

# Transformative Evaluation: An Interpretive Study of Youth Workers' Experience of Using Participatory Evaluation

Submitted by Susan Cooper, to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Education in Education by Research in May 2012.

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## Abstract

This interpretivist research aims to add to the body of knowledge in relation to the impact of managerialism in the youth work sector by investigating the ways in which youth workers and their practices are influenced by systems of accountability, externally imposed targets and measurement. Evaluation in this context is reduced to upward compliance; the professional no longer responsible for defining good practice or determining the outcomes of their work. The concern that the learning and development functions of evaluation are lost warranted the research. Participatory evaluation can offer resistance to evaluation as 'technology of power' because of its ongoing process of collective action, reflection and knowledge creation.

Using an 'insider' methodology, a new participatory evaluation methodology was developed and implemented to explore how this different approach influenced the youth workers' sense of self and practice. Data were gathered via individual semi-structured interviews before and after the implementation of the participatory evaluation and an inductive thematic analysis was used to identify emergent themes.

This research contributes to knowledge by showing that youth workers have been seriously challenged by managerialism, and performativity particularly in relation to maintaining their personal and professional values. It confirms that they view accountability metrics as inadequate for capturing the complexity and demonstrating the value of their work. Of particular significance is the knowledge that this study adds in regard to the design and use of participatory evaluation. A new way of thinking about evaluation is proposed. Transformative Evaluation (TE) offers a methodology that supports the learning and development functions of evaluation. In addition, TE was seen to enhance practice outcomes, raise worker confidence and well-being potentially supporting a more agentic response to change.

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## **Chapter 1 Introduction**

### **Research Aims**

The aim of my thesis is to examine how two different approaches to evaluation are experienced by a small group of youth workers. Its intention is to develop understanding about how such experiences interacted with the youth workers' practice and sense of professional self. Firstly I aimed to develop understanding of the degree to which discourses of managerialism and accountability affected their practices. Whilst there is substantial literature relating these topics to the social professions more generally, for example teaching, social work and early years, such literature relating to youth work is scarce. Secondly, I wanted to see whether using a different approach to evaluation, one that is participatory and appreciative in nature, would affect the way the youth workers felt about their day-to-day practice and about themselves as practitioners.

### **Rationale**

My rationale for carrying out this research was informed by both personal and professional interests. I enrolled on the EdD programme in September 2007 for two reasons. First, having changed careers I was feeling uncertain about my new professional identity as I moved from youth work into higher education. I was lacking in confidence and, suffering from the 'imposter syndrome' (Brookfield 1995), questioned whether I could really belong in this new space. I felt that gaining a professional doctorate would enable me to address some of these concerns. The second reason related more to why I made the career change in the first place: a desire to influence the field of youth and community work by leading developments in the professional education of practitioners. In order to gain such influence I needed to be able to engage in meaningful research that stood up external scrutiny: I needed to find my own 'academic voice'.

I began the research phase of the doctoral programme in September 2009 with both trepidation and excitement. The opportunity to engage in the research informing this thesis arose unexpectedly, and the excitement outweighed the trepidation. I fully support the idea that you need to be absolutely committed to your research topic to successfully address the challenges of the research journey. My interest in the concept and the processes of evaluation spans a number of years.

My career experience of being a youth worker (1990 – 2001), a youth work manager (2001-2003), a senior manager in a Local Authority Youth Service (2003-2005), and currently an educator of youth work professionals, has informed my view that youth work has significantly changed over this period. As with other public services, youth work has been transformed and government intervention is at the root of the transformation agenda (Whitty 2006). This agenda has been driven by a shift in the belief of the efficacy of professionalism to ensure high quality provision to a belief that quality is better achieved through externally regulated measures of competency. In other words, the ‘transforming’ agenda can be understood as managerialism, and within managerialism a form of organisational control becomes a process of upward accountability. This is characterised by the assessment of quality using external benchmarks and quantitative methods such as externally imposed targets (Clarke and Newman 1997).

For youth work, the transformation began later and with much less vigour than for many of the other social professions. The Thompson Committee was set up in January 1981 to review the provision of the Youth Service in England and to ascertain whether resources could be employed more effectively. The subsequent Thompson Report (1982) was critical of youth work in terms of its unclear objectives, lack of co-ordination between the statutory and the voluntary sectors, and unequal availability to potential participants. Following the Report the focus of scrutiny was on clarifying the outcomes of youth work activity and whether these were sufficient to justify continuation of funding:

The challenge for the youth service now lies in its ability to articulate and demonstrate the values that underpin its present position and the specific outcomes that no-one else can deliver. (National Youth Bureau 1990:28)

and:

Now, more than ever, the youth service needs to consider its role and clarify the criteria for monitoring and evaluating its achievements. (National Youth Bureau 1990: 34)

In response to the challenges identified in the Thompson Report (1982) three ministerial conferences were held between 1989 and 1992 with the intention of introducing a core curriculum, establishing an agreed statement of purpose, learning outcomes and performance indicators. The result was a mandate for the National Youth Agency to produce curriculum guidelines to help Local Authority Youth Services to plan and evaluate their work. Control remained at a local level with Youth Services producing their own locally-specific curriculum documents. A further development during the 1990s was the introduction of the Office of Standards in Education (Ofsted). The *Framework for Inspecting Youth Work* (1994, revised 1997) raised the issue of accountability of staff and the systematic monitoring and evaluation of the use of resources.

*Transforming Youth Work* (DfES 2001) and *Resourcing Excellent Youth Services* (DfES 2002) subsequently brought additional funding into youth work but the latter introduced four national output targets for Youth Services that would enable comparison in terms of efficiency, effectiveness and value for money. These targets involved arbitrary quantifiable measures such as contact, participation, recorded and accredited outcomes. Many within the profession felt that the imposition of output targets threatened the very nature of youth work, particularly the requirement to deliver a specified number of accredited programmes.

In this thesis I have interpreted the 'transformation agenda' in terms of discourses of professionalism: I explore this in more detail in chapter 2. In brief, two competing discourses exist, sometimes understood as being about 'professionalism' and 'professionalisation', or as 'occupational professionalism' and 'organisational professionalism' (Evetts 2005). It is the second of these understandings that I draw on in this thesis. I maintain that professionalisation/organisational professionalism supports a discourse of managerialism. My argument is that this discourse is de-professionalising in terms of the challenges it presents to practitioners' use of discretion and

autonomy. This dominant discourse reshapes the professional as technician and oversimplifies the role of the professional (see Hodkinson and Issitt 1995). This view is supported by Young (1999:7) who states 'Youth workers do not merely deliver youth work. They define it, interpret it, and develop it.' The shift of control, from professional youth worker to the government opens the gates to the co-option of youth work as a means of social control. If youth workers are not able to practice in ways that align with their professional values then this demands serious attention and an aim of this research was to identify whether this shift was rhetoric or reality.

There has been ambivalence towards the concept of professionalism in youth work from youth workers themselves (Banks 2004) as well as from those 'outside' the profession. Youth work can be seen as a 'weak' profession, in terms of the lack of an independent knowledge base and a lack of organisation within the profession itself: for example, it does not require a licence to practice and does not have a governing body. I am concerned that this leaves youth work vulnerable to external influences, unable to resist externally-driven change and particularly, unable to maintain its value base. I examine the impact of managerialism on professional values in my literature review, particularly drawing on the work of Furbey *et al.* (2001), Osgood (2006) and Healy (2009) to consider the vulnerability of 'weaker' professions.

Alongside this concern is the question of whether the youth workers in this study demonstrate any resistance to the changes that are occurring, whether they are able to make use of their 'agency' to control what they actually do in their professional practice. I wanted to see if they were critically shaping their own responses to what they perceived as problematic situations (Emirbayer and Mische 1998). Hilferty (2008) argues that agency is the individual and collective power of people to control and shape their environment, in other words, not just about individual intent but also a collective form of action. This idea of collective action is of interest to me, and shaped my design of the evaluation methodology developed for this research. Collective spaces for professional reflection and dialogue appear to be diminishing in the workplace and yet from my experience of working with practitioners in training settings, this appears to be highly valued for its re-energising and restorative properties. I wanted to explore this idea

further through my research as potentially it could improve practitioners' daily lives, countering the deficit discourse associated with performativity.

I explore the concept of performativity, a manifestation of managerialism, in my literature review, drawing particularly on the work of Ball (2008) and Avis (2003). Performativity is generally understood in terms of the imposition of external control through targets and systems of measurement and comparison. It is my argument that performativity impacts on what youth workers 'do' in their professional practice in negative ways: as Dahlberg *et al.* (2007:91) assert 'Quality and its evaluation can thus become an integral part of a new control system, assuming a policing function, so that the power that decentralisation gives away with one hand, evaluation may take back with the other'. From my own experience and from anecdotal sources, I suggest that performativity has changed the way in which practitioners relate to the process of evaluation. Issitt and Spence (2005) argue the process of evaluation within the public services has been corrupted to focus almost entirely on accountability, thereby losing some of its ability to support programme development or generate knowledge, and this has had a detrimental effect on practice. Evaluating one's own practice is fundamental to one's sense of 'being professional': I explore the relationship between performativity, evaluation and professionalism in chapter 2. My concern is that if youth workers no longer see evaluation in terms of a process through which they can learn about and value their own practice then how will they develop their practice and their professional confidence?

I have had an interest in how youth workers assess the impact of youth work for a number of years. This stems from a personal and professional need to be able to demonstrate the value of youth work and of what it can offer young people. I have always been frustrated by the fact that as a profession we seem unable to articulate what it is that youth work does, although at an individual practitioner level, most youth workers seem to be able to talk fluently about how their interventions impact on young people. My Masters dissertation 'Evaluating Evaluation: The argument for participatory evaluation in statutory youth services' (Cooper 2005) allowed me to explore the topic but was limited to using only secondary data. The opportunity to work alongside youth workers to develop a different approach to evaluation that could be useful to them, to young people and to the organisation was a very exciting prospect. The longer-

term aspiration of my research project is to enable youth workers to be active agents in the evaluation of their own practice, and to do so in ways which support their continued development and the development of youth work practice.

My premise for using a participatory form of evaluation was that it can offer resistance to the dominant discourse of evaluation as technology of power (Everitt and Hardiker 1996). Participative evaluation can be seen as an ongoing process of collective action through the inclusion of a range of stakeholders in reflection, negotiation, collaboration and knowledge creation. Fetterman and Wandersman (2004:4) state that participatory evaluation is underpinned by facilitation, advocacy, illumination and liberation. Drawing on the work of Jackson and Kassam (1998), I argue that participatory evaluation supports and extends participatory models of practice and involves processes that:

- Empower individuals, communities and organisations to analyse and solve their own problems;
- Value the knowledge and experience of participants;
- Use learning and education to promote reflection and critical analysis by both project participants and practitioners;
- Serve the purpose of improving the program and the organisation in the interests of the users;
- Use participatory methods of obtaining data and generating knowledge, employing a wide range of predominantly qualitative methods, sometimes in combination with quantitative methods; and
- Are participatory and collective and that creates better, more in-depth, and more accurate knowledge of the performance and impacts of a practice intervention.

(Cooper 2012:88)

I have argued elsewhere that if youth work as a profession is looking to re-engage practitioners in the process of evaluation then using a participatory approach seems highly appropriate (Cooper 2011).

A defining characteristic of participatory evaluation is the effort developed by a group of people working together in an interactive manner with the focus on the

process, rather than on results (Suárez-Herrera *et al.* 2009). The commitment to local control and capacity building means that participatory evaluation has the potential to enable practitioners to generate their own learning and support reflective practice (Hall and Hall 2004). Evaluation which aims to promote participation can be seen as critical praxis: Springett (2001:148) argues that 'If evaluation is viewed as critical praxis, then learning and change become the focus. The emphasis is no longer on proving but on improving.' A participatory evaluation process requires openness to dialogue, critical reflection and negotiation. In my literature review I explore further the relationship between reflective practice and performativity, the benefits of collective reflection for sustaining practice and practitioners and draw on the work of Wellington and Austin (1996) to locate the evaluation process within a reflective practice framework.

The alignment between the principles of participatory evaluation and the principles of youth work is striking. Suárez-Herrera *et al.* (2009) highlight the learning potential of participative evaluation approaches, asserting that the interaction and communication between stakeholders engaged in evaluative networks could be considered a superior way of learning. They note: 'those who learn from evaluation are those who do evaluation' (Suárez-Herrera *et al.* 2009: 323). I argue that, through engaging in participative evaluation, the youth workers can learn more about the organisation and about themselves in the context and situation in which they are working. A benefit of using a participatory approach is that it sets out to acknowledge and elevate the perspectives, voices, and decisions of the least powerful and the most affected stakeholders (Jackson and Kassam 1998). I wanted to see whether this was possible in practice and, if so, whether it would support the youth workers to feel confident and empowered and more readily able to make use of their agency.

## **Research Context**

The opportunity to carry out this research was unexpected but welcome. My institution was commissioned by a voluntary sector youth organisation to carry out an evaluation of its work following their receipt of a Youth Sector

Development Fund grant (YSDF) from the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF). The organisation, a registered charity, works with 11 -25 year olds through specialist projects and programmes addressing issues that marginalise or place young people at risk, including mental health, homelessness, crime, racism, sexuality, drug and alcohol use, abuse, rural isolation and poverty. The organisation receives funding from a range of sources, most of which is short-term. Their annual income is usually around £750000 - £770000 and they employ a staff team of 18 full and part-time workers. The YSDF grant was substantial relatively-speaking, spanned a period of two years and was focused on building the organisation's capacity and long-term sustainability and in turn the reach and impact of their work.

We were engaged to evaluate the impact of the organisation against their bid application data. I was appointed Principal Investigator and, with colleagues, designed a mixed methodology evaluation to gather both quantitative and qualitative data for analysis. I saw the opportunity to develop and implement a participatory evaluation as part of the overall evaluation and sought and gained permission from the Chief Executive to use this opportunity to carry out my research study.

The mixed methodology evaluation consisted of three strands as shown in table 1:1;

Strand 1	This strand focused on 'hard' outcomes as specified in the YSDF application and evaluated the progress the organisation made in reaching their specified targets. It was based on analysis of quantitative data supplied by the organisation.
Strand 2	This strand focused on young peoples' perspective in relation to the work of the organisation. It was qualitative in nature, gathering data via group and individual interviews and used an inductive thematic analysis.
Strand 3	This strand focused on the use of a participatory evaluation by a group of lead youth workers. This strand provided the opportunity for the research on which this thesis is based.

**Table 1:1 The three strands of the organisation evaluation project**

All three strands contributed to the production of an interim report (October 2010) and a final report (May 2011).

This opportunity enabled me to realise my ambition to develop an evaluation methodology that, in contrast to outcomes-focused accountability, enables practitioners to develop awareness and understanding of the impact of their practice in ways that would support both practice development and develop professional knowledge. I based the methodology on the 'Most Significant Change' (MSC) technique, developed by Davies in 1994 through his work in Bangladesh (Davies 1996a). This technique had not been used in a youth work context in the UK before (email discussion with Dr Davies 25.02.11).

I worked with six practitioners who held project-lead positions within the organisation to implement the participatory evaluation. This involved developing training materials, delivering training workshops and facilitating the group to implement the evaluation over a period of 11 months. Essentially the technique involved the generation of a number of Significant Change stories and the systematic collective analysis and selection of the Most Significant Change story for any given period. I set out to adapt the technique to ensure its suitability for a youth work context and also to develop the level of participation of the youth workers in the story generation stage. These adaptations and a description of the process are discussed in detail in chapter 3.

## **Research Design**

I located my research in an interpretivist paradigm and my commitment to social justice and my belief in the capabilities of individuals to find their own solutions influenced my desire to practice in an empowering way. I used an 'insider' methodology as I was conducting my research alongside facilitating the third strand of the overall evaluation project as shown in table 1:1. My choice of methods was influenced by the nature of the research and practical considerations. The emergent nature of the research demanded flexibility. I delivered an introductory workshop exploring the participants' knowledge, feelings and evaluative activities and two further workshops to support the development of understanding and skills in the use of the participatory evaluation. I recorded discussions via fieldwork notes and drew on these to develop the methodology for a youth work setting. I used individual interviews to generate data regarding the youth workers' experience of the process,

interviewing at the beginning and end of the evaluation project and an inductive thematic approach to analysis. Taking this approach demanded that I was reflexive during the research and the keeping of a research journal and regular supervision sessions enabled me to do this.

### **Inhabiting multiple roles**

Conducting my research as an 'insider' researcher meant that I had a number of different roles (see Diagram 1:1);



**Diagram 1:1 The context of the study**

#### *As Principal Investigator (PI)*

This role involved overseeing the organisation evaluation project. My contractual responsibilities included management of the evaluation and production of an interim report in October 2010 and a final report in May 2011.

#### *As Facilitator of one of the three strands*

This role involved the development and implementation of the new evaluation methodology. My responsibilities included the training and facilitation of a group of youth workers in the use of the new methodology between March 2010 and January 2011.

*As 'Insider' Researcher*

This role involved conducting the interpretive study of the experiences of the group of youth workers as they implemented the evaluation methodology.

Having these various roles was both challenging and rewarding. The expectations placed on each of these roles by others as well as by myself meant that at times the roles were in conflict, for example, in relation to timescales, being directed by the timescale set for the organisation evaluation rather than the research project. I was aware that this potential conflict needed constant attention, particularly in regards to issues of credibility, ethical dimensions and power. In practice the boundary between the facilitator role and the researcher role was blurred for the youth workers and for me and this blurring increased as my relationships with the youth workers developed. This raised concerns for me in both roles, particularly in relation to issues of power. I discuss these issues in more detail in chapter 3. In order to balance these challenges it is important to note that the messy nature of insider research can be a rich source of data as it allows 'understandings to unfold naturalistically' (Smyth and Holian 2008:35).

**Overview of thesis**

Chapter 2 provides an exploration of the literature informing the study. Presented in two parts, the first draws on literature from a range of disciplines focussing on discourses of professionalism, exploring some of the theoretical concepts upon which I have built my analysis. Using Evetts's (2005) model of occupational and organisational professionalism as a frame, I explore in detail the impact of managerialism as a discourse of professionalism. This is followed by a consideration of enacted professionalism, particularly in terms of how professionals respond to the challenges of managerialism, drawing on the work of Gleeson and Shain (1999). I examine the work of Furbey *et al.* (2001), Osgood (2006) and Healy (2009) to consider the impact of managerialism on weaker professions. I look to the work of Hilferty (2008) and Lawy and Tedder (2009) to examine ideas about agency and agentic practice. The second part of chapter 2 explores and examines literature associated with the concept of

evaluation, performativity and reflective practice. I review two evaluation studies (Furlong and Cartmel 1997; Merton *et al.* 2004) as both provide insights into youth workers' experiences of evaluation. I then focus on reflective practice literature, using Wellington and Austin's (1996) 'Orientation' model to locate the evaluation methodology developed for this research project. This is followed by a review of studies focusing on collective reflective conversations drawing in particular on the work of Allard *et al.* (2007), Ng and Tan (2009) and McCormack and Kennelly (2011).

Chapter 3 presents the theoretical framework and methodology used in this study. It begins by describing my approach to the research, setting out my ontological and epistemological positions and paradigm choice. This is followed by a description and explanation of my methodology, research design, methods and approach to analysis. It concludes with a consideration of the ethical issues, and a discussion of research quality and the limitations of the study.

Chapter 4 is the first of two chapters presenting my findings and discussion. The themes emerging from the inductive thematic analysis of data which structure this chapter are *external control* and *evaluation as accountability*. These themes relate to the participants' experiences of managerialism and performativity and address the first of my research aims: to develop understanding of the nature and extent to which managerialism has impacted on youth workers.

Chapter 5, again structured by emergent themes, is presented in two parts. The first part presents three emergent themes - *meaningful conversations*, *identifying learning* and *an apt process*. These themes relate to the youth workers' experiences of using the participatory evaluation and the ways in which that experience shows in their practice. This part addresses the second of my research aims: to illuminate the experiences of the youth workers as they implemented a new approach to evaluate their practice. Part two of this chapter is structured by a further three emergent themes; *empowering process*, *working together* and *enhancing reflective practice*. These themes illustrate the ways in which using the technique impacted on the youth workers as professionals. I conclude this part by exploring the links between transformative learning, transformative relationships and the participatory methodology developed for

this research and drawing on this, I coin the term 'Transformative Evaluation' to describe the new methodology.

Finally, chapter 6 is also presented in two parts. The first provides an overview of my findings and identifies the addition that this thesis makes to the limited knowledge relating to youth workers' experience of managerialism and the use of participative evaluation in youth work. It sets out the questions raised by this research and suggests further areas of study. Part two focuses on my personal learning journey through the research phase of Ed D programme and identify my key learning and the impact of this learning on me as a researcher.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### Introduction

My research has two areas of interest, one relates to discourses of professionalism and the other to practices of evaluation, I want to understand more about how these relate and inform each other. To reflect the nature of my research this chapter is presented in two parts, the first part focuses on the concept of professionalism and related issues and the second is about different methods and orientations to evaluation. Youth work is a seriously under-researched sector and as such most of the literature I have used comes from the wider social welfare sector. I start both parts by looking at the literature which has helped me construct my conceptual framework; this is followed by an in-depth review of key studies.

Part one discusses the contested notion of 'professionalism' in the context of managerialism and explores the competing discourses of occupational professionalism and organisational professionalism (Evetts 2005). Having aligned organisational professionalism with managerialism, I sharpen my focus then to investigate the possible ways in which professionals experience the affects of managerialism in order to understand what might underpin these responses and pay particular attention to the studies by Gleeson and Shain (1999) and Evans (2008) as these provide interesting frameworks that may support my understanding of the experience of the youth workers in this study. I conclude this part by reviewing key studies by Furbey *et al.* (2001), Osgood (2006) and Healy (2009) to understand more about the ways in which managerialism is experienced across professional groups, in particular those considered as 'weak' professions, for example housing and early years. I look to the work of Hilferty (2008) and Lawy and Tedder (2009) to explore the different ways in which individuals respond to the various changes, in terms of making use of agency.

In part two, I explore the concept of evaluation. I discuss literature relating to the affects of managerialism on the process of evaluation as experienced by professionals in their daily practice in order to construct my conceptual framework. I show that the dominant approach to evaluation in Children and Young People's Services is strongly aligned with accountability and provide evidence that this is alienating practitioners from the process. I review two key studies, one that evaluates youth work in Scotland (Furlong and Cartmel 1997) and one that evaluates the impact of youth work in England (Merton *et al.* 2004). Whilst not directly related to my study as I am not exploring the evaluation of youth work per se, both give an insight into youth workers' experience of evaluation. I move then to literature relating to reflective practice and use Wellington and Austin's (1996) orientations model to situate the evaluation methodology developed for this research before reviewing the work of Allard *et al.* (2007), Ng and Tan (2009) and McCormack and Kennelly (2011) to examine the notion of reflective practice as a collective activity. Drawing on these works I argue that alternative forms of evaluative practice are both possible and desirable and in doing so provide a rationale for developing a new evaluation methodology.

## **Part 1: 'Professionalism' – a contested and ever-changing concept**

I start by acknowledging that professionalism is a contested concept (Hargreaves 2000, Hoyle and John 1995). It has changed over time and continues to change (Crook 2008); it is as Whitty (2006) suggests a 'shifting phenomenon'. One way of understanding the changes to professionalism over the past four decades or so can be seen in relation to the advancement of neo-liberalism as the dominant global economic and political ideology. Neo-liberalism is primarily based upon a belief of the pre-eminent role of the market in maximising human well-being and is characterised by the shift of power away from professionals towards policy-makers. Davies (2003: 91) claimed 'it [neo-liberalism] may well involve the most significant shift in the discursive

construction of professional practice and professional responsibility that any of us will ever experience.' Whitty concurred that the major driver of change was government intervention via its reform and standards agenda:

In practice ... in most countries the characteristics of a profession have been increasingly determined by the state, which became the major stakeholder in defining professionalism in the twentieth century. (Whitty 2006: 3)

Managerialism is the product of neo-liberal political rationalities and business management approaches in the workplace (MacKinnon 2000) and its aim is to bring about organisational change in order to meet the competitive challenge of a global economy. In other words, managerialism seeks to improve the performance of the public services by way of introducing managerial techniques taken from private enterprise (Clarke and Newman 1997). Managerialism is characterised by a positivist assessment of quality, one that uses external, objective benchmarks and quantitative methods (Clarke and Newman, 1997). These new forms of organisational control undermine the level of trust placed on the professional (O'Neill 2002, Avis 2003).

Managerialism has changed the concept of professionalism. Professionals are no longer self-regulating and self-controlling but held accountable. Accountability in this context is understood as upward compliance (Ellis 2009). Much of the political discourse of professionalism placed the need for change at the feet of the professionals for their 'failing' practice (Hoyle and John 1995, Whitty 2006) or because they were deemed to be out of touch with the broader socio-economic changes in the world (Morris, 2001). This blaming legitimised centralisation and the state's strengthened control of the social professions (Furlong *et al.* 2000). A consequence of this is that the professional can be viewed as a technician (Hodkinson and Issitt 1995). Reinders (2008: 568) supports the argument that managerialism has undermined professionalism and argues that 'traditional professional practices have been invaded by a set of different values', concluding that managerialism presents serious challenges to social professionals with regard to remaining faithful to the values of their profession. The pervasive logic of 'value for money' has turned transparency and accountability into the key values of all service agencies.

The concept of profession has always been problematic in the social welfare sector (Hodkinson and Issitt 1995). From an external perspective, social welfare professions are not viewed as 'true' professions for a number of reasons; in relation to youth work the absence of an elected governing body and a licence to practice are currently key areas of debate. From an internal critical perspective, those in the social professions feel a discomfort with issues of self-serving elitism (Davies 1996b, Freidson 2001). Hargreaves (2000) makes a useful distinction between 'being professional' and 'being a professional'. He associates 'being a professional' with issues of status, regard and levels of reward and with processes of professionalisation. 'Being professional' relates to issues of conduct, demeanour and standards, in other words a set of skills, knowledge and values and behaviours exercised in the best interests of the client. The concept of professionalism or 'being professional' sits more comfortably within the social professions, including youth work, than the more traditional concept of profession as 'Part of being professional is to deliberately maximise those choices available to us in the best interests of the people we are employed to help' (Hodkinson and Issitt 1995:63). The notion of 'being professional' with its empowering and democratic relationships with service users offers social professionals a more acceptable form of professionalism (Hodkinson and Issitt 1995, Foley and Rixon 2008). Intuitively the notion of 'being professional' feels likely to fit with youth workers' experience, however there is a knowledge gap in terms of substantiating this claim.

### **Emerging Forms of Professionalism**

The impact of government intervention, through its 'transforming' agenda can be seen in one of two ways: as de-professionalisation (Furlong *et al.* 2000) or as re-professionalisation (Jones and Green 2006, Whitty 2006). Those who view the changes as a process of de-professionalisation highlight the loss of autonomy and the focus on competence rather than professional knowledge as key indicators of a shift in the nature of the work from liberal humanism towards technical rationality (Hodkinson and Issitt 1995, Furlong *et al.* 2000, Jeffs 2006). Those who equate the changes with a process of re-professionalisation highlight the de-coupling of vocationalism from professionalism or, as Ball

(2003) terms it, a process of ‘exteriorization’. This process involves a significant shift in the nature of the relationship between worker and their work in that the sense of calling no longer has meaning or value and professional judgement becomes subordinate to requirements of performativity and market.

Evetts (2005) proposes two emerging discourses: organisational professionalism and occupational professionalism (see Table 2:1).

Organisational Professionalism	Occupational Professionalism
Discourse of control used increasingly by managers in work organisations	Discourse constructed within professional groups
Rational-legal forms of authority	Collegial authority
Standardised procedures	Discretion and occupational control of the work
Hierarchical structures of authority and decision-making	Practitioner trust with both clients and employers
Managerialism	Controls operationalised by practitioners
Accountability and externalised forms of regulation, target-setting and performance review	Professional ethics monitored by institutions and associations

**Table 2:1: Two forms of professionalism (from Evetts 2005:10)**

Organisational professionalism is a discourse of control, involving increased standardisation of work practices, in other words managerialism. In contrast, occupational professionalism is a discourse constructed within professional groups, and relies on practitioner trust from employers and service users. Evetts (2005) used knowledge-based occupational groups to inform her model, and makes the important link between organisational professionalism and managerialism in reference to teaching, social work and the NHS. Further, she argues that organisational professionalism is used as a powerful instrument of occupational change and social control at macro and micro levels.

‘Occupational professionalism’, a discourse constructed within professional groups and reliant on trust, places power and control largely with professionals. For some, this model may raise questions about vested interests. However, the association with client-centred occupational values has quietened some critics in recent years (Colley *et al.* 2007). This model is one which many youth

workers would consider an ideal type as it places issues of ethical conduct, professional values, professional identity and reflective practice centrally, alongside client focus, participation and empowerment. This view is supported by earlier research (Cooper 2007) that identifies these issues as key factors for students developing their sense of 'being professional'. However, questions of viability in today's practice environment must be asked. Avis (2003), in his work on post-compulsory education, considered occupational professionalism untenable at the time of publication. Evans (2008) makes the same point using the term 'old school' in relation to this perception of professionalism. Avis (2003) argues that, rather than trying to re-instate earlier forms of professionalism, teachers should move towards a democratic and dialogical professionalism, 'one marked by dialogue and negotiation across a range of constituents having an interest in educational processes' (Avis 2003: 330). The question here is whether this dialogue and negotiation is really possible in the context of managerialism.

Whitty (2008) offers alternatives to the traditional and managerial forms of professionalism; he terms these 'collaborative' and 'democratic'. Democratic professionalism builds on Evetts's (2005) occupational professionalism in that it involves being sensitive to a range of stakeholders and seeks to build alliances between professionals, the service users and the wider community. This takes account of the Government's drive to involve service users in the development of services. According to Whitty (2008) democratic professionalism requires both stronger professional associations and a much wider active engagement with a range of stakeholders. He asserts that an activist identity (Sachs 2003) will be necessary to achieve this. He does, however, recognise that the shift from 'victim of change' to 'agent of change' will not be easy for some practitioners. Collaborative professionalism takes account of the move towards integrated working, in which professional groups work in collaboration with each other, with para-professionals and with non-professionals.

The question remains as to the experiences of youth workers, how might they experience discourses of professionalism in the workplace? My research adds to this unexplored area by illuminating the ways in which the youth workers in this study experience and make sense of emerging forms of professionalism.

### **Enacted professionalism –what professions actually ‘do’**

Evans (2008:27) argues that ‘To be real, professionalism has to be something that people – professionals - actually "do", not simply something the government or any other agency wants them to do...’ This provides a valuable reminder that if we accept that professionalism is socially constructed then professionals are potentially key players in that construction ‘accepting or resisting external control and asserting or denying their autonomy’ (*ibid*: 23). She challenges the notion that professionals passively accept externally imposed changes and makes a strong point that a discourse of professionalism cannot be seen as a powerful instrument of occupational change and social control until it is accepted and adopted by the professionals it is aimed at. Hilferty’s (2008) perspective is congruent with this, indeed she uses Evans’s term ‘enacted professionalism’ defining it as ‘an active process of social engagement through which teachers shape their own work lives’ (*ibid*: 162). Hilferty highlights the connection between agency and enacted professionalism by asserting that both require a knowing participation. Many commentators purport that managerialism poses a potential threat to professional autonomy arguing that in practice there has been a reduction in the number of opportunities for professionals to develop or express individual or collective autonomy (Mahony and Hextall 2000, Ball 2003, Osgood 2006).

### **Reviewing key studies**

I begin this section by reviewing Gleeson and Shain’s (1999) seminal study of academic middle managers in Further Education (FE). They were concerned with what they saw as the prevailing determinism of other commentators of the time, considering this to be an over-simplification of what was happening in organisations with the spread of managerialism. Their ESRC funded research study set out to analyse the way professionals interpret policy and practice changes and was conducted over an eighteen month period in five FE institutions. Using semi-structured interviews they gathered data about the managers’ experience and perception of the way in which national reforms impacted on their work at a local level. In essence, they set out to connect managerialism with the experiences of professionals ‘on the ground’. Drawing

on their findings they proposed three types of compliance were operating in the workplace; willing compliance, unwilling compliance and strategic compliance. Willing compliance is characterised by the conscious internalisation of the managerialist discourse, unwilling compliance is evident in the level of scepticism and disenchantment displayed. Strategic compliance is a middle way, in which people developed an 'artful pragmatism'. This involves the recognition and acceptance of the non-negotiable aspects of managerialism coupled with innovative ways of working around these that enabled the managers in the study to maintain their professional values and a strong commitment to the service users. Interestingly at the time of their research, now thirteen years ago, the FE sector was going through a funding crisis and industrial action, not dissimilar to the youth work context today.

Their contribution to the debate is refreshing in that by arguing that managerialism is not as uncontested or complete as was often portrayed, they create space for the idea that professionals are not passive recipients of change. Gleeson and Shain (1999) argue that although the impact of managerialism was shaping professionalism and professional practice it was not determining it. They proposed that the impact of managerialism could be understood as enabling new constructions of professionalism to emerge. The question is whether this can be applied to practitioners. Their paper draws on the responses of academic middle managers, the fact that they hold a management position will impact on their sense of power within the organisation. It could be argued that this role power is a supporting factor in enabling these professionals to be active in the construction of new forms of professionalism.

Furbey *et al.* (2001) begin with the premise that managerialism challenges established forms of professionalism and look to respond to the question as to whether in the context of managerialism 'new' professions, in their case the housing profession, can continue to lay claim to being a profession. Based on data gathered through a national survey and focus group discussions their findings confirm Gleeson and Shain's view that a range of responses are possible. They contend that individuals can adopt, adapt, resist or circumvent external demands for change and that the nature, purpose and boundaries of practice are 'constructed and reproduced by housing managers themselves'

(Furbey *et al.* 2001:40). Their key findings were the precarious status of the traditional housing professional domain, the active agency of employers in shaping the direction of housing professionalism and a readiness to define the emerging professionalism in terms of networks. However, as with the work of Gleeson and Shain (1999) the question of whether this can be said of practitioners as well as managers needs to be addressed.

Of particular interest for my research, is the argument that Furbey *et al.* (2001) make in relation to the 'weak' nature of housing professionalism, as evidenced in their assertion that managerialism constitutes a greater challenge to a 'weak' profession such as housing management. This notion of weak profession is pertinent to my research. They draw on a range of literature to show the fragility of housing professionalism, including its lack of a discrete and easily defensible knowledge domain, the lack of market closure and limited control over its own work, and its failure to develop a common, collective identity. They acknowledge that the traditional 'fragile' housing professionalism project may not survive the spread of managerialism but then are over optimistic when they suggest that this demise may offer new opportunities. These new opportunities to 'act professionally' relate to the development of what they term "professional" generic skills and attributes and an increase in immediate autonomy. However this can be interpreted as a contingent approach that results in de-professionalisation, and in fairness, they do recognise that they have 'hardly discovered a platform on which to develop a unified and distinctive 'housing' professional project' (Furbey *et al.* 2001: 41).

Healy's (2009) research confirms the view that the impact of managerialism is varied across professions, claiming that social welfare professionals have 'been highly exposed to the corrosive effects of managerialism on professional identity and influence' (*ibid.* 401). She bases her argument on the premise that 'weaker' professions are less able to use their individual and collective agency to resist the affects of managerialism. The relevance of this literature for my research is that her claim is underpinned by two factors, firstly the fact that community and social services are less able to demonstrate the value of their work through a positivist paradigm of evaluation and secondly, the well-established ambivalence towards professional recognition from within the profession. Drawing mainly on documentary analysis and workforce reforms, she argues

strongly that social welfare professions must cautiously engage with the professional project to define a collective identity and a shared understanding and defence of their professional capacities, particularly in service domains where these professions are now under threat.

Osgood (2006) offers an interesting extension of the agency debate in her discussion paper on early years teacher professionalism. She challenges the view that individuals are actively involved in reproducing, interpreting and transforming policy through their individual action or agency rather than simply reacting to imposed managerialist initiatives. Her argument is that practitioners need sufficient belief in themselves as 'professionals' to challenge top-down policy implementation. This is a helpful marker to consider for my research, and addresses the concern that other research has focused on managers rather than practitioners. There are similarities between early years and youth work for example, the impact of managerialism in youth work and in the early years education sector has only recently been felt. Her research found a prevailing 'passive resistance' wherein although practitioners were overtly opposed to new managerialist policy reforms, they felt powerless to resist. Again, similarities exist between the early years and youth work since youth workers are generally not confident in their professional status as noted earlier.

The ability to use agency to resist external control is an important consideration for my research. Hilferty (2008) usefully broadens the definition of agency by referring to the individual and collective power of the professional to control and shape their environment, in other words, not just about individual intent but also a collective form of action. The collective nature of the participatory evaluation project in which my research took place potentially adds to this perspective. However, despite the fact that many talk about agency in terms of power (for example Osgood 2006, Hilferty 2008), Emirbayer and Mische (1998: 971) define agency as 'the capacity of actors to critically shape their own responsiveness to problematic situations', their use of the term 'capacity' perhaps suggest something more than power. Biesta and Tedder reject the notion of agency as a form of power that individuals have and can use, arguing instead that

Agency should (...) be understood as something that has to be achieved in and through engagement (...). Agency, in other words, is not something that people have; it is something that people do (Biesta and Tedder 2007: 136)

Any discussion of agency needs to be held with a recognition that the structure - agency dichotomy is extremely complex and, importantly variation occurs within professional groups. For example, Halford and Leonard (1999: 120) remind us that 'Employees (...) come to work with their own personal agendas, such that the degree to which their identity is changed by new discourses in the workplace is highly variable'. Lawy and Tedder (2009) explore the ways in which the many changes associated with the audit culture have impacted on practitioners and managers in the FE sector. They used an ethnographic approach to both data collection and data analysis to shed light on the way in which a range of practitioners made sense of the various changes and impositions. Presenting two cases, one an experienced teacher educator and manager (Andrew Cave) and the other a relatively new practitioner (Emily Newby) they asked the question of whether either achieve agency. They use 'the tone of the 'chordal triad' of: 'iterational' influences from the past; a 'protective orientation to the future; and 'practical-evaluative' engagement with the present' (Emirbayer and Mische 1998 cited in Lawy and Tedder 2009:61) as an aid to answering this question.

They found some significant differences in the way in which Andrew and Emily articulated their professional practice, but also some similarities and shared concerns. A significant difference was seen in terms of agentic aspiration, with Andrew seeing the present 'context for action' as full of frustration. He felt his ability to control his practice was being challenged by the introduction of standardised and inappropriate systems and structures. Emily, on the other hand, viewed the present 'context for action' as full of opportunities. For her it seemed to be a matter of making the best of what was available, rather than any focus on challenging externally imposed changes. Whilst Lawy and Tedder (2009) accept that individuals' access to economic, social and cultural capital impacts on what they can 'do' and therefore on their achievement of agency in a given situation, they also suggest that the wide ranging changes across the sector have not closed down the achievement of agency. They claim that the

changes have transformed the ways in which practitioners are able to articulate their agency. In other words, managerialism does not change practices, practices are changed by changing the ways in which they are understood. This is significant for my study as I am aiming to change the way in which evaluation is understood and drawing on Lawy and Tedder (2009) it follows that this may well change the way it is practiced.

## **Part Two: Evaluation**

In this part of my literature review I explore the broad concept of evaluation in order to lay the foundations for the use of an evaluation project to illuminate the nature of professional practice in a youth work setting. Having established this base I discuss a range of literature to develop understanding of the interplay between evaluation, professionalism and managerialism. I map changes in the way that evaluation has been seen and enacted by professionals as a result of managerialism and clarify my position that the process of evaluation has the potential to offer a site of resistance to the de-professionalisation movement associated with managerialism.

Having established my conceptual framework I review two youth work evaluation studies (Furlong and Cartmel 1997; Merton *et al.* 2004) to provide context for my research. Building on the findings of the latter study, I move to literature relating to reflective practice and use Wellington and Austin's (1996) orientations model to situate the evaluation methodology developed for this research before reviewing the work of Allard *et al.* (2007), Ng and Tan (2009) and McCormack and Kennelly (2011) to examine the notion of reflective practice as a collective activity.

## **Conceptions and Challenges**

Evaluation is a nebulous concept that has been shaped over time (Vedung, 2010). It is generally viewed as the process used to assess the quality of something. However it needs to be understood that quality is also an elusive concept (Harvey and Green 1993), with no universally agreed definition (Kelemen 2003, Watty 2003) and, interestingly, while 'Many people have

commented that they are able to recognise quality when they see it, (...) [they] find it almost impossible to define.' (Stephenson 2003 cited in McMillan and Parker 2005: 153). Different people will have different ways of conceptualising quality, for example a funder, a senior officer, a practitioner, a service user may all hold different ideas about what quality means.

A number of definitions of evaluation have been offered. For example, Clarke (1999) offers a simple explanation, suggesting evaluation is primarily concerned with determining the merit, worth or value of an established policy or a planned intervention. Weiss goes further, noting:

'Evaluation is the *systematic assessment* of the *operation* and/or the *outcomes* of a programme or policy, compared to a set of *explicit* or *implicit standards* as a means of contributing to the *improvement* of the policy or programme.' (Weiss 1998: 4, original emphasis)

Both Clarke and Weiss appear to treat evaluation as if it were a neutral act, something that Kelemen (2003) challenges. His model offers two opposing perspectives, the managerial perspective and the critical perspective. The managerial perspective views quality as a technical, operational achievement, seeing it as a self-contained entity that can be planned and controlled with technical and managerial knowledge. This perspective, favoured by managerialism, takes a positivist approach in which quality is studied in a neutral, value-free way through an objective lens. The opposing perspective, the critical perspective views quality as a political, cultural and social process. This perspective regards quality as a complex and contested social and political phenomenon, which acquires its meaning through processes of communication in which organisational and societal power play a substantial role. The critical perspective adopts an interpretivist approach which claims that quality cannot be studied in a neutral, value-free way through an objective lens.

Evaluation has three purposes: accountability, which responds to the demands of funders and stakeholders to meet contractual agreements; programme development, which focuses on improving the quality of the programme; and generating knowledge, which aims to develop understanding about what forms of practice are successful (Chelminsky 1997). For evaluation to be an effective process these three evaluative purposes need to be achieved and it is argued

later that managerialism has significantly hampered this. Everitt and Hardiker (1996) assert that the purpose of evaluation in the context of social welfare should be to promote 'good' practice. They conceptualise evaluation as

involving both *the generation of evidence* about an activity, a policy, a programme or a project and *the process of making judgments about its value* (Everitt and Hardiker 1996: 4 original emphasis).

They present a number of principles that need to underpin evaluation systems in order to achieve this, including an awareness of the political nature of evaluation; skepticism of rational-technical modes of practice; and firmly situating evaluation in democratic processes. The centre pin of their critique of technical-rational modes of evaluation is that evidence alone does not provide a judgment of value. However they also assert that the process of judgment-making should be informed with evidence.

Guba and Lincoln's book *Fourth Generation Evaluation* (1989) was influential in offering an alternative approach to the positivist model. The first generation, termed the measurement generation, was critiqued for over-simplifying the complex nature of education and social welfare, reducing it to a number of quantifiable criteria and falsely claiming validity through measurement. The second generation, termed the descriptive generation, focused on the means of achieving desirable outcomes. The weakness associated with this generation was that it provided little or no judgement on the value of the processes under study and this led to judgement becoming the focus of the third generation. In response to critique of the previous generation, evaluators began to make judgement claiming that their external position enabled them to be objective. Fourth generation evaluation dismissed the idea of objective judgement and instead adopted a relative epistemology and a constructivist approach. Participatory models of evaluation are informed by fourth generation thinking. Pawson and Tilley (1997) however are critical of the relativist stance taken by Guba and Lincoln (1989) arguing that such a position is not helpful in guiding practice, in other words, it fails to clarify how decisions are made between the different constructions in a conflict situation. This is important for it is likely that the various stakeholders will not agree to a common view of quality or value as stated earlier.

Vedung (2010) uses a wave metaphor to describe the changing nature of evaluation. The Science-Driven Wave occurred during the 1960s when evaluative thinking and practice was driven by a belief that evaluation could make government more rational, scientific and grounded in facts. Evaluation during this period was carried out by professional academic researchers. Trust and confidence in science to solve social problems began to fade in the 1970s and it was felt that evaluation should be more pluralistic. This led to the Dialogue-Oriented Wave, which called for paradigmatic change and a constructivist paradigm (Guba and Lincoln 1989) replaced the positivist paradigm of the science-driven wave. The 1990s saw a growing dissatisfaction with what some people saw as a concept that was 'based too much on biased ideological beliefs, political tactics, pointless bickering, passing fancies and anecdotal knowledge' (Vedung 2010:270). The Dialogue-Oriented Wave was replaced by the Neo-Liberal Wave and a return to science was seen with more focus on results and less focus on processes, a fundamental idea in managerialism. In contrast to the dialogue-oriented wave, the neo-liberal wave was customer oriented rather than stakeholder oriented and, during this period, evaluation became explicitly linked with accountability, performance measurement and consumer satisfaction. The current wave, according to Vedung (2010) can be seen as the Evidence Wave and heralds a return to experimentation. Evaluation is concerned with what works and this can be interpreted as a renaissance of science and randomized experimentation.

### **The interplay between evaluation, professionalism and managerialism**

Practitioners have always been involved in evaluation, continually making judgements about their practice and the practice of others. Indeed, Everitt and Hardiker (1996: 4) go as far as to assert 'they could not practice otherwise'. Making judgements is part of being professional: 'professional expertise (...) lies in the ability to make judgements about the most effective ways of securing certain ends with particular students in particular situations' (Biesta 2005:2). However, as Biesta points out, these judgements are not simply of a technical nature but involve an evaluation of the means of achieving those ends and therefore involve value judgements as well. The influence of managerialism on the process of evaluation has been powerful and the emergence of evidence-

based practice and its rapid expansion across a number of areas such as social work, education and youth work needs to be understood against a background of managerialism (Trinder 2000, Hammersley 2001). Tinder's critique argues that evidence-based practice is 'a covert method of rationing resources, overtly simplistic and constrains professional autonomy' (*ibid* 2000:2). Davies (2003) supports this view, arguing that evidence-based practice is both a product of managerialism and a means of implementing managerialist agendas. Hammersley (2001: UP) makes a pertinent point when he states 'the definition of what is effective, of what counts as 'success' will not be something they [professionals] have any control over'.

Evidence-based practice requires a positivist approach to evaluation. The shift towards seeing evaluation in terms of quantifiable outcomes works on the basis that there are measurable inputs, outputs and outcomes, that there is causality between them and that a measurement of this will indicate the economy, effectiveness and efficiency of an organisation. As stated in the previous chapter, the impact of managerialism in youth work can be seen in the *Resourcing Excellent Youth Services* document (DfES 2002) which introduced externally imposed targets. Setting measurable outcomes may be appropriate when the 'product' is tangible, for example, a Youth Achievement Award (YAA) or a British Canoe Union (BCU) One Star Certificate. However, youth work is a qualitative process, it is concerned with personal and social development of young people and, as such, it is not possible to identify tangible outcomes that lend themselves to measurement. Ord (2007) provides an excellent example of this when he discusses confidence as a youth work outcome and Brent (2004) provides another good example of the intangible nature of youth work outcomes when he describes a young woman's journey in from the periphery as she moved from 'a shadowy appendage of her boyfriend to 'throw[ing] herself into the life of the Centre' (Brent 2004: 70). Watson and Emery (2010) acknowledge this challenge, noting that social and emotional learning outcomes are both poorly articulated and contestable adding that programmes aimed at developing young people's social and emotional learning generate far more outcomes than are recorded. The pressure to set outcomes which are measurable has led many youth services to focus their attention on those things which lend themselves to being counted, e.g. contacts or accreditations. This presents a

very real danger during this period of 're-visioning' youth services and the phrase 'what's measured is what matters' resounds. Watson and Emery's (2010: 769) perceptive view that 'there is a need to access lived realities [of young people and youth workers] and find a language for sharing and communicating these realities' provides an alternative conceptualisation of assessing outcomes. However, despite all the research that argues against positivism in the social sciences, the reliance on the positivist paradigm in evaluation seems to persist.

An example of this can be seen in the promotion of Outcome Based Accountability by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF, now DfE). Outcome Based Accountability (OBA), developed by Friedman (2005) in the US, has been taken up by a number of Children's Trusts. In *Better Outcomes for Children and Young People – From talk to action*, written for Directors and Lead Members of Children's Services and their key Children's Trust partners, the following statement appears,

Work is underway to try to understand what works best in 'narrowing the gap' in outcomes, through the Narrowing the Gap Project. This project, funded by DCSF, hosted by the Local Government Association (LGA) and supported by the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) is one of a number of initiatives which aims to understand *what action*, if applied *universally and pursued relentlessly*, would make a significant impact on the outcomes of vulnerable groups of children and young people. It is seeking *to identify the simple truths* rooted in evidence across all five outcomes that will assist local authorities and their partners to take effective action to 'narrow the gap' in outcomes between vulnerable children and the rest. (DCSF 2008b: 6, my emphasis)

This language leaves the reader in no doubt about the positivist underpinnings of this 'new' approach. McAuley and Cleaver (2006) assert that the four key elements of OBA are a focus on results, community collaboration, participation by individual citizens, families and children and innovative financial strategies but there is little, if any, evidence of how the participatory aspect is implemented or how meaningful it is. What really stands out in McAuley and Cleaver's (2006) publication is the emphasis on 'common sense' and 'simple' approach,

particularly in terms of the three common sense performance measures: How much did we do? How well did we do it? and Is anyone better off? The problem is that using terms such as 'common sense' and 'simple' in this way silences any dissenting voices, since how can one argue against common sense? And why is it that one does not understand when it is so simple? The hidden danger of OBA is that the collaboration and participation of users is used to legitimise what remains essentially a managerialist process. To ask a range of stakeholders 'how well did we do?' in any meaningful way will require a paradigm shift, from realist to relativist, from 'one truth' to 'multiple truths', and from positivism to interpretivism because people will have different conceptualisations of quality (Keleman 2003; Whatty 2003).

There is a research gap in the study of the ways in which managerialism has impacted on youth work professionals, a gap that this thesis attempts to address. However the view from literature relating to social work, compulsory and post-compulsory teaching, and other public services is one that argues that managerialism has resulted in professionals being subjected to rigorous regimes of external accountability (Everitt and Hardiker 1996, Wong 2008) which in turn has resulted in professional autonomy giving way to accountability (Evans 2008). The use of discretionary powers of judgment based on the standards of one's profession has been challenged. Vedung (2010: 274) highlights a link between the changing nature of evaluation and the conception of professionalism in her assertion 'that it is obvious that the evidence movement wants to play down professional judgements in favour of scientific experimentation.' Spenceley makes an insightful point when she argues that the primary focus of the professional no longer lies with the provision of a service:

but in proving the value of the 'service' offered through a range of statistical measurements and customer satisfaction surveys, ensuring that the organisational 'quality standards' whose basis has moved from 'process to outcome, measured by performance indicators or outcomes ... are met. (Spenceley 2006: 300)

Professionals spend a significant amount of their time and energy in detailed administration and documentation of their activities and this erodes the time spent with clients (Reinders 2008). This shift has an impact on professionals.

Ball (2008) argues that the co-option of the quality agenda to become a regime of accountability 'employs judgements, comparisons and displays as a means of control, attrition and change' (*ibid*: 49). He uses the term 'performativity' to describe this and warns of the dangers of performativity stating that: 'Performativity invites and incites us to make ourselves more effective, to work on ourselves to improve ourselves and to feel guilty or inadequate if we do not' (Ball 2008: 51). The internalisation of this agenda is really dangerous, as it is at its most powerful when 'it is inside our heads and inside our souls' (Ball 2008: 52). This portrayal of performativity has some resonance with the earlier work of Nias (1989) who talked about professional identity in her work with primary school teachers more than twenty years ago. Her study of 50 teachers over a period of 10 years led her to conclude that 'teachers' inevitable inability fully to satisfy their own consciences and their wider audiences leaves them feeling simultaneously under pressure, guilty, and inadequate' (Nias 1989: 193). Interesting for this research is the way in which the primary teachers in her study talked about their professional identity, for example the sense of belonging, of finding one's niche, of generating a sense of community, in integrating personal connections and professional connections between the teacher and child. Her findings may well be useful in guiding my analysis, in particular, the tensions and contradictions resulting from opposing demands and the conflicting values that she raised may shed some light on the experiences of the youth workers as they attempt to juggle the competing demands of performativity and their own professional values and purpose.

### **A need to reframe and reclaim evaluation?**

Some practitioners have felt alienated from the process of evaluation as a result of the incompatibility of performativity with their practice (Everitt and Hardiker 1996, Cooper 2011). Many feel that evaluation is a management task, carried out for the benefit of funders and regulators (Ellis 2008). Others have argued that practitioners experience exclusion from the process of evaluation (Issitt and Spence 2005, Beresford and Branfield 2006). This separation between practitioners and evaluation is of real concern as it runs the risk of allowing the devaluing of practice knowledge and offers no resistance to the de-professionalisation discourse. Rose (2010) urges that instead of youth workers

turning away from evaluative processes, they should recognise the potential of these processes for the development of practice and the consolidation of youth work. Whilst Evans and Hardy (2010: 154) argue that 'evaluating in practice (...) is aimed primarily at strengthening practitioner knowledge', when evaluation is perceived and practiced within the narrow frame of accountability this is clearly not the outcome. In order to address this, it is necessary to consider other approaches to evaluation that fit with the ethos of youth work, and that enable practitioners to take back the responsibility for judging their own practice. This research sought to develop an innovative approach to evaluation aimed at supporting a re-engagement of practitioners with the process of evaluation.

Re-conceptualising evaluation allows a shift in the locus of power from auditor to practitioner. Kushner (2000) promotes a view of evaluation as the study of people who are involved in self evaluation processes, though there is ambivalence about who makes judgements and how these judgements are justified. McNiff (2002) offers a reminder that people are capable of thinking, learning and acting for themselves, and she suggests that evaluation should not be regarded as a reified 'object' but rather as a process of enquiry, 'a term that is part of the discourses of evolutionary practices' (*ibid*: UP). Fetterman offered this vision of evaluation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century

The future of evaluation will be characterised by critical and collaborative relationships. Evaluation will be a collaboration. Citizens will come to the table with a basic knowledge of evaluation as part of their democratic literacy skills. Funders, program staff members and participants will acquire the capacity to monitor and assess critical aspects of their own performance. (Fetterman 2001: 381)

This vision of evaluation provided a backdrop for the development of the evaluation methodology used in this research as it provides practitioners with a form of evaluation that is meaningful, congruent with the ethos of youth work and one that can take account of the complexity of youth work. Reframing evaluation as a collaborative, participatory process with a focus on learning rather than accountability has the potential to enable a new form of practice that is able to support the development of practice and practitioners.

## **Reviewing key studies**

I begin this section by reviewing two evaluation studies, both of which focus on evaluating the impact of youth work. The first of the two studies is Furlong and Cartmel's (1997) evaluation of youth work with vulnerable young people. Their study was conducted in Scotland where youth work is operated from within community education. There are significant differences between the English and Scottish models of youth work, in particular the National Youth Agency does not cover Scotland and the political debates as outlined in my introduction do not apply to youth work in Scotland. Having said that youth work in Scotland faces many of the same challenges as youth work in the rest of the UK, for example a lack of a statutory base, difficulty in articulating outcomes and unstable funding. It is also important to note that this study was conducted prior to the 'transformation' of youth work in England (DfES 2001) and the introduction of externally imposed targets for youth work (DfES 2002).

The aim of Furlong and Cartmel's study was to evaluate the effectiveness of youth work with vulnerable young people and took place over a period of eighteen months. They adopted a mixed methods approach gathering data from young people via a school-based survey, focus groups and individual interviews. They also gathered data via focus groups and individual interviews with service providers. I focus my review on the aspects of their findings that relate to my research interest, namely evaluation processes. They found that mechanisms of evaluation were underdeveloped in all participating providers and reported that practitioners largely viewed evaluation as an externally imposed procedure that focused on simple quantitative and easily observed measures, for example attendance. This is interesting particularly as their study which attempted to evaluate the effectiveness of youth work did so by measuring patterns of use and examining association between use and reduction of risk behaviour. Their finding that there was a lack of awareness among practitioners of other approaches to evaluation and limited training opportunities available to them to re-conceptualise evaluation as part of their daily practice rather than an externally initiated and imposed process is important.

Drawing on their analysis they propose that monitoring and evaluation mechanisms need to be enhanced in order to provide evidence of effectiveness and thereby encourage more stability in funding arrangements. They suggest

that if evaluation is to be increasingly important for developing services, then a range of stakeholders need to be more involved in the development of suitable and acceptable methodologies. They do not however include young people in their list of stakeholders, nor do they offer any guidance as to what might be suitable or acceptable methodologies.

Merton *et al.* (2004) evaluation study of youth work in England, aimed to identify and evaluate the impact of youth work provided and secured by Local Authority youth services, and in doing so, it does offer some useful insights into processes of evaluation. In contrast to the previous study, Merton *et al.* (2004) drew mainly on the qualitative data sources for their analysis. Using a mixed methods approach they gathered data via documentary review, analysis of national audit data, interviews, testimonials and a survey of young people. A key finding was the need for young people to be actively involved in evaluation of youth work, in contrast with Furlong and Cartmel who did not include young people in the list of stakeholders. Another, equally important finding was of the inadequacy of evaluation tools that were available to practitioners as well as a lack of time to reflect and discuss the work in a critical way. This is a particularly relevant point as it supports the need to develop an alternative methodology, one that involves young people and provides structure and time for practitioners to reflect on their work in order to better understand the impact of their practice.

Adopting a participatory evaluation methodology requires a return to reflective practice and hence in the final section of this review, I examine this body of literature. It is necessary to acknowledge the contested nature and value of reflective practice and as such I begin with a broad overview of the debates. Following this I draw on Wellington and Austin's (1996) *Orientations to Reflective Practice* model to locate the reflective processes generated by the evaluation methodology developed for this research. I conclude this section by drawing on a range of studies that guided the development of the evaluation methodology (Allard *et al.* 2007, Ng and Tan 2009, McCormack and Kennelly 2011)

Reflective practice has received a great deal of attention in literature (Smyth 1992) and yet there is still much debate, and some confusion about the concept (Kinsella 2007, Wilson *et al.* 2007). Kagan (1990 cited in Cornford 2002) used

the 'Goldilocks principle' to question its value for practice, arguing that 'some concepts are just too big, that is too general and vague, for effective realworld application' (*ibid.*: 227). Others have argued that reflective practice had become a 'mantra' (Ecclestone 1996), 'fashionable' (Peel 2005), a 'bandwagon' (Hunt 2006), an 'ideal' (Ottesen 2007). This is regardless of the lack of supporting evidence that reflective practice makes any difference to practice (Cornford 2002). Despite this, reflective practice has been widely embraced within the social professions, for example, teaching, nursing, youth work and social work. A paradox exists as a result of managerialism: on the one hand, reflective practice is seen to be integral to professionalism (Peel 2005) whilst on the other hand, the rational-technical focus on competence is a barrier to developing reflective practice. Practitioners are wary, even fearful, of exposing 'weaknesses' to others, perhaps especially to line-managers within a performance-orientated culture (Ottesen 2007). This sense of fear limits the learning potential of reflective practice and the development of practice overall.

In their paper entitled *Orientations to Reflective Practice*, Wellington and Austin (1996) offer a useful conceptual framework to aid understanding of reflective practice. Their model is non-hierarchical and suggests five orientations that practitioners may take: immediate, technical, deliberative, dialectic and transpersonal. Orientation is identified through three questions: Does the practitioner engage in reflective practice or not? Does the practitioner believe that education ought to be domesticating or liberating? Is the practitioner systems-orientated or people-orientated? The questions are value-based questions and tell something about how the values and beliefs practitioners hold show in their practice. Wellington and Austin are clear that while these questions are framed as dichotomous they are, in practice more akin to opposite ends of a continuum. Whilst I find their model useful, it does seem to ignore the context in which the practitioner actually practices, or perhaps at the time of development the organisational context was not so influenced by managerialism. Performativity requires practitioners to be systems-orientated, undermining and de-valuing the people-orientated perspective. In other words the pressure to take an immediate, a technical or a dialectic orientation to reflective practice is increased by performativity. This, coupled with the recognition that national policy is highly influential in daily practice through the

'transforming' agenda and that policy is aligned with a domesticating perspective of education, it is clear that viewing Wellington and Austin's model in today's context of youth work, the impact is likely that practitioners will be moved towards a technical orientation to reflective practice. The real strength of their model is that it can illuminate dominance of any particular orientation and, because of their caveats that the model is not hierarchical and is based on continuums rather than dichotomies, movement is possible through the raising of awareness. By viewing Wellington and Austin's orientations as valid parts of a whole rather than as hierarchical, practitioners can recognise and understand their position in the spatial context of their practice. They may then be able to 'discover, reconsider or revise the values and beliefs which underpin their practice' (Wellington and Austin 1996: 314). Reflective practice as promoted by the evaluation methodology used during this study can be seen to sit within the dialectic orientation, encouraging the questioning of means and ends with a focus on political and social issues whilst recognising the need to attend to system-orientated requirements.

Developing a new evaluation methodology presents some challenges in terms of reviewing preceding literature; however three studies in particular have provided starting points. I begin with Allard *et al.* (2007) whose study focused on collaborative research relationships involving a range of education professionals in Canada. This large scale study focused on reflective practice as opposed to evaluation. They were interested in professional learning processes and the way in which use of narratives and reflection can illuminate standards of practice. They used a collaborative inquiry approach with an emergent design and methodology, and used a range of activities, including what they termed 'a mini-case institute' where participants were encouraged to value their own voices and explore their assumptions.

In their analysis, Allard *et al.* (2007) argue that active engagement in the collaborative process deepened the participants' reflective practice. Their study demonstrated the value of narrative and dialogue for uncovering assumptions. In terms of the value of narrative, they raise an important point by claiming that narratives honour the voice and experience of the practitioner and that this in turn enhances the practitioner's sense of efficacy. With regard to the value of dialogue, they found that collective reflection intensified professional

development and argue that the inquiry process is enhanced through collective dialogue. Finally, Allard *et al.* highlight the value of collective dialogue, trust and openness for unearthing assumptions that underpin practice.

The challenge of using narrative inquiry in terms of both method and presentation was identified. Differing views on how stories were to be created and the concept of editing and ownership were explored. Their consideration of the notion of authenticity is helpful as is their notion of 'situational truth' as a way of shifting from ideas of permanence and truth towards ideas of ownership and present tense. Allard *et al.* (2007) found that using narrative approaches enabled the development of a reflective 'community of practice' (Lave and Wenger 1991) supporting the development of understanding, a sharing and challenging of assumptions, values and beliefs, all of which go towards developing and strengthening practice.

Ng and Tan (2009) raise an important question in regards to the learning potential of 'communities of practice' identifying that in many cases communities of practice involve a restricted form of reflection that is largely technical. They remind us that taking a collective approach, in itself, is not sufficient to ensure transformative learning, a powerful mode of deep learning that goes beyond the technical and immediate domains. Their persuasive argument, based on their experience of the teaching profession in Singapore, is that communities of practice that utilise sense-making frameworks that are underpinned by an objective and rationale worldview will lead to learning that is mainly technical in nature and restricted to immediate practice concerns. This serves as a useful reminder that managerialism has removed the critical edge from the practitioner, and as competence-based practice has tended to reflect government and employers agendas rather than empowering forms of practice (Wilson *et al.* 2007), where does this leave the client? Or the practitioner for that matter?

The main thrust of their paper is that teachers should be encouraged to engage with critical reflection and opportunities for them to do so need to be deliberately structured in. For them, this requires a shift from a focus on pre-specified standards and performance indicators to a questioning of educational goals and values and qualitative indicators which emphasise qualities of judgement, decision-making and practice wisdom. Ng and Tan's view that reflection within

communities of practice can be as susceptible to the influence of managerialism as individual reflection is useful and support Brookfield's (1995:8) assertion that 'reflection is not, by definition, critical'. Drawing on critical theory, Brookfield (1995) is clear that critical reflection needs two distinct purposes; firstly to understand how considerations of power underpin, frame and distort practice and secondly to question assumptions and practices that seem to make our practice easier but actually work against our own best long-term interests. Important for my research is the claim that a key characteristic of critical reflective learning is the requirement to move away from the immediate to take a broader view (Ng and Tan 2009). Doing so enables reflective practice to shift from problem-solving towards active collective reflection on the educational goals and values and issues of equity and social justice.

McCormack and Kennelly (2011) provide another useful perspective on 'conversation communities'. Their investigation, focussed on HE teachers in Australia, addresses the research question of how can teachers develop communities where conversations about learning and teaching can flourish. This was in response to their sense that reflective conversations had disappeared from everyday academic practice and their belief that these conversations have the potential to influence one's sense of self as well as one's practice. Their study involved multi-disciplinary participants who worked together to create a teaching philosophy statement. Their interest as researchers was in process rather than product, in facilitating practice improvement and knowledge generation rather than accountability and to do this they used story-telling and reflective conversations.

In their analysis, McCormack and Kennelly (2011) support the view that reflection can move from being a solitary, individual activity to become on-going critical, collaborative conversations. They found the use of stories as a starting point for critical inquiry was beneficial in that writing, reading and listening to stories of learning and teaching experiences helped their participants (academics) to 'see into themselves to see what they may not have seen previously, or to see the familiar through different eyes' (McCormack and Kennelly 2011: 518). There is a question however as to whether the fact that they used multi-disciplinary groups supported this critical reflection, it could be suggested that it helped to avoid the risk of 'groupthink' (Janis 1972), a

detrimental process which occurs when a group's effectiveness is undermined because of each member's tendency to conform to what they believe to be the group consensus. In response to their research question they suggest three factors facilitate the building of conversation communities; connection, engagement and safety facilitated risk-taking and discovery. In summary, this chapter has reviewed a range of literature relating to competing discourses of professionalism, including the influence of managerialism in shaping emerging forms of professionalism in order to provide a theoretical framework for my research. The scarcity of literature relating specifically to youth work has meant that I have drawn on literature from a range of related professions for example, teaching, social work and early years. It is generally assumed that the impact of managerialism has been experienced similarly across the 'social professions' and I aim to begin to address the gap that exists in the knowledge base by illuminating the ways in which a small group of youth workers experienced managerialism and more specifically, performativity in their everyday lives. The literature reviewed in this chapter suggests that managerialism has changed the process of evaluation moving it towards external accountability, in other words, into a process of performativity. This has resulted in some practitioners turning away from evaluation, viewing it as a managerial task, to prove their value according to externally imposed targets and standards rather than to improve their practice. I wanted to understand how performativity has impacted on the youth workers' practice and on them as professionals and choose to look at this through an evaluation lens. The questions that defined the focus of my research were;

How did the youth workers experience the current approach to evaluation?

How did this impact on their understanding of and engagement with the process of evaluation?

I also wanted to explore whether using an alternative and indeed oppositional approach to evaluation would change the way they understood and connected with the process of making judgements about their practice. Much of the literature places reflective practice in terms of individual activity and deficit-based discourses. Managerialism and the associated performativity has served to reinforce this position. The learning potential of reflective practice in this

context is severely limited. Shifting reflective practice from an individual pursuit to a collective activity offers potential in terms of regaining a critical edge, but this is not a given. Reframing evaluation as a collaborative, participatory process with a focus on learning rather than accountability has the potential to enable a new form of evaluation to be developed which is able to support the development of practice and practitioners. I was interested to know whether engaging with a participatory evaluation approach would provide the conditions that might enable the youth workers to feel positive and confident about their work and about themselves as professionals. My guiding questions here were:

Would using a participatory approach to evaluation change their perception of evaluation?

How did the experience of using a participatory evaluation process impact on them as professionals?

## **CHAPTER 3: Methodology and Methods**

### **Introduction**

This chapter is presented in two parts; the first part provides an in-depth exploration of the theoretical framework and methodology used in this study. It begins by explaining my approach to the research, setting out my ontological and epistemological positions. This is followed by an account of my paradigm choice, methodological approach and analytical framework. Part 2 focuses on methods, and includes my research design, and an overview of the evaluation project in which my research was based. I describe the Most Significant Change (MSC) technique, the adaptations I made to it and the implementation of this adapted methodology. I explain my data collection and analysis and conclude with an exploration of limitations and ethical considerations.

### **PART 1: Theoretical Framework and Methodology**

#### **Developing my Research Approach**

The way in which I approached my research was guided by the assumptions I hold about the nature of the world and it is therefore necessary to examine these assumptions, and their influence on my choice of paradigm - the 'basic set of beliefs that guide action' (Guba 1990 in Denzin and Lincoln 2005:22). The components of a paradigm are generally considered to be threefold, ontology, epistemology and methodology, although Denzin and Lincoln (2005) include a fourth, axiology (ethics and values) to indicate the embeddedness of these issues. Ontology raises questions about what it is to be human and the nature of reality, (Denzin and Lincoln 2005); epistemology is concerned with the nature of knowledge, that is what is known and how it comes to be known (Whitehead and McNiff 2006); and methodology refers to 'the strategy, the plan of action,

process or design lying behind the choice and use of particular methods' (Crotty 1998:3).

### **Understanding my ontological position**

Ontology is commonly described in terms of two oppositions. On the one hand there is the realist world where it is claimed that the world exists independently of human experience and on the other side relativism claiming that there are no universal truths outside of our use of language. Whilst I reject the object nature of reality I am not comfortable with idea of relativism as I believe this masks issue of power. Rather I believe that whilst we always perceive the world from a particular viewpoint, the world acts back on us to constrain the points of view that are possible. The ontological labels of realist or relativist caused me concern when viewed as dualist; however understanding these as ends of a continuum was more helpful.

Having initially associated realism with the positivist paradigm I found it difficult to reconcile my ontology either way since I did not wish to commit to realist or relativist ontology. This concern was alleviated by Crotty's assertion that constructionism is both realist and relativist, 'To say meaningful reality is socially constructed is not to say that it is not real' (*ibid* 1998:63). Hammersley (1995) presents 'subtle realism' as an adequately grounded place for social researchers seeking a middle way between the various paradigm positions. For him 'subtle realism' views language as both constructing new worlds and as referring to a reality outside the text. Subtle realism sits somewhere between the naive realism of naturalism and the relativism of constructionism (Madill 2008) and according to Seale:

The researcher treading this middle way is continually aware of the somewhat constructed nature of research but avoids the wholesale application of constructivism to his or her own practice, which would result in a descent into nihilism. (1999: 470)

Altheide and Johnson (1994) developed 'analytical realism' in their rejection of the dualist view of ontology. Working in the field of ethnography, this perspective sees the social world as interpreted and socially constructed and

knowledge as socially produced through communication and dialogue. An analytical realist perspective calls for a strong emphasis on knowledge verification. Altheide and Johnson (1994) assert that research must try to understand observed perspectives of social reality in naturalistic setting and since there can be multiple perspectives, ethnographies should seek to understand and report the multivocality including how the researcher's perspective fits in. Bhaskar's (1989) 'critical realism' addresses the issue of influence in asserting that our beliefs and expectations influence the way in which we perceive the social world. A defining characteristic of critical realism is that it places human emancipation as a central concern of research and this sits well with my own commitment to social justice.

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) reject much of what the critical realists advocate, arguing that critical realism is not sufficiently committed to addressing issues of social justice. Guba and Lincoln (2005) use the term 'historical realism' and define this as a stance that accepts reality is virtual, shaped by the social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic and gender values that have been crystallised over time. They associate this perspective with critical theory paradigm. Developing my understanding of my own ontological stance has supported my development as a researcher. In particular, the realisation that an understanding of ontology is more about providing the researcher with a basis from which to question the claims she may make than about inserting herself into any particular 'camp' has been a valuable one.

### **Understanding my epistemological position**

Epistemology can be understood as a theory of knowledge, the relationship between the knower and the known (Denzin and Lincoln 2005). It addresses central research questions of what is knowing? what is known? and what is knowledge? As with ontology, epistemology is often view as a dichotomy, either objective or subjective. I believe in 'knowledges' rather than 'knowledge', in other words there are multiple 'truths' as I see knowledge as something that is constructed. I value knowledge, not for knowledge itself but for what it can bring to practice and hence it is important to me that research is directly linked with practice. My epistemological stance is influenced by social constructionist

principles in line with Willig's (2001: 7) definition: 'Social constructionism draws attention to the fact that human experience, including perception, is mediated historically, culturally and linguistically.' In other words, how we perceive and experience the world must be understood as specific to our gender, class, age, ethnicity and history.

The term 'social constructionism' is notoriously ambiguous and is often used interchangeably with social constructivism, it is important however to recognise that whilst there is similarity, these are two different constructs. Social constructivism describes the individual engaging with objects in the world and making sense of them whereas social constructionism takes the view that the individual is introduced directly to a whole world of meaning. The culture into which we are born provides us with meaning. Crotty (1998) asserts that culture establishes a tight grip on us. A further distinction made by Crotty (1998:58) is that 'constructivism tends to resist the critical spirit, while constructionism tends to foster it.' Social constructionism views knowledge as contingent, perspectival and generated and maintained through social interactions. Although it might appear that social constructionism is at odds with a realist ontology, some social constructionists embrace a form of realist ontology. One reason for rejecting relativism is that taking a relativist stance can prevent political action, if all claims to knowledge are equally valid how can we defend political action? In general then, social constructionists who hold a realist ontology tend to favour critical realism or, as in my case, historical realism. Developments in the epistemology of social science have increasingly been informed by social constructionism. The constructionist claim that empirical data can only ever offer a contingent and partial account of aspects of our participants' lives is now well established (Dunn and Ives 2009).

### **My Paradigm Choice**

Carr and Kemmis (1986) distinguish three educational research paradigms, positivism, interpretivism and critical theory whereas O'Donoghue (2007) suggests there are four, adding post-modernism. Guba and Lincoln (2005) have updated their original typology to include a fifth, the participatory paradigm. Paradigms seem therefore to be evolutionary rather than concrete. Denzin and

Lincoln (2005) note that paradigmatic boundaries are blurring overtime and Pring (2000:47) asserts that the 'distinctions *within* the so-called paradigms are often as significant as distinctions between them.' In order to address my research question I adopted an interpretive paradigm.

Four main assumptions underpin the interpretive paradigm; that is that knowledge is always situated, that people construct their 'lived' reality by attaching specific meanings to their experience, that there is always some degree of autonomy and research involves interaction and negotiation (O'Donoghue 2007). The ontological stance of the interpretivist paradigm is generally assumed to be relativist, recognising that there is no one reality, but multiple constructed realities (Denzin and Lincoln 2005). My ontological stance is compatible with an interpretive paradigm as whilst I see relativism as untenable, I do see reality as a social construction as stated earlier. The epistemological stance is generally taken to be subjective and transactional rather than objective. Knowledge is co-constructed by mutual negotiation and is situation-specific (O'Donoghue 2007). A naturalistic methodology is associated with the interpretive paradigm, generally using qualitative methods that capture voice, e.g. interviews and focus groups. These are seen as appropriate for capturing interpretations and the meanings participants attribute to events, in how they make sense of the world.

In summary, my theoretical framework is informed by social constructionism. I located my research within an interpretive paradigm as this was congruent with my research aim of exploring the youth workers' experiences of an alternative approach to evaluation in order to develop some insight into what these experiences can tell us about the relationship between processes of evaluation and the youth workers' understanding of self and practice.

### **Methodological Approach**

My methodological approach supported an 'insider researcher' position. The opportunity to do my research alongside the project evaluation provided the opportunity to take on the role of 'observing participant' (Alvesson 2003). This enabled me to develop close relationships and gain a deep insight into the

experiences of the participants. There were similarities between my approach and ethnography, particularly in relation to the researcher-participant relationship and the centrality of critical reflection; these are explored in depth later in this chapter. Sikes and Potts (2008) talk about the dilemmas that insider researchers face in trying to identify a methodology that enables them to fulfil both roles (practitioner and researcher) simultaneously and suggest that in practice, moving between identities is best conceived of as fluid. In my experience I found that this shifting between identities caused me more concern in the early days; as the research progressed I became more comfortable in the dual role.

My methodology was also informed by collaborative inquiry which Bray *et al.* (2000: 2-3) describe as 'one of several participatory, action-based inquiry methods that have emerged as innovative ways of improving practice and developing new knowledge.' Collaborative inquiry celebrates participation and democracy in the inquiry process and this was congruent with my personal values and with the nature of the task in which the group were involved, namely the implementation of a new evaluation methodology. Collaborative inquiry values an holistic approach to what constitutes valid knowledge and makes its claim to validity through the test of whether change is achieved. It was important to me that the research process was a learning opportunity for the participants as well as for me, that there was a sense of 'we're in this together'. Neither I nor the participants had used the evaluation methodology before; we were breaking new ground and learning as we went along. This sense of partnership or collaboration impacted on the relationships I was able to form with the individual participants and with the group. My methodological choices extended the learning potential for all, in that it required reflection from participants and researcher. However it further blurred the already blurred boundaries between the research and the implementation of the evaluation methodology.

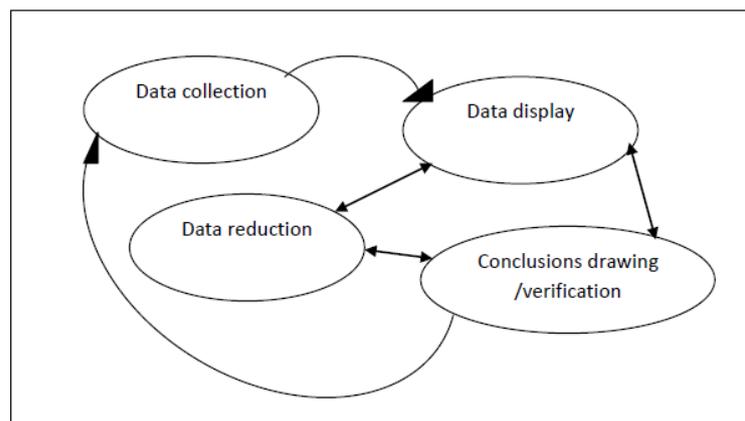
Whilst the advantages of doing insider research, using a participatory methodology were clear, for example, increased access, an understanding of the language and conventions used by the participants, closer relationships and trust, it is important to note that these can also be considered as disadvantages by some. My 'insider knowledge' may have led me to make or confirm assumptions, rather than looking for new and underlying meanings. Insider

researchers tend to have several years of experience of working with the issues and consequently they will have assumptions and ideas about what they expect to find, in other words they may have a theoretical stance before beginning the research (Sikes and Potts 2008). This was certainly my case; previously I had been a senior manager in a Local Authority Youth Service with responsibility to develop appropriate evaluation methodologies and systems. I had developed a theoretical understanding whilst completing my Masters dissertation (Cooper 2005) and I currently teach a Masters level module entitled 'Exploring Quality, Evaluating Practice'. However I would argue that no research is neutral, an interpretive paradigm requires the researcher to engage in critical reflection; supervision and the keeping of a research journal supported my reflection.

A further criticism of insider research, particularly of ethnography is that of the researcher becoming too close to the participants. The term 'going native' was commonly used to refer to this situation although its links to colonialism means that the term is now outdated. The criticism however remains current. Two issues arose from this for me, the question of whether researcher involvement prevented me from 'asking the difficult questions' and secondly a question I asked of myself was 'who's side am I on?' There were times during the research when I experienced both of these issues. On occasion, I was concerned that my research was an additional burden on the participants, who were expressing views of being over-burdened. There were times when I avoided the 'difficult question' because it felt at odds with the empathetic relationship I had developed with the participant. At other times during both the individual interviews and the group sessions I felt myself colluding with the participants in relation to their experiences of managerialism and of evaluation as a control mechanism. Researcher involvement can impact on participants' expectations in regards to their responses being shaped by what they may believe the researcher wants to hear. I return to these criticisms later in this chapter.

## Analytical Framework

Kvale (1996) tells us that qualitative research may have as many interpretations of the data as there are researchers. Wolcott (1994) suggests there are as many as fifty different distinctive approaches to analysis and Coffey and Atkinson (1996) warn us that the search for the perfect method of data analysis is fruitless. What is clear is that whatever approach is adopted it must be compatible with the research paradigm. According to Cohen *et al.* (2007) data analysis involves the organising, accounting for and explaining of the data in terms of the participants' definitions of the situation, noting patterns, themes, categories and regularities. Miles and Huberman (1994: 10) define analysis as 'consisting of three concurrent flows of activity: data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing/ verification.' They present analysis as an interactive cyclical process as shown in Diagram 3.1:



**Diagram 3.1: Components of Data Analysis: Interactive Model (Miles and Huberman 1994: 12)**

I used inductive thematic analysis to interpret the data. Thematic analysis is a method of ascertaining, describing, evaluating and reporting themes within qualitative data (Boyatzis 1998). A theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents a patterned response within the data set. Thematic analysis moves beyond counting recurring words or phrases, it focuses on identifying and describing implicit and explicit ideas within the data.

Themes can be identified in two ways; inductive or deductive. Inductive analysis involves the process of coding data without trying to fit it into a pre-existing coding frame, in other words, analysis is data-driven. In contrast, a deductive

analysis tends to be driven by previous research in the area, and is thus more theory-driven. I chose an inductive thematic analysis approach because it is well suited to researching unexplored areas (Reid *et al.* 2005). This enabled the identification of overarching themes that captured the phenomenon of evaluation as described by participants in the study. An additional benefit was the identification of unexpected themes in the data (Braun and Clarke 2006). My analysis resulted in a number of emergent themes and these themes structure the following two chapters of this thesis.

## **PART 2: Methods**

### **Introduction**

My discussion on methods begins with an overview of the participatory evaluation project in which my research was conducted. It includes an introduction to the MSC technique and my adaptations. It is important to note that the evaluation itself was not the focus of the research, rather my research set out to illuminate the experiences of a group of youth workers undertaking a participatory evaluation of their practice as part of an overall project evaluation.

### **Overview of the project evaluation**

In January 2010 the University in which I work was awarded a contract to carry out an evaluation of a voluntary sector youth organisation in the south west of England. Appointed as Principle Investigator, I oversaw the design and development of the evaluation. A mixed methodology evaluation consisting of three strands was designed as discussed in chapter 1. The third strand involved the implementation a new participatory evaluation based on the MSC technique (Davies 1996a). I was responsible for facilitating this strand, and this involved the development of the technique, the development and delivery of training

materials to the group of youth workers, and the support and facilitation of this group to carry out three rounds of the evaluation process.

### **Introducing the evaluation methodology**

The evaluation methodology developed for the purpose of this research is based on the MSC technique. This technique is a dialogical, story-based approach with a primary purpose of facilitating programme improvement by focusing work in explicitly valued directions (Dart and Davies 2003). I chose to use the MSC technique as a basis for the evaluation methodology because of its participatory and dialogical nature. It is an on-going practice, rather than a 'one-off' evaluative process and hence it is shaped by those who use it as they learn from its use.

I felt it had real potential to re-engage the youth workers in the process of evaluation because it focused primarily on learning rather than accountability (Willets and Crawford 2007). The MSC technique, as with other participative evaluation methods, is aligned with the interpretivist paradigm, it does not seek to identify 'right ways' of doing things, it does not seek to 'generalise and transport' rather it seeks to develop insight and understanding and to develop professional practice based on this increased understanding. In other words participative evaluation belongs to those involved, not just the funders which is how many view evaluation (Ellis 2008).

### ***Adapting the MSC technique***

Davies and Dart (2005) developed a ten steps model for implementing the MSC technique as summarised in Table 3.1:

Step	Purpose	Action
Step 1	Initiate the project	Introducing the idea, fostering interest and commitment
Step 2	Define the domains of change	Selected stakeholders identify the domains of change to be monitored
Step 3	Define the reporting period	Decide how frequently to monitor the changes

Step 4	Collect Significant Change stories	Stories are collected from the participants
Step 5	Select the most significant of the stories	Stories are analysed and filtered up through the organisation. MSC stories collated
Step 6	Feed back the results of the selection process	Reasons for selection are feedback to those involved in selection process
Step 7	Verification of stories	Selected stories can be verified by visiting the sites where the described stories took place
Step 8	Quantification	Include quantitative information with the story / compare number of changes from site to site
Step 9	Secondary analysis and meta-monitoring	Consider who participated, how they affected the contents, how often different changes were reported etc.
Step 10	Revising the system	Revise the design taking into account what has been learnt

**Table 3:1 Ten Steps Model**

This model was developed for use in large organisations and it was not appropriate or necessary to apply all of these steps for this particular project. I had particular purposes in mind and these informed my adaptations. I wanted to create a process in which the youth workers could evaluate and communicate the value of their interventions to others. This was to counter what I saw as the negative effects of performativity. It was also necessary to take into account the size of the organisation, small in comparison with the other MSC projects that had produced reports (Dart and Davies 2003, Willetts and Crawford 2007). I decided not to use steps 7-9 because of the small scale of the organisation and the aim of developing trust in professional judgement which ruled out the need for verification and quantification. Also the timescale limited opportunities for secondary analysis.

### **Implementing the new evaluation methodology**

I designed a four stage model for use in this project: 1) preparation, 2) story generation, 3) analysis, selection and feedback, 4) meta-evaluation. I chose not to define domains in advance of collecting stories as some other MSC projects

had because of the size of the organisation. In large organisations, predetermined domains can help to manage the data and can provide some guidance in terms of the kind of changes that are being sought (Davies and Dart 2005). Allowing the youth workers the freedom to generate stories as they wished went some way to supporting their voice and their values. The youth workers set the domains at the beginning of the stage 3. The reporting period was determined by the overall timescale of the project evaluation, I was keen to complete sufficient rounds to enable the youth workers to develop their skill in story generation but also recognised the time constraints for the youth workers to engage in the methodology. I felt that three rounds would be appropriate for developing skills and for obtaining sufficient evidence in the form of Significant Change stories for the overall project.

#### *Stage 1) Preparation*

I produced a range of materials in February 2010 to support the implementation of the evaluation methodology. The preparation and training of the youth workers was delivered via three workshops, held in March and April. In addition to this, I met with each youth worker in a 1:1 setting to support the development of the methodology. I met with the managers of the organisation to discuss their role in the process and they agreed to involve the Trustees in the process as well.

#### *Stage 2) Story-generation*

We agreed to implement three rounds of generating and selecting significant change stories between April 2010 and January 2011. The rounds involved each youth worker generating up to 4 significant stories from the young people attending their projects over a three month period. A Significant Change story is the response to the open question:

Looking back over the last month, what do you think was the most significant change that occurred for you as a result of coming here?

The youth workers engaged young people in conversation, asked this question and recorded the responses in a variety of ways. The young person was prompted to explain why the change was significant to them. This promoted reflective dialogue between the young person and the youth worker.

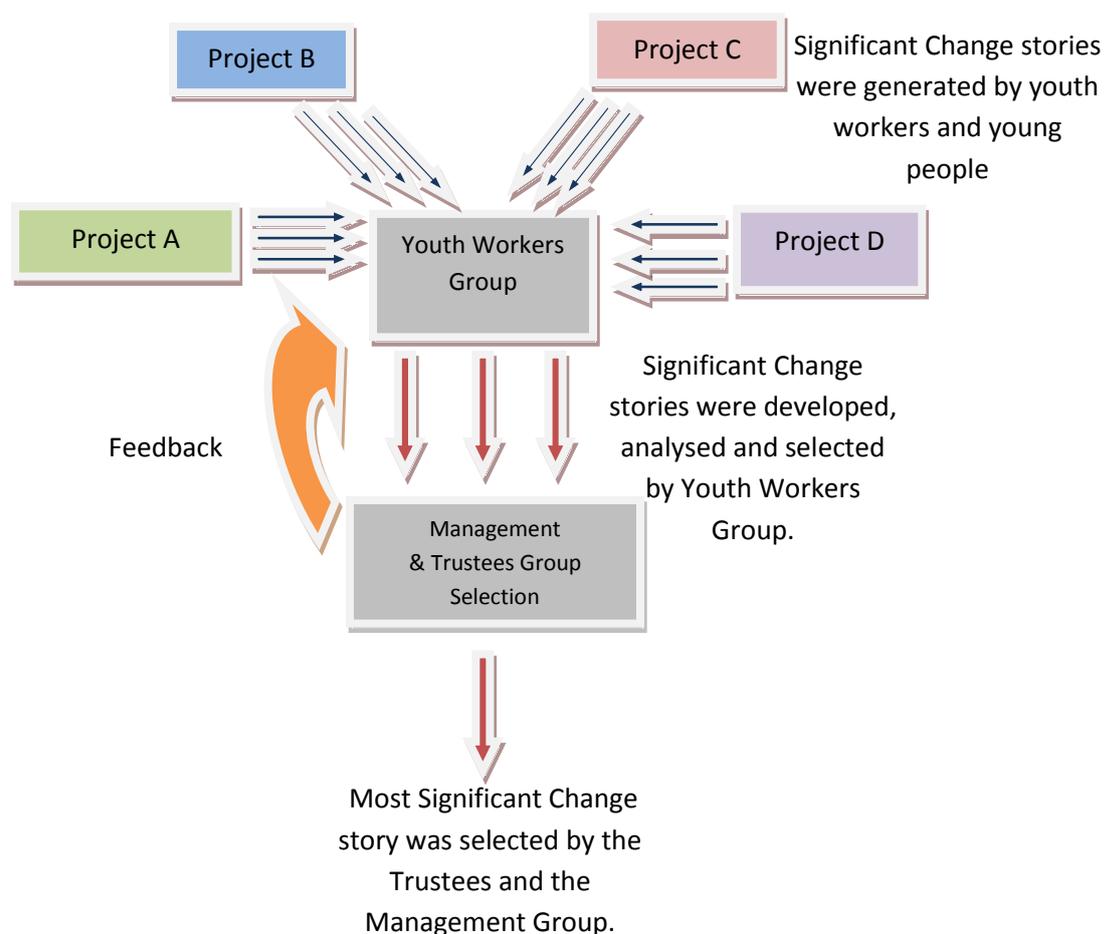
*Stage 3) Analysis, selection and feedback*

Once the stories had been generated, the youth workers came together to analyse them. This stage began with the sorting of stories into groups or domains. Sorting the stories and assigning domain names led to in-depth analysis and reflection and was a challenging part of the process. I adapted the process at this point to include an input from the youth worker who had generated the story, allowing them to add context and meaning to the young person's story. This structured in the engagement in reflective dialogue (Ng and Tan 2009) with peers about their understanding of the young person's story and their intervention and enabled the co-construction of stories. The increased involvement of the youth worker in story generation aimed to raise their voice in the process of evaluation (Jackson and Kassam 1998, Allard *et al.* 2007) in an attempt to address the alienation some practitioners experience (Everitt and Hardiker 1996, Beresford and Branfield 2006). Reaching consensus on the most significant change story for each domain was the final task for the youth workers. The reasons for selection were added to the original stories and the selected stories were then passed to the Managers and Trustees Group. The task of this group was to select the most significant change story for that round. The round was completed by the return of the MSC story together with the reasons that the Managers and Trustees selected that particular story (see appendix 1 for example story). The complete process is shown in Diagram 3:2.

*Stage 4) Meta-evaluation*

At the end of each round I facilitated the group in reviewing their experience of using the evaluation methodology with the purpose of developing their skills and understanding. The generation of stories was a challenging stage for some of the youth workers in regards to concerns about validity of the process, of leading or manipulating young people and issues of sampling in similar ways to the participants in study by Allard *et al.* (2007). These issues were discussed throughout as the youth workers developed their skills, understanding and approach. The notion of 'generating' rather than 'collecting' stories was introduced to make transparent the 'researcher involvement' in interpretivist research. Interestingly, what also came out of the discussions regarding the role of the youth worker in story generation was the realisation that in fact these conversations could easily be seen as part of the youth worker's role, to support

young people to reflect on their experiences and learn from them. The use of purposive sampling was questioned in terms of reliability, and this created a level of unease for some. Clarification was given that whereas purposive sampling can be seen as a weakness in the positivist paradigm, it is seen as strength in interpretivist study. It is entirely appropriate to select 'excellent informants' (Spradley 1979) as these people are the ones who can tell us the most about the question we seek to understand. Selecting young people based on prior knowledge that they have experienced a change as a result of being involved with the organisation was purposefully 'biased', not to make the organisation look good but in order to learn from those cases of good practice (Patton 2002).



**Diagram 3:2: Representation of the evaluation process**

### Limitations of the evaluation methodology

There were, of course, limitations to using this methodology, firstly the MSC technique on which it is based, was developed in the field of overseas development and with adults, and both of these raise questions about transferability to a youth work project in the UK. Secondly, the size of the organisation was an issue as most other MSC projects were conducted in much bigger organisations. As the implementation progressed, a number of minor adjustments were made, particularly in terms of the size of the organisation, and therefore the range of stakeholders involved. Finally, much of the criticism of participatory evaluation raises challenges about validity, reliability and generalisability, which are clearly located in positivist-inspired aspirations (O'Donoghue 2007). Participatory evaluation is informed by the interpretive paradigm and does not draw on these positivist criteria, rather it uses terms such as credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Guba & Lincoln 2005). It is important here to state that this evaluation methodology was used alongside other methodologies; it was seen as complementary and not as an alternative.

### The participants

Overall eight youth workers took part in my research. The project started in March 2010 with six participants, however during my research the organisation went through a period of change and two of the original participants, George and Helen left the organisation. They were replaced by Emma and Fiona who joined the research project. Table 3.2 provides brief participant vignettes.

Participant Name	Role	Employment history with organisation
Ali	Lead Worker Centre-based	Been with the organisation for a year, holds the professional qualification for youth work (JNC), graduated 2 years ago. Has worked as volunteer and student in statutory youth provision before joining this organisation. Manages staff as part of her role.
Beth	Lead worker Outreach	Been with the organisation for nine months, holds the professional qualification for youth work (JNC), graduated 2 years ago. First substantive post in youth work since qualification, she did voluntary work previously.
Cath	Lead worker Projects and	Been with the organisation for 3.5 years, holds the professional qualification for youth work (JNC), graduated 2 years ago.

	Outreach	Manages a number of targeted projects, focusing on young people not in education, education or training. Also runs a generic outreach project. Manages staff as part of her role.
Dave	Lead worker Outreach / mobile	Been with the organisation for 4 years, does not hold professional qualification in youth work but has graduate qualification in Outdoor Education. Worked as Outdoor Pursuits instructor and in a Pupil Referral Unit previously. Manages staff as part of his role.
Emma	Lead worker Information & advice / centre based	Been with the organisation for 3 years, holds the professional qualification for youth work (JNC), graduated 7 years ago. Spent 4 years looking for a job after moving to the area following graduation. Emma replaced George on the participatory evaluation group following the organisational restructure.
Fiona	Outreach / centre-based worker	Been with the organisation for a year, holds the professional qualification for youth work (JNC), graduated 1 year ago. Fiona replaced Helen on the participatory evaluation group following the organisational restructure.
George	Lead worker Media Projects	Been with the organisation for 2 years, does not hold the professional qualification for youth work, graduated in film and video –now his area of expertise and the focus of his work with young people. George left the organisation following a restructure in October 2010.
Helen	Lead worker Centre-based	Been with the organisation for a 9 months, does not hold the professional qualification for youth work (JNC). Helen recently graduated with an environment–related degree. Helen left the organisation following a restructure in October 2010.

**Table 3:2 Participant vignettes**

## Research Design

Research design decisions are sometimes presented as rational and logical, as ‘horses for courses’. However, as Wellington *et al.* (2005) point out, this is simplistic and misleading. As a ‘beginning researcher’ I struggled to accept that my research design would need to be just that, mine, that I would need to justify my decisions to others, that there was no right way to approach my research and no ‘off the shelf’ design package to provide a comfort blanket. I found the ‘Cinderella’s Slipper Syndrome’ (Sikes 2006 cited in Sikes and Potts 2008) helpful in accepting this position, realising that in the early stages I was indeed trying to force my research into one category or another. Discussions with my supervisors supported me to let go of the notion of safety associated with the ‘clean’ approaches to research in the text books and step forward on my own journey and begin to accept the messiness of research in practice. As

Etherington (2004: 72) says ‘Choosing how to do research is therefore a personal decision about what I need to do to discover what I need to know.’

My research design was influenced by a number of factors; my researcher positionality, the research aim and the desired outcomes, the situational and contextual factors and time factors, for both me and the participants. The fact that I carried out the research whilst also acting as facilitator of the project evaluation significantly influenced my methodological decisions. I approached the Chief Executive of the youth organisation to request permission to conduct the research project alongside the evaluation. Having gained permission I introduced the idea of the research to the youth workers at the end of our first meeting. I provided them with verbal information and a participant information sheet in order for them to make a decision as to whether they wished to be involved. I was keen to emphasise that the decision to engage or not in the research was completely optional and would not impact on their involvement in the evaluation. All the participants agreed to participate.

Table 3:3 displays the research activities chronologically:

Date	Activity	Participant/s identified by Initial
19.03.10	Workshop 1	Participants B, C, D, G and H
23.04.10	Workshops 2 & 3	Participants A, B, C, D, G and H
14.05.10	1:1 interview	Participant A and Participant B
04.06.10	1:1 interview	Participant C
11.06.10	1:1 interview	Participant D
	Round 1 Selection	Participants A, B, C, D, G and H
25.06.10	1:1 interview	Participant G and Participant H
03.09.10	Round 2 Selection	Postponed, rescheduled for 24.09.10
24.09.10	Round 2 Selection	Postponed again, rescheduled for 24.10.10
Participants G and H leave the organisation, replaced by Participants E and F		

24.10.10	Round 2 Selection	Participants B, C, D, E and F
07.12.10	1:1 interview	Participant E
15.02.11	1:1 interview	Participant B and Participant F
22.01.11	Round 3 Selection	A, B, E and F
01.03.11	1:1 interview	Participant C and Participant D
04.03.11	1:1 interview	Participant A and Participant E

**Table 3:3 Chronological Events**

### Interviewing

It is clear from the literature on research methodology that the concept of the interview within research has developed significantly over the past decades. Interviewing is no longer viewed as a simple information-gathering operation (Holstein and Gubrium 2003). 'Queering the interview' (Kong *et al.* 2003) had a major influence on how interviews are seen, challenging the traditional perception of interviews as an objective and neutral process by highlighting their historical, cultural and contextual nature. Fontana and Frey (2005) assert that interviewing is not merely the neutral asking and answering of questions but rather a process between two people whose exchanges lead to a collaborative effort. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) use the term *inter-view* in recognition that knowledge is constructed in the inter-action between interviewer and interviewee, and describe the research interview as a conversation with structure and purpose.

The shift in perception from information-gathering to knowledge construction represents an epistemological shift. I found Kvale and Brinkmann's (2009) metaphor of researcher as miner or traveller useful in exploring some of my concerns about carrying out interviews. The miner believes that knowledge is waiting to be discovered and extracted, through a process of probing, a positivist perspective in which data collection tends to be separated from data analysis. On the other hand, the traveller explores unknown territory, meeting different people along the way and through these interactions new understandings of the

topic and new understandings of self may be constructed. Within this post-modernist perspective processes of interviewing and analysis are intertwined. The important point for me here was that successful interviewing did not need to rest upon 'hitting the seam'; it was not an individual pursuit but could be seen as an exploratory journey with others to discover new places. Seeing interviews in this light supports a sense that research is a learning journey that is on-going. Hammersley (2001) urges care when using metaphors, suggesting that the imagery of discovery tends to obscure the fact that knowledge will be influenced by the questions we ask and the construction metaphor can suggest more control over outcome than exists in reality.

Rubin and Rubin (2005) use the term 'responsive interviewing' to indicate that qualitative interviewing is a dynamic and iterative process, they also state that 'qualitative interviewing is not simply learning about a topic but also learning what is important to those being studied' (*ibid*: 15). This approach to interviewing sat well with my research aim, that was to gain an understanding of the ways in which the youth workers experienced evaluation processes, how it felt for them? What it meant to them? I felt that using a formulaic approach, including a fixed set of questions would not bring this data out. Responsive interviewing sits well with an interpretive, constructionist paradigm as it recognises human agency, knowledge as construction and researcher subjectivity. Responsive interviewing however is not an easy option; it requires high levels of skill in active listening and rapid interpretation (Eraut 1994).

### ***The interviews***

I conducted thirteen 1:1 in-depth interviews, lasting for approximately an hour each over an eleven month period. My aim was to interview each youth worker before and after using the evaluation methodology. I hoped that this would enable me to collect data that would offer some insight into any changes that were identified by the youth workers in relation to their perceptions and practice of evaluation across the duration of the study. As a result of the change to staffing during the time period of the project, I was able to complete 'before and after' interviews with five of the participants. I conducted single interviews with 3 other participants, two prior to the project and one after. All the interviews were conducted in the youth workers' work setting at a time convenient to them. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. I rejected standardised structured

interviews in favour of a semi-structured approach as this allowed the youth workers to use their unique ways of defining the world, it assumed no fixed sequence of questions was suitable to all and it allowed the youth workers to raise issues of importance to them (Silverman 1993). I considered an open structure however I had concerns that this approach may be limiting, in terms of gathering 'useful' information. Time constraints were a real issue for the youth workers and I needed to make the best possible use of it hence I developed interview schedules that aimed to probe but also to allow them to tell their own story in their own way.

#### First interview question areas

- Tell me about your role within the organisation –opening question to get things moving and to identify important aspects from youth worker's perspective
- Tell me something about how you go about evaluating your work – before I started working with you – to explore youth worker's current understanding and practice of evaluation
- Tell me something about your feelings about the MSC technique, about how it might / might not work for you – to explore some of the issues related to using an alternative form of evaluation

#### Second interview questions

- What has been your overall experience of using the MSC technique?
- Your favourite and least liked moments of the project?
- What has the last 9 months been like for you more generally – important points, turning points
- What have you valued? What will you take away?

Returning to the assertion that interviews are not neutral, it is necessary to consider issues of power, particularly in light of any claim to collaboration. Changes in terms, for example, from respondent to participant, or when both interviewer and interviewee are co-participants, can be seen as an attempt to highlight the collective contribution to the research however this shift must be

played out in practice. Ensuring that all the youth workers could effectively raise topic-related questions and that 'everyone (...) underst[oo]d that answers are not meant to be conclusive but instead serve to further the agenda for discussion' (Holstein and Gubrium 2003: 19) was important. Interactive interviewing can help to close the hierarchical gap by promoting dialogue rather than interrogation (Ellis and Berger 2003). This requires self-disclosure and emotionality from the researcher and demands the researcher to be reflexive. Holstein and Gubrium (2003) argue that researchers need to be reflexive not only about what the interview accomplished but also about how the interview is accomplished. Interestingly I had a moment of crisis similar to that which Sikes and Potts (2008) reported, where they found that EdD doctoral students had 'struggled to keep their views out of interviews'. After my first two in-depth interviews I was concerned that I had been too vocal as the following extract from my research journal indicates;

*Having completed the first two interviews, I am concerned that I engaged too much, that perhaps my engagement had been leading, that this would render these interviews useless ... that I had forgotten my role as researcher... (Research Journal Entry 14.05.10)*

I reflected on my dilemma with peers at the next doctoral weekend. By this stage I had started to question why I was concerned and wondered if this was about a sense of 'contamination', a remnant from the positivist view of researcher involvement. I questioned whether I was 'stuck' in my educator role? This, in turn, led me to question my identity: was I a researching educator or an educating researcher? It felt wrong not to engage in a dialogical process, where I was able to share my thoughts with the interviewees in the same way as I was expecting them to share with me. As far as I was concerned we were in it together, we were learning together and not sharing my thoughts would have felt like withholding, and that raised issues of power for me. Fontana and Frey (2005) support this, arguing that getting involved, providing personal opinions, engaging in 'real' conversations makes the interview more honest, morally sound and reliable. Foley and Valenzuela (2005) used a 'conversational or dialogical style of interviewing' which they found encouraged greater

participation: 'We interviewed in a very informal manner, and at times we shared more personal information about ourselves than do conventional interviewers' (*ibid*: 223). Holstein and Gubrium (1995) uses the term 'creative interview' to describe a process in which mutual disclosure between interviewee and interviewer allows the latter to have a deep involvement in the conversational development. Kincheloe and McLaren (2005) talk of Freire's influence on them as researchers in that they saw the participants of their research as partners, and research as a process where 'everyone learned to see more critically, think at a more critical level, and to recognise the forces that subtly shape their lives.' (*ibid*: 305). On reflection and on listening again to those early interviews I became aware that we, the interviewees and I had 'made sense' together, that I had come to understand things differently through the dialogue. Interviewing is not the neutral asking and answering of questions but rather a process between two people whose exchanges lead to a collaborative effort (Fontana and Frey 2005). Alvesson (2003) argues that it is more helpful to view the research interview as the scene for a social interaction rather than a simple tool for collection of data.

The final issue in my exploration of interviewing was the multilayered problem of voice (Guba and Lincoln 2005). Firstly, any claims I make that my research raises the voice of others needs to be questioned;

The power invested in interviews to construct discourses that are then legitimated as the words of others points to their effectiveness as technologies that can be used in naturalising the role of specialists (Briggs 2003: 497)

The research interview was not a conversation between equal partners because I defined and controlled the situation (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009) and it was I who recorded, analysed and now present the data. At any stage of the research process, the youth workers' voices could have been silenced, raised or manipulated. Secondly, Gubrium and Holstein (2003: 20) raise the thought-provoking question 'Is there always only one story for the respondent to tell or can there be several to choose from?' I found this particularly interesting in terms of developing my thinking. The youth workers held multiple identities; as employees, as members of a particular profession, as members of this particular

group, and as human beings. Whose voice did I hear during the interviews? Which stories did the youth workers decide were most tell-able? A further question I needed to consider was to what extent were the youth workers telling me what they thought I wanted to hear – a criticism of insider research as discussed earlier in the chapter. I needed to probe and at times challenge responses to explore this notion of ‘whose voice’.

### **Research journal**

I kept a research journal throughout my project. This is seen as good practice for researchers engaged in qualitative research (Etherington 2004) and essential for those engaged in insider research (Sikes and Potts 2008). I recorded my observations, thoughts and feelings particularly after interviewing or group sessions and found that writing in my journal allowed me to find some ‘thinking space’ between me and ‘the doing’ of the research. This enabled the early stages of analysis. The act of writing helped me to identify assumptions, to consider my personal impact on the data, and the extent to which my values were influencing my interpretations. Smyth and Holian (2008) tell us that insider researchers must work at staying in touch with their feelings to ensure that they do not get too close or over involved in the organisational processes and therefore unable to rigorously interpret the data. Keeping a reflective journal structured that work for me. Hamersley and Atkinson (1983: 165) assert that keeping a reflective journal ‘constitutes precisely the sort of internal dialogue or thinking aloud that is the essence of reflexive ethnography’.

Surprisingly for me the most valuable part of the journal was the continuing dialogue I had with myself in regards to ‘being’ a researcher. Etherington (2004:127) sees the reflective journal as the private space in which ‘to develop a sense of who we are, while still remaining uncertain and open to change.’ Each journal entry had a section entitled ‘Me as Researcher’ where I discussed the challenges I experienced in coming to terms with my researcher role and my other overlapping roles (see Figure 3.2) as the following extracts show;

*Still concerned about how best to capture the data – indeed what constitutes data – separating the project from the research – not a clear line – better now that everyone has signed up to participate in the research – means I can use all of the process.*

*Feel I need to start asking questions rather than simply focussing on the facilitation – but not sure whether this is about me thinking I need to have a clearer, more defined researcher role – maybe it isn't like that – why would it have to be – surely the questions, the important questions will emerge from the group – with me being part of that group... Something here about the nature of being a co-researcher, working with participants who are co-researchers – giving up power and control and the uncomfortable nature of this at times. (Research journal entry 23.04.10)*

*Still struggling to be comfortable with control issues – think some of this is as a consequence of wearing the 'evaluator' hat and the 'researcher' hat.*

*Felt good about my level of input into this session – leaving the group to work their own way through – but this feels as much about group development and my groupwork skills as it does about my researcher approach/skills – again, not sure I need to separate these...*

*I recorded much of the discussion as a way of capturing as much of the data as possible – this did allow for me to focus on the 'here and now' and to raise questions in real time. (Research journal entry 11.06.10)*

On reflection I feel that the experience of carrying out my research as an insider researcher working outside of my own organisation, whilst extremely challenging at times, provided me with a real opportunity to consider carefully the role of researcher. In the end I was able to appreciate the benefits of engagement beyond the research to allow significant access to the participants' lived experience.

Keeping the research journal was also very important in capturing the evolving nature of my study, as Silverman (2000:193) states 'we commonly find the sense of the past in the present'. It is likely that without the journal my early thinking about my research would have been lost, and this would have limited my (and the reader's) understanding of my journey.

### **Analysing the data**

As is common in qualitative research, data analysis began during the data collection process. Having completed the first round of interviews during May and June, I personally transcribed the audio recordings. Whilst this was a time-consuming activity it allowed me to immerse myself in the data which then enabled some very early analysis. This supported my continued data collection in the group sessions which took place in June and October. During August I returned to the transcripts to carry out a more in-depth analysis. I began by reading the interview transcripts several times and listening to the audio recordings. I found the audio recording particularly useful in taking me back to the interview and picking up on the feelings and emotions being expressed by the participants. I looked for the things that seemed important to them and noted my interpretation of the content and meaning of those things. This is described as making descriptive comment and is a process of coding (See appendix 2 for example of coded transcript). I created a code list after the first transcript and then read the rest of the transcripts looking for similarities and difference. I created charts and tables that looked good but seemed to tell me nothing – or worse still seemed so far removed from the richness of the original data. It was at this stage that I felt I had wandered into one of the ‘dead ends’ that researchers find themselves in as they journey through their study. I became dissatisfied with my process of analysis as it felt that having created the code list, this list had become an unnecessary and unhelpful filter. The comparison perspective seemed inappropriate given that each participant had a unique story to tell.

On reflection and further reading, I realised that I had rushed into my analysis and lost sight of my aim, my focus should have been on understanding the content and complexity of meaning rather than measuring frequency (Smith 2003). This was a valuable piece of learning for me and enabled me to return to the transcripts with a renewed sense of purpose. Using the concept of a ‘double hermeneutic’ I set out to develop an initial ‘insider’s perspective’ for each of the participants, using verbatim examples for illustration and support and followed this by creating an interpretative account of what it meant for those participants to have those concerns in that particular context (Reid *et al.* 2005). I found the notion of three types of comment (descriptive, linguistic and conceptual) helpful

in assisting my initial coding and in developing a list of themes for each individual transcript (Smith *et al.* 2009). I discussed my early interpretations with the group and used data collected from the group sessions to challenge and interrogate my interpretations further. I conducted the second round of individual interviews in February and March 2011 and used the same analysis process as before, although this time with more skill and more insight. Having analysed the interviews individually I then looked for echoes, amplifications and contradictions between the first and second interviews for each participant, again drawing up theme tables for each participant. (See appendix 3 for example of individual theme table). I then looked for patterns across the data set. This involved looking across all of the theme tables to try to identify those themes that occurred in the majority of participants. This was not a straightforward process and involved me going back to original transcripts adjusting and amending comments in order to best capture the group level themes and to ensure that those themes were sufficiently supported by the data. Having satisfied myself that this was the case I created a table of group level themes (See appendix 4 for example of group level theme table).

### **Ethical Considerations**

In a similar vein to research design, there is no standard set of 'ethical rules' that can be applied (Pring 2000). Codes exist, for example, the Revised Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (2004), the University of Exeter School of Education, and these were used as guidance as I recognised I was responsible for constructing my own ethical procedures. Ethical considerations were on-going throughout the research process (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009, Wellington *et al.* 2005). Approaching ethical considerations as a day-to-day task was particularly important in this study as interviews were the main method of data collection. Interviews have an inherent evolving nature, a basis of trust and empathy and a promotion of the free exchange of viewpoints.

I submitted my application for ethical research approval to the Graduate School of Education and received approval to conduct the research in November 2009 (SELL UAR D/09/10/25). I was guided by the 'Revised Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (2004), and gave particular attention to issues of

informed consent, confidentiality, consequences and role of researcher. I gained informed consent by providing information regarding the purpose, main features and risk and/or benefits for the participants in verbal and written forms. I also made it clear that participation was voluntary and the right to withdraw a given. Christians (2005) argues that an entirely new approach to research ethics is needed because the current model, with its roots in positivism, is inappropriate, focussing on issues that are 'non issues' in participatory forms of research, e.g. signing forms to indicate informed consent when participation is voluntary. Smith (2005) raises an interesting contention that perhaps suggests the presence of managerialism, arguing that

Research ethics is often much more about the institutional and professional regulations and codes of conduct than it is about the needs, aspirations, or worldviews of "marginalised and vulnerable" communities. (Smith 2005: 96)

I decided that despite the advice of both Christians (2005) and Smith (2005) I would proceed with the more formal process of gaining written formal consent as a way of trying to make distinct the research from the evaluation as I felt this was necessary for ensuring full consent.

Confidentiality involved protecting the privacy of the participants and being clear about who has access to the raw data. All information was stored securely and electronic information was protected by username and password. Confidentiality presents the usual challenges, particularly because of the small number of participants, however as Parker (2005 cited in Kvale and Brinkmann 2009) points out whilst anonymity can protect participants it can also deny them their voice. A particular concern related to the gender composition of the group, I questioned whether I should remove gender indications, for example using gender free names and gender-free pronouns in presenting the participants' experiences. Originally I used letters to label the participants, for example participant A, Participant B, and so on. But this felt inappropriate given the nature of the research. I took this dilemma to the participants and we agreed to use pseudonyms and gender specific pronouns in spite of the challenge this presented to anonymity. I proposed names beginning with the letters used, for example A became Ali, with the proviso that individual participants could accept this or choose their own. All accepted the proposed names.

Consequences look to the potential harm and benefit that might arise from research. This is an area that required careful consideration, as participation in the research had the potential to raise uncomfortable feelings for the participants. I was sensitive to this possibility, particularly during the group sessions. I have worked with integrity to ensure that this thesis presents findings that are as accurate and representative as possible. The question of research integrity is particularly relevant when using my chosen methods as I was the main instrument for data collection. I began with a sense that it would be necessary to guard against 'going native' as relationships with and empathy for the participants developed and I made use of reflection, both individual and peer, and supervision to keep this under check. I committed to striving towards a reflexive approach in line with the following definition;

the self-aware analysis of the dynamics between researcher and participants, the critical capacity to make explicit the position assumed by the observer in the field and the way in which the researcher's positioning impacts on the research process. (Gobo: 2011:22)

### **Approach to Quality**

It is not appropriate to judge my research using positivist 'validity' criteria but rather by criteria generally associated with an interpretive paradigm, for example, trustworthiness, credibility, transferability and confirmability (Denzin and Lincoln 2005). A constructionist inquiry is successful if it presents increasing understanding of its phenomenon. Greenwood and Levin (2005: 54) suggest 'co-generated contextual knowledge is deemed valid if it generates action'. Siraj-Blatchford (1994) supports the notion of catalytic validity, suggesting, also, that the responsibility for assessing the validity of interpretive research lies with the reader, in other words narratives should resonate with the reader (Van der Zalm and Bergum 2000). Christians (2005: 152) asserts that, from a critical theory perspective, interpretive research is authentically sufficient when it fulfils three conditions: it represents multiple voices, enhances moral discernment, and promotes social transformation. Locating my study in the interpretive paradigm, I did not set out to find one single answer or truth, but

rather a coherent and legitimate account that is attentive to the words of the participants.

I aimed for credibility, not validity, with success related to whether or not this thesis adds to the understanding of the relationship between processes of evaluation and youth workers' sense of self and practice. I have used substantial verbatim extracts from transcripts to allow readers to make their own assessment of my interpretations (Brocki and Wearden 2006). Transferability is the task of the reader so the 'rich descriptions' in this thesis aim to enable her/him to transfer this understanding to their own context and assess the similarities. I sought dependability not reliability sharing Yardley's (2000) view that reliability is inappropriate as the purpose of my research was to offer just one of many possible interpretations. In terms of dependability, I kept an audit trail, tracking the research process and documented changes as they occurred. I have been clear about my own values and position in regards to the research and have presented a balanced presentation of all perspectives, aiming for fairness and authenticity. My thesis has identified how the youth workers' understanding became more informed as a result of the study demonstrating a level of 'ontological and educational authenticity' (Guba and Lincoln 2005) and the follow up interviews and feedback from managers indicate that action was inspired by the research process, demonstrating 'catalytic authenticity' (Guba and Lincoln 2005).

### **Limitations of the Research**

This study was limited to the voices of eight youth workers working in a single organisation however, while the small sample size could be considered a limitation by some, Smith *et al.* (2009) consider that reduced participant numbers allows for a richer depth of analysis that might be inhibited with a larger sample. The fact that I was unable to select the participants could also be regarded as a limitation however the sample can be seen as a 'fairly homogenous sample' (Smith *et al.* 2009) in terms of participants' level of experience of working in the particular organisation.

The change of participants during the study added a further challenge to the effective use of the evaluation methodology as it impacted on the group dynamics. The two members of staff that joined midway through the evaluation had not experienced the early stages of development of the methodology and had not been involved in the discussions about its practical use. Their arrival did mean that there was a need to re-visit some of the earlier debates and new challenges arose that benefited the development of methodology overall. The staff were new to the evaluation project but not new to the organisation thus peer relationships were already formed thereby reducing the impact on the group dynamic. There was a potential loss of important data from the two members of staff who left the organisation.

I conducted the research as a single researcher therefore the form of triangulation that can be found with multiple researchers was unavailable to me. In some cases researchers employ independent audits of their analysis; again this option was not open to me. This could be seen as a limitation of this study; however, I argue that the group performed this checking task in informal ways as did my supervisors and peers on the EdD programme. My own audit trail was an attempt to ensure that my account is a credible one, not *the only* credible one (Smith *et al.* 2009).

## Chapter 4: Experiencing Accountability

### Introduction

The findings presented in this chapter have emerged from the inductive thematic analysis of interview data, as discussed in chapter 3. The two emergent themes presented here: *External Control* and *Evaluation as Accountability* relate to the youth workers' experiences of managerialism and performativity. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the findings which address my first two research questions.

### Theme 1: *External Control: Who pays the piper, calls the tune?*

The theme described in this section emerges from the youth workers' accounts of the tensions and dilemmas about values they encountered in their day-to-day practice. The youth workers explicitly link accountability and funding thus indicating that for them, in their new world, accountabilities mean that the requirements of funders essentially delimit practice and determine outputs, hence the theme subtitle.

The youth workers accepted that funding was necessary to enable youth work to happen and there was a certain level of resignation that funding would come with 'strings':

*had to juggle paperwork and get targets and get outcomes and be able to hit what they ask you to hit to be able to get the money, because without the money you can't go and work there anyway* (Clair: second interview)

*it's horrible but you're just having to jump through more and more hoops to get the funding so you've got to do what the funding says or else they get nothing at all, it's going to get harder, a lot harder* (Dave: second interview)

These 'strings' were experienced in the form of externally imposed targets which directed the focus of their youth work practice; the resulting external control of work was identified by 6 of the youth workers, for example,

*we have to do work around IAG [Information, Advice and Guidance], drugs and alcohol, sexual health, we have to be doing those cos that's what the government wants us to do (Ali: first interview )*

*it's that drive for them [the funders] to see certain things and I guess it's those targets and statistics, teen pregnancy and NEETs [Not in Education, Employment or Training] and things like that, so work gets driven towards that sort of stuff, rather than sometimes, just providing young people with a space (Beth: second interview)*

Beth was uncomfortable with the pressure to work with the issue rather than the young person; this is a values-based concern in that the external targets define the recipients of youth work rather than youth work being open to all in line with the commitment to equality of access:

*you feel like you have to work with some young people more than others or that you're doing stuff for your own gain and your own sort of, to meet those targets rather than working with the young people just because they are the young people that are attending your projects, someone walks in and they say they're NEET and you say brilliant, one more tick. (Beth: second interview)*

There are indicators here of internal conflicts; '*you feel like you have to work*' suggests she feels forced; she is doing this against her will. '*You're doing stuff for your own gain*' however suggests that in some way she feels complicit in this action and guilty about working to meet her need to reach targets as opposed to the needs of young people.

Emma also raised concern in regard to external control and was clearly concerned about the values implication of focusing on externally imposed targets:

*we're being asked to prove ourselves more, being asked to prove youth work more and distance travelled and the value of youth work and*

*outcomes and targets and, umm you know, the very nature of youth work ... you're pushing young people sometimes in a certain direction to meet the targets of the funding (Emma: second interview)*

The interesting issue here is that she has conflated the value of youth work and distanced travelled with outcomes and targets. By doing this she is, perhaps, demonstrating confusion between youth workers evaluating their work using their own reflective mechanisms, either individually or collectively and the measurement and monitoring of practice against externally set targets. Use of the words '*pushing*' and '*certain direction*' portray a feeling of manipulation of young people which sits awkwardly and uncomfortably with the central values of youth work, in particular participation and empowerment. Emma recognised that she does this sometimes to meet externally imposed targets.

Both of these extracts support Spenceley's (2006) assertion that the primary focus of the professional has shifted from the provision of a service to proving the value of the service. Beth's experience resonates with conclusions drawn by Nias that the inevitable inability to satisfy one's own conscience and the wider audience leaves professionals 'feeling simultaneously under pressure, guilty and inadequate' (Nias 1989:193). Beth's final comment has a certain flippancy about it which seemed at odds with the manner of her interview, perhaps a further indicator of her conflicting emotions.

Ali shared Beth's values-related dilemma in relation to the target for establishing new contacts with young people:

*it's about how many young people we engage with and about new young people, I think we just did 140 in the last quarter, and I think we've got to keep doing that and that's difficult because that's about working with different young people, it's in the back of your mind – I need to move on to new young people to meet those targets. (Ali: first interview)*

The phrase '*it's in the back of your mind*' suggests the on-going tension she is experiencing as a result of trying to meet a target that undermines the relationship aspect of youth work. She is aware that her need to build more and more new relationships will inevitably impact on her existing relationships. The phrase '*I need to move on*' refers implicitly to the need to leave behind those

existing relationships as a result of externally imposed targets that appear to take no account of the centrality of relationship in youth work. Starting a relationship with the end in sight has implications for building authentic relationships and this imposed restriction on authenticity may cause youth workers to question their actions in relation to professional values.

Clair shared Ali's concerns and is more explicit in identifying the possible impact of this target on existing relationships. She says:

*I've got quite high contact numbers and I do look at it and kind of go ok – so that's great, I'm going to spend this much of my time moving provision around to ensure that I hit that number of young people but what about the young people that we've already engaged with? What – we've got their details we can now push them to the side – we don't.* (Clair: first interview)

The interesting point here is expressed in her final phrase 'we don't' as this agentic response indicates a level of occupational professionalism (Evetts 2005) in managing the target culture. As noted in chapter 2, Evans (2008) argues that professionals do not passively accept externally imposed changes to practice; rather they are potentially key players in shaping their professional practice. Furbey *et al.* (2001) also argue that individuals can adapt, adopt, resist or circumnavigate external demands for change. I had expected to hear more talk about how the youth workers resisted or circumnavigated external demands however only two, Ali and Beth, talked about this:

*I don't let them [targets] stop me doing the work I want to do, I do the work I want to do, that young people want us to do and then just make it fit the targets afterwards.* (Ali: first interview)

*you manage it in the best way you can, you learn ways to sort of, I guess, manipulate those [targets]*( Beth: second interview)

These extracts suggest that these three youth workers have adopted 'strategic compliance' (Gleeson and Shain 1999) towards the changes imposed upon them by the external funding requirements. They demonstrate a recognition and acceptance of the non-negotiable aspects of managerialism but have developed ways to work around these that enable them to maintain their professional values and commitment to the young people.

This raises questions about why there is not more evidence of workers achieving agency, of manipulating ‘the system’ in favour of meeting young people’s needs rather than external funders’ requirements (Emirbayer and Mische 1998). It may be that the factors that enable professionals to act with agency have been eroded or undermined, however this link is not explicitly made by the youth workers. Osgood (2006) argues that practitioners need sufficient belief in themselves as professionals to challenge top-down change and perhaps, as with the early years workers in her study, some of the youth workers in this study felt powerless to resist. It is important to note that there does not appear to be evidence of willing compliance (Gleeson and Shain 1999).

The requirement to accredit young people’s engagement in youth work in order to demonstrate its value was a key area of contention. The youth workers experienced this as problematic, particularly in relation to how this requirement was seen to direct their practice. The increased focus on accreditation was often expressed negatively, not so much in terms of accreditation as a concept but rather accreditation as a focus for youth work. Ali made a link between accreditation and accountability:

*our targets are things like getting young people through accreditation which is great because it recognises their achievements, but it’s because that’s the only way we can show funders what we have been doing (...) because there is no way of quantifying the work that you do, so the only way that those funders are going to understand is that that young person then gets a Youth Achievement Award, when actually shoving accreditation down young people’s necks is not what they want (Ali: first interview)*

This view that accreditation is used simply because of its ease of measurement resonates with Furlong and Cartmel’s (1997) study, in which participants also found evaluation mechanisms focussed on over-simplistic and easily quantifiable measures.

Clair talked about her dilemma arising from the conflict between the externally imposed requirement to deliver a number of workshops and the foundational value of participation in youth work:

*part of our targets is to deliver so many workshops on drugs education so we'll do that and a young woman turned round to me the other day and she said 'we just want to chill out' and I was like... I couldn't say anything to her because we spend all our time saying 'we consult young people, we want to know what you want' and they say 'we want a space to chill out – we want to be left alone really, we want you to provide activities and give us information if we want it' and we go 'that's really cool, that's what you want – NOW we're going to do this!' and I do struggle with that.*

(Clair: first interview)

There is a real sense of frustration coming through in the way that Clair recounted her experience, particularly when she stated '*I couldn't say anything to her*'. This sense of being rendered speechless may suggest that she did not feel able to respond in a way that she wanted to, in other words she was experiencing a degree of cognitive dissonance, or what Ball calls 'values schizophrenia' where 'commitment, judgement and authenticity within practice are sacrificed for impression and performance' (Ball 2003:221). Clair's discomfort arose from her need to justify her behaviour in terms of the imposition of workshops on young people, that opposed her belief in participation and being young-people led.

Dave raised the question of how far youth work can go in terms of meeting funder requirements before it compromises itself to such an extent it can no longer be called youth work:

*are things getting overlooked because we're actually having to concentrate on what the funders want rather than what young people want and need, umm so yeah that's a real, a real hard side and yeah, I always play devil's advocate but it's always in the back of my mind you know, so actually, yes this is great [getting the YSDF funding], but actually is it great? They've given us all of this money but what do we have to do, and that is the thing that I am hating at the moment about the way things are going and it's only going to get worse.* (Dave: second interview)

Having identified the dilemma between addressing both what the funders want and what young people might identify in terms of their wants and needs, Dave hesitated, and struggled with his dilemma. He expressed his struggle in the

phrase *'that's a real, a real hard side'*. His use of the phrase mentioned earlier *'in the back of my mind'* indicates a nagging doubt and the use of *'devil's advocate'* suggests he feels a lone voice, a 'party spoiler' by raising this question of whether by accepting the funding the organisation has 'sold out'. He was clearly uncomfortable with the position and foresaw a bleaker future. Emma shared his concerns about the extent to which the nature of their work was changing:

*I think we get pushed out of our comfort zones and why we went into the job in the first place in order, yes to bring in funding which is important, but at the expense of what really? (Emma: second interview)*

She identified the challenge at a more personal level than Dave. She experienced the impact of the changes resulting from managerialism in terms of the questions they raised for her in relation to her 'calling' to youth work, in other words, her professional 'raison d'être'. This resonates strongly with Nias's (1989) findings in relation to the challenges professionals face in terms of balancing competing demands and conflicting values. This also adds support to Ball's (2003) 'exteriorisation process' in which managerialism involves that decoupling of vocationalism from professionalism.

Clair recalled a past moment of solidarity against becoming involved with targeted provision, prior to the organisation accepting the government funding and feeling the full impact of managerialism:

*when I was first in [the organisation] I remember us all standing there and it was all 'we will never become target driven, we will never become like Connexions' and knock on doors and do this to get numbers and three and a half years later we are doing that, we are, (Clair: first interview)*

There is a sense of disbelief portrayed in her phrase *'we are doing that, we are'* that perhaps indicates a reluctance to accept that the solidarity *'us all standing there'* was insufficient to resist the onslaught of performativity. She went on to say

*especially those of us who have been in the organisation for a couple of years who knew what it was like before - it makes it sound like YSDF funding was the worst thing, it wasn't, it was an amazing opportunity that*

*we've had but it brought with it very specific high targets and it has caused quite a few heated discussions about are we really doing what we were doing before.* (Clair: first interview)

These findings support the literature in relation to the youth workers' expressions of being directed or controlled by externally imposed targets: for example Osgood's (2006) assertion that more directive approaches to curriculum reduced early years practitioners' sense of autonomy and Mahony and Hextall's (2000) warning that professional autonomy and morale were being eroded by managerialism. The youth workers in this study spoke of very similar experiences. There is resonance between Clair's reflections and the case of *Andrew Cave* presented by Lawy and Tedder (2009) in that both feel their ability to control their professional practice has been called into question as a result of external systems of accountability. The sense of challenge or threat to their professional values is strongly expressed and supports Reinder's (2008) assertion that managerialism has brought about the 'invasion of a different set of values' into professional practices. The youth workers were indeed seriously struggling to remain faithful to their professional values. The experience of these youth workers resonates with those in the study by Edward *et al.* (2007) in the sense that they find themselves trying to meet conflicting demands whilst also trying to reconcile these demands with their own professional values, as well as with their own priorities for the work that they do. Challenge to one's values goes to the very core of 'identity', of who people are and how they feel about themselves and what they do; this is significant in terms of achieving agency. The two factors which, according to Healy (2009), undermine the 'weaker' professions' ability to resist managerialism through the achievement of agency are useful in providing a possible explanation of the responses of the youth workers in this study. The first of these two factors; the inability to demonstrate the value of their work using positivist evaluative processes is evident in this study. The second; the ambivalence towards professionalism has been present, and may still be present, in the youth work profession (Banks 2004).

My findings support the claim that managerialism can undermine practitioners' sense of professional self. Hodkinson and Issitt (1995:63) assert that 'part of being professional is to *deliberately* maximise those choices available to us in

the best interest of the people we are employed to help' (original emphasis). Within the youth workers' accounts there are examples of occasions when they felt as if they were not working to the agenda of those they were employed to help but rather that they were 'dancing to the tune' of the funders or more difficult still, working for their own gain. There are also some examples of agentic practice as they discuss the ways in which they manage their daily practice. There seemed to be a level of compliance indicative of professionals seeking to find their way in the new realities (Reinders 2008).

It is clear from the data presented above that the youth workers are experiencing significant change in relation to the ethos and purpose of their day-to-day work. It is also clear that these changes are seen as being externally driven - by the funders through systems of targeting and accountability. There are similarities between the data here and Spenceley's (2006) study of professionalism in the FE sector, particularly with regard to practitioners no longer being in control of the design of their work, rather this had been taken from them by external forces, namely the economy. Spenceley used the term 'servant of the economy' to describe the re-positioning of FE and the imposition of various government agendas; my analysis suggests this could be equally applied to youth work.

The findings echo some of the tensions raised by Ball (2003). Firstly the questioning of whose needs should be prioritised, the funders or young people is clearly a tension for the youth workers in this study. Ball (2003) uses the phrase 'process of exteriorisation' to describe the shift in the relationship between the practitioner and her/his work; arguing that 'service' commitments no longer have value or meaning and professional judgement is subordinated to the requirements of performativity and marketing' (ibid 2003: 226). This tension can be seen in the articulation of the self questioning by Dave, Emma and Claire of where their work seemed to be heading. They ask, for example: What are we doing? Are we doing what we were doing before? Is it what we came into the profession to do? Do we believe in what we are doing? Again, this attunes with Ball's study, particularly the question he raised: 'Do we value who we are able to be, who we are becoming in the labyrinth of performativity?' (Ball 2003:220).

The ways in which the youth workers managed the tensions was interesting as it raised questions as to their level of compliance. There is a suggestion that the process of transition was not a smooth one and that there was some resistance in terms of 'heated discussions' in relation to the impact of targeted funding on the values and ethos of youth work. Drawing on Gleeson and Shain's (1999) typology of compliance - willing, unwilling and strategic - it would seem that the majority of the youth workers had adopted 'strategic' compliance: 'a form of artful pragmatism which reconciles professional and managerial interests' (Gleeson and Shain 1999:482). On the whole they found ways to retain their professional values while accepting that some aspects of the new work culture were non-negotiable. They sought ways to work around these conditions in the interests of the young people. This position requires continued internal and external negotiation and will be accompanied by a sense of continual flux, instability and uncertainty, all of which demand effort and energy and can be emotionally draining.

### **Theme 2: *Evaluation as Accountability***

Accountability in the context of managerialism is experienced as the imposition of rigorous regimes of externally managed monitoring and auditing systems requiring professionals to spend significant time and energy in detailed administration and documentation (Reinders 2008, Wong 2008). The recording systems used in the organisation were regarded by all the youth workers as intrusive, as reductionist and in opposition to youth work values. Most of the youth workers expressed concern over the increasing amount of paperwork associated with managerialism:

*I think it's a necessary evil now, everything's, it's just the way it's changing, funding is getting tighter, funders are getting more strict with what they want unfortunately nowadays you have to follow what they say, so it is an absolute pain to get it all done and then get the data inputted, things like that but unfortunately I think it's going to be one of those things that isn't going to go away any more and its going to have to be done. (Dave: first interview)*

Dave used emotive language to describe his relationship with paperwork; ‘a necessary evil’ and ‘an absolute pain’ leaving us in no doubt about how he has experienced this change. Clair also makes the association between systems of accountability and pain when she said she had ‘the numbers drilled into my head’ in the extract below. For her, the level of monitoring had infringed on her ability to ‘do positive work’:

*I have the numbers drilled into my head but then that’s another thing I have an issue with – it’s that whole issue about being target-driven because I really don’t agree with it – I can see why it’s necessary but I don’t agree with it and its becoming harder and harder to be able to do positive work with young people when you’re spending so much time justifying why you’re doing it – you can’t do it for the sake of it being good (Clair: first interview)*

The theme of accountability taking time away from the ‘real’ work is picked up by Dave and Emma as shown in the following extracts:

*The fact is that more and more of the funders are asking for more and more paperwork and are we actually now turning into pencil-pushing people rather than doing the actual face-to-face with young people which is the important side of it. (Dave: second interview)*

*I hate paperwork and sometimes I feel it takes up more time than me actually being with young people (Emma: first interview)*

All the youth workers talked of not having enough time to do their work, of being squeezed, of things being hectic and rushed:

*I think you have so much to do already, to squeeze into your hours. (Beth: first interview)*

*we’re all really hectic all of the time... it’s so easy to go over your hours every week you know so we’re all trying to fit everything in (Fiona: first interview)*

*you’re never going to avoid that [rushing around] when you’re working with us cos we all do things by the skin of our teeth (Ali: second interview)*

*it just felt all a bit rush really, but then that's always the way, we always get stuck with time.* (Emma: second interview)

In her comment about cancelled sessions, Emma provided a telling insight into the level of pressure she felt as a result of the audit systems:

*Some sessions got cancelled last week because of the snow so that for us was brilliant cos it meant we could do other things.* (Emma: first interview)

The 'other things' related to the bureaucracy attached to the accountability systems such as up-dating case files and inputting data. This provides further support for the perception that these systems compete with the 'real work' (Reinders 2008). Some expressed the view that the amount of work and pressure was increasing:

*it is that time thing, and the list of things we've got to do and our hours are getting smaller and smaller and smaller, I don't know how I'm going to do half my day job let alone, you know all these other things that would be really nice to do.* (Ali: second interview)

*there's always something else to be doing, there's always emails being sent around, loads of stuff going on which you just don't have time to help young people get to really, so I think we are busier but I think it's a different busy from before* (Emma: second interview)

*all of a sudden we're asked to do this, we're doing this, we're doing this ,oh and do this and do that and you just, you can't take it away from the face-to-face.* (Dave: second interview)

The level of pressure felt by these youth workers was palpable. Interestingly all these extracts are taken from second interviews which may support the perception that the situation was worsening. Alternatively, it could be that they felt more able to be open with me as our relationship developed, or indeed, a combination of both. The requirement for organisations to become more efficient, to increase productivity and reduce costs has impacted across all sectors. Keeping up with increasing demands comes with an inevitable cost in time (Jones and Gallop 2003). The consequences of this for many employees include increased workloads, longer working hours and greater time pressures

and yet as Green and Skinner (2005: 125) point out, 'a long hours culture results in stress and reduced effectiveness making people feel less able to cope and to control their workloads, their time and their lives.' The lack of time to reflect on and discuss work was an issue raised in the study by Merton *et al.* (2004).

The issue of surveillance was raised, with some youth workers expressing a sense of being watched and judged via the paperwork systems:

*being told a lot at the moment that the project is being watched due to the fluctuation of numbers, ... but we've been getting between 25-38 on a Friday night – which is good, it picked up from 10-15 but I think, I definitely think the paperwork is seen – which I can see the positives and negatives of that, us being watched in terms of what we're doing, how we're recording, whether we're doing our job properly and not being slack, but on the other side of the coin merely us doing that paperwork is going to mean us potentially slacking in other areas sometimes and young people will suffer (Emma: first interview)*

Interestingly Emma appears to be justifying the surveillance but challenging the fact that doing the paperwork takes time away from doing the 'real' work. This may be because she was confident that she was '*doing [her] job properly and not being slack*' but was aware that her paperwork may not represent that to others. I found it interesting that she said '*but we've been getting between 25-38*', this seemed a particular rather than a random number range. This may indicate that she was very aware of her numbers which in turn may indicate an internalisation of performativity (Ball 2008) and a level of defensiveness as a result of 'being watched'. Ali talked about the monitoring that took place at organisation meetings:

*and every time we meet at a [project] day, they see where we are achieving and where we're not and they push us to do it. (Ali: first interview)*

and considered the paperwork provided managers with easy access to up-to-date information on projects:

*so with this they can look through and get more of a current picture of how many database forms we're getting in. (Ali: first interview)*

In the two extracts above Ali appeared to relate to the forms of monitoring unemotionally, in a matter-of-fact way. However the following extract indicates an underlying need to justify a situation that might be called into question, the number of young people attending on a specific night:

*sometimes I write “very quiet tonight – this is because the fair was open” cos I might want to justify why there’s not many people in. (Ali: first interview)*

This may signify a sense of fear associated with surveillance and the possibility of being unfairly judged on the basis of attendance. These extracts support Ball’s (2008) position that managerialism has brought about a regime of accountability that ‘employs judgements, comparisons and displays as a means of control, attrition and change’ (*ibid*: 49).

Most of the youth workers found the evaluation and recording processes associated with accountability to be reductionist:

*it doesn’t give you much scope to write about everything that’s really happened, like sometimes you feel like you could just attach a bit of paper, but obviously that’s not the information they’re asking for. Then there are the tick boxes of issues which are quite good but also then you are just ticking, you know, so you could have had a sentence or something from a young person and that’s another box ticked. (Beth: first interview)*

Beth was clearly dissatisfied with the system in that it did not enable her to report what had ‘*really happened*’. It would appear that she has considered using the monitoring system as a minimum and adding additional information to enable her to report more fully however her comment ‘*but obviously that’s not the information they’re asking for*’ suggests that she believes that this additional information would not be valued. It was not what was required and as such the system itself controls what information is gathered and in what form. Others reported a sense that the systems failed to gather the ‘real’ picture:

*the paperwork is only half a story really – it’s what you have to put down, so you either condense it or, never get a full picture - cos they don’t know the young people either so they can only judge it on what’s on that form,*

*and that isn't always necessarily a clear picture of the reality. (Emma: first interview)*

*they [monitoring forms] don't capture half of what you want them to, we've stood there before and said somebody's done this – and you kind of go well where does that go on here? And if you do put it on there it doesn't have the same feeling – if you just stick a sentence going they did this and somebody else will come along and read it and go 'and?' it's really hard to get that feeling across of someone achieving something that can be really quite small, and for one of ours (our young people), I remember writing on the form 'attended school for half a day' and thinking if somebody reads that they're going to be like I don't see what the big deal is – but actually for that young person attending school for half a day was huge, they hadn't done it for like 6 weeks (Clair: first interview)*

Both of these extracts say something about the frustration and the impossibility of trying to capture the complexity of youth work on a standardised form. These frustrations echo those expressed by the participants in Furlong and Cartmel's (1997) study in relation to the inadequacy of the evaluation mechanisms. There is a concern that the receiver of the information will be unable to comprehend the significance of the youth work intervention from the information and hence will be unable to recognise the value of the work, resonating with the tension noted by Ball (2003) between belief and representation. This supports Healy's (2009) findings in relation to the difficulties faced by the social professions in terms of demonstrating the value of their work through quantitative evaluation processes. Coupling this with the sense of surveillance and monitoring explored earlier it follows that these frustrations may be associated with a fear of not being understood or valued. The following extracts suggest that the youth workers saw the system as being for, or belonging to, the funders and managers as opposed to being for, or belonging to, them as practitioners, thus supporting Ellis's (2009: 7) findings that 'evaluation is in practice predominantly driven by a government performance-driven agenda, and through funding, contractual and regulatory relationships.'

*I personally don't think it really always creates a real sense of what we're doing anyway - it's just for funding I think (Fiona: first interview)*

*It is a very corporate way of evaluating, I don't think it really captures that real youth work we're doing, but it's still important in terms of funding so we've got to do it (Helen: first interview)*

Beth (B) shared her view with me (R) in her first interview;

*B: I think they [the forms] are a good way to condense the information that is really needed*

*R: Needed, why needed? Needed by whom?*

*B: Funders*

*R: So does it feel that it's all about funders- that form?*

*B: Yes*

*R: Do you get anything out of it as a practitioner?*

*B: No there is no real choice for reflection or anything like that so you are not really getting anything out of it.*

Ali felt that the system did not support or encourage reflective evaluation as she gave us a glimpse of 'real life':

*sometimes if you've had a hectic session, its 10 o'clock at night, you've just had to sweep up a load of crap off the floor and you've had confrontations with young people you're just going to go tick, tick, tick, number of young people, (...) were the aims met, yes and you hand it in – and that hasn't evaluated the session... (Ali: first interview)*

For some of the youth workers the way in which the accountability system conflicted with their personal and professional values caused them the most difficulty. Beth's story of her struggle with the individual monitoring of young people provides a good insight into how she experienced the system. Firstly, she struggled with the pressure to label young people:

*When you are sort of going through the stages of putting it into the data base I struggle with it, I really struggle with it. I really feel like I'm putting issues on young people whether they've got those issues or not. I'm then putting that on them. And I'm clicking a box to say that they've got that issue or that they've come they've done this with us and that means that they've got this. (Beth: first interview)*

This pressure to apply labels to young people in order to access or account for funding conflicts with the strengths-based approach of youth work and further as Smith (2008: UP) argues ‘The labelling and data-sharing involved can quickly work against the interests of the young people involved, invade their right to privacy, and inhibit the creation of the sorts of space and relationships they need to flourish.’

Secondly, Beth felt the system was changing her practice; she identified young people’s positive actions only to find that when it came to inputting the information she was unable to include this positive information:

*I quite like writing down positive things on their sheet and when it comes down to putting it on the database there’s no sort of scope for that really.*  
(Beth: first interview)

*we got a young lad and when he first started coming to our session he was a complete nightmare, talk back, swear at you, just really did not care, got kicked out quite a lot, that sort of stuff and then after a while when he got to know us he was absolutely great and really on form now, knows us and comes to sessions, listens to us, doesn’t do that chat back thing just gets on with it, but there’s no way to record that. All that bad behaviour gets recorded but when it comes to ‘Bob had a really good session this week’, you know, really positive, there’s no way of recording that because it’s not a standard outcome, it’s a soft outcome I guess, so there’s no big outcome to put on the database so if you looked at that it would show that his behaviour was still bad but it’s not its changed so ...* (Beth: first interview)

Finally, Beth was concerned about how young people might respond if they knew the way in which information about them was categorised:

*I worry if a young person ever asked me to see their database information. Because if they did read that they might go ‘look at all these issues you’ve given me.’ And I know that I wouldn’t like it, I wouldn’t like someone keeping tabs on me. So yeah it’s a little bit scary.* (Beth: first interview)

Emma offered an alternative perspective, suggesting that certain aspects of the system could be useful to practitioners as a way of recording progress:

*the IM [Individual Monitoring] forms and things like that are quite handy when you see what's been going on, whether there's been a change, a decrease or increase in a young person's journey (Emma: first interview)*

## Summary

My findings support a view that the youth workers in this study experienced the accountability systems associated with the external funding negatively. Many of them used terms such as '*pain*', '*struggle*', '*nightmare*' and '*hate*' to express responses to the changes in their practice brought about by the introduction of the systems of accountability. Seeing paperwork as a necessary evil supports strategic compliance, but I suggest the level of negative emotions expressed may indicate that if Gleeson and Shain's (1999) categories were viewed as a continuum, then many of the youth workers may well be on the border between strategic compliance and unwilling compliance. A number of them talked about the amount of time the accountability systems took from their everyday practice and how the requirement to provide information took them away from the 'real' work (Reinders 2008). Some expressed a sense of being watched through the accountability systems and others thought the accountability systems enabled managers to keep a closer watch on what they were doing. These views support the perception of accountability as a technology of control (Everitt and Hardiker 1996, Dahlberg *et al.* 2007).

Importantly, the data support Spenceley's (2006) claim that managerialism, through the process of accountability, has removed control of the design of their work from practitioners. She argues that professionals have become 'servants of the economy' directed and control by external agendas. This study develops this further by evidencing an explicit link between accountability and funding and showing that the youth workers experienced this particular form of accountability as delimiting practice. There appears to be a resigned acceptance that 'who pays the piper, calls the tune.' The data further support the view that the youth workers see processes of accountability as upward compliance (Ellis 2009). They expressed concern that the systems of accountability were not able to capture the complexity of their work adding support to the findings of Furlong and Cartmel (1997) and Merton *et al.* (2004).

The concern was expressed that the systems in place failed either to enable understanding of their work or to demonstrate the value of the work adequately, thereby supporting Ball's (2003) 'belief and representation' thesis. Like the youth workers in this study, the teachers in Ball's study had concerns that their work would not be captured by, or valued within, the metrics of accountability.

Practitioners can feel alienated from the process of evaluation because it appears incompatible with the nature of their work. This is supported by my data; in particular, the frustration expressed by the youth workers concerning the fact that they have no control over what constitutes success (cf Hammersley 2001). The removal of opportunity to make and record professional judgements by the introduction of standardised tick-box forms has undermined their sense of professionalism (Biesta 2005). A further frustration is that the system seems to be based on a deficit model of youth, recording 'bad behaviour' and actions that need to be remedied. This contravenes youth work's strengths-based ethos resulting in feelings of alienation for the youth workers. Another example of why youth workers feel alienated from evaluation processes that focus on accountability is provided by the recognition that the system is a system of surveillance of young people, not just youth workers, and that youth workers have been unwillingly co-opted as surveillance agents by the system.

In summary, the themes presented in this chapter have addressed two of my research questions:

- How did the youth workers experience the current approach to evaluation?
- How did this impact on their understanding and engagement with the process of evaluation?

I set out to illuminate the experiences of a group of youth workers as they negotiated their way through a period of change in their organisation resulting from a new funding source. Analysis of the transcripts suggests that they experienced externally imposed targets and systems of accountability negatively, and they particularly felt this in regards to the challenges it presented to their personal and professional values. Many felt the direction in which their work was being driven by the external control was in opposition to

core youth work values, in particular those of participation and empowerment. Whilst there was a realisation or an acceptance that in order to do youth work, funding was needed, some youth workers were seriously questioning how far youth work and youth workers could go in terms of accepting funding from government sources. The controlling nature of managerialism is accompanied by overt and covert systems which reinforce the authority of the funder.

Most experienced the monitoring systems and requirements as over-burdensome and time-consuming and some experienced these systems as surveillance. The accountability systems employed within the organisation were seen to be as a result of funder influence. These were described as reductionist, and inappropriate for capturing the 'real' nature of their work. Concerns, in particular the concept of labelling and surveillance of young people, were raised in relation to the accountability systems. The use of emotive terms such as 'pain', 'struggle', 'nightmare' and 'hate' to describe their experience of managerialism lend support to Ball's (2003) notion of 'terrors of performativity'.

Evans (2008) makes the point that if professionalism is a social construct then professionals are potentially key players in the construction. There is evidence that some of the youth workers in my study had adopted strategic compliance (Gleeson and Shain 1999) towards the externally imposed changes. However there is also support for Healy's (2009) argument that the ability to be agentic in practice may be restricted by the sense that the systems of evaluating and recording the impact of their work are inadequate. The belief that the evaluative processes in use were inapt and unable to capture the complexity and value of their work appear to have affected the youth workers' sense of security. The changes brought by the external funding have added to this, resulting in a questioning by the youth workers of self, of purpose, of the authenticity and trust that necessarily underpin relationships with young people, all of which present barriers to the enactment of occupational professionalism and agency.

## Chapter 5: Experiencing Participatory Evaluation

### Introduction

This chapter is presented in two parts and sets out findings which have emerged from the inductive thematic analysis of interview data. Part one explores the impact of this new methodology on the youth workers' practice. The emergent themes that structure this part of the chapter are: *Meaningful Conversation*, *Identifying Learning* and *An Apt Process*. Part two examines the way in which the experience affected the youth workers as professionals and the emergent themes that structure this part are: *An Empowering Process*, *Working Together* and *Enhancing Reflective Practice*.

The discussion of findings in this chapter largely reflect my third and fourth research questions and provide an insight into the ways in which the youth workers experienced using the participatory methodology; how these experiences affected their connection with the process of evaluation; and the impact these new insights had for the youth workers as professionals. The chapter concludes with a discussion relating to the transformative nature of the evaluation methodology.

### Part One: Impact on Practice

#### Theme 1: *Meaningful Conversations*

The evaluation methodology required the youth workers to generate significant change stories with young people (see chapter 3). Many of the youth workers commented on how much they had enjoyed the experience of 'sitting down and talking' with young people. For example Beth reflected:

*I quite enjoyed sitting down and writing those stories, talking and sitting with young people and talking to them about how they feel the sessions have helped them. (Beth: first interview)*

Dave commented:

*I did really actually quite enjoy just sitting down and chatting with them (Dave: second interview)*

I found these comments very surprising, particularly in terms of the number of youth workers for whom this seemed to be such an enjoyable event. I had assumed 'sitting down and talking' with young people was an everyday activity, as relationship-building is central to youth work practice and relationships are developed over time and generally through conversation. This, however did not seem to be the case, as the following extracts show:

*you knew you had to do it [generate stories] and I think if we didn't have to do it, it wouldn't have happened and it was a really good chance to sit down 1 on 1 with that young person and kind of talk through what they've done and how they feel about the project and have that kind of conversation and I guess that's relationship building stuff really. (Beth: second interview)*

*it [using the methodology] has highlighted for me the need to give young people the space to be able to talk about themselves and how you facilitate that and how that can happen. (Clair: second interview)*

*R: has there been anything that you've valued or that you'll take away from being involved in using this technique?*

*Emma: ummm, probably only one thing really, that's making sure we give the opportunity to young people and that we take the opportunity ourselves to be able to sit down and talk to them about either why they come or how they feel they progress, how they feel they're getting on in whatever wording is suitable cos as I said, you know, some of the stories we didn't know that's how they felt or they'd felt they had achieved in this way or that way and so sometimes it does get forgot because you're constantly on the go, it's definitely made me want to take more time, rather than just ask about their day, to say "how do you think you're*

*getting on here?” Or “is there anything you want to do? Do you feel you’ve changed?” You know to find out more about them since they’ve started a project or a session or in a group - so definitely that (second interview)*

Beth, Clair and Emma are saying, in different ways, that using the methodology had enabled and supported them to find the time to engage in meaningful conversation with young people. There are indications that this activity was not necessarily an everyday activity, Beth is clear that if she had not been required to generate stories she would not have engaged in the 1 to 1 conversation. Her phrases ‘*had to do it*’ and ‘*it wouldn’t have happened*’ suggests that the methodology enabled the prioritisation of time for meaningful conversation. Prioritising in-depth conversation with young people was seen as important by both Clair and Emma, with Emma adding further support to the view that time is the issue with her comment about being ‘*constantly on the go*’. There are competing claims on the workers’ time: I have already noted in the previous chapter that they spend a significant amount of time and energy in detailed administration, and time spent with young people is indirectly correlated with the time spent meeting the organisation’s demands (Reinders 2008).

The requirement of the evaluation methodology for workers to engage in reflective conversations with young people in order to co-create significant change stories has the potential to enhance existing relationships, as this comment from Helen illustrates:

*the young person that I choose I think I’ve got a good relationship with anyway so they’re quite happy to talk to me and the stories they told were meaningful to both of us, from the experiences that had gone on in the Centre so, there was a bit of bonding there whilst we discussed the stories, yeah, so I thought it was really good (Helen: first interview)*

George found that the process of generating the stories had enabled him to develop deeper relationships with young people:

*I think it’s good, yeah, it’s definitely a good way of doing things, I think you get into a more of a .... because you’re asking them questions which are kind of difficult rather than just offhand comments about things, you*

*create a bit more of a relationship, you develop a relationship with people a bit more, so yeah, it's good. (George: first interview)*

Beth found the use of the significant change question helpful in initiating the conversation and focusing the conversation on reflective evaluation, she also indicated that this was something that has been missing from her engagement with young people:

*I think it was a really good set question to give to young people and kind of explore, you kind of miss that sometimes, you don't always go back to those young people and ask what they've got out of the project (Beth: second interview)*

However, all of the participants found it challenging to find the time to implement the methodology:

*it's one more thing to add to your pile. (Clair: second interview)*

*it has been challenging time wise – I mean the meetings and everything they do take a while to go through and at first I really felt frustrated because I was thinking how am I going to build this into my schedule. (Helen: first interview)*

The generation of stories took place during normal youth work sessions and therefore it was assumed this activity would require no additional time. However many of the youth workers commented on the difficulty of finding time within the sessions to generate stories. Generating significant change stories involved engaging in meaningful conversation with young people, the essence of youth work, and yet the youth workers seemed to struggle to find time to do this. The problem appeared to be a shared one, that of feeling unable to give individual young people sufficient protected time to hold the conversation and a reluctance to initiate conversations that were likely to be interrupted. The cause of this problem was seen to rest with staffing numbers and the volatile nature of some of the groups with which they worked. Clair explained her problem;

*You want to be able to give the young person real time to talk about their story, cos it's their story and that was a little bit of a challenge sometimes because of the settings that some of us are in and especially on the*

*outreach projects. It's really hard to get that space where somebody feels they can be really honest with you, without you having to run off half way through, and go "hang on a minute I've got to go and sort that out" which is really bad, I really struggle with that.* (Clair: second interview)

Beth shared the concern about interrupting the process of a young person telling their story:

*when you might only have two workers in a session and you've got 30 young people you know it can actually be really hard to do that, to sit down and even have just that 10 minutes with one young person, and that sort of, and you don't want to be distracted from that because I think it's a really important thing that you're sitting down and talking to young people about and it feels that you want to pick your moment and not 2 minutes in have to get up and tell other young people that they shouldn't be doing something and take that time away from that young person that you're sitting and having that discussion with cos then I think that process gets broken then and that doesn't work.* (Beth: second interview)

She emphasised the difficulty of finding 'just that ten minutes' with a young person. Both Clair and Beth demonstrated their commitment to the value of respecting young people, and recognised the risks associated with starting a conversation, opening up a dialogue which may then be stalled because their attention was needed elsewhere. Helen also used the term 'broken' when she refers to the interrupted conversation;

*you really need a private 1-2-1 space where you're not going to get interrupted because you lose that flow of the whole thing, so if you try to do it in the session and you've got loads of interruptions it can feel quite broken* (Helen: first interview)

The questions this raises are: if meaningful conversation is central to youth work, and yet workers are reluctant to engage because of the likelihood of interruption, what has happened to youth work? What is going on in sessions? Perhaps the focus on attendance and activity has become so central that the time for meaningful conversations has become limited. Jones and Gallop's (2003) article highlights the potential erosion of the reflective space in

supervision as a result of the 'need' to focus on activity. It may be that this erosion is not limited to reflection in supervision, which is the focus of their study, but perhaps this is also a potential risk within youth work sessions. McCormack and Kennelly (2011) note that reflective conversations seem to have disappeared from the everyday practice and, whilst they are referring to reflective conversations between colleagues, the same seems to be true for reflective conversations between youth workers and young people.

Some youth workers expressed regret and disappointment that they had not been able to generate stories or attend all of the sessions. It was difficult for me as the researcher to listen to their stories of additional burden and hear them berate themselves. It felt as if I had given them another stick to beat themselves with:

*as I say it's just a nightmare that we haven't been able to get the stories in at the moment but I'm hoping we can work on that and get them in (Dave: first interview) I've been useless at getting to meetings and stuff like that (Dave: second interview)*

*forgetting to collect stories and then going "oh shit, Sue's coming on Friday" that's like in 4 days time and then sort of rushing around (...) that's the worst part, or thinking that you haven't got enough stories. (Ali: second interview)*

*at times it been like "oh for god sake I haven't done that" (Clair: second interview)*

### **Theme summary**

This theme emerged from the youth workers' views about the way in which using the evaluation methodology supported and enhanced their youth work practice. Most of them commented on how it had enabled them to spend quality time with young people, in meaningful conversations that developed and deepened their relationships with those young people. The youth workers found using the evaluation methodology supported the development of relationships with young people in two ways. Firstly it required them to prioritise time to engage in 1 to 1 reflective conversations with young people. Using the methodology validated the activity of 'sitting down and talking' with young

people. Secondly it provided a frame to support the development of meaningful conversations, a template that aided a shift from everyday surface conversation to deeper and more meaningful educative conversations that constitute skilful youth work. The methodology appears to promote the process of 'really talking' (Belenky 1986 cited in Mezirow 2000: 14) where emphasis is placed on active listening, reciprocity and co-operation where youth workers have an active dialogue with young people to understand better the meaning of an experience.

### **Theme 2: *Identifying Learning***

The evaluation methodology began with the generation of significant change stories, stories in the words of the story-teller about what they feel happened as a result of being involved with the project. Using the methodology for the first time in a youth work context required a level of experimentation and in-depth discussion about the concept of co-creation. Initial concerns regarding leading questions and sampling were addressed in the training workshops and as a group we developed a process of co-creation that involved a youth worker working with a young person to generate a significant change story. The story begins with the youth worker facilitating the young person to identify their change in their own words, the youth worker then adds contextual and temporal information together with their professional assessment of the significance of the young person's journey. Although the methodology might appear simple, its effective use required high level skills, as Helen suggested:

*you are going to have, I think different levels – not even levels, I suppose different outcomes from the story gathering from the different people's style in how they've done it, and it kind of relies on your ability to talk to young people, and the young people themselves who you're actually interviewing.* (Helen: first interview)

Young people's ability to recognise their own learning was commented on by all the youth workers:

*maybe they don't realise themselves the change they've gone through, it's often the case, you can see it but they don't realise themselves how far they've come.* (Fiona: first interview)

*something has happened and as youth workers we're going to recognise the change in that young person possibly before they do, and actually you're helping them to realise it and perhaps, if you hadn't approached them, would they have realised it?* (Ali: first interview)

Some made the association between story generation and the youth work process more explicitly:

*part of youth work is getting young people to recognise those sort of things because ... young people don't always* (Beth: first interview)

*a young person might not be able to point out that themselves or assess themselves in that way, the things that they've come forward on, which is part of our job anyway.* (Emma: first interview)

*maybe that's the job—someone sees a young person come out of themselves and they've not seen that before – maybe that's the job of reframing that in that way* (George: first interview)

Youth work involves supporting young people to develop a range of 'soft skills' which are not easy to assess, this methodology offers a process that 'enable(s) professionals [and young people themselves] to see, judge and monitor young people's achievement' in relation to social and emotional learning (Watson and Emery 2010:768).

Some of the youth workers commented on the way in which the methodology had encouraged the young people themselves to develop skills in reflection:

*it gave them a chance to talk about how they feel they've changed, or how far they've come* (Emma: second interview)

*it got them to think back about some of the good stuff they'd done* (Dave: second interview)

*think it's a good skill to pass on to young people to get them to look at themselves.* (Clair: first interview)

Supporting young people to develop their ability to reflect has the potential to enable them to develop a range of associated skills including analytical skills, self-awareness skills, critical thinking skills and communication skills

(Thompson and Thompson 2008). Seeing the benefits for young people in using the methodology is likely to be an incentive for youth workers adopting such a practice. This supports Estrella's (2000) proposition that participatory evaluation can be used as a self-assessment tool because it enables people to reflect on past experiences, examine current realities, revisit objectives and define future strategies. It appears from the interviews that time spent engaging young people in reflective activity had been limited, '*something that gets missed out*'. Beth comments on how reflecting with young people enabled them to realise the extent of their involvement:

*you don't always sort of talk to young people about that sort of stuff so it's really good way, I think, for them to actually realise what they've done, because sometimes, you know sitting down and asking them and actually getting them to think about that, I think, sometimes they were a bit shocked about what they had actually done and what they could write down cos you know at first you speak to young people and they're like 'I don't know what to write down' and then 'oh actually' and then something springs to mind and they sort of think about it. (Beth: second interview)*

Encouraging young people to reflect on the outcome of their involvement with the project sheds light on their learning journeys and this learning is possibly extended or solidified as a result of that illumination. Clair articulates this well when she says '*the process of generating the story is a journey in itself* (first interview).

### **Theme summary**

The process of generating significant change stories was experienced by many as a significant piece of youth work, illustrating congruency between the methodology and the youth work process, supporting the argument that young people should be actively involved in evaluating practice (Merton *et al.* 2004). Using the methodology enabled the youth workers to illuminate young peoples' learning journeys in a way that they had not done previously and this was highly valued with all the youth workers commenting on this aspect. The generation of significant change stories was described as a journey in itself, further demonstrating congruence between this evaluation methodology and youth work practice.

The recognition that the evaluation methodology is conducive to youth work has real potential to impact on the workers' perception of and engagement with the concept and process of evaluation. The participatory nature of the methodology enabled a 'doing with' rather than a 'doing to' approach to evaluation which was experienced as both satisfying and enjoyable by the youth workers in stark contrast to the ways in which they experienced the 'accountability approach' (as explored in the previous chapter). The sense that the methodology enhanced their day-to-day practice is very encouraging, as this has the potential to address the alienation some workers feel (Issitt and Spence 2005, Beresford and Branfield 2006, Ellis 2008) and may support a re-engagement with the concept of evaluation. Seeing the process of evaluation as part of the 'everyday role' is a significant shift from seeing evaluation as something that is done for the funders and the managers (Ellis 2009). This shift in perception is supportive of a voluntary engagement with, and a strengthening commitment to, meaningful evaluation. This transformation enabled the youth workers to reconceptualise evaluation as something that 'belongs' to them and the young people with whom they work rather than to managers or funders. This way of seeing evaluation challenges the dominant discourse of evaluation in which practitioners have no involvement in the 'construction' of what is perceived as effective practice (cf. Hammersley 2001). My analysis supports the view that evaluation that promotes participation can be seen as critical praxis, with learning and change the focus of the participation and a commitment to openness to dialogue, critical reflection and negotiation (Springett 2001).

### **Theme 3: *An Apt Process***

The evaluation methodology was seen by most of the youth workers as more suited to the purpose of evaluating the complex nature of youth work than the accountability system currently in place (as explored in the previous chapter). It brought youth work to life through the stories of those involved. Dave talked about the shift from quantitative to qualitative processes, claiming the strength of this form of evaluation is in its participatory approach, asking young people directly about the impact of the project in a non-prescriptive way:

*it's not all about ticking boxes, it's actually true to them you know, (...)this is actually asking them how do they feel about themselves and our impact, you know, and it's not actually presuming from what they said in a questionnaire or what they've done here, it's actually asking them 'how do feel about this?' (Dave: first interview)*

In his second interview Dave went further:

*it actually brings the work we're doing to life at the end you know, it's been a brilliant thing to do because I don't think they [Trustees] actually realise so little has such big impact on what young people actually do, umm so yeah I think it's actually brought it to life to them a bit more. (Dave: second interview)*

His comments that '*they*' (the Trustees) had not realised the extent of the impact of youth work and that '*so little*' has such a big impact was interesting. This may well relate to the fact that actually youth work is not an expensive activity in relation to other educational services; youth workers are able to develop valuable learning opportunities for young people on minimum resources. Dave did much of his youth work in parks and on a mobile unit where his main resource was himself and his staff team.

Helen compared the two systems of evaluation and concluded that the adapted MSC technique was far more apt at capturing the soft outcomes more generally associated with youth work:

*it's so different, the results are going to be so different from what you get from YSDF box ticking exercise which I don't think is, in any way, really showing the good work that we do and this is a way of really capturing the soft outcomes and the things that aren't necessarily easily measured – the emotional stuff, the social stuff, you know, I don't – there's no easy way to capture that, film and music seem to do it but no kind of administrative process I've ever seen has been able to capture that. (Helen: first interview)*

By making the explicit comparison between the participatory methodology and the accountability-based evaluation the youth workers confirmed their previously expressed view that the latter does not adequately enable

understanding of the work or adequately demonstrate the value of the work, thereby supporting Ball's (2003) notion of tension between belief and representation discussed in the previous chapter. It would appear that the youth workers believed that the new methodology offered an evaluation process that enabled them to reduce that tension significantly. The interpretive and appreciative foundations of the methodology were found to be much more apt for illuminating those 'un-quantifiable' outcomes associated with youth work's ethos and purpose.

Some of the youth workers expressed a hope that using the methodology would enable them to demonstrate to others, outside the profession, the value of youth work:

*I hope that people maybe look at another side of youth work, actually look at the real kind of roots based work that we do actually and not that just that we've managed to speak to 100 young people in one day - which doesn't give an open view of what we've done at all but to actually show one young person's story where we've really helped them in some way or that they feel that they have gained something from us, hopefully people will be able to take that away and go 'yeah, they do something'. Maybe a lot of people think 'oh, youth work, they play games and go outside and play football' and stuff like that and it's about even if it is playing a football match it's what can that actually bring to those young people and that's coming from young people as well, you know, it's not just us sort of doing a case study and saying well actually we believe that this young person and maybe we've picked those young people but all those words have come from them, that's their story and it's kind of showing that young people see that as well and can take that away for the rest of their lives really that they feel like they've built something while they've been here. (Beth: first interview)*

Clair seemed to think that this evaluation methodology may offer some hope for the future:

*I think if it does what we are hoping it will do and that is (...) being able to translate in a way that other people outside of the youth work field will look*

*at it and go 'no that is valuable' we can use that rather than everything we doing being about numbers. (Clair: first interview)*

Clair continued:

*any process that enables us to really shout about those travels for young people and making them be recognised as legit, it does bug me that you go into a professional situation and you can have the best story in the world and they can go 'yeah, it's just a story', you just think no – they don't get any of the stuff and some of the people that we're speaking to are so disjointed from youth work, they don't have a clue what it is – a lot of people still (...)go 'well, you just play pool all the time and you're just hanging out – you've got a slack job because you couldn't do anything else' and I kind of go hang on a minute. (Clair: first interview)*

Her need to be recognised as a professional is strongly expressed here in the way Clair uses the words '*shout about*'. She seems to be implying that she needs to shout in order to be heard and this may be linked to a sense of weakness in relation to professional status (Healy 2009, Osgood 2006).

### **Theme summary**

A majority of the youth workers expressed views that the methodology developed for this research was a more apt process for capturing the essence of youth work, 'bringing it to life' in an accessible form for those outside of the profession. My analysis suggests that all the youth workers felt that using it had in some way impacted on their perception of evaluation, and further that it has the potential to enhance understanding and appreciation of youth work and youth work outcomes beyond the profession. Importantly there seemed to be a sense that this methodology could 'capture' the essence of their work and display this to others easing the tension between belief and representation raised by Ball (2003). This belief in the 'process' of evaluation enabled the workers to feel confident about their practice and perhaps in being agentic in their response to changes and challenges they face in their practice (Osgood 2006).

## Part Two: Making a Difference

### Theme 1: *An Empowering Process*

Most of the youth workers expressed increased feelings of value and self-worth as a consequence of using the participatory evaluation methodology. These feelings were associated with a sense of ‘making a difference’ to young people’s lives and a sense that their efforts were worthwhile. Hearing this directly from young people strengthened these feelings. Beth described her experience thus:

*Just nice to know that the sessions that you’ve been running, that young people feel that they’ve, that sort of, you know, have made a difference to them and really helped them – I think it’s quite nice to know that you’re doing something that helps someone else really, and you know it’s actually as a youth worker that’s what the main aim of my job is, to sort of help young people with what they want to do so it’s just nice to get that feedback from them really. (Beth: first interview)*

She appeared embarrassed at accepting recognition that she had made a difference but was clear that this was her purpose. Young people confirming the achievement of her central purpose was both rewarding and affirming. Having a means by which to justify actions and beliefs is important as it enables a feeling of empowerment and of being valued (Brookfield 1995). The ‘appreciative gaze’ (Ghaye *et al.* 2008) of this form of evaluation turns the focus to the things that worked, countering the effects of performativity (Ball 2003) and the deficit-based discourse associated with accountability and managerialism. The increased sense of self-belief can help support professionals to use their agency (Osgood 2006).

Ali acknowledged the potential of the methodology to highlight the benefits and value of youth work but questioned whether it would satisfy funder requirement:

*we can use it to realise that the work we do is really valuable and maybe other organisations can appreciate it as well but what worries me is that it wouldn’t actually help you to prove anything to funders. (Ali: first interview)*

This suggests a level of pessimism and demonstrated, perhaps, how strongly she felt 'controlled' by managerialism (Clarke and Newman 1997, O'Neill 2002). Perhaps for Ali, as with 'Andrew Cave' (Lawy and Tedder 2009) the re-conceptualisation of self from 'victim of change' to 'agent of change' was not easy (Whitty 2008).

The appreciative nature of the methodology meant that the youth workers were seeking out positive change stories and through sharing these they became aware of the range and scope of the positive work that was happening in the organisation:

*It's showing the positive things that individual workers are doing and individual centres are doing and highlighting the achievement of young people who deserve that recognition. (Helen: first interview)*

*a bit of a pat on the back because of these things are happening for young people (...)it's the time we've spent talking about it, time spent reflecting and making ourselves realise that the work we're doing is really important. (Ali: first interview)*

Using the methodology required a shift in mindset for the youth workers 'away from confessional tales and towards conversations about success' (Ghaye *et al.* 2008: 362) that both legitimised and encouraged the sharing of 'good work' stories. This raised the question as to whether the youth workers were able to recognise their own achievements and the achievements of their peers prior to using the methodology or whether accountability systems conceal rather than celebrate achievement. Ali's use of the phrase '*making ourselves realise*' is interesting and perhaps indicative of a need to counter a deficit discourse. It does appear that the methodology has supported an altering of the youth workers' social construction of reality (Bushe 2007) and this is likely to reinforce effort in the future and help sustain practitioners during difficult times. The boosting nature of the methodology can be seen in Clair's extract below:

*it has made me feel that actually there was some really good stories that came out of there and you know, even when it really crappy, for young people it is valuable for them (Clair: second interview)*

For some of the youth workers the evaluation methodology provided a means of communicating with others that the accountability system did not. The following extracts illustrate a level of support that they felt in terms of using their voice (Jackson and Kassam 1998, Allard *et al.* 2007). Fiona reflected on the upward communication involved in the story generation and selection stage where they, the youth workers, were required to include their professional knowledge about their interventions in the story. This provided a means of informing managers and trustees in the final stage of selecting the most significant story. She imagines a time when workers can provide managers with insights into the work and the possibility of informing the future direction of the work:

*I think maybe it would be nice sometimes for, in an ideal world, you'd have these kind of conversations with managers in respect of giving them an insight into the kind of work that's going on in a bit more depth like we were doing, cos they write the bids at the end of the day you know, it is linked*  
(Fiona: first interview)

George also felt the stories were a way of informing managers about what was happening on the ground:

*There are issues that go in the stories that I actually want senior management to understand what is happening.* (George: first interview)

Ali saw the stories as potential 'ammunition' in the fight against externally imposed targets:

*it will give us ammunition to justify the work that we do, when you're told from above that you can't do something anymore, you'll be able to turn around and say it might not be hitting those targets but this is what its generating* (Ali: first interview)

The three extracts above demonstrate the empowering potential of the methodology and support the view that participatory forms of evaluation can restore a sense of professionalism and power in the sense of having a voice (McLaughlin *et al.* 2004). The adaptation of the MSC technique to involve the youth worker as co-creator of the significant change stories formalised their inclusion in an attempt to address the feelings of alienation and exclusion from accountability-based forms of evaluation (Everitt and Hardiker 1995, Beresford

and Branfield 2006). The co-authorship, between young person and youth worker, firmly placed control in their hands, raised their voices together and provided a sense of empowerment for the workers. The indication that the youth workers felt that the stories could inform management and challenge external stakeholders suggests that using this form of evaluation could enable a move towards a form of democratic and dialogical professionalism (Avis 2003). It seems clear that using the methodology raised workers' esteem and confidence which in turn increased their sense of well-being, all of which support the use of agency (Osgood 2006).

Dave captured this when he said:

*the fact is you've got something there that you can actually look at and say 'wow, we've made a difference' so it actually reinforces your work, makes the workforce a lot happier, we're doing the right thing and it gives us confidence in what we're doing (Dave: first interview)*

The energy boosting aspect resulting from the appreciative nature of the methodology was expressed by Helen:

*finding that actually it's really lovely to spend some time doing this, it feels good and I leave the meetings elated and feeling stress-free instead of leaving the meetings feeling 'arrgh, I've got loads to do' it is helping us as individuals. (Helen: first interview)*

These extracts provide support for the view that participatory forms of evaluation can result in a renewed feeling of pride and excitement about the profession and in a revitalised sense of oneself as a professional (Dadds, 1995; McLaughlin *et al.* 2004).

### **Theme summary**

This theme highlights the empowering nature of participatory evaluation. It demonstrates that positive feelings associated with focusing on 'good' work can support and enable professionals to be active agents in shaping their professional practice and professional contexts. The nourishing nature of an appreciative lens is seen in the ways in which the youth workers talk about their experiences of engaging in the evaluation methodology. This theme adds support to view the use of narrative in evaluation honours the voice and

experience of the practitioner and in turn enhances their sense of efficacy (Allard *et al.* 2007).

## **Theme 2: Working Together**

The opportunity to spend time together as a staff team had declined for these youth workers over the period of the study and the collaborative nature of the methodology was appreciated.

*R: what was your favourite bit about using the technique?*

*Ali: having the time, cos we had to put the time aside, so it was nice to be able to prioritise having the time to meet up and you knew you were going to have a good couple of hours to speak with your colleagues and it almost became like a peer supervision type of thing and that was really nice and that's something that we don't do, we do but increasingly we're having less and less time to do those kinds of things or to prioritise them but when we we're doing this it was like "right, Sue's coming, we've got to be there" so you knew you'd got to spend a couple of hours with a cup of tea talking about your work which is really nice. (second interview)*

Ali placed high value on peer space and, interestingly, she likened the methodology to a supervision-type process rather than to an evaluation process, perhaps suggesting its reflective, educative and supportive nature. Meaningful reflective conversations can sustain and nourish practitioners (Ghaye and Ghaye, 1998).

Fiona talked about 'taking time out together' and indicated that time out to reflect was often missing from their working lives:

*really interesting to work as a group and actually take the time out to think about all those stories, that can get missed quite a lot of the time. (Fiona: first interview)*

She went on to discuss the process of story selection, and expressed surprise at the depth of the discussion during this stage of the methodology which may be indicative of a lack of in-depth discussion and reflection elsewhere:

*it was nice as a staff group to find out what we all thought about the different stories that were collected, (...) and a lot more came out of it than I probably anticipated – I thought we'd all just look at them and go 'yeah, that one, that one, that one – done' but there was so much to it and it was far more complex, so it was really interesting, definitely (Fiona: first interview)*

Emma elaborated on this in-depth discussion as follows:

*discussing why a story should go through and why it shouldn't and finding out what everyone thought, either individually or as a group as to what is distance travelled and what is an achievement for a young person and working out who has come the furthest and who has achieved the most and I think that was quite good for everyone to see where young people have come from and where they are now. (Emma: second interview)*

These are extremely complex issues. They demonstrate a key characteristic of critical reflective learning in that they illustrate the move away from the immediate to take a broader view of practice (Wellington and Austin 1996). This in turn enables the shift from problem-solving towards active collective reflection on the educational goals and values and issues of equity and social justice (Ng and Tan 2009). Discussion is a collaborative activity that can illuminate and challenge assumptions (Allard *et al.* 2007). Time spent in collective reflective discussion is beneficial for the development of professional knowledge, confidence and practice. My findings support the assertion that seeing peers as key contributors to the learning process develops a supportive environment in which both individual self-evaluation and collective critical reflection can be nurtured and ultimately can become a 'safe part(s) of professional practice' (David *et al.* 2000: 713). This sense of safety, vital for learning, is not generally associated with performativity cultures and practices.

For some youth workers, the time spent in the group sessions was a way to combat the isolation and pressure they experienced as individual workers:

*[It was good for me] to see all those projects as a whole cos its all different projects coming together and sometimes you're quite in the zone with*

*yours, I think, just to see what people had done and what young people had identified as good. (Beth: second interview)*

*I think, you forget about other projects sometimes so it was quite nice listening to like the [other] stories and being like, oh yeah, that's going on there as well, it gives you the wider awareness cos the work is so intense you can be very inward about your own work and yeah, on lots of different levels it sparked of lots of conversations and just thinking a little bit more outwardly rather than quite so inward, its good. (Clair: second interview)*

The methodology supported collaborative activity. The sharing of expertise, good practice and support was identified by Emma as a benefit of using the methodology, as the following extracts demonstrate:

*we get to see other people's [stories] as well which I think is an encouragement to us and to other workers and you know, everyone else gets to see 'oh I've got a similar problem' 'what did you guys do with them?' so even though that's not what it's about I think that that can be quite helpful as well (Emma: first interview)*

*being able to support your colleagues (...) you can offer support, advice cos we all have quite different skills as well so I think that's good (Emma: second interview)*

These responses seem to link to what Ng and Tan (2009) refer to as 'sense-making' rather than to critical reflection. They see 'sense-making' as a collective level process involving a continuous and reciprocal interaction of seeking information, assigning meaning and making appropriate response. Whilst this is a powerful mode of learning, it is usually limited to fact-finding, sharing tips and trading stories.

### **Theme summary**

This theme reflects the benefits of using a collective approach to evaluation, extending the process of evaluation by drawing in and on the knowledge of peers. The evaluation methodology supported the development of a shared understanding of practice which in turn may support the development of a shared professional identity (Healy 2009). This theme adds support to claim

made by Allard *et al.* (2007) that collective reflection intensifies professional development.

### **Theme 3: *Enhancing Reflective Practice***

Many of the youth workers found using the methodology re-united them with reflective practice. The realisation that they always seemed to be focused on the next event or the next activity made some of them question their practice:

*I think it makes you realise, sometimes you just look forward all the time, next project, next month's sessions, looking for funding, starting up things, I do start things, I do start things up and then I jump and jump, but it made me stop and think what has happened over the last month and be a bit more reflective cos I think, when you stop having to be reflective, when you stop doing the degree basically, (laughs) that part of you shuts down a little bit and it was quite nice to be [reflective again]. (Ali: second interview)*

*sometimes you just slog on and don't really think about what you're doing, or all the stuff you've done (...) that kind of gets forgotten (Beth: second interview)*

*we spend a lot of time consulting with them [young people] about what we want for the future but we never spend any time looking backwards. (Clair: first interview)*

It is not possible from these extracts to attribute the cause or causes for these youth workers to have become so focused on the future, on activity to the detriment of reflection. For Ali, it could be suggested that once she did not have to demonstrate reflective practice to others she chose not to do it. This may add support to the view that the value of reflective practice to practitioners is questionable (Cornford 2002). Alternatively, it may be that her time-poverty, resulting from competing demands, such as the need to initiate new projects as a result of short-term funding, may have meant that her time to engage in reflective practice had been reduced. Beth's use of the phrase '*you just slog on*' indicates a sense of 'head down, hard work', this is not a state that is conducive to reflective practice. Time constraints are a recognised barrier to reflective practice (Fade 2004, Morris and Stew 2007, Thompson and Thompson 2008):

when workloads are high, reflective time can be seen as a luxury. Clair offered no justification for only looking forwards; she reported it as a matter of fact. This tendency for workers to be focused only on the future needs further exploration.

Most youth workers commented on how the methodology had enabled and supported their reflective practice; for some it had raised their awareness of not engaging in reflective practice as much as they felt they should:

*I think it can only improve practice cos it makes you reflective doesn't it and we should be doing that all the time. (Fiona: first interview)*

*that reflection is good to do and I should make more time to actually reflect on what we've done and actually talk to them [young people] about what we've done more, I mean I know we sit there and we sort of actually "right, what would you like to do?" but actually go back and actually see "so last year, what have you enjoyed doing the most? Why is that?" (Dave: second interview)*

I found it particularly interesting that, of the youth workers who were interviewed twice, comments on their own reflective practice were included in their second interviews, not in the first. This may indicate that the methodology illuminated the gap between espoused theories and theories-in-use (Argyris and Schon 1974) in relation to the youth workers' engagement with reflective practice.

The reflective nature of the participatory methodology shed light on assumptions as evidenced by the surprise expressed at the outcomes identified by young people as significant for them:

*sitting down with those young people and asking that sort of question [most significant change question] and then actually what came out was almost completely different than what you were thinking in your own head. (Beth: second interview)*

*just reminiscing [with the young person] about that experience, for both of us was really interesting, and her perspective of that experience was different to what mine was, so that was interesting as well, different view of the outcome and a different view of what she got out of it than what I expected. (Helen: first interview)*

This can be interpreted to suggest that the methodology highlighted the youth workers' assumptions about the outcomes of their work activity. The target culture has a tendency to push towards assuming outcomes (as I explored in chapter 2). This illumination may have restored their desire to reflect with young people, and to recognise the dangers of assuming outcomes. This finding offers support for McCormack and Kennelly's (2011) assertion that narratives, in this case the co-constructed stories, can enable critical reflection. Emma felt the methodology had enabled the workers to '*find out stuff they didn't know before*' (Emma: second interview). Helen elaborated on this suggesting that it supported the workers to develop a more holistic understanding of young people's lives:

*getting the different perspective of the story whereas I might have thought 'oh that's a story about this, this and this'. And then the young person actually telling it in a different way than you expect them to and the result in a different way than you had expected for how they feel about it - which kind of reminds you that even if you have eyes in the back of your head you can't see everything that goes on in your centre, you do miss little things and they've got lives outside of the centre where things happen, that evolve, that contribute to that story as well (...) so that's quite helpful in terms of just you know, your knowledge of young people and what they're getting up to and actually, maybe they need a bit of work on this maybe we can help them with that, and never really thought of that before. (Helen: first interview)*

Reflective practice is associated with professionalism and has become a mandatory professional competency in many initial professional education programmes. For some it is a central aspect of being professional (Schon 1983, Peel 2005). However, the changing concept of professionalism with its rational-technical focus on competence is a barrier to developing reflective practice (Ottesen 2007, Evetts 2005). It could be viewed that the shift towards being monitored and measured according to externally imposed outcomes has in some ways removed the need for reflection. The data support the suggestion made in chapter 2 that the pressure to take an immediate, a technical or a dialectic orientation to reflective practice is increased by performativity and that practitioners are pushed towards a technical orientation to reflective practice (Wellington and Austin 1996). The youth workers in this study responded

positively to the requirement to reflect that was central to using the methodology indicating perhaps, the unsatisfying nature of becoming a technician.

### ***Theme summary***

This theme focused on the ways in which the evaluation methodology supported and enabled a return to reflective practice. In line with the findings from Merton *et al.* (2004) this study identified a lack of time for practitioners to critically reflect on their work. There is also strong support for the claim made by Allard *et al.* (2007) that active engagement in collaborative inquiry, in this case in participatory evaluation, deepened reflective practice. This study supports their finding that using narrative approaches enables the development of a reflective community of practice. There was less evidence of Ng and Tan's (2009) concern that reflective communities are as susceptible to managerialism as individual forms of reflective practice. This may be related to the 'newness' of the methodology and hence would need to be considered in the long term.

### **Concluding thoughts: Transformative Evaluation**

The themes explored in this chapter have helped to answer my research questions:

Would using a participatory approach to evaluation change the youth workers' perception of evaluation and

how did the experience of using a participatory evaluation process impact on them as professionals?

Analysis of the data suggests that using the methodology made a difference to the participants. The language associated with using it was significantly different to the language used in relation to their experiences of the performativity system. Expressions of enjoyment replaced those of pain and hate. This suggests a different relationship between the youth workers and these two forms of evaluation. As Dave put it:

*I came away from that first meeting thinking I actually quite like this – it's the first evaluation that I'm actually going to enjoy and that's got more of a point to it. (Dave: first interview)*

In contrast to the experience of the accountability model of evaluation explored in the previous chapter, the youth workers found using the participatory approach to evaluation provided them with a process which they found empowering. The feelings of empowerment stemmed from the personal recognition that they were 'making a difference' to young people's lives.

Youth workers and young people were able to identify the impact of youth work and this enabled the youth workers to recognise the value of their work, boosting their confidence and esteem. All the youth workers commented on how the process had brought them together, and provided time for them to tell their stories to each other. This 'coming together' supported their sense of self, professionalism and, for some, combated feeling of isolation and exhaustion. The collective reflective discussions involved in the selection stage energised time-pressured workers and provided a peer support space in which to share good practice and support. The methodology enabled reflection. Generating the Significant Change stories both required and enabled reflection at an individual level for the young person and the youth worker and the selection stage encouraged professional debate and supported collective reflection at a deep level. The evaluation methodology required a certain amount of 'un-learning and changing', or transformation (Mezirow 2000), of everyday practice.

Using Mezirow's (2000:7) definition of transformative learning as:

the process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action

I suggest that, in this particular study, the evaluation methodology used can be seen to have been transformative in that it involved a process of re-framing evaluation that enabled a more democratic and participatory evaluation practice which is akin to the ethos of youth work. Further, the methodology 'transformed' the practice of youth work, by enabling a return to the notion of relationship and

meaningful conversation as central to youth work practice. Finally, it transformed practice by enabling a re-framing of reflective practice from an individual pursuit of 'problem-identification and rectification' to one of critical collective dialogue based on narratives of practice.

Mezirow's view of transformative learning however is not without its critics, for example, Brookfield (2000: 139) suggests that the word 'transformative' is often misused and believes 'an act of learning can be called transformative only if it involves a fundamental questioning and reordering of how one thinks or acts.' For him, simply having a more informed or a deeper understanding of something is not 'transformative'. I argue that the evaluation methodology developed through this research did involve the youth workers 'reframing and reclaiming' their conceptualisation and their practice of evaluation. Transformative Evaluation requires and enables intentional critical reflection rather than just allowing for the possibility of reflection to happen, in line with Brookfield's conceptualisation of transformative learning. Taylor (2007) identified the essential features of transformative learning in his critical review of empirical research as: critical reflection, relationships with other, engagement in dialogue. These are essential factors in the evaluation methodology. My reasoning for using the word 'Transformative' is to demonstrate that the evaluation methodology developed through this research study did not simply provide a new process to enable the youth workers to evaluate their practice but rather that the process itself brought about the development of that practice and of those practice outcomes as well. In other words, the process of evaluation itself was transformed. A challenge to this claim could be seen to rest on the question as to whether the change that appeared to result from the youth workers participation was sustained.

There is compatibility between transformative theory and the participatory evaluation used in this study in that they share a commitment to dialogue, participation and reflection (Percy 2005). Of particular interest is the essential nature of relationship and dialogue in both. Eisen's (2001) work on transformative relationships is helpful here. She identified seven qualities that contribute to making relationships transformational in her study of peer-based professional development. All but one of these can be seen as essential in the adapted form of the MSC technique used in this study. Importantly these

contributory features are present, in varying degrees, in the relationships between the youth workers and the young people as well as in the peer relationships between the youth workers, as shown in Table 5.1.

Eisen's relational qualities	Youth Worker / Young Person relationships	Youth Worker / Youth Worker relationships
Trust	Developed through on-going nature of relationship and through engagement in conversation	Developed over time through, 'close-knit' group who socialised as well as worked together
Non- evaluative feedback	The young person as the story-teller is setting the agenda, not prescribed level or standard involved	Feedback during the selection stage is focused on understanding, not 'scoring'
Non-hierarchical status	Whilst clearly there is a power imbalance, youth workers work towards equalising this power. The process supports the shift of power to the young person as story-teller.	No positional power relationships in the group however 'expert' power was present however the process is one of questioning rather than correcting.
Voluntary participation	Young peoples' engagement was voluntary	Youth workers were selected by their organisation to take part however their level of participation was voluntary.
Shared goals	Not explicitly but implicitly both parties benefitted from the experience	A real sense of 'in it together'
Authenticity	The process enabled authenticity whereas outcome-based evaluation seems to undermine it.	The process enabled authenticity whereas outcome-based evaluation seems to undermine it.
Partner selection	Not applicable /present	Not applicable /present

**Table 5.1 The Contributory Factors Supporting Transformative Relationships**

The evaluation methodology drew on the trusting relationships between the youth workers and the young people, and between the youth workers themselves to enable questioning discussions, the open sharing of information

and the achievement of consensual and mutual understanding. These relationships can be seen as transformational for the young people and for the youth workers (Eisen 2001). However, as the youth workers were already a well established group and very supportive of one another; it may be that the methodology was transformative because of the strength of their trusting relationships rather the actual process itself and this requires further research. McCormack and Kennelly (2011) talk about the three factors; connection, engagement and safety that held their groups together as conversation communities. They argued that successful conversation communities needed to be built deliberately and systematically. I believe the evaluation methodology developed for this research can provide such a systematic framework but further research will obviously be necessary to confirm this.

## **Chapter 6: Conclusions**

### **Introduction**

This concluding chapter is presented in three sections. The first section provides an overview of my findings and demonstrates how my study has addressed my research questions. This is followed by a section which explores the limitations to this thesis. In the final section I look at future directions, identifying the contribution this study has made and the ways in which I intend to take this work.

### **Addressing my research questions**

My research aim was to develop understanding about the ways in which youth workers experience accountability-focused evaluation; how their experiences impact upon their conceptualisation of evaluation; and how this informs or shapes their sense of self and practice. With the aim of adding to the very limited literature in the field of youth work, I wanted to see whether youth workers experienced managerialism in similar ways to other professionals in similar fields. Equally, I wanted to explore whether using a participatory form of evaluation would impact on the way in which youth workers perceive and practice evaluation and if so, what the consequences might be for them.

My findings show that the youth workers in this study experienced the impacts of managerialism in similar ways to practitioners in similar professions, for example in relation to their sense of being directed or controlled by externally imposed targets (Osgood 2006) and the erosion of their professional autonomy and morale (Mahony and Hextall 2000). The sense of challenge or threat to professional values was strongly expressed by the youth workers in this study: this supports the argument that managerialism has brought about the 'invasion of a different set of values' into professional practices (Reinders 2008).

Reinders's assertion that human service professionals will seriously struggle to remain faithful to their professional values is strongly supported by my findings.

My data resonate with the claim that managerialism can undermine practitioners' sense of professional self. Within the youth workers' accounts there is a recognition that sometimes they feel as if they are not working to the agenda of those they are employed to help – but rather to the tune of the funders or, more difficult still, for their own gain (Hodkinson and Issitt 1995). These feelings suggest a questioning of professional self that leaves them feeling under pressure, guilty, and inadequate (Nias 1989). This sense of self doubt is supported to some extent by the lack of evidence of the use of agency in the youth workers' accounts of managing their daily practice.

There are similarities between the data presented in this thesis and Spenceley's (2006) study of professionalism in the FE sector, particularly with regard to practitioners' loss of control of their work to external forces, namely the economy. Spenceley's term 'servant of the economy' can be equally applied to youth work. The ways in which the youth workers managed these tensions varied. Drawing on Gleeson and Shain's (1999) categories, I have suggested the majority of the youth workers adopted 'strategic compliance', finding ways to retain their professional values whilst accepting the non-negotiable aspects of the changes. This position has required them to engage in continued negotiation and has been accompanied by uncertainty. The data support a perception of accountability as a 'technology of control' (Everitt and Hardiker 1996, Dahlberg *et al.* 2007) and the associated evaluative processes as belonging to managers and/or funders (Ellis and Gregory 2008). The youth workers expressed the view that the systems of accountability were unable to capture the complexity of their work, thereby supporting the findings of Furlong and Cartmel (1997) and Merton *et al.* (2004). This expressed concern also lends support to Ball's (2003) notion of a tension between belief and representation.

In contrast, using the new evaluation methodology supported the youth workers to develop deeper and more meaningful relationships with young people. It required them to prioritise time to engage in one to one reflective conversations with young people and the methodology legitimised this activity. The new methodology promotes conversation and highlighted a lack of opportunity for

these conversations previously. This supports and extends McCormack and Kennelly's (2011) claim that reflective conversations have disappeared from daily practice by illustrating that this is not just the case between professional colleagues but also between professionals and their clients, in this case between the youth workers and young people.

The evaluation methodology encouraged young people to reflect on the outcome of their involvement with youth work and, further, it was felt that the young people's learning was extended or solidified through using the methodology. The creation of significant change stories was described as a journey in itself, further demonstrating the congruence between this approach to evaluation and youth work practice. The youth workers were able to re-conceptualise evaluation as an embedded component of youth work. This is a particularly interesting finding since it is in opposition to the commonly held perception that evaluation is an additional activity that takes place after the event. The sense that the methodology enhances daily practice has the potential to address the alienation some workers feel (Issitt and Spence 2005, Beresford and Branfield 2006, Ellis and Gregory 2008) and may support a re-engagement with the concept of evaluation.

Using the participatory methodology increased the workers' self-esteem and confidence: they identified feelings of being valued and supported by their peers and the young people (the latter was evidenced by the young peoples' feedback). This increased the workers' sense of well-being, supporting the claim that honouring 'voice' can increase practitioners' sense of efficacy (Allard *et al.* 2007). The youth workers felt the stories enabled them to inform management and to challenge external stakeholders: this demonstrates a link between self-belief and the use of agency (Osgood 2006). The participatory methodology supported collaborative activity: participants in this study placed high value on the collective, reflective, educative and supportive nature of the methodology. The collective reflective discussions involved in the selection stage energised time-pressured workers, combated isolation and provided a peer support space in which to share good practice and support. My data offer strong support to the findings of Allard *et al.* (2007), particularly in relation to their claim that active engagement in collaborative inquiry deepens reflective practice.

### **Limitations of the thesis**

As is the case in all research, the journey itself is illuminating for the researcher in regards to the effectiveness (or not) of her /his research decisions. Reflecting on my research journey there have been 'moments' when I would have done things differently and these 'moments' will inform my further practice. I know that I enjoy working in participatory ways and engaging over time with the participants of my research, but I am now much more aware of the potential hazards of 'insider' research methodologies; for example, the impact of relationship on asking challenging questions, the tendency to develop allegiance and the danger of assuming understanding. I am very aware of a 'moment' when internally I really wanted to challenge something an interviewee said as I felt that it was not a 'real' reflection of their position, however I felt unable to do this. I was disappointed with myself at the time but recognised that the supportive relationship I had developed with this interviewee acted as my barrier. I found it particularly interesting on reflection that this concern for the relationship is something that I experienced in the very early days of being a youth worker and realised that the strategy I adopted then could be applied here. In future, I will initiate a dialogue with the research group and the interviewees in the early stages with the intention of establishing agreement that, within supportive relationships, challenge is not a negative action but a caring process to develop understanding; and that trust is not so easily broken. This strategy, as with the evaluation methodology will promote 'really talking'.

I am aware that my early interviews were not as effective as they might have been; I developed a style that I was comfortable with over time. This was my first experience of conducting research interviews and, with hindsight, it would have been beneficial to have conducted a pilot interview. My learning from the first two interviews was significant and this certainly influenced those that followed. I feel my early lack of experience had minimal impact on the research data as I conducted thirteen interviews overall, including second interviews with both of the early interviewees,. However, I am now committed to carrying out pilot interviews in any future projects because of the insights they can bring, not only in terms of the questions and the process but also in terms of preparation for entering the research context.

I feel I could have made better use of the group sessions. All of my data is from individual interviews and, whilst I used the group sessions to check out my analysis of the first round of interviews, I did not collect data from these sessions. There were missed opportunities in relation to the group and I feel some of this relates to the 'false' barriers that I erected between the multiple roles that I held, particularly between the facilitating role of the evaluator and the insider researcher role. It is highly likely that I will again find myself wearing multiple hats but I feel that the experience gained through this research project will enable me to manage these 'role boundaries' more fluidly.

Finally, in terms of 'learning from doing', I certainly have a greater understanding of the commitment required to carry out a research project, not only in terms of actual time but in terms of the amount of time that it filled my 'thinking space': it effectively *became* my life at times and consequently impacted on other areas of everyday living. If I were to start the project anew, I would spend more time in the planning and preparation stage rather than 'rushing in'. The initial theoretical framing of my study was in reality an ad hoc process, taking shape as the research progressed. I set out to find and adopt that elusive 'best model' and experienced what Elliot (1990) terms one of the biggest constraints on one's development as a researcher – the presumption that this exists. I struggled with the need to accept uncertainty. I experienced feelings of chaos and floundering but in the end came to accept that 'becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable nature of "not knowing" is a crucial element of the doctoral research journey' (Wellington *et al.* 2005:32). I have learnt the importance of a 'made to measure' rather than an 'off the shelf' approach and understand that the craft is to be able to design the most appropriate process to meet the research question. What I now understand is that trust in oneself underpins much of this, and that this trust comes from a continual critically reflective conversation with oneself, supported by conversations with others, including research participants. I will address this challenge more confidently in the future, recognising that research design is as much a part of the research journey as any other stage. The confidence I have gained as a researcher will support me to be more assertive in framing future research projects.

## **Future Directions**

This research has contributed to professional knowledge in a number of ways. Firstly, it has generating insights into the ways in which the youth workers in this study experienced managerialism. It has shown that youth workers, as with other professionals in similar fields, have been serious challenged by aspects of managerialism and performativity, particularly in relation to maintaining their personal and professional values. Secondly, it has confirmed that youth workers believe accountability metrics are unable to capture adequately the complexity of their work or to demonstrate the value of their work to others. This adds strength to the call for alternative forms of evaluation.

Of particular significance is the knowledge that this study adds in regard to the design and use of participatory evaluation. The study has shown that the benefits of using a participatory approach are far-reaching; for example, in relation to outcomes for young people, for generating practice improvements and for practitioners themselves in terms of countering the negatives effects of managerialism and performativity.

I use the term 'Transformative' to indicate the potential of this participatory methodology to bring about a re-conceptualisation of the concept and practice of evaluation. Transformative Evaluation is more than an innovative process that has the potential to improve the assessment of the impact of youth work. Its real value can be seen in its ability to engage practitioners in a fundamental aspect of professionalism - the assessment of the impact of their work. This re-engagement, in turn, has the potential to influence the way in which the practitioners feel about themselves. The appreciative nature of the methodology counters the current deficit discourse associated with performativity and provides a complementary approach to evaluation that focuses on learning and practice improvement.

The adaptations made to the MSC technique are at the root of the transformative nature of this methodology in particular, the adaptation to involve the youth workers as co-constructors of the significant change stories. Co-authorship of the stories firmly placed control of the evaluation in the hands of the young person and youth worker. This was a purposeful action to challenge the status quo in which managers and funders are seen as the owners of

evaluation processes. This adaptation shifted the locus of judgement-making. Practitioners moved from a passive to an active engagement in the evaluation process, from responding to externally imposed targets to identification of impact in partnership with young people. This transformation was experienced as empowering and potentially provides a space for practitioners to find ways to 'be who they want to be', to find their voices – individually and collectively, to value themselves and to become active in the construction of their futures.

In addition, Transformative Evaluation provides a framework to encourage organisational learning through collective reflective spaces and the enhancement of dialogue up, down and across the organisation. The transformation that occurred at the practitioner level brought about change at an organisational level as was demonstrated by the changing nature of the responses from the Managers and Trustees group. This is an area I am keen to understand further as it was not the focus of this research. The potential of this new methodology to focus on collective reflective dialogue for the purpose of learning and development, which engages young people, practitioners, managers and trustees as partners in the process goes some way to creating Fetterman's vision of evaluation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century;

The future of evaluation will be characterised by critical and collaborative relationships (...) Funders, program staff members and participants will acquire the capacity to monitor and assess critical aspects of their own performance. (Fetterman 2001: 381)

Further research is required to continue the development of Transformative Evaluation in order to realise the potential of the methodology and to deepen understanding about the factors which maximise its potential. I want to explore the conditions which support this kind of approach, to focus on its benefits on a range of stakeholders; for example, the organisation as a whole and the young people involved as well as the youth workers or other practitioners. I would like to explore whether Transformative Evaluation is transferable across professions, or whether it relies primarily on the participative relationship between youth worker and young person. Further research could also usefully focus on the issue of gender as I did not address this in my study. It would be interesting to understand more about the ways in which men and women react

to changing 'professionalisms' and whether or not they respond in similar or different ways to a participatory form of evaluation.

I am seeking opportunities to disseminate my findings through conference papers and the publication of articles in order to add to the limited literature on participatory evaluation methodologies. I delivered a conference paper at the *International Conference on Youth Work and Youth Studies* at Strathclyde University in August 2012 (see appendix 5 for abstract). I am certain that the conclusion of my doctoral research marks the beginning of an exciting journey as I set out to further explore and develop my knowledge, understanding and expertise in concept and practice of evaluation.

## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Example of a Most Significant Change (MSC) story

#### **DAVE'S STORY:**

##### ***The young person's story...***

*"I got banned from the Centre then the youth worker came into my work and I walked in from 'after school' to work. My boss and the youth worker were sitting down drinking tea and chatting. They decided that it would be a good idea to run a tuck shop at the centre and asked me to run it. A week after I got together my stock and float and starting running my tuck shop. I then turned into a supportive good boy from a badly behaved boy. I think now that I run my tuck shop I have made progress with my behaviour and have become more helpful in the sessions. I am really happy working with the community and my behaviour has improved."*

##### ***The youth worker says...***

*"Dave has presented challenging behaviour over a lengthy period of time; he can be rude and aggressive and is easily influenced but also influential. He seemed to persistently be in trouble in the community and was regularly excluded for short periods because of his behaviour. Since getting involved and taking responsibility for running the tuck shop, his behaviour has changed drastically. Engaging him in the running of the tuck shop, enabling him to exercise some power and control, to take responsibility for his actions has giving him the opportunity to break a cycle of negative behaviour. He now takes of the role of challenging the behaviour of others, using his influence in a positive way. He still has a way to go, but progress to date is very encouraging."*

##### ***This story was selected as the most significant in the domain because...***

The youth workers group selected this story as a significant change story as it demonstrates the value of working in a community. Outreach working allows youth workers to build relationships with key members of the community and this story demonstrates how the youth worker was able to work with the

employer and the young person to create a developmental opportunity for the young person. Young people may take on different roles in different contexts, the young person in work was 'different' to how he was in the centre, by drawing these two spheres together the young person was able to change a negative pattern of behaviour.

***This story was chosen as the most significant story overall because....***

This story was chosen by the Managers and Trustees group because it demonstrates how to channel a young person's aggression / challenging behaviour into something positive by giving him responsibility and status of a different kind. This example shows how the workers never gave up and eventually enlisted the help of the employer to persuade Dave to take on a challenge and no doubt support him with it. Overall this story demonstrates the workers' persistence, eventually they were able to find a way of helping him, the club and the community showing that positive outcomes are achievable to the benefit of the youth and the community and the business community.

Appendix 2: Extract from coded transcript

Exploratory comments	Emma's second interview	Emerging themes
	R: my first question is about your experience of using this technique to evaluate your work, so just how you found it?	
<p><i>Use of umm – indicating difficulty in articulating experience or getting back in touch?</i></p> <p><i>All said before / repeating myself – some reluctance to being interviewed again?</i></p> <p>Confirming position expressed in first interview</p> <p>New stuff about combating isolation</p>	<p>D: right, ok, umm, I need to get my brain in gear cos I'm not in XXXX mode, ummm, yeah, it had its ups and downs, I think, like we've all said before really, I do feel like I'm probably going to be repeating myself from in our group situations and in my previous meeting with you, you know, the good things were; we got to see different aspects of our work and see where young people have come from and where they are now, which is really good but then on the other side that whole competition thing of why would one story be chosen over the other when it's all relative and, ummm but then its also been good hearing about people you maybe don't work with so much, what they've been doing in their centres cos sometimes we are all in our little worlds so I think that was good as well, it's quite time-consuming but I think that's just from a work</p>	<p>Collective spaces (Working together)</p>

<p>Time factor – additional burden</p>	<p>perspective, you now, none of us really, obviously none of us were given any extra time to do the thing so we were kind of squeezing it into already hours that go over umm I think that's probably it really</p>	
	<p>R: it does seem that the time thing is something that a lot of people talk about; do you think you're busier now than you were like 6 months ago, a year ago, 5 years ago?</p>	
<p>More busy because of accountability and more responsibility because of nature of funding</p> <p>Changing pattern of work – depends on demand (from young people)</p> <p>Sense of pressure and not quite making it</p>	<p>D: ummm yeah, I would say so just because, ummm, even things like Child Protection, Health &amp; Safety or anything like that, there's much more that we have to be adhering to now and there's much more that we have to be online with and more responsibility gets handed over to the youth workers because of funding ummm and, it goes through fits and starts, you could go through 6 months when you need to do loads of 1-1 work that you don't have hours for and then you could have 6 months of not doing that, but then there's always something else to be doing, there's always emails being sent around, loads of stuff going on which you just don't have time to help young people get to really, so I think we are</p>	<p>accountability</p>

	busier but I think it's a different busy from before so,	
	R: that's interesting, a different 'busy' – does it feel more, I don't know, how is it different, try to get hold of that, I think I know what you mean but	
<p><i>Repeated use of more to add emphasis</i></p> <p>Not just management – also about funding and competition</p> <p>Needing to prove something that is extremely difficult to prove</p> <p>Not comfortable place to be</p> <p>Questioning of self – of purpose</p> <p>At what expense? – values dilemma</p>	<p>D: ummm, I think we just have, we get given more pressures and more responsibility and that's not just because of management, it is partly to do with management, but it's partly to do with the nature of youth work and funding and everyone's fighting for the same pots now so we're being asked to prove ourselves more and asking, being asked to prove youth work more and distance travelled and the value of youth work and outcomes and targets and umm you know, the very nature of youth work, that's the opposite of all those things so I think we get pushed out of our comfort zones and why we went into the job in the first place in order, yes to bring in funding which is important but at the expense of what really, ummm and you're pushing young people sometimes in a certain direction to meet the targets of the funding or ummm yeah, I just think its changes quite a lot even in the 3.5 years I've</p>	<p>Accountability</p> <p>External control:</p> <p>Losing purpose: selling our souls?</p> <p>values dilemma</p>

	been with XXX so	
	R: when you say pushing young people in a particular direction?	
Funding driving the work  The right work? Who would decide what is the right work	D: yeah say there's funding for, I don't know 'EATSA' funding for healthy living – if they just want to come in and hang out or do, I don't know, sexual health for example in that session, and we've planned a session around cooking and none of them want to do cooking we have to be proving that we're doing healthy living because we got the funding for it. So sometimes, you know, we get funding for stuff that there's a need for and that's how the funding has come about because the young people or the workers have recognised a need and other times, we get funding, were told we've got this funding and we need now to do A, B C and D. So sometimes it's about getting the money rather than doing the right work and other times it does stem from a need	External control  values dilemma
	R: How much control do you feel you have over what you do?	
No control – <i>heads above the water</i> – struggling to survive – same for managers and practitioners	D: at the moment – none. But then that's funding, we're all really struggling, management is struggling, organisations are struggling so I think we're all just trying to keep our heads above the water at	Surviving

<p>Is this a personal worry? Job insecurity?</p> <p>Hardest time...big society policy</p> <p>Selling ourselves</p>	<p>the moment, personally, financially, work-wise , you know, and its going to have a knock-on effect on young people you know, even things like working tax credits going down and stuff like that, a knock-on effect on young people and families and relationship breakdowns which will then come through us but then are we going to be able to provide that help and support service, and if not what will happen umm so yeah, I think, yeah it's just a different time, it's definitely the hardest it's been since I've been doing youth work, especially with the change of government stuff and privatising community work and rather than it coming from the government so that means we have to be selling ourselves more and more to local communities if they get funding then we're the ones they pick umm but we are in most communities already so that's one thing that goes in our favour</p>	<p>Pessimism</p> <p>External control: selling ourselves</p>
	<p>R: you're in quite a good position as an organisation?</p>	
	<p>D: yeah, in one way</p>	
	<p>R: ok, so 3 things there I think you've said about the technique itself so one of the things was about competition, that was one of</p>	



<p>Confirmation of earlier interview comment</p>	<p>have 10 stories and say these should go through so I think putting them in some kind of order cos then you could have a story from each different area of youth work which is good, ummm its hard cos there was good and not so good at every stage really so ummm but I don't know what the answers are really, I think, and again getting young people to say the stories is, I just, I don't think there is any perfect way of measuring youth work unless you know the young person, yeah, I don't really know how to answer that question</p>	
	<p>R: I guess that the process starts off with the person who knows the young person, so, you for example, when you're collecting your story, you know about that, you have a real good understanding of that and then you bring it to the group and you have to share that with the group and some, the group will understand to some level because you're all part of a team and you all do youth work, but they won't understand it to the same extent because they weren't there, and the next group who know less about youth work</p>	

<p>Supported the opportunity for the youth worker to add context to the story</p>	<p>D: they're more distant, I think it's good that we got to give a bit of background information to try to put it more in context on behalf of the young person, I think that's good because you could have 2 sentences that the youth worker would know was a really big deal, or you could have a whole page that didn't seem like such a big deal, but then if the youth worker put it in context and where it comes from, I think that's really good because that gets us to sort of facilitate on their behalf really – of how big a deal it was for them</p>	
	<p>R: is there any benefit in the process for young people, do you think they got anything out of it or not?</p>	
<p><i>Umm / silence –thinking about this- uncomfortable about saying no?</i></p>	<p>D: umm, (long silence)I think a little ,like personally a tiny bit, I wouldn't say yeah cos some of the stories you were literally like trying to drag out of them, so if young people don't want to talk about it then that's fine, then there's young people who always want to talk all the time which is fine, umm so I think for some of them, they got to, like there were a couple of them we didn't know how they felt about the group and then we found out and we</p>	<p>Encourages</p>

<p>More beneficial for youth workers to find out things about the young people – <u>this doesn't happen normally?</u></p> <p>Some benefits for young people</p>	<p>thought oh that's really positive, we didn't know that so I actually think it was more beneficial for the youth workers to know, to find out stuff they didn't know before, more than the young people, umm, but I guess for some of them it gave them a chance to talk about how they feel they've changed, or how far they've come, like some of the ones in I, cos I know the young people in I as well cos I used to work there so I know how far they've come, so helping them to see it on paper or verbalise with support of a youth worker or from their mouths how far they've come I think is a good thing because they might not have thought about but I think that's equally the same for the youth worker as well, so</p>	<p>meaningful engagement with yp</p> <p>Apt process</p> <p>Encourages yp to reflect</p> <p>Identifying learning</p>
	<p>R: what was your least favourite part of doing it?</p>	
<p>Time factor</p> <p>Rejecting stories: competition</p>	<p>D: The time (big emphasis) laughs – that's the honest answer, like practically the time, it's very time consuming, other than that, probably just the fact that 2 stories out of a possible 10 get put forward and it does so, not for me personally, but in the process there's that rejection of even though it's not on purpose there is a rejection of stories that haven't made it for whatever reason when</p>	<p>Time</p> <p>Rejecting stories:</p>

	actually in reality they should all go through umm, so I think that's the hardest bit probably	competition
	R: Ok and what was the best bit (12.15)	
<p>Collective dialogue</p> <p>What is distance travelled / what is an achievement : fundamental youth work questions being debated</p> <p>See the work of others / support colleagues</p>	<p>D: umm, best bit, I think probably was discussing why a story should go through and why it shouldn't and finding out what everyone thought, either individually or as a group as to what is distance travelled and what is an achievement for a young person and working out who has come the furthest and who has achieved the most and I think that was quite good for everyone to see where young people have come from and where they are now with their colleagues cos as I said we all work in such different places, I think it's really important to know what's going on and even being able to support your colleagues or you know, help support those young people that have still got stuff going on that you may not have known about , you can offer support, advice cos we all have quite different skills as well so I think that's good,</p>	<p>Collective spaces (working together)</p> <p>Professional debate / Enhancing reflective practice</p>
	R: yeah	

	D: recognising the diversity of the young people that we have I think is quite good cos we have very different stories, even if there were 5 clumped together under one section, they were all very different as well, so I think that's good	Apt process
	R: I guess that is one of the issues, that because all those young people are at different points in their lives and in their development as people that actually it's really hard to compare and contrast cos actually they are, as you say, all completely different	
	D: absolutely	
	R: and each step is important to that individual	

## Appendix 3: Example of individual theme table

### First Interview

Themes	Page	Keywords and phrases
<i>External Control</i>	p.2/3	' we did self reflection and with colleagues, having chats afterwards, filling in an evaluation form at the end of each session that was pretty much what we were doing until the last year, so now we have pregnancy safeguarding forms, general safeguarding forms, individual monitoring forms, session evaluation forms, IAG form, referral forms, obviously CAF paperwork, CAFs, - I'm sure there's lots more as well, but I probably can't remember it, database forms all that kind of stuff'
Paperwork	1:3	' sometimes I feel it takes up more time than me actually being with young people'
	1:5	' it's going to take away from the ground work'
	1:6	' us doing that paperwork is going to mean us potentially slacking in other areas sometimes and young people will suffer'
	1:5	' being told a lot at the moment that the project is being watched due to the fluctuation of numbers'
Monitoring	1:6	' being watched in terms of what we're doing, how we're recording, whether we're doing our job properly and not being slack'
	1:6	' it's what you have to put down, so you either condense it'

Inapt system	1:6	' the paperwork is only half a story', ' isn't always necessarily a clear picture of the reality'
Competition for funding	p.4	'with more competing for funding, a change in government , more paper trails' 'the battle for funding now is becoming more fierce'
Accountability	p.4	' they need more proof of what we have been doing to get that money, so like just speaking about it or getting a young person to tell them isn't enough anymore - its fierce competition'
External control	p.13	' the funding is getting so limited and competitive we basically apply for funding and fulfil the work rather than speak to the young people and apply for funding cos it might not be there'
	p.14	'but sometimes they get quite frustrated 'why are we doing this, we don't want to do this' and then management say 'oh you've just got to make it more fun for them, how do they want to do it – well, what if they don't want to do it – what are we suppose to do? But we have to do it so, it just a vicious circle'
Playing the game	p.17	' I love my job, I love doing youth work, it's just how its changing so much at the moment is what I find a bit hard, that we're having to play the game and actually who is benefitting from that actually...'
External control	p.18	' we're playing a game now, I think we've lost a lot of our ethos of youth work, of coming right from where the young people are and then going out from there, it's definitely much more the other way

	p.17	round now ... ' the government and the funders because they've got control over the young people really'
	p.17/18	' there's no generic pots of youth funding that I'm aware of anymore, it's all very specific whether that's to do with the government or due to other things so I don't always think it's about meeting the young people's needs now, it's about what everyone else thinks their needs are and then we have to go with that
<i>Performativity</i>		
Responding to management demands	p.5	'management's on our case'
	1:15	' when management are moaning about numbers and paperwork all the time and I just think for **** sake, what about all the stuff that we do on the ground'
	1:16	' we were doing a bit of everything to try get something done but not enough time to focus on one, the money to focus on one'
	1:16	'explain how we're trying to with the time we have, we're all part-time, and with the resources we have that's as far as we can go and by the end I think he realised we were trying to do it'
Increasing workloads	1:5	'I've got to do this but I also have to plan sessions, I've got to do 1:1s there's always an event to plan and stuff like that, there's always stuff going on,
	1:7	' Some sessions got cancelled last week because of the snow so that for us was brilliant cos it meant we could do other things'

	1:17	'because I've been doing so many other things'
<i>Experiencing Participatory evaluation</i> Identifying learning	1:10	'a young person might not be able to point out that themselves or assess themselves in that way, the things that they've come forward on which is part of our job'
Working together Supports young people's reflection Encourages group reflection	1:12	'we get to see other peoples as well which I think is an encouragement to us and to other workers and you know, everyone else gets to see 'oh I've got a similar problem, what did you guys do with them?' so even though that's not what it's about I think that that can be quite helpful as well'

#### Second Interview

Themes	Page	Keywords and phrases
<i>External control</i> performativity	2:2	'there's much more that we have to be adhering to now and there's much more that we have to be online with and more responsibility gets handed over to the youth workers because of funding'
Values dilemmas	2:2	'there's always something else to be doing, there's always emails being sent around, loads of stuff going on which you just don't have time to help young people get to really, so I think we are busier but I think it's a different busy from before'
	2:3	'bring in funding which is important but at the expense of what really'
	2:3	'you're pushing young people sometimes in a certain direction to meet the targets of the funding'
Surviving	2:4	'sometimes it's about getting the money rather than doing the right work'

Selling ourselves	2:4	'we're all really struggling, management is struggling, organisations are struggling so I think we're all just trying to keep our heads above the water at the moment'
	2:3	'so I think we get pushed out of our comfort zones and why we went into the job in the first place in order, yes to bring in funding which is important but at the expense of what really,'
	2:5	we have to be selling ourselves more and more'
	2:15	'Are we doing this because we want to sell ourselves to local council men'
<i>MSC Improving Practice</i>		
Enabling collective spaces – working together	2:1	'sometimes we are all in our little worlds'
	2:9/10	'discussing why a story should go through and why it shouldn't and finding out what everyone thought, either individually or as a group as to what is distance travelled and what is an achievement for a young person and working out who has come the furthest and who has achieved the most'
Identifying learning: Encouraging young people to reflect	2:10	'we all work in such different places, I think it's really important to know what's going on and even being able to support your colleagues'
	2:8	'it gave them a chance to talk about how they feel they've changed, or how far they've come'
	2:8	'I actually think it was more beneficial for the youth workers to know, to find out stuff they didn't know before'
Encouraging meaningful	2:17	'making sure we give the opportunity to young people and that we take the opportunity ourselves

<p>engagement</p> <p>Enhancing reflective practice</p>		<p>to be able to sit down and talk to them'</p>
	<p>2:17</p>	<p>'it definitely made me want to take more time, rather than just ask about their day, to say "how do you think you're getting on here?"'</p>
<p>performativity</p>	<p>2:3</p>	<p>'we get given more pressures and more responsibility'</p>
	<p>2:3</p>	<p>'it's partly to do with the nature of youth work and funding and everyone's fighting for the same pots'</p>
	<p>2:13/14</p>	<p>'it just felt all a bit rush really, but then that's always the way, we always get stuck with time'</p>
	<p>2:17</p>	<p>'it (meaningful engagement with young people) does get forgot because you're constantly on the go'</p>
	<p>2:9</p>	<p>'there is a rejection of stories that haven't made it for whatever reason when actually in reality they should all go through'</p>

#### Appendix 4: Example of Group Level Theme 'Making a Difference'

Theme	Extract	Page
An empowering process	A: and we can use it to realise that the work we do is really valuable	1:18
	A: a bit of a pat on the back	1:37
	A: it will give us ammunition to justify the work that we do	1:37
	A: making ourselves realise that the work we're doing is really important'	1:37
	B: was a bit of a boost for me	1:37
	B: Just nice to know that the sessions that you've been running, that young people feel that they've, made a difference to them	1:38
	B: it's just that sense that you know what we're doing is worthwhile	2:7
	B: it's a way to show our work's value	2:3
	C: to look and think "wow, we have actually made a difference"	2:3
	C: so for me it was just like "yeah, actually all that hard work you put into it is worth it	2:22
	C: half the time youth workers spend a lot of time fighting the fight for young people that we don't do it for ourselves	1:33
	C: it has made me feel that actually there was some really good stories that came out of there and you know, even when it really crappy, for young people it is valuable for them	2:30
	D: you've got something there that you can actually	

	<p>look at and say ‘wow, we’ve made a difference’ so it actually reinforces your work, makes the workforce a lot happier, we’re doing the right thing and it gives us confidence in what we’re doing’</p> <p>D: it will still encourage staff to know what they’re doing is making a difference</p> <p>F: it would be nice, in an ideal world, you’d have these kind of conversations with managers in respect of giving them an insight into kind of the work that’s going on in a bit more depth’</p> <p>G: there are issues that go in the stories that I actually want senior management to understand what is happening</p> <p>H: it’s showing the positive things that individual workers are doing and individual centres are doing and highlighting the achievement of young people who deserve that recognition</p> <p>H: it’s really lovely to spend some time doing this – it feels good and I leave the meetings elated and feeling stress-free instead of leaving the meetings feeling ‘arrgh, I’ve got loads to do’, it is helping us as individuals</p>	<p>1:26</p> <p>1:27</p> <p>1:18</p> <p>1:11</p> <p>1:15</p> <p>1:21</p>
Working together	<p>A: it was nice to be able to prioritise having the time to meet up and you knew you were going to have a good couple of hours to speak with your colleagues</p> <p>A: it’s the time we’ve spent talking about it, time spent reflecting</p> <p>B: it makes you feel quite good actually seeing all the stuff that’s going on throughout the projects</p> <p>B: to see all those projects as a whole cos sometimes</p>	<p>2:6</p> <p>1:37</p> <p>2:6</p>

	<p>you're quite in the zone</p> <p>B: nice for everyone to come together we don't always get the opportunity to do that as a group</p> <p>C: it gives you the wider awareness cos I think sometimes you, cos the work is so intense you can be very inward about your own work</p> <p>E: we get to see other peoples as well which I think is an encouragement to us and to other workers and you know, everyone else gets to see 'oh I've got a similar problem, what did you guys do with them?</p> <p>E: sometimes we are all in our little worlds'</p> <p>E: we all work in such different places, I think it's really important to know what's going on and even being able to support your colleagues</p> <p>F: nice as a staff group to find out what we all thought about the different stories that were collected</p> <p>F: having space, sitting down together, that was my overall favourite thing</p> <p>G: I've particularly liked that group deciding situation, good to see how people react</p>	<p>2:10</p> <p>2:10</p> <p>2:18</p> <p>1:12</p> <p>2:1</p> <p>2:10</p> <p>1:1</p> <p>1:1</p> <p>1:26</p>
Enhancing reflective practice	<p>B: and actually for us as well I think as really good way of realising what young people have got from it</p> <p>B: it's a good way to reflect on the work you're doing</p> <p>B: actually what came out was almost completely different than what you were thinking in your own</p>	<p>2:2</p> <p>2:23</p>

	head	2:9
	D: stuff that came up that I wasn't expecting to come up	
	D: that reflection is good to do and I should make more time to actually reflect on what we've done	2:6
	E: I actually think it was more beneficial for the youth workers to know, to find out stuff they didn't know before	2:11
	F: I think it can only improve practice cos it makes you reflective doesn't it and we should be doing that all the time	2:8
	H: it allows reflection	1:18
	H: just reminiscing about that experience, for both of us, and her perspective of that experience was different to what mine was, so that was interesting as well, different view of the outcome and a different view of what she got out of it than what I expected	1:10 1:10
	H: your knowledge of young people and what they're getting up to and actually, maybe they need a bit of work on this maybe we can help them with that, and never really thought of that before	1:13

### **Transformative Evaluation: Changing the way we think about evaluation**

Much has been written about the impact of managerialism on public services; however its impact in youth work is under-explored. The introduction of externally imposed targets has brought changes to the way in which youth workers go about their daily practice. To investigate these changes an innovative evaluation methodology, Transformative Evaluation (TE) was developed. TE was designed to be participatory and appreciative in nature in stark contrast to the deficit outcomes based accountability processes in use.

This paper draws on my doctoral research project which took place in a voluntary sector youth organisation in the south west of England. It involved eight youth workers using TE over a period of 14 months. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the youth workers at the beginning and end of their participation.

A number of themes emerged from the analysis, two of which I present in this paper; the first relates to the youth worker's practice, the second relates to the youth workers' sense of professional self. The first theme provides evidence that using Transformative Evaluation (TE) enhanced the youth workers' opportunities to engage in 'meaningful conversations' with young people. The second theme supports a claim that using TE was empowering for the youth workers and supported and enabled their reflective practice.

In contrast to the de-professionalising nature of managerialism and performativity, it is argued in this paper that TE not only enabled the youth workers to identify and articulate the positive outcomes of youth work, but importantly using TE enhanced their practice and their sense of professional self. The synergy between professionalism and evaluation is of interest in the field of youth work and beyond, changing the way in which practitioners conceptualise evaluation may enable a more agentic response to externally imposed changes and thus a more positive outlook for the future.

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