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18. Every Child/Youth Matters, a government programme for welfare reform; the research findings of a Pilot Study conducted for a PhD research project that is focused on: exploring the impact of the Every Child/Youth Matters programmes on professional practice across the agencies of education, social services, health and youth justice

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Summary

Much has already been written and will continue to be written about the rationale for the Every Child Matters/Youth Matters (ECM/YM) programme (hereafter referred to as ECM). I chose it as the focus of my research proposal because I have a deep interest in the underlying principles that have led to the introduction of the ECM programmes as a result of my professional background. I have been a teacher and manager in schools for over thirty years and I worked as an Ofsted inspector from 2001 – 2005. As well as my research work, I also work in schools as an educational consultant for the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL). My research for this PhD thesis focuses on just how the sweeping changes proposed through ECM are being implemented and the impact they may or not be having on the working practice of professionals across the welfare agencies.

The main purpose of this paper is to:

- outline the processes of analysis and interpretation of these findings, for which I used selected tools from the Grounded Theory process;
- explain how I was able to induct three hypotheses from the research findings and how these helped me to shape the focus and direction of my final study;
- summarise the findings from my Pilot Study, which comprised a series of loosely-structured interviews with professionals and young people from across the agencies concerned.

One of my intentions is to ground my writing and research firmly in the field of the workers, managers, children, parents and young people who are the direct recipients of the ECM agendas. These findings are drawn from original data and are in no way shaped around or attributable to what the legislation and government documentation tells us should be happening.

Keywords

Integrated services / targeted support / vulnerability / performance indicators

Summary of the three key, inducted findings from the Pilot Study research data

Induction 1 The intelligent use of ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ data by the different welfare agencies (education, health, social services and youth justice) helps to:

- a) pinpoint/identify need and vulnerability amongst children, young people and their families and

- b) provide a meaningful evaluation of or judgement about, children and young people’s achievement.

The actual process of identifying these hard-to-reach groups does not necessarily probe the different cohorts (of children, young people and their families) sufficiently to identify the most vulnerable and the neediest.

Questions arising

The Every Child Matters programmes for change have certainly raised awareness across the different agencies of the heightened need to support the most vulnerable children and young people through effective, integrated services. However the Pilot Study research data shows that the actual process of identifying these hard-to-reach groups does not work as well as it might because of the nature of the centralised, performance indicators used.

Induction 2 Support that is accurately targeted at the most vulnerable children and young people enables the effective integration of services to support them and monitors the circumstances that might make them more vulnerable.

Questions arising

Where support for children, young people and their families is targeted to match their particular needs, there is evidence of an effective integration of services and early intervention. This suggests an effective approach to providing welfare services that are driven by *need* rather than *supply*. However, if this type of targeted support is triggered by centralised indicators, are those children and young people who are *not* at the lowest end of the socio-economic spectrum having their needs identified appropriately? Are they receiving less effective support from the universal services?

Induction 3 The way agency teams are structured and how/why they meet, directly affects how information on children and young people is used to implement support for them.

Questions arising

From the research data it appears that those teams that meet regularly and have a full representation across the agencies, exchange and use information effectively. The research data also shows that often the very localised nature of such a system is a major factor in its effectiveness. Therefore, is a national database for the most vulnerable children and young people really what is required?

Context and background of the research

The politics of New Labour provides an interesting discourse through which to analyse the language used by the government in its documentation for ECM and the way in which it has structured the aims of the ECM programme for change. An important element of the Labour party's 'third way' governance that has underpinned many of its revised social policies is its declared commitment to acting **in partnership with agencies** to foster community renewal and development. Nowhere has this aim been more clearly declared than within the ECM documentation, evident in the emphasis placed on multi agency working, and the need to involve 'other schools....culture, sports and play organisations and the voluntary and community sector' (DfES 2004:12). 'The reform of the state and government should be a basic orienting principle of third way politics – of deepening and widening democracy. This new "mixed economy" can only be effective if existing welfare institutions are thoroughly modernised' (Giddens, 1998). It was this shift in thinking that prompted – amongst many others - the transformational changes to social policy that championed the Every Child/Youth Matters programmes. These programmes for change proposed to address the inequalities of the 'old way' social democracy, through a modernising agenda, where public services that are

delivered locally, becoming *more user-centred and focused*. The government recommended the implementation of a significant organisational change that would help achieve the aims of the ECM programmes; 'key services for children should be integrated within a single organisational focus locally and nationally' (DfES 2003:9). This issue of integrated services figures significantly in one of the findings of my Pilot Study. Another of the aims of ECM is to address the achievement gap that exists between children from the opposite ends of the socio-economic spectrum. The government stated:

- ... the gap in achievement between different socio-economic classes, and the number of children who are the victims of crime;
- ... we need to do more to catch up with other countries. Overall this is a country where life chances are unequal;
- Our aim is to ensure that every child has the chance to fulfil their potential by reducing levels of educational failure, ill health, substance misuse, teenage pregnancy, abuse, neglect, crime and anti-social behaviour among children and young people. (DfES, 2003)

The intention of my research proposal was to conduct a closer examination of these proposed aims of the ECM programme in order to gain an insight into the potential conflict between what the government is actually proposing – or espousing – through these extensive welfare reforms and what is actually engaged with 'on the ground' by the professionals who are to deliver these changes. This has close links with the reality-rhetoric dichotomy referred to by Fairclough (2000:142). At the heart of this paper is the question: are Labour's proposed welfare reforms, through the ECM agenda delivering

a more user-centred and tailored provision for children, young people and their families?

The processes of analysis and interpretation

My analysis of the findings from my Pilot Study was based on selected analytic tools taken from the process of Grounded Theory. It is important to state that I have been selective in the application of Glaser and Strauss's writings on Grounded Theory to the analysis of my research data. I have chosen to use those analytical tools that I identified as useful to my own research, rather than attempting to apply the process of Grounded Theory wholesale. The main tools I used were:

- i. Coding and abstracting categories from the data;
- ii. Comparing incident with incident;
- iii. Dimensionalisation and integration of the categories.

In my analysis of the interview transcripts, I coded by hand the main categories (identified through the literature review) which included any additional references that further encapsulated the essence of each category. This helped to identify further categories as they emerged from the 'language of the research' (Glaser and Strauss, 2007:107) and built up into an extended list of coded categories. I also recorded analytic memos, which identified the shifts in – or different emphases of – my thinking in response to the data. Through comparing the incidence of each category across the interviews with respondents from other agencies and in different roles, the nature of the main categories changed and developed to reflect the many different nuances of their occurrence in the data. Through this method of constant comparison the further development of categories emerged. The following is one example:

Managing change

This category was constructed from the Literature Review and referred to:

- how the new ECM programmes are being managed within Children’s Services in local authorities;
 - how the agencies are introducing the programmes into their own practice;
 - how the programmes are actually facilitating the five outcomes and the chief aims of ECM.
- a) After initial analysis, the new category of **‘structure and planning’** emerged through ‘abstraction from the language’ (Glaser & Strauss, 2007:107) of the research and comparison with incidents from other interviews. Further, related categories that emerged included: models for change; new structures; co-ordination of support; re-structuring in response to ECM.
- b) **‘Structure and planning for ECM’** emerged as the final, newly-defined category, because the properties this incorporates best encapsulate the way most respondents described how the new ECM programmes were actually being implemented in their particular domain. This newly-defined category takes account of the structure of management teams, support for the new programmes by senior management and the way support for the most vulnerable children and families was co-ordinated within the communities.

I was careful to transcribe and analyse the evidence given by respondents in such a way that made it clear whether they worked at different levels of seniority within the same local authority or if their areas of responsibility were distinct from one another. For example, with reference to the initial category of ‘managing change’, the respondent who managed the Youth Offending Team in a local authority talked about aspects such as the size and structure of the team and streamlining of different roles. This reflected his **strategic view** of structure and change. The respondents who worked in education referred to aspects such as how the support for children and young people was actually delivered within the communities. This reflected a more **operational view** of structure.

The polarisation apparent across this dimensional continuum served further to inform my identification of new categories/sub-categories that might emerge as significant to my analysis. The above process helped me to ‘begin thinking in terms of the full range of types or continua of the category, its dimensions, the conditions under which it is pronounced or minimised, its major consequences....and its other properties’ (Glaser and Strauss, 2007:107).

Inducting hypotheses from the research findings

After analysing the interview transcripts I wrote out, in longhand, the findings from each of the interviews and put these into a

Operational (Education)
Issues arising: delivery of changes “on the ground” within the communities; partnerships that supported the changes; where and how training for this took place.

Strategic (Youth Offending Team)
Issues arising: systems - centralised or localised; influence of senior management team (SMT); need to eliminate duplications within roles; size of SMT in Children’s Services seen as a strength.



table format. From the first analysis of the research data I identified some 12 categories and many more sub-categories. Within these there were many overlaps and duplications within the data, and through further analysis I was able to reduce the number of main categories to four, each with some 8 – 10 sub-categories. This process is what Glaser and Strauss describe as ‘taking out non-relevant properties...integrating details of properties...and – most important – reduction’ (2007:110). Further comparison and analysis gave rise to yet more reduction, until I was satisfied I had pinpointed the most original and significant data with which to consider drawing out my hypothesis or theory.

The final set of research data I produced from the above analysis, contained **three key issues** that underpinned the resultant three main findings – each of which had its origins in both the categories and sub-categories. I was pleased with this outcome because each of the issues clearly reflected (as a result of applying the analytic tools) an integration of the data and had extracted the most significant elements from the research data. Glaser and Strauss refer to these elements of data as ‘elements of theory’. My final task was to induct, from these elements

of theory the findings that would help me to set the direction for the final study for my thesis.

Main findings from analysis of the Pilot Study research data

1. **The first finding** showed that the ECM programmes have certainly raised awareness within the welfare agencies of the heightened need to support the most vulnerable children, young people and families through effective, integrated services. The research data also shows that the actual process of identifying these hard-to-reach groups does not work as well as it might and that the indicators may need to be re-assessed. In one local authority from the Pilot Study, the agencies of youth justice and education worked together to identify isolated pockets of pressing need within the community that hitherto had not been recognised. This was achieved through the use of a new set of indicators that recognised many different forms of vulnerability. A whole new framework of indicators was pioneered that identified a number of families who clearly had need of support, but historically had not ‘scored’ the requisite number of

	Elements of theory
	Leadership and management: systems have generated centralised performance indicators for assessment and evaluation.
Category 1	These and other types of indicators are used to trigger support for children and young people and to evaluate their achievement.
Induction 1	
i. The intelligent use of ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ data (by the agencies) helps to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) pinpoint/identify need and vulnerability amongst children, young people and their families and b) provide a meaningful evaluation of or judgement about, children and young people’s achievement. 	
ii. The actual process of identifying these hard-to-reach groups does not necessarily probe the different cohorts (of children and young people) sufficiently to identify the most vulnerable and the neediest.	

Every Child/Youth Matters, a government programme for welfare reform

	Elements of theory
	Assessment of the needs of children and young people.
Category 2	Targeted support for the most vulnerable children and young people enables early intervention.
Induction 2 Support that is accurately targeted at the most vulnerable children and young people enables the effective integration of services to support them and monitors the circumstances that might make them more vulnerable.	

government ‘indicators’ to trigger support. If significant degrees of vulnerability are not being identified through application of these centralised government indicators, are they actually supporting the fundamental aims of the ECM programmes? Similarly, provision of services is also measured, or judged, by the inspectorates using prescribed, centralised sets of indicators. So it might be that successful outcomes of provision are being missed (and similarly, inadequate outcomes misinterpreted as adequate), because the quantifiable outcome is what is measured, not the underlying factors that are qualitative – but no less significant.

2. **The second finding** showed that where support for children, young people and their families is targeted to match their particular needs and levels of vulnerability, there is evidence of an effective integration of services and early intervention. This is evidence of a multi disciplinary approach to providing welfare services that more effective because they are **driven by need rather than supply**. Targeted support also serves to monitor the most vulnerable people and help them avoid other causes of vulnerability such as mental health issues, alcohol and drugs. If this type of targeted support is triggered mainly by indicators such as

those centrally prescribed by the government it poses a further question. Are those children and young people who are *not* at the extremes of need receiving less effective support from the universal services? Could this mean that the quality of welfare support provided to children and young people through the ECM programmes is actually favouring those identified as most vulnerable and perhaps failing to give effective support to ‘the rest’?

3. **The third finding** was concerned with the how effectively the welfare agencies worked together. From the research data, it is apparent that the way agency teams are structured and how and why they meet directly affects how information on children, young people and their families is used to structure support for them. Those teams that meet regularly and have a full representation across the agencies exchange and use information effectively, to trigger support and early intervention. Where teams met with the specific purpose of identifying the most vulnerable children and young people, early intervention was successful and prevented them from getting into further trouble. The research data shows that often it was precisely the localised nature of such a system that was the major factor in its effectiveness. Where teams are familiar

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	Elements of theory
	Integrated services and the extent to which agencies work together to support children and young people.
Category 3	The extent to which agency teams exchange and use information about children and young people.
Induction 3 The way agency teams are structured and how/why they meet directly affects how information on children and young people is used to implement support for them.	

with the information about children and young people it is readily exchanged and issues that overlap across the different agencies are therefore quickly picked up. Often the managers themselves act on and implement the day to day interventions, obviating the need for communications through a time-consuming, 'arms length' chain of command.

Conclusions

1. Measuring performance – of pupils, schools and the other welfare agencies - through national indicators ensures a compliance with at least minimal standards. Is this good enough? Using similar types of centrally prescribed indicators to assess the degrees of vulnerability of children, young people and their families may mean that many are not identified as being in need of support, simply because they do not press the right 'buttons' that trigger the support. Both these and the indicators used by Ofsted and other inspectorates to make judgements about the providers of welfare services are mostly quantitative, referring to prescribed, centralised targets (HM Government, 2007). In the local authority from the Pilot Study mentioned, isolated pockets of pressing need within the community were identified, through the use of a new set of indicators that recognised many different forms of vulnerability. This Vulnerability Audit spawned a

whole new framework of indicators that identified a number of families who clearly had need of support, thereby successfully probing these hard-to-reach children, young people and their families.

(At no time during the Pilot Study did I come across any agencies using the CAF - Common Assessment Framework - as a common means of assessing children's needs.)

2. There might be significant numbers of children and young people who are in receipt of universal welfare services that are less effectively integrated than those supporting the most vulnerable and needy. What exactly is it about targeted support that makes these integrated services more effective – and why should there be a difference between targeted and universal services?
3. The final finding of what represents an effective or ineffective multi-agency structure gives an interesting insight into the whole issue of sharing information across the agencies. The analysis of the research data shows that rationales for teams and meetings are most effective when they are convened specifically for the purposes of identifying vulnerability and for sharing information about a *specific* group of vulnerable young people. This is all grounded in *localised* groupings of professionals who have a comprehensive knowledge about the children or young people concerned.

Such a concept would seem to be in direct opposition to the government's proposals for a national database – or the newly-termed Contact Point – which seems still to be in the inception stages. Is a national database of all children really what is required to improve information sharing? The government promised to 'remove the technical barriers to electronic information sharing through developing a single unique identity number for each child' (DfES, 2003:10). In 2008 we are no nearer to the creation of such a database or to agreement on which children should be included or exempted. There are many cultural and professional complexities implicit in working and sharing information across the boundaries of the different areas of education, health, social services and youth justice. Perhaps we should be asking what the key factors are that contribute to the effective sharing of and – more importantly using – information about children and young people. As already mentioned, the rationale for the way teams are structured/convened appears to be a critical factor in facilitating the flow of information across and between the different agencies. Can the localised nature of the successful multi agency teams from the Pilot Study be re-created, as a model of good practice for local authorities nationally?

Appendix - Grounded Theory analysis of Research Data: a Model.

In writing about the process of Grounded Theory analysis – as I applied it to my own research data – I wanted to construct a model that could be used as practical tool by other researchers in the process of their

work. To give a clear representation of the stages of the analytical process, I chose to adapt an existing model called the Ashridge Diamond, or Model for Strategy. This model shows four key stages of the process of constructing a strategy for an organisation. Each stage incorporates sets of important elements that underpin different features of the rationale of the organisation and it is through a process of integrating these features that an articulation of the strategic position of the organisation is arrived at, or induced. (See Diagram 1: The Ashridge Diamond – a model for strategy). This model provided me with a useful comparator for the process of inducting a theory or – in my case – a finding from my research data, as outlined in the process of using Grounded Theory.

In the original Ashridge model, the whole process of constructing an organisational strategy is iterative and the elements that contribute to it are always in a state of organisational 'flux', exerting an inevitable, mutual influence on and between one another. In my adapted model, (Diagram 2), we can see that iteration occurs as a discrete process in just two of the stages: stage 1, 'the construction of categories' and stage 2, 'processes', (in which the specific analytic tools of grounded theory are applied). The process of the application of the grounded theory tools constitutes the iteration, through the coding, constant comparison, dimensionalisation and integration of the categories.

The three hypotheses I inducted from my analysis served to direct me towards a more sharply focused starting point for the final research study. This enabled me to commence the final study with a research design that reflected the heart of the findings from the Pilot Study.

Diagram 1: The Ashridge Diamond - a model for strategy

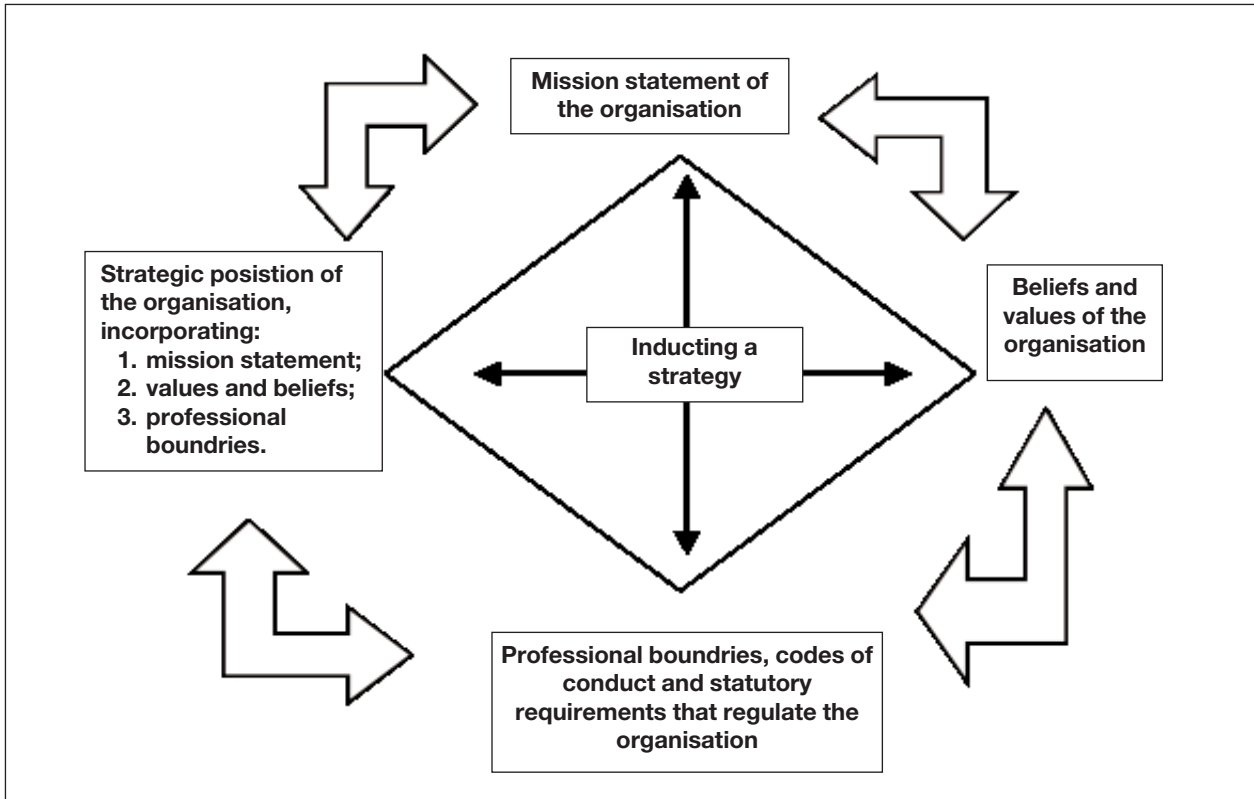
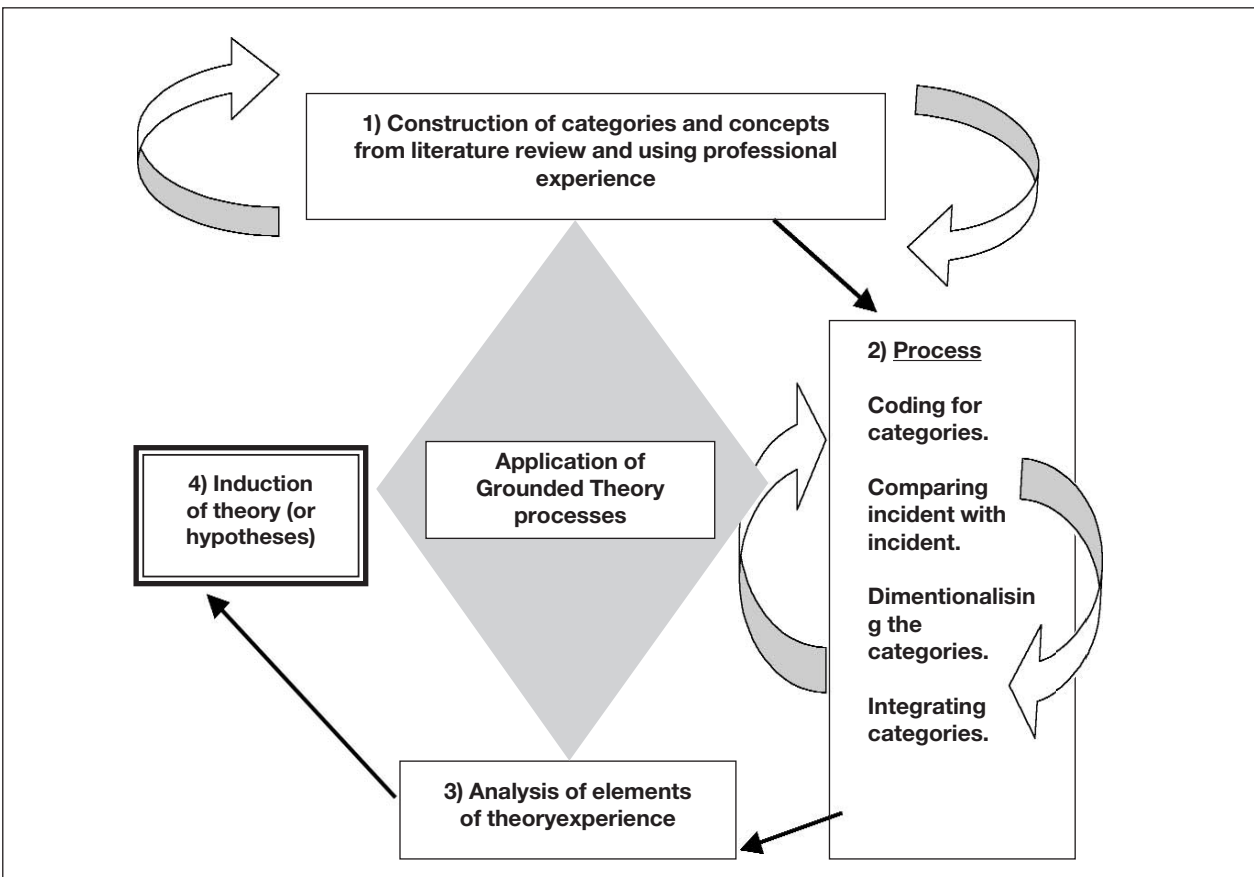


Diagram 2: Model for applying Grounded Theory analysis to research data



Biography

Christine Hough currently works as a Research Associate at the University of Cumbria and Lancaster University and is an Associate at Brathay Hall Trust. She is also a consultant for ASCL (Association of School and College Leaders) providing training and development for teachers and managers in schools throughout the UK and overseas.

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