which, increased a whole child approach and improved the changes and outcomes of children in care (Maynard, 2007). The government acknowledged that the issues and contexts of children and people's lives were intertwined and would inevitably impact on wellbeing and outcomes, not only to support and intervention in crisis but also through developing a flexible and responsive preventative

agenda with the needs of young people at the centre (Jones, 2012). However, it is also acknowledged the shift away from a young person centred way of working gave power to the State and the role of the state was to intervene and regulate (Parton, 2008). This shift impacted upon the fluency of youth work regarding its responses to the issues, risks, hopes and dreams of the young people accessing the services.

With the Youth Matters Report (DfE, 2005), the agenda shifted once again. The focus was on newly created Children's Trusts within local authorities (Youth Matters, p.2). This resulted in a duty to respond through providing advice, guidance and positive activities for young people within their local communities and in reducing the number of young people not in education, employment or training (Youth Matters, p.9). There was encouragement for young people to volunteer and become more engaged in their communities and be empowered to make their own decisions (Youth Matters, p.5). There was a desire for the service to be integrated, inclusive and accessible to young people and those young people most at risk would be targeted and supported. This was a further reform that moved away from more traditional, relational (Jeffs and Smith, 2010) young person centred approaches. The agenda was not that of the individual young people and there was an external agenda seeking to promote conformity and social control, targeting young people based on identity and behaviour rather than by the simple fact they are young people and as such entitled to a service.

Aiming High for Young People: A ten-year strategy for positive activities (HM Treasury/Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2007), was another strategy that targeted young people perceived to be most at risk. The aim was to potentially 'persuade'

young people to engage in perceived positive activities in their leisure time, with the anticipated result being a beneficial impact of outcomes and resilience (Jones, 2013). The important consideration for me was how young people would be involved in the decisions about what positive activity was meaningful to them and how access could be assured across all young people. Whilst the intervention was for all young people, it was targeted at those least likely to achieve and/or to access support. The desired outcomes that indicated success were (Aiming High for Young People. p 8):

- to remain in education and continue with their learning journey until they are 18;
- engage in activities to meet their needs and desires and to develop resilience;
- have a safe and supportive environment;
- develop social and emotional skills;
- have good physical health;
- make a contribution to society and engage in social change;
- enjoy their time away from education and in their leisure time.

Youth Matters (2005) and Aiming High for Young People (2007) signaled a shift from the approach of the Connexions service and the work was situated more in schools, through an extended school service (Youth Matters, 2005 P.22). It was during this period that a number of youth hubs were proposed as part of the MyPlace initiative, but this proved limited in its success due to a lack of funding, and this prompted a further shift from open youth provision (Ritchie and Ord, 2017). The challenge that endured for my practice was how to engage young people who wanted to choose no engagement, which is their right, more significantly how I could evidence that their non-engagement was potentially a young person-centered empowered decision.

The National Youth Agency (no date) recognised the demise of government funding for youth work, and in 2009 refocused, updated and modernised the way they worked and generated their own funding, this enabled an initiation of youth work campaigns and the development of support services for youth workers (NYA, History of the National Youth Agency, no date).

### ***5.3.3 Critical Reflection Seven - Policy Developments – Coalition and Conservative***

In 2010, there was another general election, a new Coalition Government brought about a period of austerity, which has a fundamental impact on youth work and youth services regarding how and for what purposes, funding was allocated. A number of policy initiatives, focusing on the financing and delivery of services for young people have intensified the challenges facing youth work practitioners (Davies, 2013). “These challenges frame the contemporary experience of youth workers and young people” (Mason, 2015, P.5). The work moved from what I consider to be youth work, more towards work with young people and I concur with Davies (2013) that the democratic and emancipatory process that previously happened with young people, through youth work, became vulnerable.

The Positive for Youth Policy (HM Government 2011) was very much about a shared and integrated approach to services for young people, demonstrated through the positive way in which ministers consulted with young people and those working with these individuals, during the writing of the document. The focus of Positive for Youth (2011) relates to how the different agencies and different parts of community can best work together to support families and the lives of young people, especially those at most risk of disadvantage or vulnerability (HM

Government, 2011). However, this policy was not accidental, it could be seen as an attempt to absolve the state of having to deliver or fund youth services (Davies, 2013). There was an emphasis on motivating and supporting young people to succeed and reach their potential and to flourish. The Positive for Youth (2011) document advocated that it is important for young people to have a voice and invested funds, in order to develop Youth Councils.

A significant outcome of Positive for Youth (2011) was the development of local Youth Hubs through the MyPlace initiative. Of particular interest to this thesis, was a pledge to monitor and report the measures to demonstrate that progress was being made to improve the lives of young people. It is difficult to determine a holistic statement of improvement, young people are not a homogenous group but rather individuals with a unique identity, context and experience.

In 2013, a review of Positive for Youth was published, which reported on the development of the Framework of outcomes for Young People, produced by the Young Foundation on behalf of the Catalyst Consortium (McNeil and Reeder, 2012). This was a significant and helpful document that situated well the desire to monitor outcomes in a flexible way, in consultation with a range of organisations working with young people and significantly, young people themselves.

Another coalition government initiative was the Big Society (2010), which laid out a move of power from central government to local communities and local people, in order that people could come together and work towards solving the problems they identify and encouraging people to achieve more in and for their own communities. Whilst this was positive in respect



of a power transfer it was not supported by funding, to implement and sustain change, young people's involvement was not significant or central and as such was a move away from what is considered youth work.

One significant outcome for young people was the National Citizen Service (NCS) for 16-year-olds to come together, from diverse backgrounds, and engage in summer holiday activities in order to become active and responsible citizens, now and in their transition to adulthood. Davies (2013) highlighted that monies would be better allocated to keeping local youth services open, and that following local reviews funding for NCS should be redirected to grassroots youth work, so that local people could decide regarding youth work that meets local needs and perhaps retain some elements of NCS such as outdoor activities and learning for life, (de St Croix, 2017a). de St Croix (2017a) recognises other significant erosions of youth work as a result of the NCS neoliberal approach, such as the de-professionalisation of youth workers through the absence of their voice in evaluation, the voice of young people is also absent. NCS legitimised the privatisation of youth work as a number of providers and profit-making companies needed to evidence the recruitment of young people to NCS and evaluate their completion. This need to provide evidence potentially treats young people as human capital due to the need to demonstrate a return for the investment, which undoubtedly will change the nature of the relationships.

The Centre for Youth Impact (Youth Impact, 2023) was initiated in 2014 and continues to support the those working with young people, in all youth settings, to understand the work they do through evaluation in order to improve outcomes. This organisation's work is in line

with the aims of my study, which can make a contribution to the emerging knowledge. What is significant about my research is that I am interested in how the impact of youth work is evaluated and measured, and where this can be identified.

Youth work, as I knew it through my role as a practitioner, seemed to be being cast adrift. This was compounded in 2016 when the Youth Services was moved from sitting within the DfE to within the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, the implication being that Youth Work was less recognised as an educational process and viewed as more of a leisure time pursuit.

During 2019, the main political parties in England endorsed the recommendations of an All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG, 2019) Inquiry into the Sufficiency of Youth Work (NYA, 2019c). This raised the profile of work with young people and the significance of youth work.

There were six significant recommendations in the APPG Inquiry (2019) into the Sufficiency of Youth Work (p.8) that support work with young people:

1. politically, with a minister who holds a portfolio focused on young people;
2. financially, recognising the need for greater investment in youth work and a commitment to support youth services;
3. a statutory duty and protection for a minimum level of youth service;
4. with a lead worker in every local authority area responsible to a youth service;
5. professionally, with a commitment to considering ratio expectations of professionally qualified youth workers, those in training and volunteers;

6. and significantly for this thesis, recognition of a need to develop a standard national system for evaluation regarding the suitability of youth services and considering whether this is sufficient, alongside evaluating the quality of youth work.

Whilst the above appear positive developments, and they are certainly recognised as such by the NYA (2019c) there is concern from youth workers that funding will be targeted towards preventative work, particularly in response to knife crime, rather than young person centred informal education (Davies, 2019).

The APPG report (2019) appears to be asking for much stronger government control and this is in contrast to the very early days, where the church was perceived as in 'control'. This challenges my view, which is that young people should be in control, and it is the role of government, organisations or churches to facilitate a process, rather than to control and demand outcomes. I consider that the report also documents a shift in the role of a youth worker in that the greater focus should be on the young person, their needs, and the ways in which they are deemed deficit. This shift is in stark contrast to focus of youth work during the years prior to the two world wars, when the work was concerned with preparing young people to meet the needs of society.

#### ***5.3.4 Key points from era Three:***

There was much professional and political activity during era three, which has had a significant impact on the development of youth work and its relationship with measurement. There was a series of ministerial conferences, which debated the notion of curriculum, and the

requirement for a local curriculum for youth work established, which came with a shift toward satisfaction and the notion of success and monitoring outcome and outputs. The nature of the work with young people became more about youth development and moved away from youth work, with the shift from group work to individual case work, supported by the Connexions service. There was also a continuing shift towards targeted work with young people who were vulnerable and at risk, rather than universal work. Coussée (2009, p. 117) discusses the notion of an outcome related youth work identity linking the practice to development against desired outcomes. It can be observed in the Timeline concluding this Narrative (see page 135), that there was much political influence. The Labour government introduced a number of significant reports and developments, Extended Schools Service and MyPlace youth hubs were established. The National Occupational Standards (2002) were introduced, also the Children's trusts were set up, together with a greater emphasis on organisations working together and sharing information. The work was targeted at young people not in education, employment, or training (NEET) and there was provision of positive activities for all young people. This was experienced as a move back, working with young people for the purpose of social control rather than social change, together with monitoring and surveillance. The Coalition government and Conservative governments also brought about significant developments, particularly multiagency working with young people at risk, the National Citizen Service (NCS) was set up in 2011, which took funding and resources away from more traditional and local youth work delivery, however there was a development of work supporting young people to have a voice. Significantly, it is during this era that the management agenda gained traction and the need to recognise the impact became more of a focus, leading to the Young

Foundation creating the Framework of outcomes for young people, which is considered in detail in Narrative Four.

It is important to conclude that whilst what is considered to be youth work may remain somewhat constant through the period of this historical consideration, the ideology, motivation and the way the work has been delivered has changed in response to the context of society, funding available and the government policy of the day.

The very early days of this historical narrative was evangelical, in which volunteers provided and led a range of activities for young people, working together with an aim of social control rather than social change. It was during era one that youth work emerged, and young people were recognised as having a stake in the provision and a voice to express their issues.

A Youth Service was established but in the late 1950s it was recognised by the government that the service was failing, despite a dedicated and enthusiastic workforce. The Albemarle Committee report (1960) brought about significant changes, which included recognition that young people needed places to meet with their peers in venues where they had ownership within, engage in voluntary relationships with trusted adults and take part in activities that met their presenting needs as well as offering a programme of activities to challenge and informally educate young people on their terms, whilst also having fun and developing themselves. It was around this time that there was recognition that public authorities had to be accountable to young people and that young people should have the right to have a political voice and be supported in positive social change and community development. The

report also instigated funding for buildings to deliver work from and training and a qualification (JNC) to create a professional workforce. Local authorities were held accountable and there was demand for better value for money spent on youth work.

The next significant development relevant to this thesis is the debate at a series of ministerial conferences and the subsequent introduction of a curriculum for youth work at a local level. This development was welcomed as a move towards the professionalisation of youth work, it did come at a cost with a much more controlled and bureaucratic system and a move towards youth development, working with the individual rather than in association, with a focus on deficit, conforming to societal norms and moving away from youth work and social change (Smith, 2019). There was a desire to establish the notion of success and monitoring outcomes and outputs became custom and practice.

There was a flurry of activity and policy development in the 1990s and 2000s and the shift towards targeted work with young people who are vulnerable and at risk, rather than universal youth work, continued and was supported for a time by the Connexions service. There was impetus for group work through various initiatives, as a requirement, providing positive activities for young people, development of integrated working, extended school services and funding for MyPlace youth hubs, to name but a few Labour government initiatives.

Things changed rapidly with the general election of 2009 and the Coalition and then Conservative governments. It is during this period that the measuring of impact really became

a feature of practice, with the launch of Framework of Outcomes for young people by the Young Foundation and the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) Inquiry.

The profession's progression towards the APPG is documented in this historical review. There are some perceived implications for the implementation of the APPG report and there are a number of key points that I will return to throughout this thesis, for example power, control and funding, which determine how we evidence impact and capture influence.

Much change has occurred over the period of the eras covered in this section and this thesis is concerned with the interface with youth work and impact measurement that happened in the eras happen.

#### 5.4 Contemporary Studies

The work of Tania De St Croix and Louise Doherty has been significant to my thinking throughout this research journey and as I approached my own conclusions they produced a number of papers relevant to the topics and tensions in this thesis, and make important recommendations for practice, and whilst contemporary, they are significant to the emerging historical context, and noted here for context in relation to my own findings.

During 2022, research was produced considering 'Rethinking Impact, Evaluation and Accountability in Youth Work' (Doherty and de St Croix, 2022a & 2022b). Valuing youth work Research-informed practical resources for youth workers: Reflecting on the value and

**Commented [TC1]:** (Doherty and de St Croix, 2022a)  
[Valuing youth work: Research-informed practical resources for youth workers: Reflecting on the value and evaluation of youth work - King's College London](#)

(Doherty and de St Croix, 2022b)  
[Valuing youth work: Seven evidence-based messages for decision-makers on youth work and its evaluation - King's College London](#)

(Doherty and de St Croix, 2023)  
['It's a great place to find where you belong': Creating, curating and valuing place and space in open youth work - King's College London](#)

(Doherty and de St Croix, 2024)  
['Embers, and fragments': Social haunting in youth work, impact measurement and policy networks - King's College London](#)

evaluation of youth work (Doherty and de St Croix, 2022a), is a resource for youth workers, recognising youth workers are keen to evaluate the work they are doing. Significantly for me, this work highlights the voice and contribution of young people, recognising that their contribution is within the context of their lives. This is a resource that can be used flexibly, rather than a specific tool, this adds value to the complex work involved when trying to evaluate or measure the impact of informal education in open youth work settings.

Valuing youth work: Seven evidence-based messages for decision-makers on youth work and its evaluation (Doherty and de St Croix, 2022b), acknowledges that youth work is valued by young people, and that youth work is effective in supporting young people through complex issues, from a young person centred starting point. For youth work to be open, the provision must be in relation to both the participation of young people, on their terms, and the outcomes achieved also on young people's terms (Doherty and de St Croix, 2023).

## **5.5 The Historical and Political Story Timeline**

Table three summarises the story over approximately 240 years. This timeline notes the impact of historical landmarks and the resultant changes to youth work, with consideration of the strengths and weaknesses.

From my research and practice experience it is evident to me that the key events and reports were brought about by the external drivers and the religious, social, and political issues of the day: it was those with money and a desire for control and power, who defined and



determined the nature of work with young people and held workers accountable for what were perceived as the desired outcomes. For example: evangelised young people; young people fit and ready for war; young people experiencing less poverty and more positive activity and thus less likely to be involved with criminal activity and civil unrest.

There is a clear shift away from work delivered by the church, moving to the state, and from an entirely voluntary workforce to a statutory youth service delivered by part-time and full-time paid youth workers. I have worked for both the voluntary sector and the statutory sector and the issues of accountability and recording outcomes and impact have become increasingly significant in both sectors. The work I carried out in the voluntary sector was accountable to the funders and with the local authority I was accountable to local government and the public purse.

Table 3 below indicated a timeline of events and reports that have shaped the development of work with young people and youth work practice. I have annotated these with my consideration of the change to practice alongside the impact. I have identified two distinct sections, early developments of practice and contemporary youth work. The early developments are informed by Bright (2015) and I suggest that this is however the early stage of work developed for young people as much of the practice is outside of my definition of youth work. The contemporary period in relation to youth work, for the purpose of the thesis is from the inception of the National Occupational Standards in 2002.

**Table 3. Key Events in the History and Development of Youth Work**

Date	Key Event / Report	Change to Youth Work	Impact / strengths / weaknesses
The Key developments of youth work (Bright, 2015)			
1780s	Sunday Schools – Hannah More and Robert Raikes	I do not consider this Youth Work but more evangelical congregation	Evangelical approach I consider a weakness as the agenda was external to the needs of the young people, however, this did provide activity and community engagement and education
1834	First Girls' Club opened	By my definition of youth work I consider this the start of youth work	Work with young people through relationships, initially in their territory and then in a club. This work developed, and larger organisations emerged
1844	Ragged schools	Provide access to education	Enabled young people who were excluded by poverty to access education, there remained some evangelical focus
1844	Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA)	The first youth organisation	Focused on need, offered opportunities for support, not just concerned with religion and spirituality. There was a positive impact on those who volunteered as teachers
1854	Boys Brigade	A uniformed Organisation	Military, drill, discipline and uniform, religious focus, that agenda is external to the specific needs of young people whilst providing activity and a positive contribution to young people's lives
1866	Barbados	A charity for vulnerable young people	Valuable contribution but the focus is on vulnerable young people and therefore not universally available, positive fundraising to support local services
1907	The Boy Scout Association	Became the Scout Association – the growth of work with young women	Uniformed and governed by laws and promises, work to achieve badges. Offered association and adventure, concerned with the well-being of young people and a move away from evangelical work
1910	The Guide Association	Girlguiding – the growth of work with young women	Uniformed and governed by laws and promises, work to achieve badges. Offered association and adventure, with the well-being of young people.
1911	National Organization of Girls' Clubs	Became UK Youth, this started to deliver work based on the needs and rights of young people	The work was more concerned with the young person's agenda and involved participation, advocacy, non-formal learning, residential opportunities and social responsibility
1918	First official recognition of	A Home Office committee issued a report advising local authorities to take	A positive move towards recognition of youth work as a way of working with young people,

	the need for youth work	steps to co-ordinate youth work in their areas	different to work with young people in previous years
1931	Methods in Youth Work	The first known mention of Youth Work in the title of a publication	Further establishing youth work as a model of work
1939	The Inception of Youth Service – In the Service of Youth (Circular 1486)	This is widely regarded as the beginning of the Youth Service in England	The agenda was external to the needs of young people. With the threat of war organisations were encouraged to work with young people to develop fitness, this addressed both boys and girls. Young people assumed to initiate activities, partnership working with voluntary sector organisations encouraged and discovering what local needs are, there was also consideration of staffing and competence
1944	The McNair Report – Board of Education Teachers and Youth Leaders	Report of the Committee appointed by the President of the Board of Education to consider the supply, recruitment and training of teachers and youth leaders. A useful review of developments up to this point and statement of the nature of youth work	Focus on the training and support of youth leaders, the focus on the worker being a guide and a friend rather than imposing an external agenda or curriculum. A positive development in the professionalization of youth work, seen by some as a potential for a loss of spontaneity
1945	Ministry of Education. The Purpose and Content of the Youth Service. A Report of the Youth Advisory Council appointed by the Minister of Education in 1943	Provides a statement of youth work as non-vocational group work	Recognises group work and leadership as a vehicle for individual development as well as participation and voluntary engagement, therefore the work should be recreational, fun and informal
1960	The Albemarle Report – Ministry of Education. The Youth Service in England and Wales	Was prompted in part by a perceived ‘youth problem’, there had been riots centred around race, national service was drawing to a close and the post war baby boom were becoming teenagers.	Provided youth work with a very rationale framework – and was a key element in substantially increasing funding for youth work. It recognised the contribution youth work can make and boosted a struggling service, some suggest that what followed this report was a ‘golden age’ for youth work, there was funding for premises and staff, it encouraged the service to develop

		There was a perceived need for social control	more spontaneous work that was attractive to young people, developing provision incorporating association, challenging, and training <u>Specific impact:</u> Increase of full-time workers A training college was established The workforce had access to training Increase in funding for sustainability Increase in building available for delivery Funding for innovation in the voluntary sector Terms and Conditions established (JNC)
1964	National Youth Bureau	Became the National Youth Agency in 1991	Provided a national information centre for youth services
1969	Department of Education and Science 'Fairbairn-Milson' Report – Youth and Community Work in the 70s	Followed a review by two sub-committees of development post Albemarle	Considered youth work and schooling and youth work and the relationship with the adult community. The positive impact was the greater link between youth work and community development and the increased focus on professional training
1982	The Thompson Report Department of Education and Science Experience and Participation	Review Group on the Youth Service in England	The youth service should provide services and programmes concerned with personal development as well as social and political education.
1990	Ministerial Conferences Steering Committee Towards a Core Curriculum – The next step	Three ministerial conferences during which the issue of curriculum for youth work was considered, in response from the government of the day to reshape and control youth work and establish a core curriculum with learning outcomes and performance indicators	During each of the three conferences, the field consistently rejected the notion of an imposed curriculum
1997	General Election	A new Labour Government	This led to range of reports and responses that ultimately did not bring about the changes hoped for and led to a shift away from youth work, towards working with young

1999	Connexions Service	A rigorous method of recording information about young people alongside a multi-agency working to support and advise all young people deemed vulnerable or at risk of successful transition	The emphasis was on dealing with young people who were deemed socially excluded and to support young people to successfully transition from school into further education, training, or employment. A deficit approach
Contemporary society in relation to youth work, for the purpose of the thesis			
2002	National Occupational Standards	The standards helped to define the competencies in terms of knowledge, understanding, performance and values of a youth worker	Perceived as Governmental commitment to youth work and set out a clear map of what youth work should include. This informed a range of awards and qualifications
2002	Department for Education and Skills Transforming Youth Work – resourcing excellent youth services	A shift from youth work to youth development, towards delivery rather than relationships, accreditation, individualization, and targeting, away from association and a more traditional and open provision	It continued and refined the government’s ‘modernization’ attempt to alter the character of youth service work
2004	Every Child Matters: Change for children. HM Government Department for Education and Skills	Brought about whole system changes within children’s services. Focused not only on young people but also children and was intending to respond to immediate concerns in relation to safeguarding and wellbeing	It is positive that ECM prompted a greater focus on working together and information sharing in order children and young people are: healthy, safe, have the opportunity to enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution and achieve economic well-being. Coordinated by The Common Assessment Framework (CAF), there are concerns in relation to privacy and surveillance
2004	The Children Act	Following Every Child Matters and other papers	The role of Children’s Commissioner was established, and the Act aims to support local authorities and other local organisations to develop and improve safeguarding, welfare and wellbeing, through universal and targeted services taking a young person centered approach
2005	Youth Matters: HM Government Department	Provided funding for positive activities for young people and set a clear offer that local	Attempted to address: improving services to better meet individual young people’ needs; Streamlining organisations working together; preventing young people from poverty and crime;

	for Education and Skills.	authorities had a duty to deliver through newly initiated Children's trusts, including spaces	develop technologies and increase opportunities. Focusing on early intervention and preventative ways of working and targeting those at risk
2007	Aiming high for young people: A ten-year strategy for positive activities. HM Treasury Department for Children, Schools and Families.	Intended to improve outcomes for young people and increase participation and constructive leisure time activities Support was available for youth workforce	A strategy to improve activities and support services for young people and make an investment in services for young people. There was a desire to improve the public perception of young people; enabled young people to be involved in designing the services they wanted, created more local safe places for young people to meet; expanded services available and removed any barriers to these services
2009 to 2022	The In Defence of Youth Work campaign launched at the Youth and Policy History conference	A campaign to defend and develop what is seen as a traditional youth work approach – based on voluntary participation, trusting relationships and the young person's agenda	Focus on youth work as an educational process. Generated debate and conversation about the perceived imposition of targets and measurement and identifying young people as somehow deficit.  In October 2022 the energy to sustain IDYW was lost and the website containing a collection of articles documenting the period will remain an historical archive
2010	General Election	Coalition Government brought about a period austerity	There was a significant restructuring of local authority services and a reduction in funding available for youth work, the focus was on individual social responsibility rather than state control – the implementation of 'Big Society' provided the opportunity, if not the funding, for local people and communities – for themselves
2011	Positive for Youth	Is the paper about improving the services for young people by bringing together governmental departments and policies, setting out how all parts of society contribute to the support for families and improving outcomes for young people to achieve their potential and succeed. It has been developed through a collaborative process in	Following riots in 2011 this paper intended to place responsibility in the hands of individuals and communities, but this was not appropriately funded. It is encouraging that the paper is positive about young people and is young person centred that there is respect for young people's right to have their voices heard, whilst seeking to support parents and careers, and is built on local partnerships rather than state control and thus empowers and supports local leadership

		which young people were consulted	
2011	National Citizen Service (NCS)	A programme funded by the government and concerned with the personal and social development of young people aged 16 and 17 years old	Set up under the Coalition Government and continued by the Conservative Government. The programme provides a range of positive activities for young people, but this programme mainly runs during school holidays and at the expense of local year-round youth provision
2012	Catalyst consortium was commissioned	Led by the Young Foundation and tasked to create a Framework of Outcomes for Young People	The Framework of Outcomes for Young People will support the youth work sector and those working with young people, to measure the impact they are having on young people's lives
2013	Review of Positive for Youth	Reported the progress since the Positive for Youth paper in 2011	The focus is on supporting success rather than preventing failure and Young People having a voice in matters that affect their lives. Several projects have been initiated, significantly NCS
2014	The Centre for Youth Impact launched at the Creative Collisions conference	Supporting a collaborative way of working to develop ideas and practice in evaluation, measurement and improvements to youth work and service for young people	Along with the IDYW, the campaign provides an opportunity for dialogue and debate around the impact and targets agenda Supports organisations to come together to have conversations about impact and measurement and increase the impact of their work
2016	Youth Work is relocated from DfE to the Digital, Culture, Media, and Sport Committee	By inference, Youth Work is considered more recreational rather than educational	Less recognition and funding for Youth Work as an educational process
2017	General Election	Conservative Government elected	Continuation of the practices initiated under the Coalition Government
2019	All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) Inquiry into Youth Work	A welcome national inquiry into youth work	Led by the National Youth Agency (2021c) evidence was collected to demonstrate the role and impact of Youth Work A significant outcome was that support and funding for youth work is to be made available then the role and impact of youth work needs to be demonstrated There six areas in which recommendations are made: politically, financially, a statutory duty and protection for a minimum level of youth service

			with a lead worker in every local authority area responsible to a youth service; professionally and a need to develop a standard national system for evaluation of the suitability of youth services and considering if this sufficient, alongside evaluating the quality of youth work
2019	Civil Society Strategy	Which considers how they should secure and deliver activities and services for Young People	It is intended to focus on the positive role and impact local authorities can have on the delivery of youth service
2019	The youth investment fund	A new fund, for one year, made available in an announcement by the Chancellor Sajid Javid. This fund is aimed at supporting Youth Work opportunities and spaces in local communities, this announcement was welcomed by the sector	Funds available for the youth investment fund as well as building and improving existing youth centres and services for Young People (NYA 2019a and NYA 2019b)
2019	The Culture Secretary, announced £12 million would be available for youth projects	This funding includes money to expand services that were already proving successful as well as to support the sector's also, is the ability to respond to needs	Funding is made available for the #iwill campaign aimed at encouraging Young People to take part in social action (NYA 2019a and NYA 2019b)
2020	National Youth Agency launched a new curriculum for Youth Work (2020a)	A significant contemporary development	Offers clarity and mechanism for measuring impact against pre identified criteria
2020	The Centre for Youth Impact launched the Youth Sector Data Standard	Working in collaboration with national and regional stakeholders and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport	Designed to start to collect consistent data from across the sector and offer a shared insight of findings. It is designed as a simple process to collect data about challenges faced generally by the sector
2020	NYA launched a ten-year vision for youth work in England	This is yet to be released	Help is being sought from the youth work sector to translate this vision into a practical strategy. It is positive that the desire is that the strategy be owned by people involve in and in support of youth work
2020	Government announces	An emergency fund to protect grassroots and	Support for organisations to survive to deliver their services beyond the pandemic and to



	£16.5 million youth Covid-19 support fund	national youth organisations during the pandemic	respond to specific issues created by the pandemic, such as mental health issues
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Having reviewed a historical and political perspective of youth work, I next will consider in more detail the ideology, principles, and characteristics of youth work in contemporary practice.

## **Chapter Six: Narrative Three: A story about Youth Work, its ideology and underpinning principles and characteristics, based on theoretical analysis and literature**

### **6.1 What is Youth Work?**

The focus of this literature review is on youth work, its ideology and assumptions and how I will be defining youth work throughout the study. The contemporary debate around the defence, structure, and future of youth work alongside the complex interface of gathering evidence, defining, and measuring impact will be considered in more detail later.

The question to be addressed here concerns 'youth work', as opposed to 'The Youth Service'. Youth work is a specific profession with core elements rather than a service that provides a range of activities for young people to take part in. Youth work is a profession that is contested, innovative and radical (Clements, 2018).

In order to discuss if youth work can survive, two fundamental issues need to be addressed to ensure clarity of the context: the past, and the present. In this chapter the question 'What is youth work' will be considered with reference to its definition, currently and historically. Reviewing the literature, it is clear that much has been written about the definition of youth work and whilst there have been some broad similarities between the definitions, there have also been differences leading to the recognition that the term itself is widely contested. The intention here is to distil the key themes, using a thematic approach to summarise the definitions for the purpose of the thesis.

Firstly, the analysis of the definition of youth work will be considered from a variety of sources, for example from national organisations and governing bodies, policy texts and academic literature.

The National Youth Agency (NYA, 2014 and NYA, 2021a) is the leading national youth work organisation in England. The NYA state that they support youth workers to do their jobs effectively (NYA, 2014). The Institute for Youth Work (IYW) is a membership organisation for the young peoples' workforce offering information, resources, forums and continuing professional development opportunities. The definitions provided by these organisations are therefore important, contemporary touchstones for this literature review.

The NYA (2014, 2021a and 2021b) uses a definition which established specifics regarding age range and mode of delivery, incorporates an emergence of themes with a focus on values and ethics with the creation of the NYA Ethical Conduct in youth work (NYA, 2004). Establishing Codes of Practice are recognised as being valuable in supporting ethical practice (Banks, 2010). The following decade the Institute of Youth Work (IYW) was established and developed a Code of Ethics (IYW, 2022), securing values, ethics and anti-oppressive practice as a fundamental component of youth work. The NYA (2014, 2021a and 2021b) definition, along with the Ethical Statement (2004) and the IYW definition (2022), proposed a clearer and more consistent, nationally recognised definition of youth work. Significantly, where there is agreement within these definitions is that the approach should start with where the young people themselves are and be based on their lived experience. It is important that anti-oppressive practice is also considered and that space for young people is available to explore their own identity, make

decisions about their future in a safe way, with trusted adults. The challenge during austerity relates to the reduction in the number of spaces and workers available to undertake this process.

Through a scoping literature review of academic texts, policy and professional documents as well as reflecting on my own experience, the initial analysis (see Appendix Two) enabled the identification of five key themes that constitute youth work. These themes reflect commonalities and identify differences. These broad themes, which reflect commonalities and identify differences, will now be explored:

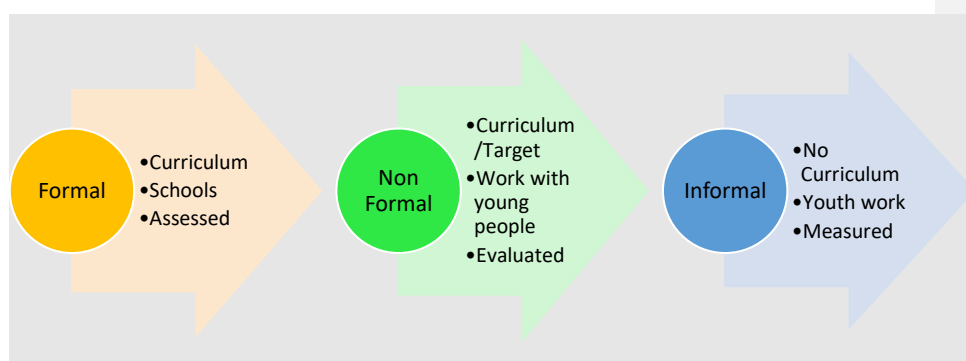
1. Informal Education
2. Voluntary Relationships
3. Empowerment and being young person centred
4. Equality of opportunity and Anti Oppressive Practice
5. Concerned with wellbeing and welfare

#### **6.1.1 Theme One: Informal Education**

Traditionally, there has been a clear distinction between non-formal, formal, and informal education and the environments in which youth work takes place. Youth work, in my view, is informal education whilst other, valuable, work can take place in non-formal and informal setting, this is not youth work. Informal education can take place in a variety of settings and for me the important aspect is that there is no hierarchy (Johnson and Majewska, 2022). The diagram below demonstrates the continuum of education type, the setting and how 'success'

can be measured. Figure 11 below demonstrates the continuum from formal to informal education and its interactions with measuring impact.

**Figure 11. Continuum of Education**



Formal education is part of a curriculum delivered in schools, and informal education is not part of a curriculum (or at least not in a formal curriculum) and takes place in Youth Centers and places where youth work is happening outside of the school building and school day. The concept of curriculum is explored further when considering the measurement of impact.

Smith and Jeffs (2010) propose that youth work is about informal education and welfare, principally arguing that youth work supports a young person to develop not only skills, knowledge and understanding but also self-awareness, autonomy and agency enabling young people to take best care of their own welfare, potentially reducing the need for external intervention.

An important feature to mention, that separates youth work from formal education is the principle of informality and young person centred approach. Unlike an imposed curriculum

with specified outcomes (Ritchie and Ord, 2017). Batsleer (2018) recognises that the work of youth workers is about dialogue, through listening to young people and engaging in conversation youth workers build relationships with young people. The author goes on to say that as informal educators, youth workers must start where people are and facilitate learning that is significant to the young person rather than an imposed and pre-decided curriculum.

In my practice I recognise youth work is a distinct profession that is complementary to other types of work with young people, because the skills that young people develop through an informal education can be transferred to all areas of their lives: it is the nature of the engagements that makes it youth work, and the way workers support young people on their journey. As Pitman (2004) recognised youth work endeavours to move beyond the place young people start, it is important to encourage young people to consider their own experiences through both a critically reflective and creative lens. It could therefore be argued that in order for any impact to be measured, it is essential that a baseline is established.

Whilst youth work does not claim to be education in the context of scholastic endeavours, it has been suggested that the skills acquired and/or developed are transferable. If this is the case, then it might be argued that any measure of impact would need to accommodate this somewhat nebulous change.

#### ***6.1.2 Theme Two: Voluntary relationships and Young People's participation***

Central to all other aspects of a successful youth work journey, is the nature of the professional relationship between the young person and the youth worker. This is not an issue of

personality, but more about the specific features necessary for a young person to voluntarily enter into and remain in the relationship.

The process should be focused on participation and the young people must have opportunities to make choices and to be actively involved, if they are to be not simply passive in their engagements but engaged to make choices and find solutions (Sapin, 2013). Jeffs and Smith (2010) also consider youth work as being about the voluntary nature of the relationship in that it is the young people that make the choice to take part and get involved (Smith, 2013) which further emphasizes the voluntary relationship. This principal of a voluntary relationship is also recognised in the PAULO report (2002) and by Batsleer and Davies (2010) as a defining characteristic of youth work; voluntary participation, that young people chose to be involved in.

Voluntary participation makes youth work different to most other professions supporting young people. In youth work it is the young person who sets the agenda and the direction of the intervention and therefore their own journey (Young, 2006; Batsleer and Davies, 2010), within the safe practice and safeguarding procedures. If young people are in control and have a voice, from my experience it is more likely that they will be engaged in the process.

Young people have, traditionally, been able to freely enter into relationships with youth workers and to end those relationships when they choose to do so. This has fundamental implications for the way in which youth workers operate. It can encourage youth workers to think their approach in rather more dialogical ways rather than following a predefined

curriculum (Batsleer, 2008). It also means that youth workers must either develop programmes that will attract young people to a youth work agency, or that the programmes can be used in a setting where young people are (Smith, 2013). This approach is unlike a school setting in which young people's attendance is compulsory.

It is essential that youth workers meet the needs of young people and go beyond simply providing diversionary activities and safe, warm spaces. It is evident from my experience that there is a specific approach but not just one way of delivering it, as youth work can take place in many settings with a multitude of approaches with a diverse group of young people with a wide range of different needs. It is the approach that defines youth work, not the client group or the environment, and it is this that distinguishes youth work from other forms of work with young people.

This theme, the voluntary relationship, seems to be at the heart of youth work, a defining feature and one that is championed and reflected in the principles of youth work. Any impact measure therefore may need to begin with a clear statement around voluntary participation.

### ***6.1.3 Theme Three: Empowering way of working and being Young Person centred***

Firstly, it is interesting to consider the notion of power in order to understand the meaning of empowerment. This is an area that will be expanded on later in the thesis, but for the purpose of this chapter it is important to recognise that for young people to be empowered, the balance of power needs to be tipped more in their (the young person's) favour (Davies, 2019), and that empowerment is not simply a case of building self-esteem and confidence. In order



for youth workers to empower young people they must recognise and relinquish their own power in the youth work setting and process, enabling young people to make informed decisions and take responsibility for their choices, clearly in line with safeguarding best practice. For a young person to claim power and responsibility in their own lives, they need to be enabled to explore their own reality, identity and values and ultimately make their own decisions with information, guidance, and with support from a trusted youth worker. Young (2006) reflects that following a series of conferences and consultations in the late 1980s, the National Youth Bureau (NYB; 1991, p.16) stated that youth work should be “empowering and supporting young people to understand and act on the personal, social issues which affect their lives, the lives of others and the communities of which they are part” (Young, 2006, p.17). Young people do not operate outside of society and community, and consideration must be given to social impact and social responsibility. The IYW (2022) in its Code of Ethics states “youth work enables young people to develop holistically, working with them to facilitate their personal, social, and educational development. Youth work enables young people to develop their voice, influence, and place in society and to reach their full potential”.

More recently the NYA (2021b) describes the youth worker’s role in relation to empowerment. They state that the process is, to empower and enable young people to engage when they are ready to learn about themselves and to explore who they are, and their identity, in safe ways. This process will provide the opportunity to develop a range of skills and make decisions and take responsibility for the consequences of these decisions (NYA Statement of Principles and Values (2021b), Ethical Conduct in Youth work, (2004).

The importance of empowerment in youth work is further supported by Smith and Jeffs (2013) who refer to youth work as “Focusing on young people, their needs, experiences and contribution” (Smith and Jeffs, 2013). The language used by Batsleer and Davies (2010) suggests similar, we must be where young people are starting from, seeking to provide opportunities to motivate young people to experience new things and develop new learning.

The approach of youth work over recent years has been to focus on young people as problematic, at risk or vulnerable, and it is essential that we see, encourage, and empower young people to recognise that they have assets, positives and strengths (Sapin, 2013, p.3). With this asset-based philosophy in mind, any impact measure would need to look at the identification and growth of assets over time, and not simply how perceived risk and vulnerabilities are overcome or reduced.

I consider the Statement of Purpose offered in the National Occupational Standards (NOS) to be important as it proposes that young people’s development and empowerment is central to the process of youth work, although the statement lacks potential for dialogue about the imbalance of power experienced by young people. The NOS state:

“The key purpose of youth work is to work with young people to facilitate their personal, social, and educational development, and enable them to gain a voice, influence, and place in society in a period of transitions from dependence to independence” (Pittman, 2004, p.88).

Batsleer (2008) suggests it is important that youth workers find ways to be in dialogue with young people on their terms, develop relationships and listen to their experiences and

“engage in a process of learning from the context of the everyday” (p.5) youth work .... Can be distinguished from other professions “at the point of encounter with young people because: The work starts where young people are.... It is concerned with how young people feel and not just with what they know and can do.” (Pittman, 2004 p. 91).

I believe this limits the youth work process to accepting ‘what is’ in relation to society whereas, youth work must also be about societal change, challenging oppression and social justice as a young person may choose to reject the notion of what society expects and make changes.

#### **6.1.4 Theme Four: Equality of opportunity and Anti Oppressive Practice**

A crucial element of youth work practice is equality of opportunity for all young people and for the work to be anti-oppressive, that is, ensuring that provision is accessible and inclusive, and that any prejudicial language or behaviour is challenged in ways that provide a safe space as well as a learning opportunity. In doing so, the work is celebrating diversity and challenging oppression, whilst maintaining a voluntary relationship and offering an opportunity for informal education. From my experiences, youth work must be both proactive and responsive in this respect. This means planning engaging programmes with young people to challenge the issues and celebrate diversity and responding with “elegant challenge” (Thompson, 2006, p.65) as necessary, that is to challenge the comment or behaviour whilst respecting the individual and leaving them in a place open to learning, we do not want to become the ‘speed gun police’ when all a young person learns is ‘not to say ‘that’ in front of us’. A Youth worker’s focus must be on change through a process of “Tipping balances of power and control in young people’s favour. Working with the diversity of young people and for equality responses for

them... Promoting equality of opportunity and diversity in your area of responsibility” (Batsleer and Davies, 2010, p.1). If change is imposed, it is unlikely to last as learning is may not to have taken place.

Youth workers have a duty to understand how theory and practice must be considered (Thompson,) and, in my view, seek to understand themselves and others and the complexity of oppression, discrimination and how to work together with young people. There needs to be a commitment to looking at both prejudice and privilege and developing work accordingly, to provide a space for different identities to explore how oppression impacts both as agent group and as target group in order to create a fairer society, bringing social change and liberating young people from emancipation, on their terms. It is important to see people in relation to their social context (Thompson, 2017a), and the social factors, beyond these personal factors it is also vital to consider the complex interaction between cultural and structural factors (Thompson, 2017b).

Sapin (2013) states that youth workers should address inequalities and be proactive in relation to anti-oppressive practice, alongside an anti-oppressive and participatory approach (Sapin, 2013 p.4). This is not necessarily unique to youth work, but this informal participatory process enables young people to engage on their terms. In this respect, there is a clear link between youth work and human rights in that both aspects of a young person’s identity and also their circumstances can exclude them. From my experience, I found that a very limiting factor on

young people's engagements has been poverty, it was essential we did not inadvertently exclude young people and that all provision is free at the point of delivery.

Both the NYA and IYW have a very strong commitment to this area of youth work and make this clear in their ethics documents that it is an essential aspect of the practice. The IYW (2022) talks of the holistic commitment in all areas of a youth workers practice and sets out twelve principles in its Code of Ethics (2004) and considers reflection on practice is integral throughout. Reflective practice is a vital element of youth work; Farrell (2012) describes this as a compass, although the author is describing this to teachers in a classroom, I consider that it is helpful also in relation to youth work, and not just reflecting on practice that is carried out but also reflecting on theory (Thompson, and Pascal 2011), our identity, and our reactions. It is important that an evaluative and reflective component is incorporated into an impact measure in order to ensure that this is a dynamic person centred process and not just data collection.

#### ***6.1.5 Theme Five: Concerned with wellbeing and welfare***

I have considered the proactive and developmental aspects of youth work and whilst these are essential elements, it must be recognised that youth workers also have a concern for young people's wellbeing and welfare (Jefferies and Smith, 2010). It is important to develop a proactive approach to supporting and educating young people in healthy and informed decisions rather than identifying them as a 'problem' that needs to be 'fixed'. This is discussed in more detail in the section 2.4 considering the social construction of youth, there can at

times be the need for an intervention to protect young people from themselves or external situations.

When a 'safeguarding' or 'child protection' situation occurs, a youth worker must follow due process and aim to ensure the safety and welfare of the young person and to, as appropriate, involve the young person in as many decisions as is possible.

My experience and my reflection of wellbeing, leads me to the conclusion that it is the positive development of being well; mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually, in ways that are person centred and rather than just having a concern for welfare, which is more about a duty of care. When not in relation to an immediate safe-guarding issue, wellbeing, as other aspects of youth work, should not only encompass a reactive approach, but a proactive educational process with the young person, having their lived experience at the centre. Jeffs and Smith (2010) recognise that youth work is about both "Education and Welfare" (p.1). The IYW's Code of Ethics (2022) is the notion of welfare and a duty of care whilst recognising the importance of the educational process and indeed the importance of experiential learning. There is a need to support and ensure a young person's wellbeing and welfare, yet the challenge for youth work professionals is to ensure that it is delivered in a way that is consistent with the other elements of practice discussed previously. Youth work, whilst ensuring the welfare of young people, is also about ensuring young people are able to develop strategies and resources to develop their own wellbeing and be responsible for their own welfare and choices.

Whilst the move towards greater recording of the work was introduced by The Government with the Connexions Service in 1999, and subsequent reports such as 'Transforming Youth Work' in 2002, there is also a greater emphasis in times of austerity, when people, families, communities, organisations and government are struggling financially, on 'casework' 'vulnerable', 'targeted' or young people 'at risk'. This can lead the practice away from generic group work and activity, and towards almost a 'surgery approach' of 'fixing a problem' as can be noted in my critical reflections in Narrative One: My story of practice. Youth workers must be able to work with all young people and in ways that promotes their development and, as de St Croix (2017b) notes, that youth work should be underpinned by informal education that young people choose to participate in, this participation must be on their terms, the extent to which they participate and for how long should be their choice and the notion of a targeted agenda takes the practice away from this principle.

Youth workers need to be clear that whilst an aspect of their function it to ensure the welfare of young people and act appropriately in line with safeguarding procedures, it is essential that the work delivered with young people is focused on their wellbeing and offers enabling and empowering programmes of work, which support young people to develop awareness, make choices, take actions (Maynard and Stuart, 2018) and activism based on these choices and their interests and to develop strategies in order to take responsibility for the consequences. It is vital to have these principles in mind when constructing a measurement tool.

#### **6.1.6 Summary**

The literature suggests there are five fundamental elements to youth work, however these can also be evident in other professions and ways of working with young people. Whilst these are not exclusive to youth work in isolation, for the practice to be youth work, all of these elements should be present. There is the potential for there to be evidence and outcomes in relation to each of the elements of youth work separately, and tools and frameworks exist to support this. It is in my view, that it is in the story told by young people that we have the potential to distil youth work, and potentially capture the impact.

1. Informal Education
2. Voluntary Relationships
3. Empowerment and being young person centred
4. Equality of opportunity and Anti Oppressive Practice
5. Concerned with wellbeing and welfare

Given the overlaps, the challenge is to find what differentiates these other professions from youth work, this study considers what youth work is and furthermore, if youth work is as relational as these five themes suggest, then, in addition how can the impact be measured in line with these principles? I also consider whether impact should indeed be measured in an ethical way congruent with the principles of youth work?

This review of the literature is offered as an introduction to clarify the broad frame of reference and to produce the following definition of youth work:



**'Youth work is an empowering, informal, person centred process, it is anti-oppressive, voluntary and participative, and the prime concern is the wellbeing and development of Young People alongside social change'.**

I will be exploring these concepts further, and using these findings to establish an ethical impact measure that provides a robust tool for developing an evidence base. It is essential that youth work not only provides opportunities for empowerment for young people in an existing context, but also enables young people to challenge the status quo, to work for social justice, and the elimination of discrimination through anti-oppressive practice and actively working for a fair and equal society.

Next, I move on to considering the notion of impact, the relationship between youth work and impact and the creating of an evidence base for youth work in order to attempt an evidence base to try to ensure the future of the profession.

**Chapter Seven: Narrative Four: A story about measuring the impact of Youth Work and creating an evidence base, the contemporary debate, based on a theoretical analysis and a literature review**

Once upon a time.... When youth work met impact.... People thought that nobody could measure the impact of youth work and anyone who tried was attempting to measure the immeasurable. But as time went on my desire as a youth worker and my need to measure impact grew and many people, such as the Centre for Youth Impact, started to consider how best this could be done.

What is presented here is a brief contemporary, critical discussion of measuring impact and establishing an evidence base for youth work. I consider:

1. what impact is,
2. who is measuring impact,
3. what is being written that informs the contemporary debate, and
4. who the evidence base for practice is actually for.

It is critical that youth workers find ways to measure the impact, or capture the influence of youth work that are in line with the ethical and professional principles of the profession such as, anti-oppressive practice and empowerment. Failing to measure the impact not only leaves the positive work not evidenced but also can actually be damaging, in that it could change the nature of the trusted, young person centred relationship between young people and the youth worker. If the agenda is not clear as “young people and practitioners often experience evaluation and monitoring as oppressive, intrusive, and inauthentic, particularly when it is based on quantitative ‘before and after’ questionnaires, or attendance and outcomes data

logged on spreadsheets” (de St Croix, 2022, p. 699,). The way in which we should capture, influence or measure impact must be embedded in good custom and youth work practice. The story of the intervention is important and not just a ‘capture’ of the ‘situation’ before and after.

Measuring the impact of youth work has its own vocabulary, much of which is unfamiliar to youth workers, and much contested. My current working definitions and some of the practice issues associated are presented below as an amalgamation of my personal experience and reading.

### **7.1 Key Terms**

I will make mention of the key terms in relation to this narrative, this is to ensure there is a clarity of terminology. They are not presented in a specific order and only in relation to their relevance regarding emerging discussions are they addressed in this narrative.

#### ***7.1.1 Evaluation – to judge or calculate the quality, importance, amount, or value of something.***

My experience shows me that evaluation has sometimes been a tokenistic endeavour and has been focused on how a session or a project ‘has gone’ has it been successful in meeting the criteria set? Did it ‘go well’ or ‘badly’. The challenge is to establish an appropriate method of judging the work against set criteria that considers actual impact and not simply on things that

have been done or could be counted. According to de St Croix (2017b) we need to rethink the way we evaluate youth work and how this can be used to hold the profession to account.

#### **7.1.2 Measure – to discover the exact size or amount of something.**

I have been encouraged throughout my career to count... count the number of young people attending a session, a project or a centre; how many young women become pregnant as teenagers; how many young people are in local authority care; how many are committing crimes or anti-social behaviour; levels of drug and alcohol use; who is homeless or a young carer; what is the percentage of young men, young women, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, Black, Asian, White, young people who are disabled or identify as having a learning disability. My gut reaction is 'who cares' literally, who wants to know and for what purpose, what is then the benefit for young people in their development and transition as a practitioner? I had to report this information to funders, local councillors and managers and it was rarely apparent how this information or 'measurement' improved the offer that young people desired. The very nature of this way of measuring prompted a deficit approach leading to targeting young people who are perceived to be vulnerable or at risk. Rather than working with all young people in a universal empowering way that supports young people to realise their hopes and dreams, dealing with issues and challenges along the way as they emerge organically through trusting relationships, rather than 'data on paper.' Hughes *et al.* (2014) go further and suggest that for any measurement to be meaningful, it must not just be a box ticking exercise and that in order for the 'measure' to be meaningful then any indicators should be developed with the involvement of the people to be 'measured', therefore participatory evaluation and research (Stuart, Maynard and Rouncefield, 2015) is an approach

which is significant when researching the impact of youth work. I recognise that it is important for youth workers to be accountable to outside agencies and funders, but it is more important to be accountable to young people.

### **7.1.3 Evidence – one or more reasons for believing that something is or is not true.**

In youth work the fundamental questions for me are what are we gathering evidence of? And who determines what the truth is? Who determines what is the relationship with the deficit-based areas identified above, or the successes young people identify for themselves and their progress towards their goals? Are we evidencing a process of social change or social control? Foucault, (1988a p. 131), suggested we should provide evidence only to resist the powerful “regimes of truth” that generates policy to tackle perceived problems associated with ‘disaffected youth’ (Hughes *et al.*, 2014). My experience shows me that the evidence I have been asked to collect has usually been to demonstrate how money from the ‘public purse’ or the ‘funder’s purse’ has been ‘well spent’ which has seen statistics like, a desired reduction in teenage pregnancy, a reduction in young people committing crime or being a ‘nuisance’, achieving their GCSEs, attending school, a reduction of young people in care. These are positive outcomes, but young people need to be at the centre of the decision-making process, or there is danger of ‘robbing’ them of valuable learning experiences through reflection. The focus here has always been on the young person and how they can fit into society rather than a response from the evidence to change society in order to meet young people’s own identified needs and aspirations.

***7.1.4 Evidence based – A decision, plan, policy, or practice that is supported by a large amount of scientific research.***

If the evidence is flawed or prompting a non-youth work response, that is a response that is outside the boundaries of a youth worker's role, then how can this be a base for our practice? The evidence that is helpfully collected is that of the impact of youth work on the lives of young people and it is this that I am wanting to achieve through this thesis, an appropriate and ethical way of gathering information in order to further inform and influence youth work itself.

***7.1.5 Impact – a powerful effect that something, especially something new, has on a situation or person.***

Youth work, the relationship between a young person and their youth worker, certainly can have an impact on the lives of young people and in turn community and society. Whilst I challenge the categories of measurement above, I support the notion of working with young people in an asset balanced way (Stuart and Perris, 2017) in order to support them to overcome challenges and realise their dreams, thus generating impact. In my experience young people are not broken, and do not need fixing; they need support, respect, boundaries and the opportunity for learning and development, and to 'play out'. Impact is very nuanced, what might be a large change for one young person is a small change for another. Youth work potentially creates impact in the long term, but impact measures are often short term and time or project limited.

#### ***7.1.6 Outcome – a result or effect of an action, situation, etc.***

The identification of outcomes has become custom and practice over recent years with the introduction of recorded outcomes and accredited outcomes, tools to record and processes to capture this started to appear on the market, such as the Outcomes Star in 2005. Also, there are many long standing ways to accredit the work of young people such as DofE, Youth Achievement Awards, and whilst I have managed many projects over my years in practice in which young people have achieved 'awards' I remain unconvinced that I have ever truly or intentionally measured the impact of these youth work outcomes on the lives of young people. It seems impossible to attribute any impact in the lives of young people to any one area of support or intervention, it would be arrogant to imagine that youth work was the significant and only factor. There needs to be some humility when any professional is 'outcome claiming' even when there appears to be supporting evidence.

#### ***7.1.7 Output – the amount of goods and services, or waste products, that are produced by a particular economy, industry, company, or worker.***

A popular and easy way to identify whether a youth service is value for money is to count how many 'bums there are on seats'. External agencies, the local authority or funders set an amount that indicated success or money well spent. A regular example in my practice was to record how many young people attended a session, project or club and if the 'number' was deemed sufficient then there were no more questions asked, however if the number was deemed too low then we were encouraged to explore what was 'wrong' and question why young people were not attending, it was inconceivable to imagine they might just not want to

attend. If the numbers made happy reading, then there was little concern about the quality of the youth work, the impact on young people's lives or social change, indicating how far-removed outputs are from quality measures.

Evidence, outcomes, impacts and measurements are recorded for a number of reasons, for example: for funders to demonstrate funds well spent; for public sector organisations to demonstrate value; for young people to recognise distance travelled, and offer the opportunity for celebration, however the evidence must ultimately be for young people.

## **7.2 The contested nature of measurement, impact, and evidence**

The area of measuring and offering a way to provide an outcome-based framework of evidence for youth work is contested, it is contested by youth workers, providers, and academics. In this section I offer a brief overview of the key points of contention and offer my own reflective perspective as a youth worker. There are those who believe youth work can and should be measured, those who believe that it cannot and should not be measured and there is also a middle ground where opinion is less polarised. This is a spectrum I have travelled back and forth along over my years in practice and academia, from being adamant that to measure youth work would be to destroy it, to being equally adamant that to not measure youth work would put the profession's very existence at risk. I am keen to acknowledge that this narrative is distinct from a discussion about evaluation of youth work, it is a consideration of measurement and impact. Doherty and de St Croix (2019) recognise that the value placed on youth work by young people is not reflected in the way it is measured, and this was my



experience in practice, young people valued the conversations, the opportunity to caucus with their peers and yet it was not this that I was asked to measure.

### **7.3 Theory of Change, A logic model**

Theory of Change (McNeil, Millar and Fernandez, (2019) as a logical process model has come under scrutiny from practitioners keen to preserve the young person centred organic approach (Ord 2012; In Defence of Youth work, 2012) but it is celebrated by many including the National Youth Agency as a way to establish a plan and a means of monitoring and recording youth work. I value the reflective process that Theory of Change provides, it is essential that young people are included in this process, and as acknowledged by McNeil, Millar and Fernandez, 2019, all be it at a later stage in the process. I recognise from my practice that positive work with young people leads to positive outcomes, and it is recognised by Stuart and Hillman (2017) that the theory of change can help unpack and demonstrate this process in their consideration of an asset-based theory of change with the Foyer Federation. It is not the model or process that would necessarily be faulty, but rather the assumptions within it. A deficit or positivist Theory of Change would be very problematic for youth work, again, congruence in practice and measurement of ideologies is needed.

I have used the Theory of Change Model (Stuart and Perris, 2017) and I found it helpful as it has offered me a logical way to set aims and outputs based on the real rather than perceived needs and aspirations of young people. It was useful to identify the process and assumptions leading to the aim and then this Theory of Change map was used to evaluate success. I consider this process useful if young people are actively and meaningfully involved in the

process, however, it is impossible to set aims and identify cause and effect in the ever-changing context of the work and the lives of the young people who have a diversity of influences. It is hard, if not impossible, to know what the actual impact of their engagement in youth work actually is (Duffy, 2017).

#### **7.4 The implications of Curriculum**

Both outcomes and outputs are a language all too familiar in youth work, as Ord (2004) stated, they imply a curriculum or product stated. Curriculum is somewhat helpful in supporting youth workers to communicate and agree but more so is an important interface between youth work and wider services working with young people and communities. Outcome and outputs imply inputs, potentially limiting the spontaneity and free flowing direction of grassroots youth work. This was an issue that, at times, made me sceptical of this agenda in practice. The challenge is that though who offer the input, funders for example, can dictate the outcomes they wish to achieve which may not necessarily be in line with what the young people want as outcomes for themselves.

The Transforming Youth Work, Resourcing Excellent Youth Services (2002) guidance imposed a curriculum approach on local authorities and organisations receiving funding for the delivery of youth work, setting compulsorily targets, requiring that young people contacts be recorded and tracked when they attended provision. Many of the young people I worked with resisted this perceived surveillance and I suddenly had young people signing in as 'Pingu' amongst other 'creative' pseudonyms. It is important to recognise that youth work curriculum monitoring and recording should support a process in line with youth work principles and not

as a means to providing outcomes and outputs (Ord, 2004, 2008). For external transparency, it is important that the curriculum informs process and not content or product (Ord, 2008, 2016).

### **7.5 Measuring Impact and Creating an Evidence Base for Youth Work**

I consider throughout this thesis how can we measure the impact of youth work and indeed whether youth workers, academics and researchers should seek to measure the work and whether this can be ethically achieved without changing the nature of the intervention. If the answer to these fundamental questions is yes then we need to create an evidence base that measures impact, ethically and in line with youth work principles and ideology. As Doherty and de St Croix (2019) recognise, it is important that any method of gathering evaluation data introduced should be appropriate to youth work, or risk interfering with the special relationship between young person and youth worker.

There are a number of tensions that I consider and seek to resolve during this study, such as the process used to 'measure' the 'impact' of youth work and if this can actually be achieved at a more ethical and philosophical level, rather than an individual young person level. There are a range of contemporary views about measuring impact and in order to provide a balanced context I will consider the views of a number of key writers and attempt to arrive at a position for this thesis.

The notion of measuring impact needs careful consideration so that the work with young people can be recorded in a way that genuinely recognises the impact of the work on the lives of young people, unless this can be achieved there is a risk that youth work could become marginalised (de St Croix, 2017b).

It is my observation, and position, that it is too simple a concept to say that there are those who believe that the way we deliver youth work must be defended and that measurement interferes with the very essence of the work, conversely that there are those who insist it must be measured in order survive. I recognise that there is a spectrum of opinion between these two poles, and I will consider this debate in the following brief review of the literature and opinion.

## **7.6 The Debate**

### ***7.6.1 Arguments against evidencing the impact of youth work.***

The period of Austerity from 2010 has had an impact on the way youth work is delivered and how the profession has had to evaluate and account for the work delivered and the money that is spent, which is documented in Narrative Two. During my time in practice the focus shifted from a flexible and young person-centered curriculum that identified process, to a much more rigid and outcomes focused curriculum that emphasised how money was being 'well spent'. As de St Croix (2017b) suggested, this pushes the work toward a culture of 'performativity' and whilst this is primarily an issue for formal education there are parallels for youth work as an informal education profession (Jeffs and Smith, 2021). Whilst there is a

plan and some choose the term curriculum for youth work, the informal education of young people is through activities, conversations with trusted adults and peers and spending time in association with other young people. This is a dilemma, when the work is, rightly in my view, spontaneously based on young people's needs and desires, but funders and government require the work to be monitored and measured against a set of predetermined targets and outcomes that can be accounted for. It is essential that youth work educators ensure a focus on the informal education nature of youth work (Alldred and Howard, 2022).

Duffy (2017) considers evaluation of youth work, and de St Croix (2017c) reflects, in a review of Duffy's work, that evaluation is a narrow concept. The intention of my research is to go beyond and even away from evaluation, to consider not only how things went but also the impact that occurred in the lived experience of young people. I also suggest that if we evaluate and measure individual distance travelled based on the perceived success of an intervention, then we enter the realm of comparison and competition and taking the focus away for young people and towards achieving a return from a financial investment (de St Croix 2016b).

An outsider looking into an open youth club session could report an unstructured and chaotic environment, yet to the trained eye and as de St Croix (2016a) recognises, this type of provision is difficult to measure as it is not delivered against a predetermined set of criteria. A responsive and relational way of working with the raw material being presented by the young people present and in ways that therefore makes best sense, through unstructured activities and discussion or in negotiation with the young people, for the delivery of more structured activities or project work. This is also likely to change over the short, medium, and long term

as attendance, issues, needs, goals and the context of the young people's lives change over time and this can often take place rapidly. The session may well be evaluated, and some measurement may take place, but it is important to establish how to measure the impact of the relationship and engagement on the lives and decisions of young people, indeed how do we capture the influence. Unless a way is established to measure the impact of this nature of youth work, we will rely on a neoliberal, managerialist approach to being accountable. Youth workers are accountable to young people, and this is a fundamental consideration in any impact measurement process in line with the youth work principles of person centred voluntary participation, ensuring young people are stakeholders in the evaluation and measurement processes. A drastic shift away from evaluating how provision is delivered through dialogue with a staff team and with young people through reflective supervision. This, together with the austerity cuts from 2008, has changed the focus and nature of the profession. The shift was towards impact rather than evaluation and measuring outcomes is, in my view, an essential one.

During my time in practice, I experienced the bewilderment of the new and, what felt like, the imposed agenda of measurements and yet I felt I had no voice as a practitioner to influence a process of more appropriately and ethically measuring the impact of youth work on the lives of young people and their communities.

There was debate then, as there is now, amongst practitioners across a spectrum of options about the worth and validity of measurement. Initially I was resistant to any measurement of impact for the reason that this detracted from the time that could actually be spent with

young people, I viewed this is a neoliberal tool to control the profession and young people, I could see that imposing forms of impact measurement on the work was changing the nature of the relationships with young people and yet my funded service, and job, was dependent on engaging and measuring as requested by philanthropic and public funders. I had no choice, or voice, as time went on and I found ways of engaging in the measuring impact agenda in different ways and started to see the value for the work, the young people, the community, and the funder.

The resistance was not against being accountable, the desire was to be accountable but to the young people and not just the funder, in order to protect the sanctity of the voluntary relationship whilst also acknowledging it is important to justify the distribution and allocation of resources. The reason for this thesis is to explore how, and indeed if, we can ethically measure the impact of youth work and be accountable to the young people we have the privilege of engaging with, on their terms. I concur with de St Croix (2017b) in recognising that the approach for measuring impact needs to start where young people are at and be centred in their lived experiences. There needs to be consideration regarding what measurement is and how this can be carried out in ways that are congruent with this established practice and principle. I now consider it vital and ethical that we find ways of honouring the young people, the work, the profession and in doing so not only protect a future for youth work and its established core values and principles but also reimagine what youth work in a 'new normal' world could be and the impact and influence it can have.

It could be considered that the notion that impact measurement and evaluation are mechanisms of the state as a way of social control (Skott-Myhre, 2008) as well as organisational compliance, whilst ensuring organisational and individual accountability. I acknowledge that it is important to ensure that impact is measured in a way that does not reinforce the unequal power dynamics in society nor make the assumption that it is the youth work intervention that has led to the impact. Our youth work interventions exist within the wider systems of society and young people's lives, and it is important that youth work interventions are responsive (Joshi, 2022) and do not claim credit that is rightfully owed to the young person.

Consequently, I question if it is necessary to 'identify' individual characteristics of young people and their identities for the purpose of impact measurement and whether it is significant to know the percentage of people who identify differently in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, class, sexuality or disability. I suggest that 'yes maybe it is' but only when it is significant to the outcomes of the intervention and not just as the custom and practice of data collection. I recognised the significance of this identity data collection if it challenges our practice to make sure we are being inclusive and not missing people through doing the 'same old stuff'. We need to be sure of our rationale and not collect data for the sake of it as this is not only a waste of time but also potentially contributes to systemic oppression and surveillance, which is not in line with the values and ethics of the profession, or indeed valuable when measuring impact.



The challenge remains as to how we 'measure' the impact of informal education that focuses on process often with organic and naturally occurring outcomes without a specific time frame (Duffy, 2017; Ord, 2016; de St Croix, 2018). Joshi (2022) challenges me to not only evidence the impact of the tangible outcomes but ensure there is a way for young people to represent those priceless and potentially intangible changes that impact on them, individually.

It was reported by Taylor (2017) in a debate, that youth work can subjectively be 'treasured if not measured' recognising that the desire to measure impact is inextricably linked to the neoliberal focus on managerialism and outcomes and that this is not well suited to how the impact of grassroots, open youth work can or indeed should be measured.

Doherty and de St Croix (2022) invite us to consider 'Capturing the magic' in their grassroots perspectives on evaluating open youth work, and whilst this thesis refers to youth work beyond open provision the language of this article is more consistent with my view that youth work is somewhat 'magically intangible' and therefore difficult, if not impossible to measure using any form of predesigned or standard metric, it can, and should, be a fluid, fun and meaningful process leading to evidence of impact. This however, as with youth work practice, should be an informal process (Doherty and de St Croix, 2022). I recognise that there is magic to be captured, not only in individual stories of young people, but also in grassroots open youth work. The enduring challenge is how we ensure that the value of youth work and its impact can be demonstrated whilst remaining consistent with the values of the profession, notably young person centered and not oppressive. Given the nature of the profession and the voluntary nature of engagement, it is a challenge to evaluate or measure, as youth work

is not a specific intervention with aims and objectives, but more an indeterminate relationship and engagement that the young person owns, they have a story, the group of young people have a story.

#### ***7.6.2 Arguments for evidencing the impact of youth work.***

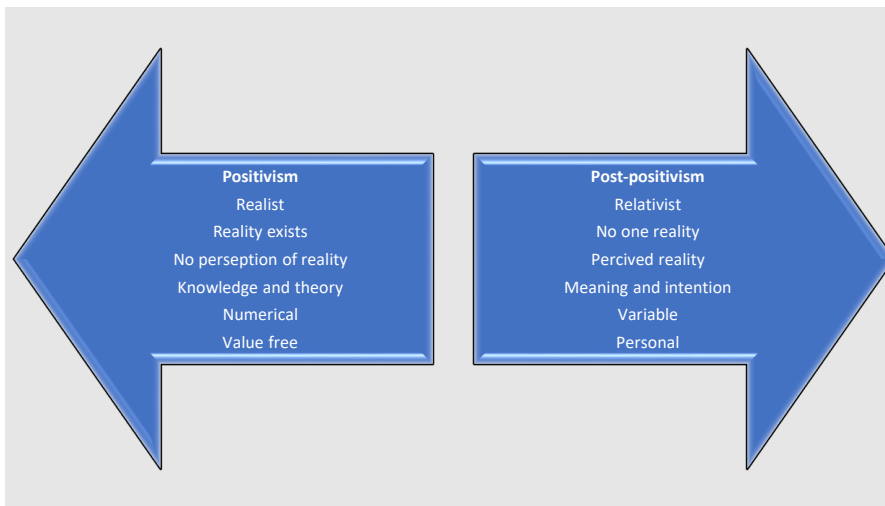
It is important to acknowledge that in order to discuss the impact of youth work and the benefits of evidencing the work that it is essential to consider the relationship to evaluation. I find the work of Duffy (2017) intriguing as she suggests that it may be possible to actually reclaim evaluation, measurement and the use of statistics to generate political debate and it is perhaps only with this traditional type of performance evaluation that the impact of youth work will be noticed in a political arena, and again I consider it important to deliberate if this is a desired outcome. This suggests to me that the very purpose of evaluation needs redefining, perhaps less about justification of practice to something more emancipatory about positive social change itself, and there needs to be congruence between youth work ideology and impact measurement ideology. The government, after all, likes there to be tangible evidence to support the investment from the public purse so perhaps, regardless of an individual view this is a necessity since 'evaluation' as such is not problematic, but the particular positivist methods advocated are.

Evaluation is also considered as a form of research (Stuart, Maynard and Rouncefield, 2015) and as such it is important to be congruent not only to youth work principles but also to the research process and associated principles. The use of post-positivist participatory evaluation could be a perfect match to youth work methods and create an evidence base that is

meaningful to youth workers or youth work, as there is never just one reality (Stuart, Maynard and Rouncefield, 2015; Stuart and Maynard, 2022). When considering the impact of youth work, how young people experience youth work and any associated impact is dependent on their own circumstance, experience, ability to reflect on the experience, and the application of learning (Kolb, 1984), and it cannot be assumed that impact will be consistent amongst a group of young people.

It is important to recognise and acknowledge how youth work is positioned within a paradigm of evaluation, the ontology of evaluation and how the evaluation is received, based on the world view of reality. Stuart, Maynard and Rouncefield (2015) discuss the nature of reality and question if reality exist outside of perception. I believe that to evaluate or measure the impact of youth work one must take a relativist perspective, as without personal perspective and interpretation youth work does not exist as a reality. As such this area of work sits within a post-positive paradigm, as if youth work is subjective and dependent on perspective then no one reality of youth work can exist, it is personal and can vary from individual to individual and in time and place. The figure 12 below, based on the work of Stuart, Maynard and Rouncefield (2015) illustrates that a post-positive approach is most closely associated with the values and fluidity of youth work and places young people in the process in creative and empowering ways, it is not about seeking what is right and wrong, it is more about how we can understand perspectives (Stuart and Maynard, 2022).

**Figure 12. The paradigms of youth work evaluation**



From the debate about impact measurement the Catalyst consortium was commissioned, led by the Young Foundation and tasked to create a Framework of Outcomes for Young people (McNeil, Reeder, and Rich, 2012). Two years passed before the Centre for Youth Impact was established and very quickly became influential within the realms of youth work, initiated and supported by government. This however, was not supported through legislation, it was through setting out the guidance and direction of youth work practice. The Centre for Youth Impact is a non-governmental body that supports the sector to develop helpful and shared ways to evaluate practice and has provided the impetus for measuring impact, which I discuss in the next section.

## 7.7 Impact Measurement

It is good practice, before commencing any data collection process for impact measurement to consider what evidence is needed and wanted and for what purpose (The Centre for Youth Impact, Measurement Hub, 2022). Youth workers should consider if data is actually needed

to improve practice and impact by way of evaluation, rather than just because youth workers have perhaps become used to collecting certain types of data in the name of equal opportunities monitoring. Let youth workers focus their efforts and resources on ensuring equal, open, developmental opportunities, rather than monitoring the participants surveilling the young people. I believe evaluation should be considered in the same way as research ethics and similar rigor and consideration be applied to consent and voluntary engagement. If those outside youth work better understand the nature of the engagement, then it is hopefully possible to develop a more flexible approach to evaluation and measurement that better captures the success of the interventions through a reflective participatory approach, honouring the complexity and individuality of the intervention and capturing evidence with consent. Just as a youth worker would not be able to evaluate the efficacy of an end-of-life care service, measuring impact must be led by people, with relevant experience, making judgements based on professional uniqueness, such as that of youth workers. It is acknowledged by Culleton and Robbins (2022) that youth workers find it difficult to explain to someone outside of the profession what indeed the profession involves. Youth Work is a profession that is organic, intuitive, and responsive to the emerging needs and issues that young people bring. It is necessary to recognise that there is a lack of impact of youth work evidence and the need to develop ways of enabling youth workers to explain and celebrate what they do and the impact of this work.

The 2010's was a difficult time for youth work, as a non-statutory service it was impacted significantly by austerity measures. My experience shows me that many centres and youth provisions were closing, and youth workers were being made redundant, and it was during

this time there was a groundswell in the requirements to evidence impact. As acknowledged by [Doherty](#) and [de St Croix](#) (2024), the ways in which impact was to be measured reflects a growing move towards a more neoliberal method of accounting for the value of youth work.

The contemporary focus on casework, targeted work and time limited projects restricts the opportunity for longer term opportunities to evaluate the impact of universal youth work and how the impact of the interventions continue to be significant into adulthood. This restricts how practitioners capture the stories of people, and how the impact of youth work can be distilled from a multi-agency response and how the process can be evaluated in the best way (Ord, 2016). It is crucial youth workers develop a way to measure the ability of the young people to develop agency in order to grow and develop as human beings, and not just to survive their vulnerability and the neoliberal system. This seems the enduring challenge, regardless of someone's position on the spectrum or view about the validity of measuring impact. Youth work is a long-term process needing longitudinal evidence rather than short term intervention and /or specific interventions.

There are a number of tools and frameworks that offer the opportunity to capture some evidence and impact of youth work, or work with young people. These are some examples I have considered during this research and are by no means a complete list. The Young Foundations, Framework of Outcomes for Young People (2012, updated 2022), is a helpful tool to support capturing an evidence base for the social and emotional development of young people as they navigate their way through a transition into adulthood and greater independence, an increasingly challenging and complex time for young people (McNeil,

Reeder and Rich, 2012). This framework is positive in support of youth workers attempting to measure the impact of their work and create an evidence base for practice. However, the concern I have is that there remains a focus on analysis and outcome and does not go far enough in allowing the simple story told to be the evidence. It is important to consider wellbeing as well as the potentially more tangible outcomes of youth work. Wellbeing is incorporated into my definition, and if we are truly to consider measuring the impact of youth work, then we must also consider how to capture how the work impacts on wellbeing. The Search Institute offer a Developmental Assets Framework, this framework is based on extensive research into the assets, both internal and external to the young people that supports their success. This is adapted by the YMCA in Newark, who offer a Developmental Assets Project, which is a young person's wellbeing framework ([YMCA Developmental Assets Programme | YMCA Newark & Sherwood](#)), an important contribution to evidence and outcomes capture as well as supporting young people, but this is a survey rather than story based and therefore offers an external framework that is pre-decided with a set of questions based on young people attitudes and behaviours. Whilst a helpful tool in youth development, for me, youth work demands a more fluid and young person centred approach. The NYA offers a Quality Mark (NYA, 2006) designed to support organisations to consider the quality and impact of their work, whilst a helpful tool, it is not specific to the individual young people and the stories they tell.

It is essential that when young people come together expecting youth work, then this is what they are offered, equally and accessible at the point of delivery. It would never be appropriate in my view to bring young people together in a coercive way to simply generate evidence and

test for impact, for example, it would be unethical to have randomised control tests as young people would be deceived and denied a service.

### **7.8 Youth Work and Youth Development**

There is much debate in relation to the potential difference between what is perceived as youth work and what is non formal youth development, which was publicly debated in 2015 by Maynard and Stuart (2015), and Davies, Taylor and Thompson (2015). Personally, I have moved my position on the relationship between youth work as an intervention and the credibility of measuring outcomes and demonstrating youth development. For me the more important consideration is how this can be done ethically and in line with youth work values and principles, in my experience youth work is a process that leads to an impact that is based on an emerging curriculum based on the young person's situation, whereas youth development suggests a more predefined curriculum with therefore anticipated and desired impacts for the young people. In line with my earlier definition, I consider that youth work is an informal learning process and yet should be planned and have an appropriate way of measuring the outcomes of the intervention, however leaving space for unintentional learning to take place and if appropriate, for it to be captured. Johnson and Majewska (2022) support the notion that non-formal learning places the control over the learning journey more in the hands of the learner, in this case the young person, and away from the youth work, which on first reading implies a congruence with youth work ideology. However this suggests that 'knowledge' exists to be learned, whereas my interpretation of informal learning best aligns with youth work as it focuses more on learning from experience, learning based in activity,



initiated by the young person and their reflection on that activity, supported by a youth worker. This learning can take place as part of a youth work intervention or from their life outside the provision, but it can be reflected on through the youth work process.

### **7.9 My Position**

This thesis is a story of both support for and skepticism of the impact agenda, it is recognised by many youth workers that this is becoming normalised in the sector (McNeil, 2017; de St Croix, 2017c), measuring the impact has become common practice and there is an expectation that funded work comes with a requirement to 'account' for the spend. In my experience, this 'accounting' is often in terms of 'numbers and money'; pounds spent, number of young people reached, distance travelled using off the shelf tools so that a judgment can be made in relation to the perceived 'success' of the work against a predetermined external set of criteria. The tension arises regarding how we develop a spontaneous intervention or service that is based on the needs, issues, and desires of young people, whilst delivering against a pre-defined set of targets or a curriculum, usually decided by adults who hold the power, such as funders and those in government. There is a tension to arrive at establishing stable causality where the lives of young people can be unstable, dynamic and sometimes chaotic. As youth workers we are accountable to many people and institutions, yet it is to young people that we are ultimately accountable as any evaluation of youth work practice must demonstrate accountability to the young people (Doherty and de St Croix, 2022).

Following my reflection of my own practice and this review of the literature my view feels better informed, yet I am still of the opinion that youth workers need to find a way to measure

impact rather than find a justification not to. I do, however, remain somewhat bewildered as to how it might be possible to ethically measure impact in line with my definition of youth work. I am looking forward to engaging with my participants in conversations to explore this further and to capturing their own, stories of practice.

Having now set out four key narratives based on my own experience and a review of literature and policy I will now tell the story of my engagement with my participants, beginning with those who engaged with the questionnaire... Are you sitting comfortably? Then I shall continue.

**Chapter Eight: Narrative Five: A practitioner's story about Youth Work and measuring impact, told by the data from the questionnaires**

his story is created by the participant responses to the questions in the questionnaire (see appendix six). The questionnaire itself and the coding of the data collected from this phase of data collection is informed by the data from previous narratives: my own reflections from practice, the story of history and policy, the narratives about youth work and measuring impact, and supports the formulation of the questions for the next stages of data collection. The main function of the questionnaire was to identify participants and hone the themes and subsequent questions for the one-to-one discussions and the focus group.

The story tellers in this narrative are the twenty-seven people who responded individually to the questionnaire, the sample size is too small to make any statistical claims and does not serve this function. I did not enquire about personal identity data but can report that of these 27 participants there are a range of professional identities and settings included, those who work with young people directly, those who teach young people as well as those who manage projects and service for young people. There are also participants who carry out relevant research and those who teach and train those who are working with young people in a variety of ways including youth work. They represented a cross section of sectors 62% hold a JNC qualification as demonstrated a majority of participants had a longevity of practice experience 78% had been in practice for over 10 years.

What is presented here a meta-narrative as I have brought their individual responses together to present their collective experience, there was one blank response. I intend to let these responses speak for themselves and not attempt to link to previous narratives or literature at this stage, I will return to this in my discussion. I will refer to participants using a letter of the alphabet in order to maintain anonymity.

### **8.1 Coding of the Data**

I used an abductive approach to thematic coding for analysis, including firstly deductive and then inductive methods of coding based on learning about common terminology from the previous narratives in order to make sense of this data set, see Tables One and Two. The Deductive coding was carried out in four stages based on the previous finding and analysis:

1. Initial Stage is based on the findings from Narrative Three: A Story about Youth Work, its Ideology and Underpinning principles and characteristics, based on a Theoretical Analysis and Literature.
2. Second Stage is based on the findings from my own My story of practice in Narrative One and the Context Chapter.
3. Third Stage is based on the consideration of ideology in the Context Chapter and Narrative Two: A Story about the History, Politics and Policy of Youth Work.
4. Fourth Stage is based on the findings from Narrative Four: A Story about Measuring the impact of Youth Work and creating an evidence base, the contemporary debate, based on a Theoretical Analysis and Literature Review.

As I immersed myself in the data during the deductive phase, I noticed other patterns that formed my inductive codes.

**Table 4. Deductive Coding Key**

Deductive Codes			
Initial Stage	Second Stage	Third Stage	Fourth Stage
Informal Education	Social Change	Educate	Impact
Voluntary Relationship	Social Control	Take care	Measure
Empowerment	Social Construction	Control	Evaluation
Anti-Oppressive Practice			Defend
Wellbeing			Curriculum

**Table 5. Inductive Coding Key**

Inductive Codes-- Single Stage			
Politics	Voice	YP Centred	Asset Based

The coding process (adapted from Braun and Clarke, 2006) I used is as follows:

1. I read the data without looking for any codes or patterns
2. I then used the colours identified in table one to identify the deductive codes
3. I reread the whole data set and started to identify when the following was mentioned directly or implied
  - a. Informal Education
  - b. Voluntary Relationship
  - c. Empowerment
  - d. Anti-Oppressive Practice

- e. Wellbeing
4. I reread the whole data set to identify where the following was mentioned directly or implied
    - a. Social Change
    - b. Social Control
    - c. Social Construction
  5. I reread the whole data set a third time to identify where the following was mentioned directly or implied
    - a. Educate
    - b. Take care
    - c. Control
  6. I reread the data a final time for this deductive phase to identify where the following was mentioned directly or implied
    - a. Impact
    - b. Measure
    - c. Evaluation
    - d. Defend
    - e. Curriculum
  7. I then scanned for inductive codes and patterns that emerged in this data set and using the colour coding in table two I identified
    - a. Politics
    - b. Voice
    - c. Young Person Centred

d. Asset Based

8. Once I had completed this process, I reviewed that data question by question to expose the new narrative data
9. Finally, I reviewed the categories to investigate patterns in relation to sector, qualification or length of service.

## **8.2 So, what story does this data tell...**

To begin with, I explored the participants' professional 'identity'. The next section relates to participants' views on youth work specifically, regarding what are the essential and forbidden elements leading to their definitions. What follows is in regard to their story of experiences with impact, measurement, and evidence. Finally, I consider how participants explain the impact of Covid-19 and the associated lockdowns and restrictions.

### **8.2.1 Professional Identity**

The participants came from a range of professional backgrounds which included, a researcher (1), youth workers (8), a teacher (1) and lectures (4), project workers (4) and managers (9). This was a good range of roles across the sectors and at different levels in organisations. As such I am confident of a wide-ranging perspective in relation to role.

Participants were asked to select which sector they identified as working in, this reflects the makeup of the networks used to send out the questionnaire, the highest response rates are

from the voluntary and public sectors with some response from those in the education sector, this will limit the breadth of analysis as the private sector is not included.

Participants were also asked to acknowledge whether they had a professional qualification in youth work (JNC),. This provided a more balanced range than I expected, and it provides the potential to interrogate if those with JNC and those without offer a consistently different or similar perspective to others. I have worked with people who will claim that in order to be a 'youth worker' you must have a JNC qualification, equally with people who believe that being a youth worker is about function and principles, so I was pleased that there was an opportunity to investigate whether there were differing responses, depending on the JNC qualification.

In order to gain a sense of the participant span of experience the participants were asked to categorise their length in practice, this gives some indication of the changes that have taken place during their time as practitioners. Over three quarters of the participants have been practitioners for over 10 years and as such will have had the opportunity to experience the changes, over time, that are detailed in Narrative Two. Most notably the shift in the 2000s towards a more targeted and measured service. Of the four participants to have less than five years' experience only one has a JNC qualification, perhaps suggesting that there is a greater range of job roles over more recent years that do not require a JNC qualification and whilst the data set is too small to be confident in this assumption it does offer a range of perspectives from inexperienced to experienced staff. Whilst I believe the categories are clear there is the potential for ambiguity due to an overlap error, to explain, a participant with five years in practice could select two to five years or five to ten years, potentially skewing the data.



### **8.2.2 Youth Work**

During the previous stages of data collection and analysis it became apparent that there were a number of elements 'essential' to youth work and participants were asked whether they agreed and they were also asked to give a narrative account of anything they felt was missing from this list. It was important that the participants were unaware of my process in establishing the list as I did not want them to see me as being an expert, and then have them say what they perceived I expected (Gray, 2021) in order to reduce conformation bias and also so that the participants felt as confident to disagree as to agree.

It was interesting to interrogate the data to understand whether holding a JNC youth work qualification had any impact on their views regarding what was and was not essential.

The participants were asked to select from a list of six elements considered essential, following analysis of previous narratives.

Of the 27 participants, the majority believed that all the elements that I had selected were appropriate, 15 people selected all six as essential elements. Of the three people who did not include anti-oppressive practice none had a JNC qualification. Perhaps this is indicative and that it is achieved through training rather than practice and that youth workers understand the fundamental role of anti-oppressive practice or possibly that they know the practice by a different term. The majority of participants who did not include informal education, and empowerment also did not have a JNC qualification but the majority who did not include developing wellbeing did have a JNC qualification, this leads me again to suggest that the focus

of the JNC training on informal education and empowerment informs practice. These numbers are so small I suggest, at best, it could be that the training to obtain a JNC qualification which places an emphasis on the terms anti-oppressive practice, informal education, and empowerment but less so on the concept of wellbeing, as potentially being an issue of language rather than intent. This is my experience of training myself as a JNC youth worker and now teaching on a programme that leads to the JNC youth work qualification. The most significant area is that of social change with eight of the participants not including this as an essential element, three of these participants have a JNC qualification whilst five are not JNC qualified, this implies that whilst it is recognised as a significant area of youth work it is considered less essential, especially by those without a JNC qualification. Only one of the ten participants without a JNC qualification included social change as an essential element, there was no pattern in relation to length of practice or sector and the pattern of response was random. Overall, the participants, who are all current practitioners, agreed that the six elements offered as essential were in line with their understanding of what constitutes youth work, with the exception of social change, as over 30% of the participants did not consider this to be essential. This suggests that the participants confirm my view of the work in relation to content and process with young people but slightly less so with my view that the work with young people brings about social change.

**Table 6. The missing Essential Elements that make the practice Youth Work**

Citizenship	Political Education	Safeguarding	Inclusive
Participation	Voice	Trusted Relationships	Association
Expression	Collective Action	Power	Asset Based
Challenge	Governance	Rights and Justice	Self-reflection
Young Person Lead	Practical Knowledge	Social Mobility	Partnership Working

The coding of the questionnaire data created the categories above in Tables Four and Five. Participants added additional elements and there is also commentary that added nuance to the rather stark list I presented. It is recognised that whilst voluntary participation is the ideal, it is important to recognise that where participation is mandated this does not mean the practice cannot be youth work. Participant B recognised that, “Voluntary Participation is ideal however mandated participation (e.g., Young Offenders) should not preclude work from being considered ‘Youth Work’”. Participant E agreed with the list I presented that these were elements of youth work but not necessarily that they had to be present “I think youth work often leads to empowerment, wellbeing and social change, but I don’t think these HAVE to be present for it to be youth work”. Participant B elaborated helpfully on the notion of curriculum and commented that it should be a “reactive curriculum to young people’s needs”.

Elements offered in addition to my list include:

- clarity about the practice being young person led, participant E stated this in terms of a “youth-centric approach” whilst participant P refers to a “young people led approach”.
- young people having a voice and an influence, participant G suggests “Participation” and in turn the voice of young people is heard, listened to and acted on in the creation of a Youth Service Offer and in the wider community” and also participant R recognised “youth voice/participation” and participant V elaborates further and recognises “Unconditional positive regard, discussion and dialogue as a pedagogy, young people being equal partners and fostering democracy in decision making. Youth work uses their voice” as an essential element of youth work.

- that it is necessary to build trusting relationships through dialogue and challenge as well as and with a focus on an asset-based approach, participant H acknowledges that it takes “time to build relationships and trust with young people” and participant I refers to “the development of mutually supportive and respectful relationships”.

I was delighted to note that several participants mentioned a political element to the work, participant A talks of “citizenship (political) education” Also considered is collective action, participant M talks of “association/collective action” as essential. This for me is the essence of social change. Not that I believe that the work we do with young people should have an imposed political agenda, more that we support young people to become aware of the power they hold to be able to influence at a local, national, and global level, participant S refers to “global citizenship”.

I have also identified a number of elements from my practice, the literature and a policy analysis that are defining components of what is not youth work, and I asked if my participants agreed.

The responses to the question about the missing essential elements that make the practice youth work were surprising as the majority of participants appear happy that adults assessing risk and vulnerability, enabling young people, and ensuring their welfare are acceptable elements and that if present means that the practice can still be considered youth work. In relation to curriculum, 19% of participants suggested that if a curriculum is present then the work is not youth work and 37% of participants agreed that if social control is present then it

is not youth work. The majority of the participants held a JNC qualification but there was no pattern in relation to length of service or sector. Perhaps this suggests that the syllabus of JNC training emphasises that youth work should not seek to socially control young people.

In order to give a narrative account, participants were asked to identify anything they felt was missing from the list, that is, what could be present in practice with young people that would render it as not being youth work? There is an interesting consideration regarding when work with young people becomes youth work. The participants considered that anything that could be considered forced inclusion or attendance would make the practice unacceptable to be called youth work. Participant A was clear that “The forced inclusion (without the opportunity to redress) of activities, aims, objectives, etc. that young people participating in the work would find unacceptable.” Another participant agreed that “compulsory attendance” as participant Q stated “compulsion, by law to be involved” participant R concurs and recognises that not only should attendance not be mandated but nor should there be “obligatory engagement with workers” as this would mean the practice was not youth work.

Participants also recognised that “if the practice was entirely adult led” (participant E), or practice in which adults are “dictating sessions” (participant Z) then this was not youth work. Whilst youth work should be an educational process this should not be done in a formal way of teaching, (participant I and participant S) rather, providing an opportunity to learn and develop, as participant G notes “I believe Youth work is an educational process that provides young people with the opportunity to gain/develop skills, knowledge and experiences that

supports them to make informed decisions about themselves (personal education) and how they fit in to society (social education) if this doesn't happen then it's not youth work."

A significant theme emerged from this small data set that indicated youth work should not be tokenistic as participant Y recognises "Anything that represented tokenism" means the practice is not youth work, it should be democratic and young people should have "liberty and choice" (participant U) in which there should be no "surveillance" (participant R) or "censoring of conversations" (participant P).

Two participants also recognised that working from a deficit and not an asset-based perspective is problematic if the practice is youth work. Participant E recognised that attention must be paid to "young people's assets, needs and interests" and participant M is clear that "Working from a deficit view of young people would make it not youth work for me".

I shared my own definition of youth work with the participants, 'Youth Work is an empowering, informal, person centred process, it is anti-oppressive, voluntary and participative, and the prime concern is the wellbeing and development of young people, alongside social change' and invited them to offer their definition. In the main, what is offered enhances, rather than challenges my definition and encourages consideration regarding the inclusion of additional elements. However, it would be concerning if the created definition became too long and complex.

Additional elements, that I considered enhancing of the definition were offered by the participants and have been selected for contemplation: a number of participants suggested elaborating on the young person centred aspect of my definition, participant A recognises youth work as including an “... informal process of empowering young people to learn about the world around them, build their own positive lifestyles in order to achieve wellbeing and be agents for social change for their communities in their vision and not the vision of workers, funders or others” and participant M adds “working with young people to create...” which concurs with other participants who mention meeting young people on their journey and nurturing them to promote the best outcomes for them (participant Y) and participant Z who acknowledges “youth work is working alongside young people to give them the skills to effect positive change in themselves and their communities. It is not something done to young people it is something they do themselves with guidance and counsel from facilitators”.

However, one definition that particularly resonates is “watering the flowers and seeing them bloom” (participant D), this is in line with participant E’s comment that, “youth work is a practice which focusses on enabling young people to feel good and function well.” I think it is also important that if young people are going to engage with a process voluntarily, then it needs to be meaningful and possibly fun, whilst recognising that this may not be something that is easily funded or measured. This also might be the case for a political element of the work, but I agree with the participant who recognise that “political enquiry” (participant P) could be included in a definition.

It has been important to me to establish a working definition for youth work to enable the profession to clearly state the way we work and the aims of that work, in order to be recognised as significantly contributing within a multi-agency environment. This position is strengthened by this data, and it is suggested that we need a definition that states why we need youth work rather than just what we do and how we do it. There needs to be a clear description and clarity regarding the outcomes of the practice, and a definition needs to be understandable and memorable to people who are not involved with the profession. I will investigate the definition of youth work again in the interview's narrative and with the focus group as it is necessary to establish a definition of what youth work is in order to understand what impact is being measured.

Considering the feedback from the participants, I remain confident with the elements of the definition as applied to this study. However, my own definition of youth work could be revised and sharpened to better demonstrate 'why' youth work is needed, whilst ensuring it remains transparent and workable.

Original Definition:

*'Youth Work is an empowering, informal, person centred process, it is anti-oppressive, voluntary and participative, and the prime concern is the wellbeing and development of young people alongside social change'*

Possible revision of a definition following the questionnaire Phase:



*'Youth Work is an empowering, informal, person centred process of informal education, it is anti-oppressive, voluntary and participative, and the prime concern is the wellbeing and development of young people alongside social change, social action and political enquiry. Young people need to be safe, healthy, positively engaged and have choices available to them about their lives and to have fun'.*

However, this definition will be developed again following further data collection. The questions in the interviews will enable participants to explore their own definitions without prompting but for the focus group participants will be asked to interrogate a presented definition.

**8.2.3 The Impact of Youth Work, how it is measured and evidenced.**

The research I carried out to create Narrative Four, a story about measuring the impact of youth work and creating an evidence base, led me to recognise, that like youth work itself, evidence is a contested area, and I am keen to explore my participants’ views and experience of this topic.

Initially I asked, youth work as had an impact when...? Please see Table Six for the broad categories identified.

**Table 7. Youth Work has an impact when?**

<b>Young people say so:</b>
“When young people are treated as individuals” participant F
“Young people tell us” participant P

<p>“a young person tells you it has!” participant S</p> <p>“Is recorded, analysed and reflected upon    young people tell you it has felt impactful” Participant U</p> <p>“Young people tell you it has” Participant A1</p>
<p><b>Progress in life:</b></p> <p>“A young person tells you what a difference you've made to their lives by providing support for them along the way” participant H</p> <p>“When young people collectively make change, When young people engage with services and make changes, when young people are in less crisis/distress, When the relationship between young person and youth worker is at the point where there is trust and the young person can express their fears/worries/concerns/opinions, When young people understand issues of equality, When young people achieve informal and formal awards/outcomes” participant Q</p>
<p><b>Distance travelled:</b></p> <p>“We see young people progress on their journey” participant B</p> <p>“Youth work has impact when a young person is aware of and can explain distance travelled from either a relationship with a youth worker or involvement in a youth work project” participant G</p>
<p><b>Young person aware:</b></p> <p>“Young people are empowered to make decisions about their life, or to take positive action in their lives” participant C</p> <p>“Young people say they feel better and function better (in their own words!)” participant E</p> <p>“in partnership with its participants” participant Y</p> <p>“the young people are engaged in the process and feel it is theirs.” participant Z</p>
<p><b>Make changes:</b></p> <p>“young people feel challenged, with the support to be able to meet that challenge and grow from it” participant T</p>
<p><b>Reflective process:</b></p> <p>“reactive to changes needed by young people throughout its process” participant A</p> <p>“how a person has felt after the intervention” participant V</p> <p>“You build up a meaningful relationship with the young person and they remember the things you did or discussed.” participant A2</p>
<p><b>Growth:</b></p> <p>“Young people have a positive self-image, can interact with confidence, can support other people’s relationships and have a sense of belonging to a greater good” participant I</p>
<p><b>Choices:</b></p>

<p>“Youth work can impact a young person to make an informed choice, help them overcome a difficult situation, give opportunity for future skills and careers development and support social relationships. Impact can be seen in a Young Persons behaviours and attitude, the improvement of a situation and reflected within their decisions” participant R</p>
<p><b>You can see it:</b>          “Youth work has an impact when communities, local authorities, third sector organisations, public sector organisations are aware of the needs of young people and are able to respond and offer support and opportunities” participant C</p>
<p><b>Lived experiences:</b>          “getting their own accommodation, successfully accessing the benefit system, understanding their past and any impact it has on their present and future, they progress into the work or education of their choosing” participant J</p> <p>“workers get alongside young people and involved in what they are doing to understand and appreciate young people’s lived experience and perspectives” participant M</p> <p>“people who have been impacted by youth work say that it supported them to become who they wanted to be, while growing their awareness of the systems and everyday life barriers that oppress them, which in turn, empowers them to challenge their oppression” participant P</p>
<p><b>Designed by young people:</b>          “it has been designed by young people from the beginning of its process” participant A</p> <p>“Young people are part of the process fully” participant N</p>

It is clear that respondents thought that young people must be involved in a process and be able to recognise impact for themselves, whether that is through feeling they have more information to make choices, more able to engage with services that can support them or how they feel following an intervention, also whether they can recognise that they have travelled some distance on a journey they have been on. It is important that young people are treated as individuals, and it is their story and interpretation of the youth work that is significant in impact measurement and not just statistics. It is only through hearing and recognising this that impact can be noted in line with the principle of a young person centred approach. I believe and consider this perspective to be supported by the data, that the significance is not that

thirty young people attended a drama session but what was their experience and how did the intervention impact on them as individuals and on their development.

In order to consider if impact is measured, participants were asked whether they actually measured this aspect of their practice.

It was not surprising to observe that a high percentage of respondents recognised that they measured impact as this is an inescapable feature of contemporary youth work practice and it is evident from previous responses that the participants have experience in this area. It was intriguing that three participants were not sure and disappointing that this had not been interrogated further, with a follow-up question to explore rationales for this answer. It is acknowledged that this question actually asks about work with young people rather than youth work and thus could potentially skew the data. This somewhat limits how robust the interpretation can be; however, this is explored further as the participants are asked to elaborate and tell their story about this in a follow up question.

This data represents a range of opinions regarding what measuring the impact of youth work means, based on my considerations in Narrative Four. There is a clear distinction between quantitative and qualitative measurements, the numbers, and the story. There is consideration of evaluation, participant F considered “many, many different ways from head counting, to post it note evaluation to longitudinal research”, and a variety of methods and tools for capturing this measurement. For example, “narrative accounts, story work, creative methods and validated scales, although these always showed less impact.” (participant E) whilst participant D works with young people to “keep a diary of the activities and we see how they progress. We discuss what they have enjoyed after every session. We play creative

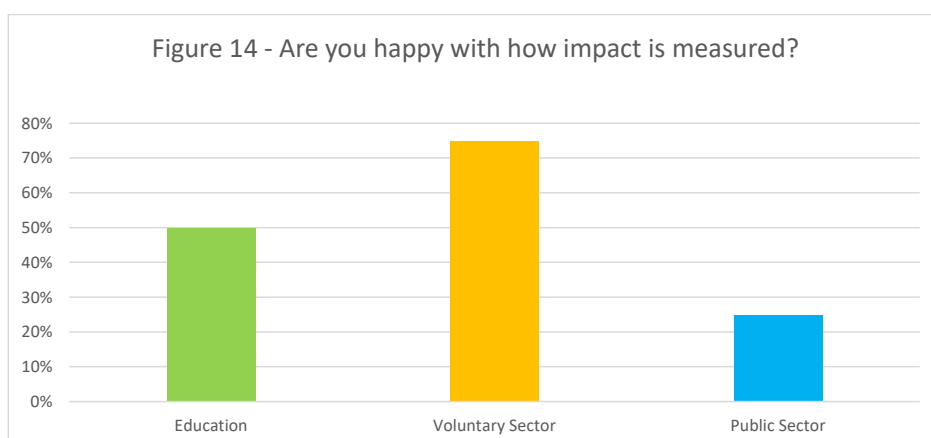
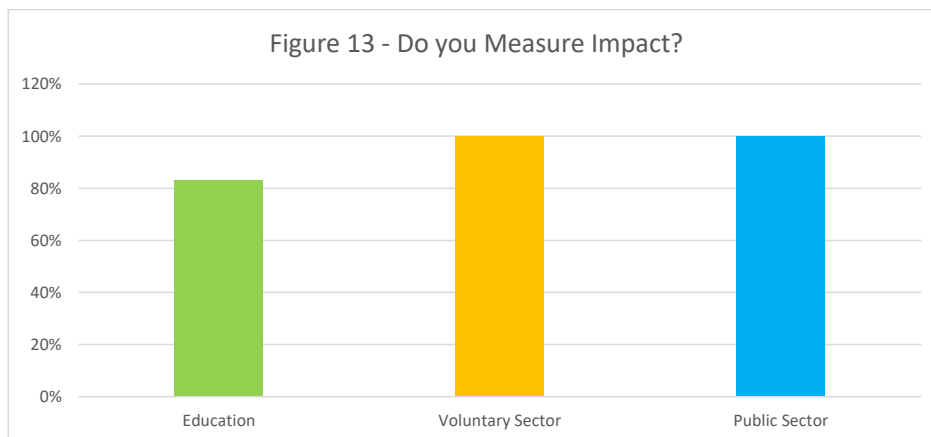
games and see how their imagination and creativity increases” participant S also used a narrative and creative approach “through a variety of measures using young people’s stories as well as quantitative measure. Use a theory of change, questionnaires, story boards” A number of participants used ‘off the shelf tools’ for capturing impact such as “We use many evidenced based programmes to address learning, we use simple tools like quizzes, games to measure knowledge learnt to things such as Radars, Outcome Stars, Youth 4 Health etc. “We use a curriculum we measure the distance travelled by young people, there are a myriad of evaluation tools we can use to see if the young person has moved on in understanding, learnt anything” (participant W). Participant Q gathers “Young People’s views pre and post scales (Child and Young person resilience Scale, My star, Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale) Stakeholder’s views Recorded 1:1 case outcomes Data on attendance at school, involvement in criminal justice system, pre and post levels of safeguarding intervention, staying in mainstream school). Local data on youth related anti-social behaviour YPQI (Youth Programme Quality Intervention) measuring open access provision”. A similar approach is used by participant Z who uses “questionnaires (such as the Warwick Edinburgh scale) at the start and end points of a journey. Use of official data and statistics e.g. Is there evidence of less reported Reflections of anti-social behaviour”.

What seems lacking in these responses is the voice of young people, how best young people wish the impact on them to be measured remains a mystery. Testimony in some form is suggested as a successful way to demonstrate impact on the young person, but it is felt that this is seen as perhaps less valued by those outside youth work as it is seen as less reliable or valid as participant Q recognised “I believe youth work is measured in the lives of those who

are impacted by its process. The problem with this measure is that society places little weight on personal testimony, as it can be contested and is informed by perspective. The respected measures of evidence are reliability and validity which are judged insufficient when evidence is provided by individual's views and beliefs".

There is a seeming lack of clarity regarding the impact being measured and whether it is the success of the work or the individual impact on the young person themselves that is being measured. A consistent theme throughout this data is the need to in some way measure what is achieved. This will be further investigated when conducting the one-to-one interviews to try to establish if there is an effective/meaningful way to capture evidence of youth work, based on the concepts of impact and influences as they are understood by the participant.

Once it had been established whether the participants measured impact, it raised curiosity as to whether they were happy with the way this was undertaken in their organisation. Figures 13 and 14 below represent the findings:



There is an overwhelming response in both the voluntary and public sectors in respect of actually measuring impact with most of the participants from these sectors reporting that they do measure the impact, even in the education sector over 80% of participants measure impact. The data represents a different narrative when considering whether participants are happy with the way their organisations measure impact; 75% of those in the voluntary sector report that they are happy whilst only 25% in the public sector suggest that they are happy

with how their organisation measures impact. However, this statistical data only reveals part of the narrative, the nuanced story is evident only when interrogating the participants' commentary. These statistics are not generalisable due to the small number of participants, but are significant in relation to the categories within this data set.

Given the narrative approach to this thesis, it was pleasing to see the value of story some participants placed on measuring impact. Participant I reported "We need to move away from the term measure". To measure something there needs to be a unit of it.... things like heat, distance and weight can be measured. Other things such as love, confidence and loyalty do not have a unit and as such they cannot be measured. They can be assessed by witnesses including the person themselves, but this has its limitations". Whilst participant E also noted they "like the stats and stories approach- stats to show the scale of change and stories to account for why change happened. I think both are essential." I recognise from my analysis to date that different 'audiences' require a different impact measurement and that both the quantitative and qualitative approaches are necessary. The twelve responses from the statutory sector provided somewhat of a mixed bag and significantly for this research there is a suggestion that the more numerical type measures are easier to capture and there is perhaps a need for a tool or process to better measure the impact or indeed the value of youth work.

From the literature I have reviewed and previous data analysis it was apparent that I needed to explore with participants not only the notion of impact and impact measurement but also, evidence. Some broad themes emerged when participants were asked to consider the



question, youth work is evidenced when? Significantly, young people are 'placed' in the process, and it is their opinion and development that matters. Participant D recognised that "the young people express their own satisfaction" this is supported by participant O who said that "Young people are telling us what works and what does not work" whilst participant J goes further in their view of when youth work is measured as when "Young adults are successfully meeting their own needs to the best of their abilities. They are happy, stable and progressing the future they want".

This question and the next, in which I asked the participants if they actually collected evidence of youth work and if so how and if not why not, revealed some insights as to why we gather evidence and highlights the different uses of evidence, that is, to demonstrate that youth work actually happened, that there has been engagement in youth work, the quality of the youth work intervention and whether there has been an impact as a result of the intervention. The participants use a range of methods for evidencing the work:

- "photographs and videos and written work" (participant D)
- "As wide a range of mixed methods, enabling full participation, knowledge democracy and socially just evaluations: photos, narratives, observations, creative, survey's the full range." (participant E)
- "we take photos, ask young people and gather anything they produce" (participant F)
- "Case studies" (participant G, L, N, and R)
- Participant L "evidences the youth work through art/dance/music/drama"
- Participant Q believes considers "direct feedback from young.... observations from parents, teachers. Retrospective reflection from young people.... Comments from

staff, teachers, parents, young people, other stakeholders Data e.g. Youth related ASB figures Volunteer positions, training jobs gained”.

It is important to be clear whether the outcomes, change and products are as a direct result of the youth work engaged in and this cannot be assumed from this data. A significant theme that emerged through this data set was that of the voice and inclusion of young people in determining evidence. Whilst there can be a range of data, products and identified learning from youth work interventions it is the young people themselves who can and should be enabled to account for the impact made on them individually, and what the evidence of this could look, or sound like.

A high number of participants collected evidence of the youth work they delivered; this is fractionally less (three participants) than those who reported they collected evidence of impact. Only two participants who measured impact of work with young people did not collect evidence of youth work. The questions are too vague to make the claim that those who measure impact also collect evidence, this will be explored in more specific detail during the interviews and the focus group.

The story regarding those who do collect evidence of the youth work they deliver is somewhat similar to that of measuring impact, there are a variety of methods used: anecdotally; providing evidence such as photographs, written accounts, recordings, surveys and a range of creative methods; numerical data; identity data; reports; supervision; social media; the story from the young person; evaluations; questionnaires; games and accreditation, a rich spectrum

of ways to evidence 'what we do' as youth workers. However, the enduring challenge in this thesis relates to how we ethically evidence the impact of the intervention on the young person without interrupting the essence of youth work. It is essential to maintain a process of voluntary participation and not inadvertently engage in surveillance or control of young people, they must remain at the centre of any process.

Twenty-three participants responded to the question, 'are you happy with the way your organisation evidences youth work'? Only 22% of these participants responded no and some felt that more could be done, some who responded yes also acknowledged that evidencing youth work is an evolving process, and that people are doing their best. There is suggestion that tools and a new way for capturing evidence of the impact for young people would be appreciated, including the grey areas and the changes that take place in young people's lives and not just the activities and interventions they engage in.

In order to finalise this section, I asked participants whether they were youth workers. This almost felt like a provocative question . I wanted to explore whether those who considered themselves to be a youth worker, agreed or disagreed with my views and vision for youth work.

The ability to analyse the significance of this question would have been enhanced had I also enquired as to the rationale for their answer which may have identified whether this was based on the qualifications they held, their job roles, their experiences, values, or indeed any further reasons.

It can however be noted that in answer to this question, the majority of participants who held a JNC qualification also reported as being youth workers. There were four anomalies: one person without JNC was unsure whether they were a youth worker, one felt they were a youth worker and two people with JNC reported that they were not youth workers. This suggests to me that in the main people with a JNC qualification identify as youth workers but perhaps their current roles impact upon this. I know I certainly do identify as a youth worker, although this is not my current job role.

#### ***8.2.4 The Impact of Covid-19***

When I started this PhD research a virus with the potential to impact on the world in the way Covid-19 has only existed in fiction and there has been much tragedy and suffering since it emerged at the end of 2019. A whole thesis could be written about the impact of Covid-19 on young people and on youth work today, and the future still remains unclear. However, there are some emerging areas of impact on the lives of young people and those who work with them, as well as how the work is actually being delivered. I will briefly consider some of this impact and report how the participants, whom I have engaged with in the interviews, perceive the impact of covid on their own work.

The Health Foundation (2020) recognises young people as the 'Covid-19 generation' and presents suggestions that young people are the worst affected in relation to social, health and economic matters. It is noted that the impact is on a number of levels, their emotional state

and not enjoying activities with limited private space at home, this is especially impactful in less affluent homes, and for young people from minority ethnic backgrounds.

Public Health England (November 2020), on behalf of the Government, reported the impact of the pandemic on children and young people and it is recognised that restrictions and closures are likely to negatively impact on the mental health and wellbeing of young people. However, there is evidence to suggest that some people are coping well and also report positive impacts on their mental health. It is further recognised that loneliness is challenging for many young people and that young people are suffering due to lack of access to services. The impact is far reaching in terms of physical and mental health. There is already clear evidence that the restrictions imposed, due to Covid-19, are having a profound impact on the health and wellbeing of young people (Young Minds, 2020). Those with existing mental health conditions are being significantly impacted. Young Minds (2020) has carried out a number of surveys with young people who have a history of mental health issues and the data suggests that as the restrictions persisted, young people reported that the impact on their mental health was becoming significantly worse as a result of increased anxiety, isolation, loss of motivation, becoming lonely and a reduction in coping mechanisms and support services. The data from a Young Minds survey with young people who already had a history of mental health issues in the summer of 2020 revealed that, “80% of respondents agreed that the coronavirus pandemic had made their mental health worse... 87% of respondents agreed that they had felt lonely or isolated during the lockdown period” (Young Minds, 2020) and Power *et al.* (2020) recognised that young people are disproportionately affected psychosocially by Covid-19. The Young Minds survey in 2021 reported that 75% of young responders felt that the

lockdown at that time was more difficult than previously. Creswell *et al.* report that young people and their parents reported a detrimental impact on the mental health of young people during lockdowns, particularly related to when schools were closed. There has been an adverse effect on the economy and society, and it was inevitable there was to be an impact on the way youth work was delivered, and the issues youth workers were responding to. Stuart (2021) consulted with young people to establish what youth work activities could be provided to support young people to recover from the impact of covid, the young people in this consultation reported that they would particularly want sporting type activities and facilities to be provided.

Much work has been done by Youth Sector organisations in response to the changing nature of youth work, due to the restrictions, not only to support young people who are affected directly but also to provide support and guidance as to how youth work can be reimagined and delivered differently to all young people. The National Youth Agency (2020b) has provided regular, timely and thorough guidance to support workers to manage activities in spaces during Covid-19 (NYA 2020b).

There has been a move towards an increase in the delivery of digital and online youth work, young people are already using a range of technology and digital ways of engaging and perhaps Covid-19 has provided youth workers with the need and impetus to move towards a more digitalised delivery and to use this, as an opportunity to engage young people differently. The restrictions 'forced' a new level of creativity in an online world and also perhaps reinvigorated the more traditional ways of delivering detached youth work.

Through my experience as a practitioner and as a supervisor of student placements, it was evident that the use of technology was increasing in the delivery of youth work before Covid-19. Youth centres had computer facilities, training in staying safe online was being promoted to workers and young people, social media was becoming a more familiar way to connect with young people about the work, youth work in a digital world was being spoken and written about. However, this was an incremental process undertaken in a way that was beneficial and meaningful to those involved. I was keen to explore whether my participants' work had been impacted by Covid-19 directly. There are a range of themes identified in this data set, including challenging but also positive impacts.

Not only has Covid-19 impacted on the delivery of youth work, but it has also had an effect on the research methods and data collection. This has impacted on this thesis as all the interviews had to take place over MS Teams rather than face to face. Having considered the impact of Covid-19 I asked the participants, during the survey, for their reflections on the impact of it on their work.

A consistent theme was that much of the work that was delivered face to face had to be suspended. There were a number of responses to this from the participants, these included a move to online delivery in a variety of ways (participants A, E, G, I, L, N, P, Q, R, S, U, X and A2) online support and drop-ins, digital youth work, phone contact with young people, social media platforms and an expansion of detached work, street based work and working outdoors, in line with the government and National Youth Agency (2020c) guidance (participants D, G, M, Q, W, X and Z).

There were perceived benefits and drawbacks as a result of greater digital delivery. Whilst there has been a desire to expand and diversify the digital offer, this is confined at times by organisational policy. Young people have invited workers into their own online spaces, as participant M recognised “we have lots of close contact with many of the young people we work with, and they were proactive in inviting us into their online spaces to work” within good practice guidelines. Work delivered online makes access for some young people and this is recognised by participant R “Youth club sessions have become online groups and support groups have been set up online. However, this has worked really well for some and has engaged a larger cohort including some who would normally be hard to reach such as those who are often socially and geographically disengaged” but reduces access and presents a barrier and excludes others and “it's highlighted poverty and lack of access to equipment etc” (participant H).

There is limited opportunity to engage with young people who are not already aware of or known to the service and it is recognised that there is a “reduction in ability to reach young people who may not already be known to the service” (participant X). Whilst there can be a digital offer of youth work delivery it is felt that the opportunity for developmental work is restricted, as reported by participant M, and in some cases project work had to cease, also it is reported that it is difficult to make contact with and engage with young people.

Away from actual youth work, delivery participants had to change roles, (participant P and V) others have recognised that there has been an increase in workload that is hindered by



decisions having to be made last minute, participant A reports “a significantly increased workload” and participant V recognised an “increased workload”.

There are many more issues that young people are experiencing and youth workers are supporting them dealing with issues such as: lack of routine; missing friends; more stress for some; whilst others are happy not to be in school; exam and progression stress; specific impact of covid on those from ethnic minorities, and mental health issues, as reported by participant M. Participants specifically recognised a detrimental impact on mental health, participant H notes “lots more 1-1 support has been needed due to increased mental health issues etc” and participant Q “Dealing with mental health more with young people” and participant W offers a “mental health drop in”.

The impact of covid 19 has offered many challenges and issues of delivery and on the lives of young people and yet some positives are recognised. There are positives in that online platforms are helpful for professional meetings and networking and providing the possibility of more people attending.

### **8.3 Summary**

The data from this stage provides many interesting themes about what youth work actually is and this is consistent with the stories told in previous narratives, from my own experience and reflection, the historical and political journey of the profession and the chapter considering youth work. Consistent in the fact that youth work is difficult to define, is context based and contested. The participants tell stories about the challenges, benefits and ways of collecting

evidence of the impact of youth work and the views and processes are mixed. However, what is recognised and implied is that measuring impact and gathering evidence is necessary in contemporary practice and that this presents the challenge of having an effective and meaningful way of doing so.

The questions I have asked, leave me in a position of intrigue and wanting to understand more behind the answers given and interrogate further the meaning of youth work and the processes of measuring impact as well as the language used. Two further stages of data collection took place, interviews with some participants from the survey respondents, followed by a focus group with others survey respondents.

During the interviews stage that will inform the next stage of data collection and contribute to narrative six I explored the following topics:

- Their experience of working with young people.
- I asked them to talk me through their own definition of youth work?
- We considered, from their experience/perspective, how can we most effectively and meaningfully capture evidence of what we do.
- I was interested to understand what the concepts of impact and influence mean to them.
- Supplementary questions investigated their experience and views on measurement.

I am excited to engage further with my participants during the next stages and hearing how this story will unfold.

**Chapter Nine: Narrative Six: A practitioner's story about Youth Work and measuring impact, told by the data from the conversations.**

The story told in this narrative is created by the participants when we engaged in one-to-one interviews, during which time I was privileged to listen to their experiences of practice with young people. We considered their definition of youth work and their experience and perspective regarding how to capture evidence of what we do, in the most meaningful and effective way. I was interested to hear about the concepts of impact and influence, what they mean to these participants and whether there are some things that we can measure, for what purpose and how it could be done. I sought enquiry into the participants' perspectives based on their understanding and experience (see appendix 9). As the narrator, I am presenting their stories, which are the findings from this stage I will discuss and analyse the findings from the data collected at each stage. The words of the participants will be reported, and I will make some interpretation regarding what may be implied. The participants words are quoted and reported in purple.

The structure and content of these interviews, together with the coding of the data collected, is informed by the analysis of data from previous narratives: my own reflections from practice, the story of history and policy, the narratives about youth work and measuring impact, and the data collected at the questionnaire stage. I read, re-read and looked for patterns and themes that enabled me to be confident with the coding themes.

The storytellers in this narrative are four people who, following completing the questionnaire, gave permission to be contacted to contribute further, told their story, and gave permission

to use it. I intend to let their responses speak for themselves and not attempt to link to previous narratives, or literature, at this stage. I recognise that whilst I can make strong claims from the data collected, these claims may not be very generalisable as it is a small and therefore unrepresentative sample, whilst also recognising that no sample can ever be entirely representative (Walliman, 2006).

### **9.1 The Sample**

The four interviews involved two men and two women and took place over a total of 2 hours, 10 minutes and 53 seconds (individually: 25:16, 54:40, 30:20 and 20:37).

The professional roles these participants hold are: a Senior Lecturer, Personal Advisor, Senior Youth Work Manager and Targeted Youth Support Officer. The roles are important as this gives an indication of the breadth of experience.

### **9.2 Experience of working with young people**

Whilst the number of participants in this data set is small, between them they have breadth and depth of experience, all of these participants had over 10 years' experience in practice with 25% over 20 years, 75% are JNC qualified and they work across the public sector (75%) and in education (25%).

### **9.3 Coding of the Data**

I used both deductive and inductive methods of coding based on the learning from the previous narratives. In order to make sense of this data set, I was able to establish a sense of

the narrative threads by becoming immersed in the data on many occasions, see Table One. The Deductive coding was carried out based on the previous findings and analysis. I made some notes of key points during the interviews but was keen to ensure I listened well. I wanted to capture the narrative threads and themes whilst being respectful to the participants. Following the interviews, I initially read the transcripts one at a time, in isolation from each other. This was not a particularly illuminating process, so I listened to the recording of the interviews in their entirety again, in isolation and began to hear some patterns based on the questions I had asked, that directed their story. Following this, I listened again to the full interviews, whilst reading the transcripts without pausing. I began to feel familiar with the feel of the interviews and identified some inductive themes. I then started the process of deductive coding using predetermined categories, this time rather than listening to the whole interview I listened to each individual question. This provided a much clearer demonstration of the themes identified both inductively and deductively.

As I immersed myself in the data, during the deductive phase, I noticed other patterns that formed my inductive codes, please see table one and table two below. Table one shows the codes already established, which I searched for deductively, not all were present in each interview directly, but all were implied from my interpretation of the words used by the participants, possibly as a result of the questions I asked and their prior knowledge regarding what is being researched. Whereas table two shows the new codes that arose inductively, in addition to the deductive codes.

**Table 8. Deductive Coding Key**

Deductive Codes			
Informal Education	Social Change	Educate	Impact
Voluntary Relationship	Social Control	Take care	Measure
Empowerment	Wellbeing	Control	Evaluation
Anti-Oppressive Practice	Politics	Voice	Defend
Social Construction	YP Centred	Asset Based	Curriculum

**Table 9. Inductive Coding Key**

New Codes from Inductive Analysis				
Participation	Dialogue	Open Access	Targeted	Story

#### 9.4 Findings

The findings from this process are presented here, the participants' stories and voices are honoured by using their own words.

This Narrative tells an interesting tale about:

- Participants' experience of working with young people.
- Their definition of youth work.
- How we can most effectively and meaningfully capture evidence of what we do.
- Considerations of the concepts of impact and influence.
- What can be measured, how and for what purpose.

The data from this stage provides many interesting themes regarding what youth work actually is and this is consistent with: the stories told in previous narratives, from my own experience and reflection, the historical and political journey of the profession, the chapter considering youth work and the data from the questionnaires. Consistent in that they agree youth work is difficult to define, is context based and contested. The participants tell their individual stories, and I am seeking to establish a collective story about the challenges, benefits and ways of collecting evidence of the impact of youth work and the views and processes are mixed, however what is recognised and implied is that measuring impact and gathering evidence is necessary in contemporary practice and that this presents the challenge of having an effective and meaningful way of doing so.

I am keen that I initially honour the participants' stories of practice, using their words, by summarising the individual and collective experience.

The first story was of a person who started out at a local youth centre, they wanted to do something with people around education, whilst at University they did community work, and this sparked an interest in becoming a youth worker. They went on to become youth work qualified following more experience in youth justice and detached work. They then held down a number of part-time youth work roles in different geographical areas before securing a full-time role in a local charity where they remained to grow the project over eleven years, by applying for a range of funding. This participant then worked for a local authority and supported teenage parents, before working for the youth service in a management role, which led on to managing the whole service. They said that they, "sort of drifted upwards gradually"

(participant Q). The fifteen years spent in youth service provided the opportunity to undertake many different types of youth work, international, detached centre based and advice work. Having worked in public health they became interested in evidence-based practice and realised that there was money available for work that could be evidenced.

Participant U initially worked as a health care assistant, however, their first paid work, as an educator with young people, was in drug and alcohol services. Following a two-year period of volunteering, they carried out one to one work and psychosocial interventions. This involved multi-agency working. The work was universal, and referrals were made to other services, as appropriate. The project engaged with vulnerable young people and there was a consistent menu of creative activities for hands-on sessions, to promote dialogue and these sessions were evaluated. This work expanded to include sex education and work around healthy relationships. This participant then attended university to gain the JNC qualification, as they were inspired by a youth worker who worked in a traditional youth centre designed by young people and it was, “all about them” (participant U). They enjoyed delivering, universal sessional work and detached work and found it a dynamic way of working with young people. The service they were working in became under threat, the funding reduced, and management changed. The JNC qualification enabled a continuation of the, “learning journey” building on CPD and training courses. This participant secured a role in the voluntary sector whilst undertaking the qualification and undertook placements in Connexions and the voluntary sector, managing funded projects and continuing to reflect and learn. They later worked for a health project and delivered peer education with young people, as part of a voluntary sector infrastructure organisation. They also undertook an International residential



trip with young men, during which they were in dialogue with these young men who were experiencing new things and pushing boundaries. Following this there was a period leading to being a senior worker in the voluntary sector.

Participant J was concise and stated that they work as a leaving care personal advisor within children's services and is undertaking a social work qualification with some background in applied psychology.

The final story I heard came from a participant who started out volunteering in the field of youth offending whilst undertaking the youth work qualification, this led to paid work with a voluntary sector organisation providing reparation, supporting young people and volunteers. The participant also had a part-time role, "in a council funded, open access, universal offer, youth club" (participant F). Following this, the participant was employed in a full-time role at a youth zone, which offered the opportunity to become involved in residentials, open access, outreach and peer mentoring, working with the mentors and those young people in need of support. The participant was also engaged with young people experiencing sexual exploitation. Their next role was with a project they described as Millennium Volunteers, working with people in the community and offering a range of accreditation and setting up a successful youth project in a deprived community. Following this they delivered a European funded project with young people not in education, employment or training (NEET), offering short term intensive interventions with a view to progressing young people quickly into

education, employment and training, leading to a research interest in this area. The participant also set up a youth club that was handed over to community volunteers.

It is evident that, for these individuals' stories, there is a wealth of collective experiences across different sectors: health, public, education, voluntary and charity, engaging in a wide range of different types of youth work. These practices included: residential, outreach, advice, detached, outreach, project work, open access, targeted provision, participation, and management. This range of experience has informed their views of what youth work actually is and how the impact can be measured.

I consider it to be straightforward and logical to hear from each individual participant and to be respectful of their contributions. I provide the opportunity for the participant to ponder their story and to not rush analysis (Bochner and Ellis, 2016) as explored in the Methodology chapter, it is recognised that this makes it more difficult to follow the development of themes and is perhaps formulaic. In chapter 11, Discussion and Recommendations. I will synthesise the data in a way that it is structured around the deductive and inductive themes and the literature.

### **9.5 Definition of youth work**

In my endeavours to establish a definition for youth work I asked these participants to share with me their own definitions of youth work, based on their experience and understanding, I

did not enquire what they had included in their questionnaire answers but focused on their responses in present time.

Participant Q notes that youth work includes working with young people on a voluntary basis where young people can choose to engage, or not, at any time, “we are educationalists but we are informal.... We are going to learn together” this participant suggests that youth workers work in empowering ways, supporting young people to make choices and decisions and to be responsible for these. Youth workers believe in and promote equality, and challenge young people if they are discriminatory. Youth workers also set up separate provision for young people who want this or where there is a perceived need. Youth work is participatory, and young people should be involved at all levels, designing the direction of the work they are engaged in as well as the service as a whole, “it’s informal education really”.

Participant U states that, “it’s informal education..... and the pedagogy of dialogue” having conversations with young people about things that are important to them. It is about a learning conversation with youth workers and young people and the activities that promote this can vary but it must be based on the relationship, which is voluntary and starts where the young person or group of young people are at.

Participant J recognises that youth work is difficult to define due to its breadth and diversity. This participant would offer a definition based on their role as accommodation support or education support rather than youth work, youth work is a, “huge topic that kinda needs to be broken down into different areas”. These areas include: working with young people, aged

14 to 21 years old; increasing engagement; helping young people deal with any issues they are experiencing; making sure they are in school; making sure they are succeeding, but if school is not for them then they are engaged in something meaningful; have stable accommodation; “getting them setup and sorted” helping and directing them to resolve issues so they can settle and progress into adult life, when they can progress anything they wish to do.

Participant F identifies youth work as (following a big sigh) something different to what they would have described it as being a few years ago as they recognise that youth work has become very targeted. However, they note that youth work happens when a young person, or a group of young people have a connection with an adult worker who is not in a formal role with the young person, someone who, “is almost a critical friend” offering informal or alternative education. They recognise that youth work is hard to define whereas, it was perhaps easier at one time. In contemporary practice there is work being delivered that is described as youth work but in their opinion, it is not how they think of youth work because it, “appears to be quite targeted at particular young people and for me.... Real youth work should be open access”, any young person who wishes to engage should be able to do so, not just at a point when they need intervention. Caseloads and imposed timescales detract from the potential to build relationships.

The consistent themes apparent from analysing the data provided by those participants who are JNC qualified include the following, that are either stated explicitly or implied, this concurs

with my finding in previous narratives and will be explored in more depth in the discussion chapter:

- Informal education and learning
- Voluntary engagement and relationship
- Participation
- Empowerment
- Equality
- Young person centred
- Open access, separate provision based on need or desire
- Relationships dialogue, with trusted adults as individuals or groups

The worker that is not JNC qualified and operates in a different role works with young people against a different definition that is more about support, engagement and securing a more predefined transition.

## **9.6 Effectively and meaningfully capturing evidence**

Participant Q considers that the most powerful way of capturing evidence is through testimony regarding individuals, people telling you about the impact there has been on their lives. There is a desire to also capture other evidence to reinforce the testimonies, such as, data. However, the participants' experiences show that case studies are preferred by those (what? Funding bodies?) wanting to receive evidence. They recognise that as youth work is relational then the personality of the worker and the young person can impact on the success, not all youth workers will interact well with all young people.

Participant U thinks that gathering evidence is best achieved through working as a team, some working with data and some in dialogue with young people in order to capture the outcomes that have been achieved and therefore evidencing the impact of the work to external people to justify the role. However, for this participant, “it’s not where the work starts for me, the work starts with the young people” it is about relationship, dialogue, and learning.

Participant J believes this can involve, “box ticking exercises” such as young people accessing mental health services, claiming benefits and being in suitable accommodation. This only plays a small part, but it is believed that these outcomes make sense to government and funding. However, specifically this participant recognises, “that a more accurate way of recording how effective it would be to speak to them... young people”. There is a drive at the moment to encourage young people to contribute to services relevant to them, and also a drive in improving these services. This participant suggests that the proper way to investigate success is to ask young people what is and is not working and what success means to them. The evidence has to come from young people themselves, others can provide supporting evidence and the practice to be directed by what the young people want. Anecdotal, qualitative evidence would capture this impact, for example, “life story work” other techniques could be questionnaires (although these would provide limited data), focus groups, discussion groups, followed by thematic analysis. It does depend on what the evidence is needed for and if it is for an increase in funding, more statistical data will be necessary.

Participant F suggests that, “the best way and the most meaningful way to capture evidence is through young people’s lived experiences, from a young person’s perspective and from young people’s views” recognising this is not necessarily the most cost effective or practical way but that the impact goes beyond the measures that are offered in contemporary practice. The effect of youth work takes place over a long time, therefore, to capture this impact the evidence must be collected long term and must be qualitative. The measures are not just about evidencing a session, or a project, but involve the impact on a young person’s life, over their life span. This participant believes it is important to also recognise that there is a rise in antisocial behaviour and criminality, due to the lack of open access youth work and it is important to evidence this link in order to credit youth work.

The consistent theme across this data set was how to capture evidence of impact effectively and meaningfully. The most appropriate way of capturing this evidence of impact was to actually ask the young people, their testimony about their lived experience is important and this can be supported by other statistical data. It is recognised that as the impact of youth work might not be recognised for a long time after the intervention has ended, it is important to consider the impact over the life span. I am keen to bring together the data from the narratives in the discussion, to offer a robust analysis leading to recommendations about a potential process for achieving a piece of longitudinal research with young people.

### 9.7 The concepts of impact and influence

Through the reflections of my own professional experience, my review of the literature and policy had left me uncomfortable with some of the language used, as discussed in the Context chapter, I consider the notion of impact to imply, clinical, control through force and action whilst, for me influence is more about social interaction and implies cause and effect and a more developmental process. I asked my participants about their understanding of the concepts of impact and influence in order to interrogate whether my own perceptions of language are shared.

Participant Q considers, “influence as a stepping stone to the impact”, the journey young people are on and they may talk about the influence of a particular youth worker as a result of the relationship, this has an impact, “the influence is the mechanism, the impact is the result”.

Participant U suggests that influence relates to sharing ideas and offering, “different kind of voice and ask questions” encourage young people to reflect and seek information, challenge what they believe to be true, “encouraging others to be critically conscious and to questions things, question themselves” identify their contribution as a citizen, a strong qualified youth worker achieves this over time with a young person, in a way that is, “calm, grounded and consistent”.



Participant J believes impact to be direct, whilst influence is more subtle as workers and friends influence young people but leaving it up to the young person what they choose to do, the impact is more immediate.

Participant F suggests that influence can be on different levels, for example, on a micro level preventing a young person from making a bad decision and providing a safe space, or on a more macro level introducing new concepts such as Feminism, an impact on a way of thinking, motivation and ethics. It is recognised that the impact of youth work is broad and as such difficult to measure, youth workers can influence beyond other professionals because of the nature of the work relating to relationship and change, without involving external targets. It is challenging to capture such evidence and the challenge is between, “doing the work” rather than, “talking about the work” it is important that the young people have a voice. We can measure the impact and influence of youth work by following people for a long time and speaking with young people in later life, also, it is important to consider the impact of the work in projects.

Having engaged in the conversation with the participants I have revised my view and consider influence and impact to be aspects of a developmental journey with young people. I now consider that there is influence along the way and that an impact is the result of an intervention or conversation. This will be discussed further with the participants, in the focus group.

### 9.8 What can be measured, how and for what purpose?

Participant Q was helped by the clarity of the Young Foundation Outcome Framework (see McNeil, Rich, and Reeder, 2012) offered. Also, to focus on the things that can make a difference with rather than the bigger, longer term and external goals. It is helpful to focus on, “what you can do... work with intrinsic individuals or in groups and you can make a difference with those” and this input can be measured and the young person asked about the impact on them, such as, working in a team, their social and communication skills, the essence of self-esteem. If the soft skills are developed the young person may be more likely to go on and achieve the hard outcomes. An example of a method used by this participant to measure impact is the Youth Programme Quality Indicator (YPQI). This is a measure of open access youth provision, encouraging workers to consider a number of aspects of provision including, the safety of the provision and measure of the relationships as this creates the evidence that leads to impact and is achieved through observation, challenge, feedback and action. This is also used in more traditional ways of evidencing impact, such as reports, data, and case studies. Impact is measured to ensure accountability and due to a desire to demonstrate what is achieved. It is helpful to use a range of methods and tools in order to triangulate the data, this needs to be nuanced by individual stories to make any real assumptions of impact, “a picture to illustrate impact”. The challenge of measuring impact is that “things come in and out of fashion” this limits the sense of consistency and trend. Another challenge is encouraging young people to complete forms thoroughly. If this is not achieved, it can render the data meaningless. When young people are motivated and involved in youth voice work, it can lead to individual impacts and achievements, but this can be difficult to capture. Work which is early intervention and delivered at a younger age is considered youth work, due to the mode

of delivery rather than the tool. The use of tools and programmes from other professions can be really helpful if delivered within a youth work format, which includes the notion of random controlled trials to demonstrate an impact of an intervention that is not delivered across a service, it is necessary to measure a longitudinal impact.

Participant U, through reflection considers this to be an area of their practice that they could strengthen. Whilst the participant does use tools to evaluate, they also identify that it is difficult to find the time, due to the demands of the direct work with young people. In practice, motivational interviewing is used to monitor and record an individual young person's progress. The, "what, so what, now what" is a model used (Rolfe, 2001). Alternatively, this can be considered in terms of a young person's safety by asking 'what are we worried about, what is going well and what needs to happen next'. This participant recognises that they are a strong, reflective practitioner.

Participant J believes that impact is easier to measure than influence as it is the result of a specific action. Influence is more subtle and harder to capture and there needs to be engagement in conversation with young people, to listen to their story. This is helpful to identify trends and negative influences and can work in a preventative way. This participant captures evidence of what is said and then analyses this in relation to the young person. Scaling questions about safety are used in dialogue and used as a planning tool as well as to monitor impact, the intervention can then be responsive.

Participant F recognises that the impact and influence of youth work can be measured through following individuals over a long time period and speaking with the young people in their later life, also it is important to consider the impact of the work in projects. This can be done for many reasons, such as to enabling youth work to be taken more seriously and to justify the work and create space for youth work as, “young people are being let down and failed” and if the impact can be proven statistically then there might be the opportunity to re-establish the services. This would enable youth workers to provide positive activities and a better life for young people. This participant felt that if we could demonstrate the positive impact of youth work on young people’s choices and lives this would be appealing to funders and governments as it would ultimately save money long term, the savings would be greater than the investment. This would also help protect the profession and thus the actual provision of youth work. This participant described their experience of measuring impact as a social return in financial language and looking at short outcomes, which related to funding and were not young person driven. They captured the numbers of those engaged and recognised that this does not capture an impact or influence, it misses the story of the individual young person, the outputs being measured are, “funding driven, form filling, paper exercise and tick boxes”. It is felt that it is better to just ask the young person about the impact on them. We have to be able to assume some beneficial impact of youth work and building relationships, but time is taken away from the work by recording outcomes.

Participants were happy to talk about their experience of, and opinion about measuring impact. They revealed that what can be measured in a variety of ways are both short term and longer-term outcomes with both individual young people and with groups. It is important to

find ways to recognise intrinsic and extrinsic skill acquisition, for example how a development of self-esteem could lead to a young person being more likely to make positive decisions about behaviour and their future, youth workers can provide a safe space for such skill development. The participants discussed a range of different types of impact measures and ways to collect this type of information, such as statistical data, reports, case studies, observations and collecting lived experiences and stories. It was my interpretation that there was an implied consensus that any impact measurement should be meaningful to young people and engage them in dialogue but that the 'data' in its various forms ensures youth workers can demonstrate accountability and achievements and encourage those outside the profession to take youth work and its potential seriously and secure investment, long term. It is recognised by the participants that a range of types of measurement is helpful to ensure triangulation and acknowledges that funders like a mix of narrative and numbers.

The interviews were fascinating, they provided data that complements and adds to the previous narratives. The final stage of data collection is a focus group, which will bring together the topics from all previous stages, that remain intriguing to me and of which I am keen to explore further in a group context, with the opportunity to debate, share knowledge, views and opinions and adapt based on others' contributions. Whilst I had a plan and facilitated the group to elicit answers to questions posed, I was open to the development of new and emerging knowledge. It was important therefore that sufficient time was available to allow for contributions (Stewart, 2012). Some people spoke for longer than others, but all participants made important contributions and offers contradictory views, whilst acknowledging much common ground.

**Chapter Ten: Narrative Seven: A practitioner's story about Youth Work and measuring impact, told by the data from the focus group.**

This narrative was created from the input of the participants involved in the focus group, I am your narrator. Within the group we considered a definition of youth work, the ideology of youth work, evidence, impact, language, and ideas. I sought to identify the participants' perspectives, based on their understanding and experience (see appendix 12). This search enabled understanding regarding answering the research questions, in relation to youth work and measuring impact, in an attempt to identify whether 'youth work has had its day'. The data from this focus group will further contribute to the data set I will use in analysis, to answer my revised research question that is outlined in the Discussion and Data Analysis chapter.

The structure and content of the focus as well as the coding of the data collected is informed by the analysis of data from previous narratives: my own reflections from practice, the story of history and policy, the narratives about youth work and measuring impact, the data collected at the questionnaire stage and from the interviews.

The storytellers, the participants in this narrative are four people who, following completion of the questionnaire, gave permission to be contacted to contribute further, these participants are different to the four I had individual interviews with. Whilst I refer to the four participants from the focus group as story-tellers it is with some artistic licence, as in reality they offer data that I am using to create this narrative. Again, I intend to let their responses speak for themselves and I will use their voices to create this narrative and not attempt to link to

previous narratives or literature. At this stage I will separate my findings from my analysis in order to write ethnographically (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2019). This enables me to honour their voices, which is in line with the dialogistic, person centred approach of youth work. As a practitioner I sought to hear and record young people's voices and as a researcher I wish to present the voices of the participants.

In order to ensure that the participants' (or storytellers') words stand out and are clearly distinguished from each other I have used a colour key below:

#### **10.1 Quotes and Contribution Key**

Participant A, Participant D, Participant O, Participant P

#### **10.1 The Sample**

The focus group involved three men and one woman and lasted 01:31:28. I collected some demographic data, mainly in relation to professional identity, however this was limited and made it difficult to determine the impact this may have had on the participants' contribution (Stewart, 2021).

The professional roles held by the focus group participants include a Senior Lecturer, Forest School Teacher, University Programme Leader, and Young People's Engagement Worker. The roles are important as this gives an indication of the breadth and type of experience, as I am

interested in their understanding of youth work and the ways in which the impact can be measured.

### **10.2 Experience of working with young people**

Whilst the number of participants in this data set is small, a subset of those participants who completed the questionnaire have a breadth and depth of experience between them.

In relation to length of experience there was a wide cross section, one participant identified between 1 and 2 year's experience, one had between 2 and 5 and another with 5 to 10 years, with the final one participant claiming 20 years plus of experience working with young people. Three of the four participants possessed a JNC youth work qualification, 3 worked in youth work education and one in youth work practice.

### **10.3 The 'pen picture' of the participants**

I have ensured that whilst I wish to demonstrate some idea of experience and character, I am careful not to do this in a way that could identify the individuals.

- **Participant A:** Is a qualified youth worker, they are a programme leader in the education sector and have been a practitioner for between 5 to 10 years
- **Participant D:** Is not a qualified youth worker, they are a forest school teacher in the education sector and have been a practitioner for 1 to 2 years
- **Participant O:** Is a qualified youth worker, they are a senior lecturer in the education sector and have been a practitioner for more than 20 years



- **Participant P:** Is a qualified youth worker, they are a youth engagement officer in the public sector and have been a practitioner for between 2 to 5 years

#### **10.4 Coding of the Data**

I used both deductive and inductive methods of coding based on the learning from the previous narratives in order to make sense of this data set, see Table One and Table Two below. The deductive coding was carried out based on the previous findings and analysis. I made some notes of key points during the focus group, I wanted to capture the narrative threads and themes whilst being respectful to the participants and was keen to ensure that I listened well, I also wanted to observe body language and consider the participants' reactions to my questions and other participants' comments, which was possible as I gained permission to record the group using MS Teams, so I have both audio and video available. Following the focus group, I initially read the transcript, this was not a particularly helpful process as it did not accurately represent what the participants had said. I felt it may be more revealing to hear the voices and so I listened to the full recording of the focus group and began to hear some patterns, based on the questions asked, which directed the discussion. This process was similar to one that I had carried out for the interviews. Following this I listened again to the focus group recording, without pausing, whilst also reading the transcripts, which enabled me to become more familiar with the flow of the discussion, and I began to identify some inductive themes. I then started the process of deductive coding using predetermined categories, to do this I listen to each question at a time. This provided a much clearer demonstration of the themes identified both inductively and deductively. I was also able to

make connections where participants agreed and disagreed. The process of a focus group is considered further in the Methodology chapter (see page 43-86).

Once I felt that an overview had been absorbed, I began applying the deductive coding and noticed that other patterns that formed my inductive codes, please see table one and table two below. Table one shows the codes already established which were searched for deductively, however, not all were stated directly but all were implied, to illustrate: Participant O implies a person centred approach when they discussed how youth workers approach young people in a holistic way and recognise that there are many features to their lives, whilst Participant P clearly states the term “person centred” directly. Again, as with the interviews, this is possibly as a result of the questions asked and the participants’ prior knowledge regarding what is being researched, whereas table two shows the new codes that arose inductively, in addition to the deductive codes.

The colours in these table are not significant; they aided my thinking during the process of listening to the focus group discussion.

**Table 10. Deductive Coding Key**

Deductive Codes			
Informal Education	Social Change	Educate	Impact
Voluntary Relationship	Social Control	Take care	Measure
Empowerment	Wellbeing	Control	Evaluation
Anti-Oppressive Practice	Politics	Voice	Defend
Social Construction	YP Centred	Asset Based	Curriculum
Participation	Dialogue	Open Access	Targeted

**Table 11. Inductive Coding Key**

Inductive Codes				
Story	Fun	Time scales	Power	Democracy

I will pull together the themes from the collective narratives in the discussion and recommendations chapter.

This narrative tells an interesting tale about:

- Definitions and views of youth work
- Experience and perspectives of capturing evidence and measuring impact
- Language.

### 10.5 A definition of youth work

In order to promote discussion, I offered two of my own definitions of youth work. However, I did not inform the participants that they were my own, in case they perceived me as an expert and did not feel inclined to challenge my views.

The first definition presented was my original definition created after reviewing the literature and presenting the finding regarding youth work:

*'Youth Work is an empowering, informal, person centred process, it is anti-oppressive, voluntary and participative, and the prime concern is the wellbeing and development of young people alongside social change'.*

I then presented the definition developed from the analysis of the questionnaire data:

*‘Youth Work is an empowering, informal, person centred process of informal education, it is anti-oppressive, voluntary and participative, and the prime concern is the wellbeing and development of young people alongside social change and social action. Young people need to be safe, healthy, positively engaged and have choices available to them about their lives’.*

The participants considered a range of different aspects of these two definitions, some important and other notions challenging. Participant O considers informal education to be important as this enables youth work to be located as a profession, rather than simply an approach to working with young people

There was an interesting debate in relation to social change and its place within youth work, linked to power and democracy. Participant D was clear that they were “never in the business of trying to steer young people into let’s sort out.... Example given” they are not sure that this would be the role when engaging with young people but also made a point important to consider in relation to social change, that it depended upon how a person defines it and this can also be applied to other terms used. Participant A also “feels a bit uncomfortable about leading young people down particular roads” but recognises that this is an issue if the practitioner is leading the agenda however, with care not to steer, it is good to help young people be aware that change is possible, based on their choices. Participant O recognises that it may not be possible to identify change for a long time “maybe that’s where there is a connection between the kind of work that is undertaken within informal education that then is perceived at a much later stage” as adults when they have a greater ‘voice’ for example,

when voting they can influence social change more directly. Participant P encouraged consideration regarding thinking about why youth work is actually needed and this was something I sought to achieve the second definition, not saying what it is but also, that is why we have the profession linked to young people's needs and rights, they state that "we live in a society and have done for a very long time that very much excludes young people" (participant P), such as they are not able to vote, having jobs, paying taxes, the things that "give you a certain position in society" (participant P) and recognise that this is why youth work is needed, to enable young people both to have a voice and to make a contribution. I suggested that this could have a link to empowerment and this participant commented that we need youth work as young people are going through certain developmental stages but also "society doesn't allow, isn't open to young people having any kind of, shall we say, power that adults have within society" (participant P). This challenged my thinking in relation to the definition of youth work, I concur with the discussion that suggests a definition should not just be something that is needed to help explain and justify the work, but it is the 'blueprint' of what we do, as well as why we do it. Participant O further develops the point in relation to power and empowerment by recognising that as a society we have removed access to power from young people and that "when we as a profession talk about empowering young people, I believe that to be a fallacy, I think people empower themselves". As power is removed, the role of a youth worker involves enabling young people to empower themselves, therefore the role and focus of informal education is critical in enabling empowerment. For Participant O, this role challenges the societal view of young people being a problem and, rather, seeing the benefits of young people being empowered. Participant P also discuss power and empowerment in relation to democracy and what the right to vote means to them and

whether they would like the right to vote, as young people felt disempowered and lacking in information in order to take on the responsibility of a voting citizen. This discussion led me to conclude that in order for young people to empower themselves then they need both opportunity and information. Participant D believes it to be worthwhile when considering wellbeing and development in that we need to be clear that this is a whole person approach “mental, physical, spiritual and their concern for the world” (participant O). An enduring challenge is a definition needs to both broad and concise and to demonstrate our value and be contemporary.

Following the discussion about the definitions offered regarding the question simplified into:  
How would you define youth work?

**Participant A:** “A process that supports the holistic development of young people as active members of society”, this participant attempted to keep their definition brief.

**Participant D:** “Youth work: any activity that empowers and helps to develop young people grow in their knowledge, understanding, emotional, spiritual and mental capacities.” A very person centred approach rather than focusing on the work.

**Participant O:** “Youth Work: a subtle definition.... Informal Education based upon active and equitable relationships, enabling personal understanding, development and growth towards empowered individuals and groups that make choices regarding their lives, futures and aspirations”, again considering a developmental person centred process. This participant also

believes informal education to be a professional role and that it should be recognised as formal education and teaching; for youth work this identified by the by the JNC qualification. This participant also suggests that if we remain located within informal education then it is not necessary to specifically define in advance, for example we would not need to specify participation or voluntary association. There needs to be trust in the professions that work is being done appropriately, in relation to the National Occupational Standards for Youth Work.

**Participant P:** recognises that some of the terms used to define youth are also used to define other professions “person centred for example, voluntary” and questions “who is it that needs youth work to be defined and I think obviously if we are considering the young people need to be at the centre of youth work is it the young people that need youth work to be defined? Or is it the professionals that need it to be defined, is it government?” This participant questions whether this is so that youth work can be funded and why is this different to professions such as nurses, doctors or social workers?

I suggested that perhaps we should not seek to define the profession of youth work but rather define what young people have a right to expect of the profession. Participant O recognises that the profession changes over time and that the majority of young people are interested in politics and campaigning and historically this would be a part of the practice, however, now this is “dissuaded” (participant O). If a youth worker is going on a journey with young people what is our role, is it simply to witness young people’s lives and learn from this (participant O).

There was an interesting discussion about definition of youth work and how snappy or wordy the definition should be, it was noted by participants O and P that other professions do not necessarily have to define what they 'do' examples offered were, doctors, teachers, nurses, and social workers. It appears that there is an assumption that these roles are just accepted as professions, without the need for further clarity. There was a collective broad agreement that youth work should be person centred, offering choice and opportunities for empowerment and development, young people having a voice was also an important consideration all participants.

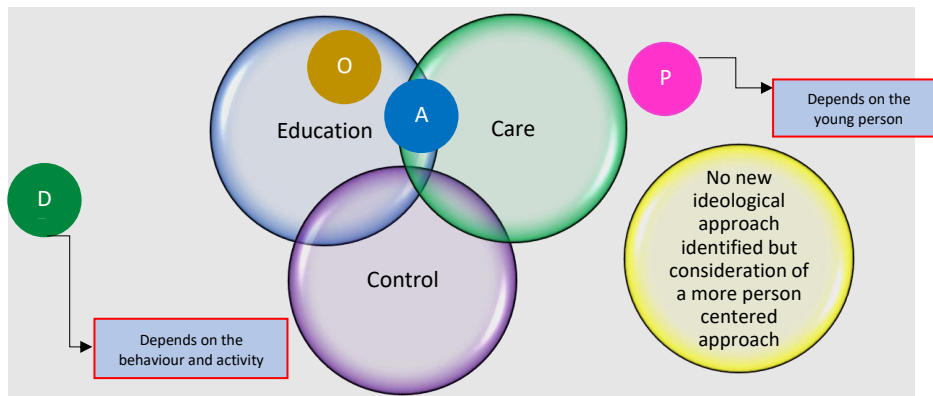
#### **10.6 The Ideology of Youth Work**

The ideology of youth work was considered, as first explored in the Context chapter (2.3) of this thesis. I offered the diagram below and asked the participants to position themselves based on their view of youth work and whether it is to:

- educate young people?
- take care of young people?
- control young people?

**Diagram 1. The participants' ideas about the Ideology of Youth Work**





The reader will be able to note on the diagram above where each participant placed themselves, they also offered explanations:

**Participant A:** during this activity this participant acknowledged that they started to question their own definition and it gives them “the jitters” as it could imply control and “they don’t want there to be an element of control” this participant recognised that education and care are important when reflecting on their own experience as a young person and a practitioner, “it’s the control side of things” that they recognise they are “uncomfortable about” what they recognise that from their own practice, that there was not an emphasis on following the rules of society but rather responsibly and appropriately questioning these rules.

**Participant O:** recognised that the contribution made by participant A has helped them to raise and answer the question “as a youth worker, why am I here?... to initiate, develop and maintain a relationship” this implies that they have to offer care... about the young person and the things that are important to them, but they would also be clear about the role of the “informal educator as learner, learning about young people, their lives and their experiences”

as well as “enabling learning” through the process of youth work. They recognised that control would not feature, and that when this participant is faced with behaviours that are challenging, they seek to understand rather than control, “understand the necessity for young people to engage in conflict” they were clear their instinct would be to understand rather than control but also to share “I hope nobody gets hurt”. Later in the discussion this participant considered the narratives that exist in society in relation to young people and cited that there are two, one that identifies young people as bad and the second that identifies them as victims. From my own experience it is clear that it is unhelpful to identify with either. This participant offered an example to clarify:

- Traditionally the narrative was – young people in gangs = bad
- Recently the narrative has changed to – young people being criminally exploited = victim.

Participant O further recognises that ideologically youth workers approach young people in a holistic way and recognise that there are many features of their lives that might be described by some as ‘bad’ or that they are a ‘victim’ but it is also important to recognise assets and strengths, which is a feature of youth work.

**Participant P:** started their contribution on the ideology of youth work by playing devil’s advocate, in that they sought to provoke discussion, that said the notion of control conjures the image of “young people being puppets and youth worker being puppeteers” and there can be a negative response to the idea of control by youth workers, however they note that “control is actually a really important part of life... it is giving you a sense of stability, giving you a sense of responsibility”. Recognising control is important when considered in these

terms. If, as youth workers, we are working with young people to become active members of society then it is important to recognise there are controls and laws that people need to adhere to “social construction... to the social perspectives” they imply that if a person cannot conform to societal control, they cannot be successful in terms of career and money. They question “why control is such a negative thing within youth work” noting this from their own experience, they further note “young people need a sense of right and wrong... and of what they should do and things they shouldn’t do” they link this to the notion of caring, and that adults can demonstrate care by being clear what is and is not ok. They recognise that their position on the ideology diagram will depend on the individual young person they are working with, and their needs will dictate the level of education, care and / or control.

**Participant D:** spoke about the link between control and safe space and noted that if young people’s behaviour is such that it is affecting others and making the space unsafe, they would take an individual approach. This participant also stated that they would need to respond differently depending on situations as they presented, it would vary according to behaviour and activity.

Two participants spoke of a very clear ideological approach to the work as they interpreted the concept, in that they located themselves on diagram one, and implied this would be a consistent approach. Whilst the other participants reflected that their approach in relation to care, education and control would depend on the young people and their needs but also their behaviour and the activity being delivered, accordingly they could not specifically locate themselves on diagram one, they recognised they would move around depending on the

situation. There was synergy between participants that the best ideological approach would be in line with their perception of the best interests of the young people, that there should be elements of responsibility and development and that learning through experience was important.

I recognised in the discussion the challenges of defining youth work and perhaps the task to define youth work is not possible, perhaps it 'depends'. I will revisit this during my discussion.

### 10.7 Capturing Evidence and Measuring Impact

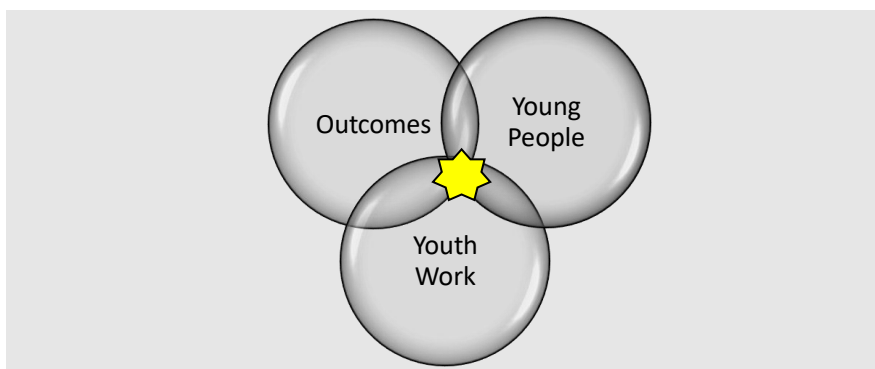
Initially I enquired 'What is evidence'?

**Participant O:** "an identification or observation that something has occurred" and earlier in the discussion this participant noted that their worry was to "count, measure, standardisation, complacent forecasting on individuals and communities = structural Violence. This has occurred in social work with for instance focusing and almost waiting for Black young men in London to become involved in crime or violence."

**Participant P:** again, makes a comparison to other professions and considers this in relation to youth work "what's the evidence of the profession of being a youth worker, or having done your job? Maybe?" they consider this a "weird concept, when you think about youth work" they found that it is more instinctive to think about outcome and product, reflecting that the notion of product in youth work is something "most youth workers would rebel against". They conclude this is a very difficult question.

**Participant D:** offered what they felt to be much simpler in that “the young person was happy, that whatever was going on that they were just happy”

This led to a consideration about the relationship between young people, outcomes, youth work and impact, I introduced my thinking behind the diagram that I asked participants to reflect on, Figure 2.



I offered, that if there is to be an impact of youth work then some youth work must take place with young people that generates an outcome as seen in the diagram above. Given the discussion about youth work, in comparison, I offer the opportunity to again consider this in relation to impact. It is noted that many professions now have targets for example, doctors and nurses have waiting list targets and teacher have SATS targets to reach. Therefore, the notion of target or outcome is not unique to youth work but perhaps measuring impact is, I cited a couple of my examples to illustrate this:

- After a patient has recovered does someone contact them after say six years and enquire how their life is as a result of their knee operation?
- Does a teacher communicate with a student some years after obtaining successful GCSE results and ask about their career and family life?

I allowed time for the participants to reflect on youth work and its connection with impact.

**Participant O:** felt that we should consider the outcome of relationships between young people and youth work as “this may enable us to perhaps measure what the impact was as we will hear it”, they clarified that “the outcome of the relationship enables us to measure the impact because it starts with intent” we have to get to know the young people, to build a relationship and then, together with young people, we can carry out the youth work required and without the outcome having any predetermined criteria.

Then I simply asked, ‘should we measure impact’?

**Participant D:** “I think the whole public sector has got its knickers in a serious twist on measuring impact and outcomes” and they consider that too much money is spent on this and reflect that we like to count things and that they themselves are “not up for it”. A young person coming away from the intervention or activity is an “indication that something positive has occurred” we can easily misjudge what we think is significant and sometimes the young person might recognise that you “made them a cup of tea” as significant, we can judge this as insignificant but to the young people “it can mean a lot” and it indicates to them that someone has shown them care. In relation to measuring impact participant A was “not a big advocate of measuring stuff” as they have become “fed up with it”. I suggested that there might be such a notion as ‘measurement fatigue’.

**Participant P:** acknowledges that when asked to measure impact we should question “who are we doing it for” and they agree with participant D in that they do not “think young people

care about measuring the impact that much” whilst recognising that young people might like to know what they themselves have achieved. It is unlikely that measuring impact in order to define a profession, is important to young people. When considering how important measuring impact is to youth workers “to define the impact of what we do”, this participant feels somewhat negative. They report that they think “the only reason professionals might want to define the impact of what they have done is so they can either pat themselves on the head and say well done you for doing that, or to learn something from what they have done”. It can be positive for professionals if they can learn from what they have done. The idea of measuring what youth workers do is frustrating as they feel that the push to do so has come from “governing bodies” and not from young people or youth workers. The work and the allocation of resources and provision is influenced by money and politics. The impetus to define and measure has not come from young people or youth workers, and this participant recognises that in order to achieve funding youth workers need to reach targets and as such the power lies with those who provide the funding and not with youth workers or young people.

**Participant O:** Implies long-term anecdotal evidence about the impact on an individual is important, even if an intervention has been deemed ineffective. They further reflected that in their early career they worked with a young person they identified as “really going places” this young person decided on a career path which was unexpected, alongside raising a family and this participant “remains shocked and believes in her choices” they considered that it is not feasible to measure this.

I asked the participants to reflect on ‘what does measuring impact actually mean to them?’

**Participant A:** believes that the “way we are expected to do it, it’s a really disingenuous process” and simply to how participant O recognised from their practice, participant A also states “impact is something that is extremely long term”. If impact can only be recognised later then “we are then forced to almost make up what impact is” in order to report this in a timely manner, creating a “false narrative”.

In relation to evidence and impact there was some interesting discussion based on differing views but also some general agreement that it is difficult to measure impact and gather evidence. It is hard to judge the significance of an interaction and that the relationship with the youth worker that is important, it is difficult to demonstrate this and account for impact, certainly in the short term.

When considering language with the participants it is important to identify a language that works for the youth work profession, as discussed in more detail in the Context chapter.

I then asked, ‘what language sits most comfortably?’

- Measure? or capture? or something else?
- Impact? or influence? or something else?

**Participant O:** suggests “that we are ahead of other professions and adapt our language to enable “other professionals to kind of keep up”. They feel we are “trapped in the language” if we used a different language in a multi-agency environment we would be “again using a language way ahead of where people are and they would have to catch up before it became



valuable". The language has not been chosen by young people and this participant accepts that "The language feels more palatable but if it does the same thing then that is not acceptable".

**Participant A:** acknowledges that their initial reaction is that this language does "sound more palatable" however creating their own way of speaking can create challenges when communicating with "others outside the youth work community of what we are doing" this could enhance the difficulties we already have when trying to define and explain youth work. Therefore, to change the language could be "counterproductive".

**Participant P:** Reflects on their work and training in the field of mental health and the ways this work is monitored, measured, and recorded. They made some comparisons to youth work and how young people would react if they were presented with a questionnaire to record on a scale their passions, motivations, and other things about their lives and struggles, in order to provide statistical data to funders. The participant's tone suggested that this would not be something that would be done in a youth work setting and stated they found the notion "mind blowing". This participant further suggests that "language is not just words" it is also "social media and internet" this has changed the way we communicate and potentially provides a "massively powerful tool" and recognises how "impactful a video of someone talking about their experience can be" and that social media is "opening people up to something youth has known about for a very long time, which is actually listening to someone's story, somebodies experience of something has an incredible impact" on how something is viewed and responded to. If we cannot measure youth work, we can consider the story to demonstrate

the impact and to modernise it online and on social media. This demonstrates the impact youth work; this measurement can be done at any stage of life.

**Participant D:** implied that in order for the measurement of youth work received by managers to be meaningful “leaders need to come from a wide range of social experience” in order to have empathy.

**Participant O:** further reflects that youth work should be accessible to all young people and not just “about fixing something” and this impacts on both definition and language.

The participants in the focus group acknowledged that there was a tricky approach in relation to language and the language of the profession needed to be congruent and meaningful in multi-disciplinary environments and potentially social media. We pondered about how best the language and approach could best demonstrate the story and words of impact.

A question that I recognised that was missing from previous engagements with participants’ ideas at the questionnaire stage and during the interviews was one enquiring about the participants’ ideas, so I concluded the focus group with a series of questions to do just that:

- Do you have any ideas about how we can best evidence/capture the impact/influence of youth work?
- What about the grey areas? These areas that are not clearly defined.
- What about the impact on the lives of young people?
- How do we do this ethically?

**Participant D:** reflected that they agreed with participant P's earlier suggestion, that it is about "the story and [it's] people's personal experience" these stories could be presented on a range of social media, "we live our lives by stories", we connect with each other through story, people are both interesting and nosy, story is powerful.

I offered that I feel a person is more likely to have an emotional reaction to story rather than numbers on paper.

**Participant O:** was told to "look for sparks... things spark in youth centres, go and follow them and find out about them, learn about them and add a little bit more to see if we can start a fire, in a positive way of course" it is important to listen in order to enable "something to happen" without a restriction of time, recognising that it is necessary to take time to build relationships. As such, this participant questions how impact can be measured over a short time frame, such as over a four-week NCS project, when there has been potentially little opportunity for relationships to develop.

The data from this final stage of the data collection again provides many interesting themes consistent with the stories told in previous narratives. Consistent in the fact that youth work is difficult to define, and that impact measurement is an area of contention, challenge, and development. The participants tell a story about how they define youth work and their ideological perspectives and then how this informs their view on the impact of youth work, how this could be measured, and an evidence base be established.

What is again recognised is that measuring impact and gathering evidence is necessary in contemporary practice, but it is important to consider the motive and driver behind this. It was difficult to establish an effective and meaningful way of measuring impact during this discussion. The consistent response in both direct and implied ways is that it is both the relationship and the story that are significant, and it is in the demonstration of this that impact can be noted.

The discussion will follow next and will bring together the themes and offer some analysis that will ultimately lead to recommendations, as such in the next chapter I will be synthesising literature and offering critiques of the data collected and presented in narrative form, the various perspectives.

## **Chapter Eleven: Discussion and Recommendations**

This final chapter aims to bring together the evidence and reflection from the narratives presented and offer a summary, to include the implications of the thesis for youth work, if and how the impact of youth work can be measured. I will reflect on the hypothesis inferred in the distilled and final questions considered. It will be important to make clear the contribution this research makes to the body of knowledge, its limitations, the conclusions drawn and the recommendations offered for practice and research.

Throughout this chapter I will refer and signpost the reader to appropriate chapters and sections to offer support for the discussion.

As a youth work practitioner and academic I recognised that there was no clear and consistent definition of youth work. Through the review of literature and policy a number of essential elements emerged, and these are considered by participants (8.2.2). It can clearly be acknowledged that anti oppressive practice, informal education, voluntary participation, empowerment and wellbeing are all key aspects of youth work during a process of social change, but not exclusively. The data from the interviews (9.5) and although more nuanced, the focus group, (10.5) concur. The data reveals the lack of an effective method to measure the impact of, and provide an evidence base for, youth work practice (7.7, 8.2.3, 9.6 and 10.7). I explored the ideology and if the intention of the work was to educate, take care or to control (2.3) and this concept was picked up and explored in the focus group (10.6) when an interesting discussion was help but no conclusion reached. What was significant was the

recognition that the ideology of an interaction was dependent on both young person and context. There is no clear and consistent model available to measure and evidence youth work, and as I started out on my quest to identify a model, tool, scale or process to measure the impact, I entered into a world of debate (7.6) about not only how this can be done but also if it should even be attempted. I soon came to the view that measuring the impact of youth work cannot be done successfully and consistently achieved and the real impacts only exist in the story of practitioners and young people, where the impact can perhaps be captured but not measured. Youth workers are privileged observers in the lives of the young people with whom they work and as such have no right to attribute credit for their influence on the emerging lives of those young people. The methods identified for data collection (3.5) and analysis (3.6) are in line with the principles of youth work, in that they are person centred, voluntary, discursive, informal and collate a story, a narrative that offers a perspective rather than numbers, evidence and conclusion (3.4.1).

I started the story presented in this thesis several years ago, and during the time of writing there has been much change to the world that is youth work and what has developed in terms of resource and thinking in relation to measuring impact.

I decided that this research would be only with adult participants, with a view to the next stage of research engaging with young people when this could be in more meaningful and informed ways. I am reassured that this was a robust decision and whilst there have been many changes, twists and turns as the story has unfolded, what has remained consistent is the need for the voice of people involved in youth work to be heard and captured in authentic and ethical ways.

The story so far has captured some practitioner voice, a new and unique contribution, and the research has allowed me to frame the next stage in terms of both method, a narrative enquiry, and hearing the voice of young people about their experiences of youth work. I have had the privilege to converse with a range of participants in different ways and to read a wealth of policy and literature that has shaped the profession of youth work. The story told here is narrated by myself, I include my own story. The narratives I have chosen to include are based on my experience and opinions informed by my practice and academic experience alongside personal and professional reflection.

I have drawn on theory and policy that offer somewhat contrasting views in relation to youth work and impact measurement, recognising that there is limited contribution from the lived experience of youth work and attempting to measure impact. It is the voice of practitioners with experience of working with young people, some of whom are qualified youth workers, that I want to offer in this thesis in an attempt to address the questions posed. I have attempted to define youth work in the contemporary context, by looking back to policy and literature as well as engaging with participants, I have considered how impact can be measured and indeed if it should be measured. I set out with some very clear questions, that through the process of reviewing policy and literature and data collecting, these questions have changed and been distilled into one enduring question: what is youth work, can we measure it, and if so, how? This would inform what an evidence base for the future of youth work could look like.

### 11.1 The Questions Posed

I refined the questions posed at different stages of the research process as it became apparent that the original questions were judgment laden. It was, however, these broad questions that informed the review of youth work, measurement, impact, and evidence, together with looking at how youth work is delivered, measured and how its impact is evidenced.

The broad questions I ultimately sought to address were distilled as follows:

1. What is youth work? What does, and also importantly, does not constitute youth work, what are the key components that need to be present to legitimise the work with young people as youth work and what elements must not be present. Does youth work even exist in an agreed and definable form.
2. How can we measure the impact of youth work? Very quickly I started to question the implication of the very question posed and became curious about not how youth work can be measured but indeed whether it should be measured, ethically should we even seek to measure impact.
3. How do we record the contribution of youth work in the lives of young people, whilst honouring the ethical foundations for the profession? This very quickly proved problematic for me as a professional, an academic and a researcher, how can we ever be sure of the impact of anything on the lives of young people, who says if it does or does not, and in posing the question do you change the dynamics of the interaction and relationship, thus rendering it no longer youth work.
4. What could an evidence base for the future of youth work look like. Clearly dependent on the question about the definition and if impact can be generated as reliable evidence.



## 11.2 The Definition

I identified a definition for youth work (2.2 and 6.1.6) that I have remained consistently comfortable with throughout the stages of this research:

**'....an empowering, informal, person centred process, it is anti-oppressive, voluntary and participative, and the prime concern is the wellbeing and development of young people alongside social change'.**

This is informed by my reflection on my own practice, and of theoretical analysis of literature relating to history, policy and the ideology and characteristics of youth work (see Chapter 5 and Chapter 6).

It is important here to expand and offer some analysis of terms included in this definition.

Throughout this research, my own reflection and interpretation has been important to the emerging story and how this has emerged in the data, contributing significantly to knowledge. My nuanced interpretations of terms are included below, it is not my intention to refer specifically to text, policy or theory, but to recognise the wider essential contribution.

### **Empowerment**

The significant part of the work empowerment in youth work is 'power', who holds the power and what do they have the power to do. It is essential that young people have power and agency in their own lives, and that a youth work environment enables young people to have information and support, to facilitate them making informed decisions that impact on their lives. I don't believe a youth worker can empower young people, they can only set the

right conditions, but they need to relinquish power and hand it over to the young people, in safe and appropriate ways.

### **Person centred process**

To a degree this is related to empowerment, young people must be at the centre of the youth work process and of their own lives, young workers must ensure that the work developed is in line with what the young people want to experience, explore and learn.

### **Informal Education**

Following on, this learning must not only be young person centred, it must be informal, not nonformal, but informal in that it is based on the needs, desires and aspirations of young people. It is essential that the 'curriculum', the plan and process is designed by and with young people.

### **Voluntary Participation**

Young people must have free choice about their engagement and participation, not just whether they 'turn up' to the provision but if they choose to engage. I have worked with young people in a range of settings where they have to be, however they always have the choice whether to, and to what degree, they wish to engage with the session, activity or experience and to what emotional level feels safe and appropriate for them. To illustrate if a youth worker is working with a young person in prison, the young person may 'have to attend' but they can never be made to engage and truly participate in a voluntary way, unless they wish to, and for me, this is one of the most significant aspects of youth work and that which separates youth work from other professions.

### **Anti-oppressive**

Our work must not only seek to be 'non-discriminatory and non-oppressive', we must seek to ensure the work actively seeks to challenge and disrupt oppression. Whether that be through challenge, informal education or political campaigning, it must be a central feature of the work, to liberate people from oppression and to challenge discrimination.

#### **Wellbeing and development of young people**

The wellbeing and safety of young people must be central, and if there are safeguarding or child protection situations, these must be dealt with through the appropriate organisational and legal channels, however for the purpose of this I am not referring to any issues of safeguarding. Young people, when they have agency, have opportunity for informal education and to engage with a trusted youth worker in a voluntary capacity, then they are the best placed to manage risk and make choices for their own lives, with some support and guidance as appropriate.

#### **Social Change**

Youth work does not happen in isolation, it exists in community, in society and can contribute to change. This can be as a direct result of young people taking local action, campaigning politically or by the choices individual young people make in their own lives.

### **11.3 The Process**

Throughout this research I have been concerned with not only considering ways to appropriately measure the impact of youth work, but also a careful consideration of if we can or indeed should actually measure the impact of youth work.

As a youth worker and a youth work manager, I was required on many occasions to justify the work we were doing and this inevitably demanded a demonstration of measurement of impact, of change, with the critical reflections presented offering some examples (4.1 – 4.8) and this led me to conclude that the idea that youth work impact can be statistically measured is anathema to me based on my experience. The impact of youth work on the lives of young people was the most difficult to represent, I could provide statistics to suggest engagement of young people, to suggest outcomes (decided by adults) for example the amount of 'juvenile nuisance' occurring or reducing. If the numbers were 'pleasing' the authorities and funders were 'content'. Was this a meaningful evidence base for demonstrating the impact of youth work on young people's lives, not at all. Whilst there were observable changes and outcomes it was impossible to know true impact as young people led complex lives, with many influences and it would be arrogant at best to claim youth work as the sole impact. This is where we need to turn our attention from numbers to reflection and story, from the notion of measuring to capturing, which is much more in line with the ethical principles of youth work. Therefore, the choice of a narrative inquiry and a storied approach to data collection, seemed most appropriate. The notion of capturing the influence and impact of youth work and measurements exists in narrative as, I believe, the impact of youth work lies in the stories told by youth workers and young people, now and through reflection in later life. The definition I offer considers concepts of empowerment, informal education, a person centred process, anti-oppressive practice, voluntary participation and participation with a concern for wellbeing, development and social change'. What is important is to capture these themes in the narratives offered.

During my time in practice, I did work with young people in ways that offered evidence of perceived impact, the evidence being the sorts of thing funders and managers seem interested in, such as awards achieved (for example DofE), tools that measured a young person's journey through a process or project (for example Youth Star). I acknowledge that these processes and awards were of benefit to young people, they could see and celebrate their progress and achievements, it was an acknowledgement of that for sure, but not of impact, that come only by someone spending quality person centred time in reflection with young people, honouring, and recording the story, if they are willing to share. I am comfortable now with the distinction I have made during the process of this research.

- Youth work exists and can be defined.
- There can be a statistical evidence base for youth work.
- The impact of youth work exists in the reflective stories of young people and can be captured but not measured

I set out to develop a 'tool' to better measure the impact of youth work and through many tears, tantrums, realisations, reflections, and evidence from narratives, I changed my view and became convinced that no new external tool is needed or possible to measure impact, and that we as a youth work profession need to listen to the authentic stories told by young people, that is in itself the 'tool'. Are we trying to measure the immeasurable, for example, attempts to measure anti-oppressive practice, the empowerment that may have been, if a young person's engagement is truly voluntary, and if they perceive the work to be young person centred. As youth work is often delivered in a group of diverse young people it is incongruent to imagine they will all experience the interaction in the same way, and instead

will have different perceptions of desirable individual outcomes and impact. Recognising that an essential element of youth work is the relationship between a young person and the youth worker on the young person's terms, this relationship is unique, and any impact can only exist through reflection and the story telling, by the young person, in their own time and on their own terms. There is the need to capture youth work rather than measure it and the impact, and this research has identified that it is through the story, the narrative from youth workers and young people is where this exists, this is individually unique and rich, rather than offering countable data to measure.

The tool created is therefore the process of demonstrating the causal relationship between the youth work activity undertaken and the outcomes and outputs that can be perceived or measure; the narrative 'fills the gap', providing the opportunity to hear and capture a young person's story about their engagement, based on the definition of youth work. In order to create the conditions to enact and support a storied approach to capturing the story of youth work, youth workers are, and must remain, skilled listeners. It is essential that youth worker training remains cognisant of the need to equip youth workers with the ability to really hear the lived experience of a young person's experience of youth work, and the impact this has had on their own life and the potential impact on outcomes more generally. The hearing of the story must not be an interrogation to seek anything specific from young people, but the listener must be skilled to listen for ways in which empowerment, informal education, a person centred process, anti-oppressive practice, voluntary participation, participation, wellbeing, development and social change' are implied. The next stage of research would be to consider what is needed to support experienced and new youth workers to be 'good listeners' and 'good capturers' of the authentic stories told by young people about the impact of the work on them, also youth workers need to be equipped to demonstrate the causal

impact, what did the individual gain from the youth work that lead to the outcome. These narratives can help demonstrate and evidence the impact that exists between the intervention and the numerical output. To illustrate, a project is undertaken with young people to understand the risk and consequences associated with criminal behaviour and the statistics over a period of 3 months during the project shows a significant reduction in 'youth crime', but why? No really why? It is not because youth workers engaged young people in a project, it is that the young people were impacted in ways that enable different choices, and this can only exist in their own story.

I present this thesis as a narrative, a story, told in everyday language and plain speaking, in an attempt to ensure the research is accessible to workers in practice as well as academics, whilst honouring the stories I have heard and using participant voice. The finding of the thesis will be distilled into conference presentations, journal articles and used to enable the next phases of development with practitioners and young people. Recognising and acknowledging that any narrative of practice has the potential for individuals and organisations to be identified.

I structured the thesis to guide my thinking and the reader through the chapters of the story. Dialogue in relationship is a basis of youth work and an important principle for this research. It was important to set the context, youth work exists in time and within a changing landscape, as practice and policy has changed over time so has the relationship between youth work and evidence, as well as the contested nature for this relationship. It was important early on to consider the language used and to secure a definition of youth work for the thesis within the

ideology of the profession, exploring the social construction of both young people and youth work.

Following a consideration of context and ideology, and in order to prepare for my engagement with participants, I reviewed the narrative in literature and policy. The narratives were developed and presented in a sequence, to generate an emerging story. As a starting point to addressing the research questions I reviewed my own practice and this is distilled into critical reflections, stories, about the nature of youth work, measurement, evidence, and impact. This enabled me to add a contribution to the body of knowledge and debate about the definition of youth work, and if the impact can be measured (Chapter Four).

The three literature reviews (Chapters Five, Six and Seven) enabled me to present a theoretical analysis and foundation from which I was able to add the voices and lived experience of practitioners. The personal reflection helped clarify the internal landscape and offered a reflexive position which was used when reviewing the written word about the history of youth work, policy, and the implications of politics, what youth work is and how it is defined, and a consideration of measuring impact. This informed and led to further enquiry in a specific sequence with participants. Initially in the design was a mixed methods questionnaire (Chapter Eight), from which interview questions were designed and asked in one-to-one interviews (Chapter Nine) and finally the data from these informed the areas to consider in the focus group (Chapter Ten).



I tussled with the different epochs in the development and transformation of youth work, which is explored in Chapter Five, the history narrative, when I identified three significant eras (5.1 – 5.3) and then discussed what I consider contemporary, that is from the Transforming Youth Work – resourcing excellent youth services report and the creation of the National Occupational Standards in 2002.

The thesis has not literally met the original desired outcome, that being to create a new external appropriate 'tool', method, process, or guidance for measuring impact and gathering evidence of youth work. However, had this been the case I would have missed the simplicity of capturing story as evidence of the impact of youth work as this is actually the tool, and it has existed all along through the decades of youth work. Although the method is different than originally imagined, the outcome is similar, as the story will better enable practitioners to evidence the power and impact of youth work. The story that unfolds is the 'tool' with the voice of the participants capturing individual and unique impact. This thesis suggests this is indeed the most ethical way to capture evidence and provide the link between practice and outcome. There remains an impetus to create an evidence base for practice and this thesis proposes that the stories gained from young people best captures impact, and this is congruent with the principles of youth work (ethical, anti-oppressive, participative, democratic and person centred practices). "Storytellers are revolutionaries, they can change the world" (Ledwith, 2022, P.129). If a young person's story can be heard and respected, they can indeed change the world. It is important that youth workers can truly hear impact in the story they are being told by the young person, this voice may well be counter to the political,

societal narrative, but it is essential we hear and believe, be curious and enable a way to hear, capture and act on the stories we are so privileged to hear.

The most significant contributions to knowledge are an additional definition of youth work for consideration in practice and academia and a storytelling approach to capturing the impact of youth work and filling the causal gap. Whilst I have not created a new tool, method or guidance for measuring youth work, the new knowledge that has emerged is that there can be a robust evidence base of impact and it is in the stories of practice that can be captured (9.8). It is envisaged that there can be a diverse way to record and capture this evidence from stories, but this should only be done if there is no detrimental impact on the process or the relationship with the young person. This is an authentic, young person centred approach that remains congruent with the youth work values and principles. This insight is significant to those developing youth work policy, those delivering youth work, those funding youth work, those seeking to capture evidence of impact and measure outcomes. Numbers are the wrong metric; what is needed is funding, time and space to engage with young people and hear their story, their own narrative for their experience and the impact on their lives as they see it, this can potentially be gathered and presented in some way to honour the contribution and evidence the impact.

Given I believe youth work is a social construction, that youth work is a discursive profession and reflective practice is a core aspect of the work, I used a range of appropriate methods, ultimately coming together in a narrative enquiry, a story I narrated with a range of contributions to explore both the mystery and the magic of youth work, and the notion of

measurement, evidence, and impact. This has led to the of additional contributions of the stories offered, my own and the participants, which highlight the lived experiences of practitioners, a voice that is lacking in the debate, and it is important to share their voices and opinions to inform the future. I was able to explore, through stories of practice and how we recognise both the mystery and the magic of the profession. The stories will collectively provide a basis for understanding the construction of youth work in England in the 2020s. The agenda must be that of young people, their stories need to be heard and captured, and it is this that informs potential next phases of the research. This is a starting point; we have much more to do. The principle that emerges is that of capturing, rather than measuring youth work. It will be important that this thesis leads to a framework for future research, to ensure there is a contemporary response that offers a flexible and agile contribution to a developing landscape and profession. It will be important to engage with young people to not only hear their voice and opinions, but as co-researchers and authors of their own narrative. The work of artificial intelligence (AI) is fast moving and it will be beneficial to remain openminded to the potential contribution if AI in distilling youth work within story.

#### **11.4 Limitations**

The research has taken place over an extended period of time, and it has been a challenge to keep up to date with development in practice and ultimately it has to be acknowledged this thesis is a moment in time with the work to discover the impact of youth work ongoing.

Another limitation is that the participant sample is not restricted to JNC youth workers which, whilst offering a diversity of views, potentially dilutes the message.

A limitation of this approach is that it is considered in stages, I needed to initially establish what youth work is, then what is impact and then consider if there can be a way of measuring the impact of youth work.

### **11.5 Recommendations**

To remain in the discussion with other colleagues, youth workers and academics in relation to the plethora of research undertaken as noted throughout. This research makes a contribution to a now vast body of evidence on these topics. The challenge for me is always how to improve the life chances for all young people through universal youth work, alongside ethically measuring the impact of this work and bringing about social change. Youth work may well be evaluated, and some measurement may take place, but it is important to establish how to measure the impact of the relationship and engagement on the lives and decisions of young people, indeed how do we capture the influence through a storied approach.

I recognised during my research and practice that some youth workers and young people are well practiced storytellers, whilst others do not possess these skills in a way that can convey narrative and impact. One of the recommendations is to train good storytellers, but also to train youth workers to work with young people to understand their experience through whatever mechanism they are able to express. It is equally important to train those who need to listen to the story and receive the evidence of impact and concern, including youth

workers, funders, politicians, parents, commissioners, teachers, and anyone who professes to have an interest in the impact of this work. There is a body of evidence that offers a story of practice and impact measurements used to generate evidence, but I recommend that it is essential that people are able to listen and understand the nuances at both the micro and macro levels. The key issue is to ethically capture stories in order to obtain the impact of the work on participants, and then it is essential that the capture of that story is in line with youth work principles.

One of the fundamental principles of youth work is that it must be a young person centred process, and it is therefore important to capture stories in practice as well the story of practice. I recommend that a next phase of this research seeks to record the stories that are being told by both youth workers and young people. They all have a story, and some of these are stories told over and over. I am keen to identify the story of youth work, through the lens of practitioners and young people. There is the potential for a range of face to face and digital ways to gather individual and collective storied experience and this would be explored at the next stage of development. It would be inappropriate at this stage to suggest that a listener would look for anything in particular in the stories being told. If impact is to be measured by the stories of young people, it will be up to the young person to make clear what the impact is on their lives, and this cannot be formulaic. Indeed, a question always remains... should youth work be measured, ethically should we even seek to measure impact of youth work. This is a question that must be addressed on an individual level and the decision should be made by the storyteller.

Youth Work is evaluated, leading to evidence and I recommend that a mechanism is established to measure the impact of the relationship and engagement on the lives and decisions of young people, indeed how do we capture the influence and not just the impact, this can only exist in narrative and would be non-existent in statistical data alone. It is important to remain aware of the challenge of creating an evidence base to secure funding, demonstrate outcomes and demonstrate work has happened. It is essential that we remain congruent of the ethical principles of youth work thus ensuring a young person centred approach that they can engage with in a voluntary capacity, thus perhaps a capture rather than a measure.

It is important to acknowledge the potential interface between youth work and technological advances and AI, not just how technology can be used as a means to deliver and support youth work, potentially capture the stories told but also how youth work and the associated principles can be advantageous in shaping technological advances.

Ledwith (2022) offers a nine-stage structure for storytelling praxis that I consider an effective approach to hearing an honouring story that leads to action in community. The next phase of research would be to implement a process to hear stories of practice from youth workers and young people to expand the narrative recorded here.

This story has explored and tussled with many aspects of youth work, the mystery and the magic alongside measurement, evidence and how best to capture impact, the challenge that emerged is how to record the impact without altering the dynamic and intention. Through

reflective practice, review and participant engagement this simply distils to the notion that if youth work is to be measured and the impact captured, then it must not jeopardise the relationship between youth worker and young people. Through the joys and trials of this research it is apparent that youth work is somewhat mysterious, unique in the individual interactions, but there is the need for a known understanding of what the profession seeks to achieve and the underpinning values and principles. There is indeed magic, this is evident in the stories of those involved and not simply as numeric output-based evidence. For now, until we meet again, thank you for bearing witness to this story.

The End.

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## **Appendices**

1. National Youth Agency, A Definition
2. Youth Work Definitions, A Thematic Analysis
3. Checklist – from Youth Work: A Manifesto For Our Times, Bernard Davies
4. Ethical Approval Application
5. Ethical Approval
6. Survey questions
7. Consent Form for Conversations
8. Participant Information Sheets for Conversations
9. Conversation Questions
10. Consent Form for Focus Group
11. Participant Information Sheets for Focus Group
12. Focus Group Plan
13. National Occupational Standards for Youth Work

## **Appendix 1**

### **National Youth Agency, A Definition**

<http://www.nya.org.uk/careers-youth-work/what-is-youth-work/>

NYA is committed to youth work, the science of enabling young people to believe in themselves and build positive futures.

Youth work takes a holistic approach with young people. It starts where they are at.

It builds resilience and character and gives young people the confidence and life skills they need to live, learn, work and achieve. This approach is at the heart of all of our work.

Youth workers usually work with young people aged between 11 and 25 years. Their work seeks to promote young people's personal and social development and enable them to have a voice, influence and place in their communities and society as a whole.

Youth work offers young people safe spaces to explore their identity, experience decision-making, increase their confidence, develop inter-personal skills and think through the consequences of their actions. This leads to better informed choices, changes in activity and improved outcomes for young people.

## Appendix 2

### Youth Work Definitions, A Thematic Analysis

#### A review of theory and policy to establish key themes

<b>Identified themes and coding:</b>
Education
Voluntary/Participation
Empowering/YP centred
Equality
Group/Individual
Wellbeing/welfare
Approach

There is a clear distinction therefore that Youth Work is a specific profession with key elements which make it distinct from any work with young people, these being:
Informal Education
Voluntary relationships and Young peoples participation
Empowering way of working and being Young Person centred
Equality of opportunity and Anti Oppressive Practice
Working with Young people in groups and individually
Concerned with wellbeing and welfare
A specific approach

#### DEFINITIONS

"As Brew (1957:183) put it 'A youth leader must try not to be too concerned about results, and at all costs not to be over-anxious' Jeffs & Smith (2010) p.4&5.

"Over the years contrasting traditions of Youth Work have emerged and developed (see Smith 2008). When we explore the theory and practice involved with these we can find some key elements that define Youth Work. In this piece we look to five dimensions:

- Focusing on young people, their needs, experiences and contribution.
- Voluntary participation, young people choose to become involved in the work.
- Fostering association, relationship and community, encouraging all to join in friendship, to organize and take part in groups and activities and deepen and develop relationships and that allow them to grow and flourish.

- Being friendly, accessible and responsive while acting with integrity. Youth Work has come to be characterized by a belief that workers should not only be approachable and friendly; but also that they should have faith in people; and be trying, themselves, to live good lives.
- Looking to the education and, more broadly, the welfare of young people. (See Jeffs and Smith 2010)"

Smith, M. K. (2013) 'What is Youth Work? Exploring the history, theory and practice of Youth Work', the encyclopedia of informal education, [www.infed.org/mobi/what-is-youth-work-exploring-the-history-theory-and-practice-of-work-with-young-people/](http://www.infed.org/mobi/what-is-youth-work-exploring-the-history-theory-and-practice-of-work-with-young-people/). Retrieved: 03/08/15].

The second definition I have considered is developed later by Smith and Jeffs but whilst using some different language maintains the focus on similar elements.

"for over 150 years, five elements have fused to delineate what we now know as Youth Work and to distinguish it from other welfare activities. Its distinctive only when all are present. Remove one and what is observed may possess a resemblance to, but is unquestionably not, Youth Work." Jeffs & Smith Youth Work Practice (2010) p.1

1. Voluntary Participation
2. Education & Welfare
3. Young people
4. Association, relationship & Community
5. Being friendly, accessible and responding whilst acting with integrity

Jeffs & Smith Youth Work Practice (2010) p.1

At a similar time Batsleer and Davies developed a similar yet extended definition that starts to so clarify Youth Work as a process and that a crucial element is about equality and diversity, however falling short of naming anti-oppressive practice

- Young people choose to be involved
- Starting where young people are starting – and then seeking to motivate and support them to go beyond these starting points into new experiences and learning
- Developing trusting relationships with young people
- Tipping balances of power and control in young people's favour
- Working with the diversity of young people and for equality responses for them
- Promoting equality of opportunity and diversity in your area of responsibility
- Working with and through young people's friendship groups
- Youth Work as process
- Reflective practice

Batsleer & Davies (2010) p.1 What is Youth Work

Read Kerry Young The Art of Youth Work page 16 to 18 – Education, Participation, Empowerment and Equality of Opportunity

Again Young talks of Equality of Opportunity, but what about the notion of anti-oppressive practice and challenging oppression? Sapin start to include this clearly in her definition of the values aspect of her model

- Purpose:

To enable young people to learn from each other and address their needs and interests

- Practice:

Listening to young people; bringing them together to enjoy activities, address inequalities and develop services

- Principles:

Voluntary participation, proactive anti-oppression, confidentiality, accountability, continuous professional development

- Values:

Having a positive, participative and anti-oppressive approach; respect for human rights and equality Sapin (2013) p.4

“The National Youth Agency is the leading national Youth Work charity in England. We believe that now more than ever young people need Youth Workers. Youth Workers dedicate their time and expertise to helping young people in their personal and social development, equipping them with the practical skills they need to be resilient in challenging times, and positive contributors to future economic growth.

Young people are full of the spirit and potential needed to make a positive contribution to society. It is often the young who are able to offer new and creative ways to approach the problems we face, as a nation. To do this, young people need self confidence and support. They often need someone to listen to them, put trust in them and give them responsibility. They need the chance to learn how to work to improve their own lives and to create a better future for themselves and others.

We work to support Youth Workers to do that more effectively, and for more young people.

We do this by:

- Championing the role of Youth Workers.
- Enabling Youth Workers to do what they do, better.
- Helping to professionalise Youth Work.”

The NYA has offered its own definition which starts to be specific about age range and modality of delivery and again consistent themes are emerging and a greater focus on values



and ethics with the creation of first the NYA Ethical Conduct in Youth Work (2004) later the Institute for Youth Work was set up and developed a Code of Ethics (2014)

#### “What is Youth Work? NYA

Youth Work helps young people learn about themselves, others and society through activities that combine enjoyment, challenge, learning and achievement. It is a developmental process that starts in places and at times when young people themselves are ready to engage, learn and make use of it. The relationship between Youth Worker and young person is central to this process.

Youth Work happens in youth centres, schools and colleges, parks, streets and shopping precincts – wherever young people gather. Youth Work methods include support for individuals, work with small groups and learning through experience.

Youth Work offers young people safe spaces to explore their identity, experience decision-making, increase their confidence, develop inter-personal skills and think through the consequences of their actions. This leads to better informed choices, changes in activity and improved outcomes for young people.

Youth Work contributes to the government’s vision for young people – that they should enjoy happy, healthy and safe teenage years that prepare them well for adult life and enable them to reach their full potential. From January 2007, local authorities have been required to secure ‘positive activities’, including Youth Work, for young people in their area. These activities should be shaped by what young people say they want, and should help put them on the ‘path to success’.

#### NYA

Youth Work helps young people learn about themselves, others and society, through informal educational activities which combine enjoyment, challenge and learning.

Youth Workers work primarily with young people aged between 13 and 19, but may in some cases extend this to younger age groups and those aged up to 24. Their work seeks to promote young people’s personal and social development and enable them to have a voice, influence and place in their communities and society as a whole.

Youth Work is underpinned by a clear set of values. These include young people choosing to take part; starting with young people’s view of the world; treating young people with respect; seeking to develop young people’s skills and attitudes rather than remedy ‘problem behaviours’; helping young people develop stronger relationships and collective identities; respecting and valuing differences; and promoting the voice of young people. This is considered in more detail in the National Youth Agency statement of principles and values, Ethical Conduct in Youth Work.”

Later the Institute for Youth Work was set up and developed a Code of Ethics (2014) “The aim of the Institute for Youth Work is to improve and support quality in Youth Work. It will engage all those in the youth sector who work to enable young people to develop holistically and to reach their full potential.

The Institute for Youth Work is open to all those working with young people from across the youth sector, employed and volunteering, who work to the key principles of Youth Work as outlined by our code of ethics statement.

The Institute for Youth Work is not a trade union or an association that provides representation and advice to members; that is a different role and we encourage our members to join a trade union of their choice to obtain this advice and representation.

**The Institute for Youth Work currently operates in England only.**

The Institute for Youth Work will support Youth Workers to ensure individuals, and the sector, reach the highest possible standards in Youth Work.

This will be achieved by developing the following key work strands:

- **Youth Work practice** – including developing and promoting a framework for ethical practice. This will be the bedrock of membership and will provide opportunities for sharing practice, supporting colleagues through peer support and mentoring opportunities.
- **Strategic voice** – for members to influence policy and practice and promote the recognition of the impact of Youth Work.
- **Continuing professional development** – providing guidance, information and opportunities around practice development. The IYW will also provide a vehicle for recording training and CPD for practitioners.”

**IYW Code of Ethics**

“This is our code of ethics. All members of the Institute for Youth Work must agree to the following statements and twelve principles when they sign up for membership.

Youth Work enables young people to develop holistically, working with them to facilitate their personal, social, and educational development. Youth Work enables young people to develop their voice, influence, and place in society and to reach their full potential.

The Institute for Youth Work recognises the diversity of the Youth Work sector. It includes those that work with young people, who engage on a voluntary basis, in public, private and third sector (including faith-based) organisations.

The work may be paid or unpaid and includes face-to-face workers, Youth Work managers and educators.

Our members, whatever their role or setting, make judgements and conduct themselves in their work based on the following ethical principles:

1. We have a **duty of care to young people**. In the Youth Work relationship the best interests of young people have priority.
2. We **do not seek to advance ourselves**, our organisations, or others – personally, politically, or professionally – at the expense of young people.
3. Our relationship with young people **remains within professional boundaries** at all times, to protect the young person and the purpose of the work.
4. We work in a **fair and inclusive way**, promoting justice and equality of opportunity, challenging any discriminatory or oppressive behaviour or practice.
5. We seek to enhance young people's personal and social development by:
  - o Enabling them to make **informed decisions** and pursue their choices;
  - o Supporting their **participation** and active involvement in society;
  - o Helping them to become **independent** and move on when the time is right.
6. We promote the **welfare and safety** of young people, while permitting them to learn through undertaking challenging educational activities. We avoid exposing young people to the likelihood of harm or injury. This includes implementing safeguarding policies and procedures.
7. When we receive or collect **personal information** about young people, we make them aware of with whom and for what purpose that information will be shared. We do not disclose confidential information unless this is necessary to prevent harm or is legally required.
8. In our engagement with young people, and in our resulting relationship, we strive to be **honest and non-judgemental**.
9. We respect the **contribution of others** concerned with the welfare and well-being of young people and will work in partnership to secure the best outcomes for young people.
10. We encourage **ethical reflection** and debate with colleagues, managers, employers and young people.
11. We make sure we have the **knowledge and skills** necessary to work effectively with young people. We work in a reflective way to develop our abilities. We take account of the impact of work on ourselves.
12. We maintain consciousness of our own **values, beliefs and interests**, are aware when these conflict with those of others, and approach difference respectfully."

Education and Inspections Act 2006 – Section 507B outlines local authority responsibilities in respect to leisure time activities and it states:

LEAs in England: functions in respect of leisure-time activities etc for persons aged **13 to 19** and certain persons aged **20 to 24**

(1) A local education authority in England must, so far as reasonably practicable, secure for qualifying young persons in the authority's area access to—

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

(2) "Qualifying young persons", for the purposes of this section, are—

(a) persons who have **attained the age of 13 but not the age of 20**; and

(b) persons who have attained the age of 20 but not the age of 25 and have a learning difficulty within the meaning of section 13(5)(a) and (6) of the Learning and Skills Act 2000).

(3) For the purposes of subsection (1)(a)—

(a) “sufficient educational leisure-time activities” which are for the improvement of the well-being of qualifying young persons in the authority's area must include sufficient educational leisure-time activities which are for the improvement of their personal and social development, and

(b) “sufficient facilities for such activities” must include sufficient facilities for educational leisure-time activities which are for the improvement of the personal and social development of qualifying young persons in the authority's area.

(4) References in the remaining provisions of this section to “positive leisure-time activities” are references to any activities falling within paragraph (a) or (b) of subsection (1).

(b) secure that the views of qualifying young persons in the authority's area are taken into account.

(12) In exercising their functions under this section a local education authority must have regard to any guidance given from time to time by the Secretary of State.

(13) In this section—

- “recreation” includes physical training (and “recreational” is to be construed accordingly);
- “sufficient”, in relation to activities or facilities, means sufficient having regard to quantity;
- “well-being”, in relation to a person, means his well-being so far as relating to—

(a) physical and mental health and emotional well-being;

(b) protection from harm and neglect;

(c) education, training and recreation;

(d) the contribution made by him to society;

(e) social and economic well-being.”

In June 2012, the Department for Education published “Statutory Guidance for local authorities on services and activities to improve young people’s well-being. This is statutory guidance issued by the Secretary of State for Education under Section 507B of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. It relates to local authorities’ duty to secure services and activities for young people aged 13 to 19, and those with learning difficulties to age 24, to improve their well-being, as defined in Subsection 13.”

<http://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/pdf/s/statutory%20guidance%20on%20a%20youth%20provision%20duty.pdf>

This document makes reference to Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child which states “Article 12 (Respect for the views of the child): **When adults are making decisions that affect children, children have the right to say what they think should happen and have their opinions taken into account.** This does not mean that children can now tell their parents what to do. This Convention encourages adults to listen to the opinions of children and involve them in decision-making -- not give children authority over adults. Article 12 does not interfere with parents' right and responsibility to express their views on matters affecting their children. Moreover, the Convention recognizes that the level of a child's participation in decisions must be appropriate to the child's level of maturity. Children's ability to form and express their opinions develops with age and most adults will naturally give the views of teenagers greater weight than those of a preschooler, whether in family, legal or administrative decisions.

[http://www.unicef.org/crc/files/Rights\\_overview.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/crc/files/Rights_overview.pdf)

.... “it is possible to identify some key dimensions that have been present to differing degrees in the central discourses of practice since the early 1900s. Youth Work involves:

**Focusing on young people.** Although there have been various shifts in the age boundaries, Youth Work has remained an age-specific activity. Its practitioners claim some expertise in both in making sense of the experiences of youth, and in being able to work with young people (Jeffer 2001: 156). While there may be problems around how we talk about and define youth – and around the sorts of expertise we can claim – there can be no doubting that many young people both view their experiences as being different to other age groups, and seek out each other's company. (Jeffer and Smith 1999b, 2001a). Many Youth Workers have traditionally responded to this – and top the ways of understanding the world that people bring.

**Emphasizing voluntary participation.** The voluntary principle, as Tony Jeffer (2001: 156) has commented, has distinguished Youth Work from most other services provided for this age group. Young people have, traditionally, been able to freely enter into relationships with workers and to end those relationships when they want. This has fundamental implications for the way in which Youth Workers operate and the opportunities open to them. It can encourage Youth Workers to think and work in rather more dialogical ways (op. cit.). It also means that workers either have to develop programmes that attract young people to a Youth Work agency, or they have to go to the settings where they are.

**Association, community and relationship.** Association – joining together in companionship or to undertake some task, and the educative power of playing one's part in a group or association (Doyle and Smith 1999: 44) – has been a defining feature of much Youth Work since its inception. This interest in association was, perhaps, most strongly articulated in the Albemarle Report (HMSO 1960). However, of late the notion has come under considerable threat. The shift away from clubs to targeted groups has been one factor here. Another has been a growing emphasis by policymakers on the gaining of skills and knowledge by individuals (as against the enhancement of the abilities of groups to work together).

'Building relationships' has been central both to the rhetoric and practice of much Youth Work. Our relationships are seen as a fundamental source of learning. By paying attention to the nature of the relationship between educators and learners, it is argued, we can work in ways more appropriate to people's needs (Smith 2001b).

**Being friendly, accessible and responsive while acting with integrity.** Youth Work has come to be characterized by a belief that workers should not only be approachable and friendly; but also that they should have faith in people; and be trying, themselves, to live good lives. In other words, the person or character of the worker is of fundamental importance. As Basil Henriques put it (1933: 60): 'However much self-government in the club may be emphasized, the success of the club depends upon the personality and ingenuity of the leader'. The head of the club, he continued, must 'get to know and to understand really well every individual member. He must have it felt that he is their friend and servant' (ibid.: 61). Or as Josephine Macalister Brew (1957: 112-113) put it, 'young people want to know where they are and they need the friendship of those who have confidence and faith'. It follows from this that the settings workers help to build should be convivial, the relationships they form honest and characterized by 'give and take'; and the programmes they are involved in, flexible. 'A youth leader must try not to be too concerned about results', Brew wrote, 'and at all costs not to be over-anxious' (ibid.: 183)." Smith, M. K. (2013) 'What is Youth Work? Exploring the history, theory and practice of Youth Work', the encyclopedia of informal education, [www.infed.org/mobi/what-is-youth-work-exploring-the-history-theory-and-practice-of-work-with-young-people/](http://www.infed.org/mobi/what-is-youth-work-exploring-the-history-theory-and-practice-of-work-with-young-people/). Retrieved: 04/08/15].

#### **Terms – Youth Work – changes to working with young people – social pedagogy - develop**

"I am convinced, there is not a more elegant statement of the purpose of Youth Work than that offered by the British government as articulated in the National Occupational Standards for Youth Work (NOS): 'The key purpose of Youth Work is to work with young people to facilitate their personal, social, and educational development, and enable them to gain a voice, influence, and place in society in a period of transitions from dependence to independence.' This definition does not bother with where or when the work is done, but only with why and (in subsequent paragraphs) how." Karen Pittman P88

"The primary lines for distinguishing Youth Work from teaching and youth programs and organizations from classrooms and schools were not time and place but outcomes and strategies." Karen Pittman P88

In 2002, the British government reaffirmed its long-standing commitment to Youth Work, and after a comprehensive consultative process with the field, developed the National Occupational Standards for Youth Work, articulating the key aspects of the field—the anchor points for the development of detailed standards" Karen Pittman 90

Equity and justice are core values

The values that underpin Youth Work derive from a clear understanding of and commitment to learning and development, equal opportunity, social inclusion, and the educational and social importance of choice, freedom, responsibility, and justice.

"Informed by Youth Work values, the role of the Youth Workers is therefore to work with young people in ways that are:

- Educative
- Participative
- Empowering
- Promote equality of opportunity and social inclusion" Karen Pittman 90 FROM PAULO (2002), p. iv.

Building on a 1996 summation of the defining characteristics of Youth Work, the report asserts that Youth Work can be distinguished from other professions "at the point of encounter with young people" because:

- Young people choose to be involved.
- The work starts where young people are.
- The work seeks to go beyond where they start, encouraging them to be critical and creative in their responses to their experience and the world.
- It takes place because young people are young people, not just because they have been labelled.
- It focuses on the young person as a whole person with particular experiences, interests, and perspectives.
- It recognizes, respects, and is actively responsive to the wider networks of peer community and culture that are important to young people.
- Through these networks it seeks to help young people achieve stronger collective identities (for example, as blacks, as women, as gays).
- It is concerned with how young people feel and not just with what they know and can do.
- It works with other agencies that contribute to young people and social and personal development.
- It complements school and college-based education by encouraging and providing opportunities for young people to achieve and fulfil their potential. Karen Pittman 91 FROM PAULO (2002), p. ii.

#### **Interaction is the defining feature**

Youth Work in the U.K. is not defined by programs and activities but is embodied in the nuanced skills of Youth Workers regardless of whether they do "buildings-based work," detached work (that is, with young people who cannot or choose not to use centres), outreach work, work in mobile units taken to particular locations, work in schools and colleges, work in government training programs, cross-community and international work, or focused project work (for example, youth councils, group counselling, arts or youth action projects)." (National Youth Agency, (n.d.). The NYA guide to Youth Work and youth services. Leicester, UK: National Youth Agency. Retrieved August 10, 2004, from: <http://www.nya.org.uk/Templates/internal.asp?NodeID=90356&ParentNodeID= 89721.>)

"Youth Work takes place where Youth Workers and young people meet to engage in activities that are in line with its key purposes and reflect its key principles. It takes place indoors and outdoors, in the community and away from the community, in places set aside

for young people and places where the community meets and goes about its business."  
PAULO (2002), p. ii.

In the U.K., the most visible differences between instances of youth programming occur in the type of activities offered: drama, music, or outdoor recreation, for example. These differences, however, are considered superficial. The "programme of activities is. .. merely the medium through which [the] experience which leads to personal and social development is offered." Department of Education and Science. (1987). Effective Youth Work. A report by HM inspectors (p. 4). London, UK: Department of Education and Science.  
Retrieved August 10, 2004, from:  
[http://www.infed.org/archives/gov\\_uk/effecdve\\_youth\\_work.htm](http://www.infed.org/archives/gov_uk/effecdve_youth_work.htm).

3 above Pitman pg 92

<http://eds.a.ebscohost.com/eds/detail/detail?vid=24&sid=05224d57-88b6-4c1a-803f-14497276f67a%40sessionmgr4002&hid=4210&bdata=JkF1dGhUeXBIPXNoaWlmc2l0ZT1lZHMtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#db=sih&AN=16133645>  
<http://www.nya.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/National-Occupation-Standards-for-Youth-Work.pdf>

From the Youth Service In Britain – Prepared by Reference Division, Central Office of Information, London Revised October 1974 “The Phrase ‘Youth Service’ is used to describe a wide range of statutory and voluntary provision for the leisure-time education and recreation of young people mainly in the 14 to 20 age group” page 1

From Education Observed 6 Effective Youth Work “effective Youth Work also take place in buildings as well as on the hills or on the streets” page 7 Experiences away from the home and its immediate environment have a rich potential for social learning because, removed from the everyday expectations of the kinds of people they are and the way they behave, individuals are often able to respond differently and see themselves and others in a different light.” Page 12

Proactive approach – fun and will want to come back but also not seeing the young people as a problem in need of help seeing the positives and strengths (Sapin)

Participative – right to choose and are at the centre of the practice (Sapin) not just passive participants but making choices and finding solutions.

Anti-oppressive practice – equality and human rights (sapin) – exclusion due to identity and circumstances.

Sapin 2013 page 15



### Appendix 3

Checklist from:

Youth Work: A Manifesto For Our Times Bernard Davies Reprinted from Youth & Policy Number 88 Summer 2005

<https://indefenceofyouthwork.files.wordpress.com/2009/03/youth-work-a-manifesto-for-our-times-bernard-davies.pdf>

From Page 7:

In what follows, however, extended responses are offered to a series of leading questions with a view to setting out Youth Work's own 'defining characteristics'. The questions are:

Have young people **chosen** to become involved – is their engagement voluntary?.

Is the practice proactively seeking to tip **balances of power in young people's favour?**

Are **young people perceived and received as young people** rather than, as a requirement, through the filter of a range of adult-imposed labels?

Is the practice **starting where young people are starting** – particularly with their expectation that they will be able to relax, meet friends and have fun?

Is a key focus of the practice on **the young person as an individual?**

Is the practice respectful of and actively responsive to **young people's peer networks?**

Is the practice respectful of and actively responsive to **young people's wider community and cultural identities** and, where young people choose, is it seeking to help them strengthen these?

Is the practice seeking to **go beyond where young people start**, in particular by encouraging them to be outward looking, critical and creative in their responses to their experience and the world around them?

Is the practice concerned with **how young people feel** and as well as with what they know and can do?

#### Appendix 4

No:



**Research Ethics Application  
for University Staff and Post Graduate Research (PgR) students  
Application for study involving Human Participants**

**All fields will expand as required.**

1. Title of Project:

Has Youth Work 'had its day' or can Youth Work survive in a contemporary multi-agency environment?

2. If this is a PgR student project, please indicate what type of project by ticking the relevant box:

☒ PhD Thesis   ☐ PhD by Published Works   ☐ MPhil

3. Type of study

☒ Involves direct involvement by human subjects

☐ Involves existing documents/anonymised data only. Contact the Chair of Ethics before continuing via research office, [Sonia.barnes@cumbria.ac.uk](mailto:Sonia.barnes@cumbria.ac.uk)

4. Peer Review

It is expected that all research is peer reviewed before applying for ethical consideration. Please indicate who your proposal has been discussed with (Mentor, Supervisor (s), Expert in field).

Julie Taylor

**Applicant information**

5. Name of applicant/researcher:

Tracy Cowle
6. Appointment/position held by applicant
Senior Lecturer
7. Contact information for applicant:
E-mail: tracy.cowle@cumbria.ac.uk Telephone: 01524 590842 (internal extension 5842) University of Cumbria Faculty of Health & Science Humanities Block Tutor Room 4 (T4) Bowerham Road Lancaster
8. Project supervisor(s)/mentor, if different (or applicable) from applicant:
Name(s): Julie Taylor, Kaz Stuart and Alison Spurgeon-Dickson E-mail(s): <a href="mailto:julie.taylor3@cumbria.ac.uk">julie.taylor3@cumbria.ac.uk</a> <a href="mailto:kaz.stuart@cumbria.ac.uk">kaz.stuart@cumbria.ac.uk</a> <a href="mailto:alison.spurgeon-dickson@cumbria.ac.uk">alison.spurgeon-dickson@cumbria.ac.uk</a>
9. Appointment held by supervisor(s) and institution(s) where based (if applicable):
Dr Julie Taylor CPsychol, CSci, AFBPS, SFHEA   Principal Lecturer UoC
10. Names and appointments of all members of the research team (including degree where applicable)

<i>The Project</i>
<b>NOTE:</b> In addition to completing this form you must submit all supporting materials such as participant information sheet (PIS) and consent form.
11. Summary of research project in lay terms (maximum length 150 words).
To discover what a range of practitioners working with young people think youth work is and the key elements of the profession. How do the core elements for Youth Work fit in a multi-agency environment? What is the benefit of youth work intervention?
This research is situated in critical realist ontology. The aim is to examine the nature and function of contemporary youth work at a time when fiscal constraints and social demands seem to be generating considerable tension. Where what is seen to be socially necessary and what is actually possible to commission in terms of service availability seems to be at odds. The critical realist position means that the issue of what youth work is will be examined across a range of adult stakeholders (over 18 years) using a range of methods. The various sources of evidence providing a form of triangulation.

The first stage of the research will be to carry out a scoping exercise with people known to me using purposive sampling of people in current practice – this will be a range of professionals not just Youth Workers, for example social workers; police officers and teachers

The second stage will involve developing a Q-sort interview technique from the literature and data from stage one and using this with a range of professionals. Then following the analysis the final stage will be a deliberative enquiry with a range of stakeholders with a view to policy and discipline development (Stage Three)

12. Anticipated project dates

Start date: June 2016 End date: July 2020

13. Please describe the sample of participants to be studied (including number, age, gender):

Approximately 25 people from the following:

Youth Workers (over 18 years of age)

Members of staff at UoC in the Youth and Community, Work Social Work, Policing, Criminology, Education, Working with Children and Young People and families, Nursing, Sport and Psychology teams

Youth and Community Work Lecturers (UoC and other institutions)

Professionals from other services working with young people

14. How will participants be recruited and from where? Be as specific as possible.

The first stage will be purposive sampling and I will approach people I know with an information sheet and consent form.

From this letters will be sent to agencies and individuals to invite employees and/or volunteers to participate, again information will be provided and consent obtained.

I will approach organisations that work with young people in different ways to ensure a diversity within the sample

Local Authority – Blackpool and Lancashire

UoC staff

TAG - The Professional Association of Lecturers in Youth and Community Work

Voluntary Sector Networks

15. What procedure is proposed for obtaining consent?

Consent form to be completed. Participant information sheet will be provided and thus the consent will be informed by this and verbally, participants will be briefed on the

purpose and scope of the research and will have the opportunity to ask questions and withdraw at any stage.
<p>16. What discomfort (including psychological), inconvenience or danger could be caused by participation in the project? Please indicate plans to address these potential risks.</p> <p>None</p>
<p>17. What potential risks may exist for the researcher(s)? Please indicate plans to address such risks (for example, details of a lone worker plan).</p> <p>None</p>
<p>18. Whilst we do not generally expect direct benefits to participants as a result of this research, please state here any that result from completion of the study.</p> <p>Increased knowledge of Youth Work and its place in a multi-agency environment</p>
<p>19. Details of any incentives/payments (including out-of-pocket expenses) made to participants:</p> <p>None</p>
<p>20. Briefly describe your data collection and analysis methods, and the rationale for their use</p> <p>Stage 1 - will be perceptive interviewing to scope.</p> <p>Stage 2 - a questionnaire based on the findings from the literature review, own experience and the information gathered during the scoping stage.</p> <p>Stage 3 – semi-structured interviews with questions informed by stages 1 and 2 – the people interviewed will be from a range of disciplines working with young people to consider if the purpose of the engagement with young people is different depending on the profession and context.</p> <p>Stage 4 – Q method to evaluate and consider what a the range of professionals ‘think’ about youth work</p> <p>Individual interviews with colleagues to be used for scoping interviews and to identify themes for questionnaire and focus groups</p>

Questionnaire – to gather demographic information to supplement / help triangulate data from interviews and focus groups

Focus Groups – will be used following the initial scoping and quantitative data collection to explore further the topic of youth work and its delivery in a multi-agency setting

21. Describe the involvement of users/service users in the design and conduct of your research (where applicable). If you have not involved users/service users in developing your research protocol, please indicate this and provide a brief rationale/explanation.

No young people will be included as participants I will involve UoC colleagues in the design of the research

22. What plan is in place for the storage of data (electronic, digital, paper, etc.)? Please ensure that your plans comply with the Data Protection Act 1998 and University of Cumbria Data Storage Guidelines such as consideration of data archiving, password protection and data encryption.  
Stored on University system which is password protected and an encrypted pen drive and pseudonym will be used

23. Will audio or video recording take place? ☐ no ☒ audio ☐ video  
If yes, what arrangements have been made for audio/video data storage? At what point in the research will tapes/digital recordings/files be destroyed?  
Audio will be transferred to the University system which is password protected in order to access during data analysis and destroyed once transcribed

24. What are the plans for dissemination of findings from the research (reports, transcripts, summaries, publication, conferences)? Please give detail of how you plan to provide a summary of research findings in lay terms to participants.

It is my intention to present my finding at youth work and multi-agency conferences.  
For the research to inform journal articles for appropriate Youth Work publications  
I will also produce a summary/findings report for participants and stakeholders

25. What particular ethical problems, not previously noted on this application, do you think there are in the proposed study?

None

Signatures:

Applicant: Tracy Cowle

Date: 10<sup>th</sup> June 2016

Project Supervisor (if applicable): Julie Taylor

Date: 10<sup>th</sup> June 2016

**Supportive Materials Checklist**

**Please attach all necessary supportive materials and indicate in the checklist below.**

Please tick as appropriate	
Participant Information Sheet	yes
Consent Form	yes
Letter of invitation	no
Other (please state, and explain)	N/A

## Appendix 5

13 June 2016

Our Ref: DC/SB 15/36

Tracy Cowle  
Health, Psychology and Social Studies  
Bowerham Road

University of  
**Cumbria**   
Research Office  
University of Cumbria  
Lancaster Campus  
Lancaster, LA1 3JD  
Tel: 01524 384175  
Fax: 01524 384385  
Email: [sonia.barnes@cumbria.ac.uk](mailto:sonia.barnes@cumbria.ac.uk)

Dear Tracy, Julie and Alison

**Request for Ethical Clearance – Our Ref 15/36**  
**Project: Has youth work 'had its day' or can youth work survive in a contemporary multi-agency environment?**

Thank you for your revised application regarding the issues that required addressing. The Panel are now able to give approval for your project and wish you well.

With regards



Professor Diane Cox  
**Chair**  
**Ethics Panel**



## Appendix 6

### Survey Questions

My initial questions were concerned with ethics and consent and then I asked a series of 'fact' finding questions to give some demographic information:

- What is your Role/Job title?
- In what sector do you operate?
- Do you hold a JNC professional qualification?
- What is your length of time in practice?

The next set of questions were concerned with Youth Work; the categories are informed by my review of the literature.

- Do you think any of these elements are essential for work with young people to be called 'youth work'?:
  - Anti-Oppressive Practice
  - Informal Education
  - Voluntary Participation by Young People
  - Empowerment
  - Developing Wellbeing
  - Social Change
- Would you add any elements that are essential for work to be called 'youth work'?

I asked questions such as these to ensure that if I hadn't included sufficient options for participants to select from them they had the opportunity to add their own thoughts. I wanted to include open questions to elicit individual responses but also closed questions within predetermined categories informed by the review of the literature.

- Do you think the presence of any of these elements would mean practice was not 'youth work'?:
  - Curriculum
  - Adults assessing risk
  - Adults assessing vulnerability
  - Ensuring young people's welfare
  - Social Control
- Do you think the presence of any other elements would mean practice was not 'youth work'?

I then included my working definition of Youth Work 'Youth Work is an empowering, informal, person centered process, it is anti-oppressive, voluntary and participative, and the prime concern is the wellbeing and development of young people alongside social change' and invited participants to offer their own definition of Youth Work.

I then asked a question to move the consideration of Youth Work toward considering impact, measurement and evidence, their own view and how their organisation conducts, or not, the recording of evidence and impact:

- Youth work has had an impact when...?
- Do you measure the impact of your work with young people?
- Please can you elaborate? For example, if yes how? if no why not?
- Are you happy with the way your organisation measures impact?
- Youth work is evidenced when...?
- Do you collect evidence of the Youth Work you deliver?

- Please can you elaborate? For example, if yes how? if no why not?
- Are you happy with the way your organisation evidences Youth Work?

A closing question that was asked invited people to ponder their own definition and consider on what basis they answered the question: Are you a Youth Worker?

I took the opportunity to gather some data around the impact of covid-19 on the work as this is a contemporary issue that is likely not only to affect how Youth Work is delivered but also how impact is measured and evidence gathered.

Finally, I invited people to express an interest in the next stages of data collection and recorded the names of those willing to take part in follow up informal discussions and focus groups and thanked them for their contribution.

## Appendix 7



### Participant Consent Form – For Conversations

**Please answer the following questions by circling your responses:**

Have you read and understood the information sheet about this study? YES NO

Have you been able to ask questions and had enough information? YES NO

Do you understand that you are free to withdraw from this study at any time up to confirming you are happy with the transcript from our conversation, and without having to give a reason for withdrawal? YES NO

Your responses will be anonymised. Do you give permission for members of the research team to analyse and quote your anonymous responses? YES NO

You are aware our conversation will take place over MS Teams and be recorded. I will send you the transcript of our conversation for approval.

Please sign here if you wish to take part in the research and feel you have had enough information about what is involved:

**Signature of participant:**..... **Date:**.....

**Name (block letters):**.....

## Appendix 8



### Participant Information Sheet – for Conversations

Working title: 'Youth Work..... The Mystery and Magic. What does an evidence base for the future of Youth Work look like?'

#### What is the research about?

The aim of this research is to elicit storied experiences from individuals who are either a Youth Worker, someone who works with young people in another professional role, someone who is involved in the education of Youth Workers or someone who has views on the nature, future and impact of Youth Work. I am interested in 'practitioner perspectives' and keen to engage in dialogue on the nature of youth work with 'voices from the field'.

#### About this phase of the study

This phase of the research is investigating further the question "Has Youth Work 'had its day' or can Youth Work survive in a contemporary multi-agency environment? The purpose is to consider the nature of youth work, its future and its impact.

Thank you for completing the questionnaire and for agreeing to have a conversation with me so that I can find out more about your story as a practitioner. The topics we will consider in this conversation include:

- Tell me about your experience of working with young people.
- Can you talk me through your own definition of youth work?
- From your experience/perspective, how can we most effectively/meaningfully capture evidence of what we do?
- What do the concepts of impact and influence mean to you?
- Supplementary questions:
  - Are these something we can measure?

- How?
- Why? For what purpose?
- What are your experiences of doing this?

**Some questions you may have about the research project:**

**Why have you asked me to take part and what will I be required to do?**

I am contacting you now as you completed the questionnaire in phase one of my study and provided your email address so that I could contact you with an invitation to follow up on the answers you provided. The conversations will be held on MT Teams, and with your permission, they will be recorded. I will then transcribe this into a written form, which I will share with you to review.

**What if I do not wish to take part or change my mind during the study?**

Your participation in the study is entirely voluntary. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time up to the point of confirming you are happy with the transcript from our conversation, without having to provide a reason for doing so. If you wish to withdraw please send me an e-mail.

**What happens to the research data?**

All data will be anonymised and your name will not be published. The data will be stored on a University system that is password protected using OneDrive. The data will only be available to the research team.

**How will the research be reported?**

The findings will be presented at appropriate conferences and in appropriate journals, names and geographical location will be removed to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. Participants will be able to request sight of the final paper.

**How can I find out more information?**

Please contact the researcher directly:

Tracy Cowle, Senior Lecturer and Programme Leader: Youth Work and Community Development

Institute of Health

University of Cumbria

Lancaster - LA1 3JD

[tracy.cowle@cumbria.ac.uk](mailto:tracy.cowle@cumbria.ac.uk)

**What if I want to complain about the research?**

Initially you should contact the researcher directly. However, if you are not satisfied or wish to make a more formal complaint you should contact Colette Conroy head of the ethics committee University of Cumbria, Bowerham Road, Lancaster, LA1 3JD.

[colette.conroy@cumbria.ac.uk](mailto:colette.conroy@cumbria.ac.uk)

## Appendix 9

### Conversation / Interview Questions

- Tell me about your experience of working with young people?
- Talk me through your own definition of youth work
- What does measuring Impact mean to you?
- Do you consider it ethical to measure the impact of youth work?
- Do you consider that Youth work can be measured? Or are we attempting to measure the unmeasurable.
- What is your experience of measuring the impact of youth work?

Adapted to:

- Tell me about your experience of working with young people?
- Can you talk me through your own definition of youth work?
- From your experience/perspective, how can we most effectively/meaningfully capture evidence of what we do?
- What do the concepts of impact and influence mean to you?
- Supplementary questions:
  - Are these something we can measure?
  - How?
  - Why? For what purpose?
  - What are your experiences of doing this?



## Appendix 10



### Participant Consent Form – Focus Group

**Please answer the following questions by circling your responses:**

Have you read and understood the information sheet about this study? YES NO

Have you been able to ask questions and had enough information? YES NO

Do you understand that you are free to withdraw from this study at any time up to confirming you are happy with the transcript from the focus group, and without having to give a reason for withdrawal? YES NO

Do you give permission for your name and e-mail address be shared with the other participants in order I can invite you to the MS Teams meeting? YES NO

Your responses will be anonymised following the focus group. Do you give permission for members of the research team to analyse and quote your anonymous responses? YES NO

You are aware the focus group will take place over MS Teams and be recorded. I will send you the transcript for approval.

Please sign here if you wish to take part in the research and feel you have had enough information about what is involved:

**Signature of participant:**..... **Date:**.....

Name (block letters):.....

#### Appendix 11



#### Participant Information Sheet – Focus Group

Working title: 'Youth Work..... The Mystery and Magic. What does an evidence base for the future of Youth Work look like?'

#### What is the research about?

The aim of this research is to gather perspectives from individuals who are either a Youth Worker, someone who works with young people in another professional role, someone who is involved in the education of Youth Workers or someone who has views on the nature, future and impact of Youth Work. I am interested in 'practitioner perspectives' and keen to engage in dialogue on the nature of youth work with 'voices from the field'.

#### About this phase of the study

This phase of the research is investigating further the question "Has Youth Work 'had its day' or can Youth Work survive in a contemporary multi-agency environment? The purpose is to consider the nature of youth work, its future and its impact.

Thank you for completing the survey and for agreeing to be contacted about future stages. I invite you to join and engage in a focus group with me and colleagues, so that I can find out more about your perspective as a practitioner. The topics we will consider in this focus group include:

- Your definition of youth work – what is it?
- The ideology of youth work – what is it for for example: social change, social control, education, development (or something else?)
- How can we most effectively/meaningfully capture evidence of what we do?
- Can we / should we attempt to measure impact?

**Some questions you may have about the research project:**

The focus group will be held on MT Teams, and with everyone's permission, it will be recorded. I will then transcribe this into a written form, which I will share with you to review. There will be up to 5 other participants in the focus group, some of whom you are likely to know. In order to set up the focus group in MS Teams, I will have to share your e-mail address with the other participants in order that everyone can gain access. All the data collected during the discussion will remain anonymous and the discussion within the focus group must remain confidential. You are asked not to disclose the content with anyone afterwards.

**Why have you asked me to take part and what will I be required to do?**

I am contacting you now as you completed the survey in phase one of my study and provided your email address so that I could contact you with an invitation to follow up on the answers you provided.

**What if I do not wish to take part or change my mind during the study?**

Your participation in the study is entirely voluntary. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time up to the point of confirming you are happy with the transcript from our conversation, without having to provide a reason for doing so. If you wish to withdraw please send me an e-mail.

**What happens to the research data?**

All data will be anonymised and your name will not be published. The data will be stored on a University system that is password protected using OneDrive. The data will only be available to the research team.

**How will the research be reported?**

The findings will be presented at appropriate conferences and in appropriate journals, names and geographical location will be removed to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. Participants will be able to request sight of the final paper.

**How can I find out more information?**

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Tracy Cowle, Senior Lecturer and Programme Leader: Youth Work and Community  
Development

Institute of Health

University of Cumbria

Lancaster - LA1 3JD

[tracy.cowle@cumbria.ac.uk](mailto:tracy.cowle@cumbria.ac.uk)

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[colette.conroy@cumbria.ac.uk](mailto:colette.conroy@cumbria.ac.uk)

## **Appendix 12**

### **Focus Group Plan**

Overview, consent, withdraw and thanks

Pervious stages, own practice, literature, policy, questionnaires, interviews

What is youth work?

My definition – your definition

Social change / social control?

Care, Education, Conformity – Context diagram

Language, is it just about finding a language that works in line with the profession?

Measure or capture or other

Impact or influence or other

What is measuring impact? What is evidence?

Do you have any ideas about how best we ethically capture the impact youth work?

How do we capture the grey areas?

The impact YW has on the lives of young people?

How do we do this ethically?