Coming in from the cold: Troubling work with young people within their families

Lynne Kathryn (Kate) Breeze

Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

University of Cumbria Graduate School, Lancaster University.

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ABSTRACT

Austerity cuts in the UK beginning in 2009 and the continued targeting of young people's services on young people who are 'troublesome' is troubling many practitioners who work with young people. Increasingly they are employed in multidisciplinary teams working with whole families. My research explores the work of two case study organisations who have developed work with young people within their families through outdoor and residential opportunities and key working. These are organic programmes which take an asset-based approach to develop ways of working with young people within their families.

Using a collaborative, multi-modal approach, the research explores the narratives of practitioners who work on these programmes and draws on the stories of participating young people and their families to act as mirrors in a critically reflective process. Their individual narratives are bound together in a shared experience of living, playing and learning together, sometimes in the outdoors, sometimes in residential settings, sometimes at home. A collaborative action research process contributed to the on-going development of that practice.

My research explores the different articulations of work with young people within their families and supports the emergence of new theory from practice. My own macro-analysis is informed by a critical feminist perspective and examines the emerging practice-theories within the political and cultural context of families identified as being 'troubled'. The case studies demonstrate the contribution that outdoor learning, experiential learning and informal learning can offer to the multidisciplinary practice of work with families. The tradition of social education and new possibilities of social pedagogy provide further theoretical perspectives from which to critically reflect on practice and its social and political context.

I conclude that work with young people within their families is more a context for work with young people than a discipline in its own right; it does not represent a single pedagogical perspective. These approaches may combine with residential programmes to create a different space in which to

explore family relationships. I do however offer a model of critical practice to support practitioners to continue to trouble and question their practice with a commitment to the voice and empowerment of young people respecting the diversity of their experiences and their visions of family relationships. In these troubling times work with young people within their families, needs to come in from the cold and confidently articulate its contribution to this new context of professional practice.

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I would like to give my heartfelt thanks to the amazing practitioners who worked on this research project with me: for being brave and generous and creative. Your work with young people and their families is inspirational. Thank you also to the young people and families who so generously shared your stories – it was a lot fun.

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I dedicate this thesis in loving memory of Paul Breeze. A promise fulfilled.

1   INTRODUCTION

1.1   Background to the study

This research study began as a joint endeavour between the University of Cumbria, an education trust and two organisations -a federation of schools and youth development trust.

The federation of schools was part of a project set up to encourage and evaluate 'next-practices' in using residential experiences for educational purposes) to enhance young people's learning, achievement and well-being. They decided to use their funding to develop a residential programme working with young people and their families. This programme formed part of the federation's strategy to break the cycle of deprivation in the local communities it serves.

At the same time, Organisation B, was developing its work with families. It is a charitable organisation with a long history of youth development and outdoor education. From its residential base and its regional hubs, the trust works with children, young people and families in the North of England through the creation of experiences to inspire the making of changes that will "last a life time". Significantly the Trust has a history of working with young people from disadvantaged and at-risk groups. Whilst the Trust had previously delivered a few discrete residential programmes for families, they were at that point receiving regular requests for residential work with families to complement community based programmes delivered by key partners such as Youth Offending Teams, drug and alcohol services and family centres. This reflected the shift in social policy and funding priorities towards whole-family approaches in work with both adults and young people.

The original research proposal was developed collaboratively by representatives from the above organisations. Whilst residential experiences have long been used in youth work and education, it is an aspect of practice which has been little researched. Residential work with families taking an informal education approach rather than working therapeutically are not common and again there appeared to be little research about this practice context. The original aims of the research, as proposed by the partners, were to undertake a long term comparative study on the impacts of family interventions on the children, families and communities participating in these programmes, and to develop an understanding of any part played by residential experiences in enhancing effective practice. It was proposed that the research would take a mixed methods comparative case study approach undertaking an ethnographic enquiry with workers and participating families to develop an understanding of this practice and its contribution of residential experiences in enhancing work with families.

1.2   Adding to the brief

At the same time the Trust was successful in securing a commission from a local authority, to deliver key working from one of its community bases. As part of the delivery of the government's Troubled Family strategy, the Trust joined a consortium of voluntary sector organisations in working with families mainly in their own homes over a maximum of six months per family. Whilst this work was significantly different from the outdoor residential programmes described above, it was decided to include it in the research project as it was a significant element of the organisation's work with families and the Trust wanted to develop a coherent and cohesive offer across all its work with families underpinned by a clear set of values and understanding of the purpose and approach of that work.

1.3   Pilot

At the very start of the research project, a family centre in the North West of England asked me to help them articulate and present the work they were doing with families through a programme of outdoor activities. The programme had been running successfully for twelve years but had not at any point been written up or promoted to funders. Working as participant observer on the outdoor programme for a year, and exploring the different approaches to work with families used within the wider organisation, created an excellent opportunity for me to explore the wider context of work with families and develop a methodology for collaborative research with practitioners. This research was written up in a separate report which was developed for use in promoting the outdoor programme to funders and was also presented to staff and trustees of the organisation for developmental reflection.

1.4   Finding a focus

Whilst there were many opportunities to work alongside and gather the voices of families participating in the above programmes, the research project did not lend itself to a longitudinal study of the impact of these experiences on its participants. The school's Family Residential Programme was part of a wider, external evaluation process initiated by its funders. My own doctoral research contributed to this evaluation process but needed to find its own focus within its own timescale. In particular, the residential work undertaken by both partner organisations was short term making longitudinal study of the impact of their work very difficult. Whilst the schools continued to have contact with many of the participating families during the time the children and young people remained in education, the Trust's residential programmes worked intensively with families over very short periods of time but had no further contact with participants. Any follow up work was carried out by the relevant partner organisations. The narratives of children, young people and adults participating in the above programmes gathered during and within a year of their residentials were

rich and provided an important insight into the meaning they made of their experiences. However, they could only speak of immediate and short term impact.

The most appropriate way for me, given my skills and position as an external, practitioner researcher, was to focus on the narrative accounts of the practitioners working on these programmes to develop a clearer understanding of this practice. The accounts of participant young people and their families could provide data about how the work of the practitioners was actually experienced and could act as a mirror against which to hold the claims and intentions of practitioners.

1.5   What did these programmes have in common?

These programmes had a lot in common. The practitioners involved in them came from similar backgrounds, all having an interest in working with young people, and they appeared to share a general approach to their work with families, each one organically developing their practice. All programmes shared an implicit commitment to informal and experiential learning. Describing each programme however highlighted significant differences and revealed how difficult it was to give a name to the practice or indeed find a conceptual focus for the research. The common thread of the research was no longer residential experiences; neither was it working in the outdoors with families, although these were common to some programmes. Clearly the starting point for each programme was 'working with families'. It was the questioning of that practice, the critical reflection on it and the development of more coherent articulation and understanding of it that became the focus for the research - what that work with families entailed, where it was carried out, by whom and how it was understood by practitioners. Importantly, how that work was conceptualised and implemented by workers who were primarily youth workers. The names applied to this work at different points are by no means irrelevant. Family support, key work, residential work, outdoor education, experiential learning, and informal education - each provides a different conceptual framework to name and evaluate aspects of the programmes but separately do not tell the whole story. What pulled these fragments of ideas together was the notion of pedagogy and the question of whether, from the diversity of this practice with families, an identifiable pedagogy was emerging.

1.6   Interpreting Policy

An emphasis on work with the 'whole family' has developed in social policy over the last twenty years. The programmes included in this research demonstrate some of the different ways in which voluntary organisations and schools have responded to the priorities of successive governments. With each change of government the discourse around the function and significance of the family has shifted, particularly in relation to the lives of children and young people. The language used to define work with families remains vague and diffuse within policies and government

papers. How family is defined and understood is open to interpretation; what is required in terms of intervention is identified in policy-led strategies but very little about the how, creating opportunities for a wide range of response and approaches. The programmes included in this research demonstrate some of the possibilities and also constraints of working within these policies and related funding strategies

Policies are powerful in their communication of ideological discourse and political strategies. However, their implementation is negotiated by local authorities, managers and practitioners each playing a part in their interpretation and implementation (Davies, 2010). Power emerges as a central theme in this research study which explores ways in which practitioners exercise their professional agency in their relationships and practices. Because 'work with the whole family' is ill-defined and the programmes considered exist in multi-disciplinary settings, practitioners have had significant power to define the approach they use and to some extent the aims of their work with families. Therefore, this is trans-cultural study examining how workers draw on a range of concepts and different professional knowledge and relationships in boundary crossing contexts (Edwards, 2007; Gormally & Coburn, 2014). How this knowledge is reorganised in the context of work with families, and if indeed there is emergent new knowledge has become the focus of the research study. The study explores the practitioners' role in the creation of a new, or newly configured pedagogy of practice with families examining actions and ideas, methods and values, skills and relationships to find out what can be learnt from these projects to inform future policy, to inform organisational strategy and to contribute to the development of face to face practice.

Work with the participating organisations gave me the opportunity to work alongside practitioners in their work with families. As a practitioner-researcher I engaged in a collaborative action research approach which contributed to the on-going development of practice. I was also privileged to have the opportunity to work with and build relationships with participating families. Thus, what has emerged is a narrative piece of research which collects the stories of practitioners, organisations and families – children, young people and adults. Their individual narratives were bound together in a shared experience of living, playing and learning together, sometimes in the outdoors, sometimes in residential settings, sometimes at home with the aim of building on the existing strengths within the family to make positive changes in the way they relate to one another and to family life.

1.7   Theoretical frameworks

My research has no one single underpinning theoretical basis. Led by the narratives and actions of participating practitioners the research aims to explore the different articulations of work with families and support the emergence of new theory from the data. My own macro-analysis will

be informed by a critical feminist perspective which will examine these emerging practice-theories within the political and cultural context of families identified as being 'in need' and emerging practice and policy.

1.8   The Researcher

I undertook my own professional training as a youth and community worker in the 1980's developing an understanding of this work as critical pedagogy (Ledwith, 2011). I began my professional experience as a community development worker in inner-city Birmingham working predominantly with young people and women. Key issues in that context included unemployment, poverty and debt, childcare and lack of youth provision. In response we developed provision for single parents, a community nursery and credit union, girls work and generic youth club provision. In that context work with young people and their families went hand-in hand with community development.

After a number of years working in further education I become part of the piloting of the Connexions Service in secondary schools. This major government initiative was a trailblazer for formalising multi-agency approaches to work with vulnerable young people, and also the shift from universal youth work provision to targeted services for young people. I chose to work for the Connexions Service because of its initial commitment to partnership working and holistic practice with young people. It aspired, as a service, to bring statutory and voluntary services together to develop robust support structures for those young people who had previously been 'falling through the net' and those most marginalised including looked after young people, young carers and those excluded from school. At that point the Connexions service was dominated by the careers service and as a youth worker it proved to be a strange and sometimes hostile environment – like getting into a bath of cold water. However, the experience developed my understanding of the challenges and opportunities of inter-disciplinary working. It was also my introduction to action research and evidence-based practice, as underpinning the pilot activity. Sadly, it was also my introduction to policy-based evidence and research to support political ideas rather than to inform them. Latterly I worked part-time for a national charity as an advocate for looked after young people and completed a piece of action research around the participation of young people in mental health services.

I have taught on youth and community development courses in higher education for twelve years. I bring to my teaching role my experience of working in multi-disciplinary teams and at the inter-face of voluntary and statutory services and education providers. My experience of professional practice has consistently been of boundary crossing and work in shifting political and professional contexts. My work with young people has regularly brought me into contact with their families, parents and carers, and the wider community.

Personally I have a great love of the outdoors and still spend time cycling, walking and sailing. I began my own work with young people as a volunteer on a camp for children and young people from inner-city Liverpool. Outdoor activities and residential experiences have featured in my practice throughout my career. I am also a musician valuing creativity and the skills of improvisation and co-creation. These are skills which translate into new practice contexts and inform my research practice.

I am a feminist; I am deeply committed to practice and research which names and challenges inequality between women and men, and the intersection of other manifestations of inequality such as race, sexuality and 'dis'ability. Therefore in exploring how practitioners understand their work with families, I have chosen to frame my discussion within a critical feminist paradigm. Whilst this is not a feminist piece of research as such, I undertook my methodology, analysis and discussion through a feminist lens.

My personal experience as a woman and of being part of dynamic and loving family as daughter, mother, wife, widow, grandmother, partner, has inevitably impacted on my experience as a researcher. That experience has developed my empathy, my criticality and I hope, my compassion. It also has the potential to distort or limit my listening and understanding. Therefore, I have been grateful for the supervision and support of colleagues who have walked this path with me lovingly and critically.

This research is about my practice, and our practice. It is multi-disciplinary research; it aims to speak to practitioners in the fields of youth work, social care, outdoor education and school-based education. It is also relevant to those who teach on professional courses in Higher Education, potential funders and policy makers.

1.9 Case studies

1.9.1 Organisation A. School's Family Residential Programme (school's FRP)

The project is led by a high school working in partnership with feeder primaries based on one of the UK's largest estates. This outer city estate houses over 70,000 residents in approximately 50% private, 50% public housing. What began as an aspirational housing project has been greatly impacted on by the economic down turn. Unemployment rates run at 6.2% (Oct 2014 – Sept 2105), whilst 28.3% of the population are economically inactive – both figures higher than the regional average. On one hand the area was developed with many green spaces, houses with gardens and a good standard of housing stock, whilst on the other hand the estate has been vilified by the press as a symbol of David Cameron's "broken Britain".

The Federation of schools is made of up of three primary and one high school. The Head of the Federation took a lead role in imagining and driving forward the Family Residential Programme as part of the federation's strategy for breaking the cycle of deprivation in the area. The programme received three years funding (2011 – 2014) to facilitate the employment of a programme Co-Ordinator and the rental of a large cottage in Derbyshire throughout the school year. The worker appointed to this role was appointed on the basis of her communication skills and experience of working with people in the hospitality industry. She was not qualified in any related profession but during the programme achieved a professional youth work qualification. The programme is supported by workers from the high school's family support team and latterly included the employment of a young apprentice dedicated to working on the residential programme.

The Family Residential Programme works with individual sibling groups and their families through a series of three residential experiences supported by home visits and one to one in-school support between residentials. The first and second residentials are attended by the sibling groups, only the third includes parents/carers. The emphasis of the overall programme is on experiential learning with the children and young people guiding their parents through their experience and what they learnt. The children effectively became the teachers.

Over three years the programme worked with over 30 families. Whilst not all of the families completed the programme indications during the first year of delivery were that the programme made a significant impact on individual behaviour and development, individual outcomes for young people and adults, on family life and potentially on the wider community. However, the approach taken by the programme had not been articulated or named, and had no distinct theory base.

This research project joined the programme in year two of its delivery. My research ran alongside an evaluation of the whole funded programme by an independent research body. I had access to records of the first year of delivery and spent time on residential programmes and listening to the stories of young people, their families and the practitioners involved in the programme for its final two years.

1.9.2   Organisation B. Youth Development Organisation

This organisation has a long history of youth development work and outdoor education. Its work has broadened to include community based programmes with a wide range of young people from hubs in the North of England. The Trust has many partners with whom, and for whom it delivers residential and community-based programmes. It was at the request of partner services from adult and young people's services that the organisation first developed residential programmes for family groups based on outdoor and experiential learning. Early residentials were built around ambitious and wide ranging aims such as family functioning, attachment and conflict management. Over time

these aims became more realistic and focused on improving communication, having time away from daily demands and enjoying time and relaxation together. Practitioners on these residential programmes had significant skills in experiential learning and working in the outdoors particularly with young people but did not have a background in families work or social care. They report that they found the work challenging and stimulating but have had to re-think their usual approach to residential work.

Since my research project began, the organisation has built on its experience of working with the local Family Intervention Programme (FIP) tendering to deliver key working to local families as part of the government's Troubled Families initiative. A small team of practitioners undertake the key worker role from one of the organisation's community hubs providing support, advocacy and co-ordination of services to families with complex needs. This is delivered alongside other voluntary service organisations providing Tier 2 services. This team of practitioners include trained youth workers; youth work students, and a family support worker. The work with participating families does not include taking part in the Trust's family residential programmes as there is no funding for this. Whilst these two areas of work, residential and community-based are distinctive, the organisation was been keen to develop its overall understanding of work with families and develop a coherent approach which can be embedded in all aspects of its work with families. My research has supported them in unpacking and understanding practice and developing its own model or models of practice with families.

2 INTRODUCTION TO THE STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

This thesis presents the process of collaborative reflection into practice that I worked through with practitioners working on family residentials and key working programmes in two case study organisations.

My approach and research question are informed by my one-year pilot study with a family centre in North West England.

The approach I have chosen to take develops an articulation and critical reflection on practice as a collaborative process between practitioners, other key staff from the case study organisations and the researcher.

The process begins with practice experience and descriptions of that experience, and through individual and shared reflective activities identifies and critically explores emergent themes. The reflections are informed by the narratives and feedback from participating young people and their families. Theories and concepts are introduced to inform practitioner's theorising of their practice and to explore critical issues arising from it. I then take that process further, working with a range of theory to develop an overarching reflection on critical issues relating to practice with young people within their families. Finally, I identify and discuss what this means for the development of critical practice with young people within their families.

2.1 Basic structure

Background to research project

Developing my Research Question

Approach

Context – Initial literature review

Methodology

Findings and discussion

Theories and Concepts

Critical Practice

Conclusions

2.2 Literature

The iterative reflective process involves an ongoing process of literature search. As themes emerge and critical issues are identified, literature is reviewed to inform and deepen reflection. In this way what is already known informs what practitioners know and their articulation of their practice knowledge. Existing concepts and theories are used to test ideas about practice and eventually to locate practice with young people and their families as interdisciplinary practice, within a number of theoretical frameworks.

Therefore, the search for literature was both systematic and responsive to themes emerging form the action research process. An initial literature search explores the context of the practice: policy, whole family approaches, contexts and settings, youth work. Literature is then drawn on in each section of findings to further critical discussion. Literature about specific approaches to learning and practice informs the final discussion of critical practice with young people within their families.

As the practice being studied is interdisciplinary practice, the theory-base for reflection is broad. The thesis attempts to capture the process of knowledge development and capture practitioners' contributions to professional knowledge building.

3   APPROACH:

3.1   Establishing a critical paradigm: Starting points

3.1.1   From research proposal to 'my question'

The original research proposal for this piece of research aimed to develop an articulation of practice with young people and families in the context of work undertaken by youth workers, outdoor education practitioners and related professionals. The proposal has two main parts, an analysis of indicators of the impact of the 'family interventions', followed by an ethnographic enquiry in collaboration with the educational practitioners and the families to develop an understanding of effective practice in these kinds of family interventions and any role the residential experiences play in enhancing this practice.

The proposal invites research from different if not conflicting paradigms. The first aim concerned with measurement of impact reflects neoliberal priorities which have dominated social policy and related youth work, social work, and other educational and caring professions in the early decades of the twenty-first century. This aim raises problematic questions for me about measuring the impact of work with young people and touches upon a nerve that continues to cause pain to many youth workers (St Croix, 2018). The shift to new managerial practices in local government which began under the New Labour government, resulted, for many practitioners, in a decrease in professional autonomy (Bradford & Cullen, 2014).   It also led to increased managerial control, accountability and micromanagement based upon targets and the prioritising of funded work on groups of young people defined within social policy as problematic (Hine, 2009). The austerity cuts introduced and maintained by the conservative government have magnified this process of targeting work to such an extent that the values and purposes which are the very basis for professional practices with young people have been attacked and in many cases uprooted (Bradford & Cullen, 2014).   In the meantime the government has called for an increased level of accountability and evidencing of the outcomes of practice.   It can be argued that these shifts have fractured professional practices along the lines of ideological and pragmatic differences. Within youth work, the In Defence of Youth Work campaign has developed a powerful voice of resistance to the marketization of youth work and neo-liberal insistence on measuring outcomes, demonstrating value for money and evidence-based practice (Taylor, 2009; St Croix, 2017). The campaign has created a critical voice in challenging the acceptance of the marketization of youth work, the economic assumptions which underpin the creation of new business models including private and social enterprise.

Some organisations have responded to these political and economic shifts by engaging with the dominant agendas looking for ways to demonstrate the outcomes and impact of work with young people that they believe have always and continue to be the case (Wylie, 2010; Stuart & Maynard, 2015; Centre for Youth Impact, 2018). Their pragmatism has attracted criticism of 'giving in to' neoliberal priories which have little to do with young peoples' agendas (Davies et al, 2015; St Croix, 2017). The debate challenges all those involved to dig deep and uncover the assumptions and values which have been the roots of youth work practice for decades and discover which of these can be transplanted into new economic and political context, and which provide the very life force for youth work and work with young people more widely. Indeed, these debates have resulted in the redefining of youth work, of youth development and indeed 'work with young people', highlighting commonalities but passionate differences.

Meanwhile as the political agendas of 'joined-up' and multi-disciplinary working have developed, youth work is taking place in an ever-wider variety of contexts. Youth work in schools in the UK has a long history of informal provision, open sessions and school-based youth clubs (Coburn & Wallace, 2011). With the closure of many local authority youth clubs and increased expectation placed upon schools to address social issues and needs beyond the formal curriculum, youth services are negotiating regular one to one and group work provision in schools. Youth workers are providing front line services in schools that address young peoples' mental health. Working alongside social workers and school-based family workers, youth workers are engaged in addressing some of the 'risky' behaviours of young people which trouble government: sexual exploitation and grooming, cyber-safety and the increasing number of young people being taken into the care of the local authority (Lepper, 2019). Youth workers have also been placed in early intervention teams, children and families services, and have continued to work with youth offending teams, drug and alcohol services and homelessness projects. Youth workers have had a significant role to play in the government's Troubled Families strategy (NYA, 2012). My own cohorts of part-time youth work students reflect this diversification of teams and organisations within which youth workers are placed and discover a need to redefine their professional identify and affirm their professional value base.

The challenges of working in inter-disciplinary teams continues to be researched from a number of professional, philosophical positions including early years (Anning et al, 2006) and social work (Warin, 2007; Garrett, 2009). There has been less research carried out so far into work with young people in interdisciplinary contexts and very little written from a youth work perspective. There is a significant body of writing about the challenges faced by youth work as a profession but so far more questions asked than attempts to explore how youth work practitioners are responding to and practicing in within these contexts.

Bradford & Cullen (2014) in their discussion of "new terrains of professional youth work in austerity England" argue that neo-liberalism, new managerial practices and austerity policies have weakened youth work's position within welfare provision creating instability in the professional. They identity the potential 'shape-shifting' strength of youth work but also the how that shape shifting may be reforming practice in an entirely different identify for some of that practice be it social work, mentoring for example. Whether practitioners embrace these changes and effectively give in to the de-professionalization or even demise of youth work or whether they find opportunities for resistance and transformation is open to question. Bradford and Cullen ask:

> Will workers form opportunities for resistance? Create and exploit opportunities in these contexts of "porous boundaries, crevices in power relationships and hybrid spaces that juxtapose new occupational identities and practices"?

3.1.2 My research

My research is not about youth work, but it is about the changing context of youth work – in particular working with young people within their families, and work with those families in outdoor and residential settings

My research is not about youth work but I am a youth worker – youth worker, researcher, pedagogue and academic. Youth work values and purposes underpin the ontological and epistemological position of my research.

I have chosen for my own research and subject of my thesis, to focus on the second part of the original research proposal – to develop an understanding of practice with families. Finding a focus for my research has forced me to make a choice between the outcomes agenda with its concern for measuring impact and cost, cost savings, and the qualitative research task of seeking to understand the meaning of work with families from the perspectives of those involved. The first, quantitative task will be addressed to some extent by evaluation of the school's family residential programme by their funding body. The Centre for Youth Impact continue to develop ways of identifying and measuring the outcomes and impact of their work with young people through mixed methods approaches (2018). To examine the impact of this work in a wider context and in relation to cost benefit and 'value for money' could draw on social capital theory and concept of social return on vestment (Social Value UK, 2019). Evaluations of Family Intervention Projects (White et al, 2008; Gregg, 2010) and the Troubled Families programme highlight the complexities of measuring value, and social return on investment, and the provisional and often contested value of quantitative research (HMGOV, 2012).

Whilst appreciating the value of creative evaluation practices (Stuart, Maynard and Rouncefield, 2015; Centre for Youth Impact, 2019) these may provide tools within my own research strategy but not a foundation for it. Equally, social capital theory has been applied to outdoor education (Beames & Atencio, 2008, The Outward Bound Trust, 2014) to explore the relationship between outdoor education programmes and local communities; this work may have a relevance in my own discussion of data but will not be my starting point.

I come to this research not seeking to describe practice, or to measure it but to question it, to problematize it, and trouble it, and to ask 'why' alongside 'how'? This approach will complement that of other stakeholders through an exploration of qualitative data based on the narrative voices and diverse perspectives of multiple participants.

3.1.3 Researcher assumptions

This research sits within an interpretivist paradigm in that its starting point is an understanding of human behaviour as a subjective, mediated process rather than object. Behaviour and the consequences of that behaviour are made sense of, or interpreted within their socio-cultural context. Therefore, human behaviour can only be understood by seeking to access and understand the perspectives of the people we are interested in and through an interpretive process between the researcher and research participants (Hammersley, 2014).

Ontological and epistemological basis

Building on these assumptions, this research is ontologically and epistemologically aligned with social-constructionism emphasizing the influence and impact of our social and cultural worlds have on us. The practice that is central to my research, work with families is socially constructed, shaped by cultural experiences and assumptions. Social–constructionism views peoples' understanding of their worlds not as static, but constantly open to reinterpretation and change dependent on context and audience. Therefore, people may experience multiple realities built on a variety of discourses. The researcher plays a part in this construction of reality and therefore engages in the process of construction rather than the uncovering of truth or even truths.

My epistemological positon is that knowledge is constructed socially and in relationship to others, within the context and discourses of society. The ideologies and underlying power relationships of social reality are communicated through language (Foucault, 1982). Of particular significance to my own research is the epistemological position that knowledge is created within a democratic process and is created in and through peoples' lived experiences. My research takes a dialectic approach to research as learning which values conversation and feedback, as a social activity.

There is an ontological and epistemological alignment between youth work as social practice and research which seeks to understand the social world in which young people live; central to their social worlds is their experience of family. Youth work practice and its value base invite a collaborative process of critical questioning of young peoples' lives (Gormally & Coburn, 2014), an uncovering of the dominant discourse of young people and an uncovering and addressing of inequalities in young peoples' lives including class, gender, race and ethnicity, sexuality and disability.

Furthermore, a social-constructionist perspective assumes an interpretation of family as subjective and as a social construct which is both ideological and political. This ideological interpretation may be at odds with the lived experience of being or 'doing' family, and is deeply impacted by notions of class and gender. Who has the power to create those definitions and the impact of them on lives of adults and young people is part of the research task of uncovering power relationships and social inequalities. Viewed through a critical lens the family is social construct and institution, and a site for professional intervention. Professional practice and professional identities may also be examined as socially constructed and opened to critical evaluation of their social as well as personal meaning.

3.1.4 Critical theory: a theoretical backdrop

Critical theory offers a relevant and challenging overarching theoretical paradigm for my research, for the examination of professional practice within the social and political context in which it is situated. Critical theory is concerned with evaluating the phenomena in question as well as describing or explaining it (Hammersley, 2014). Whilst new forms of professional practice need to be articulated (Bradford & Cullen, 2014), to do so uncritically is based upon an assumption that practice is good, and an acceptance of the assumptions and hegemonic norms that underpin it. An evaluation of practice involves questioning its purpose and its intent. Critical theory involves a process of problematisation rather than condoning assumptions that practice is good or bad, or accepting it, uncritically on face value

Critical theory can provide a lens through which to examine some of the processes which impact on young peoples' lives, aspirations and opportunities. Critical theorists such as Habermas (1973) examine the relationship between theory and society and the social relationships which lie beneath the objective world. His work begins an exploration of praxis, a basis for the development of critical pedagogy (Giroux, 2017). A critical lens can be used to explore relationships between public and private worlds (Lander, 1995), self and collective identities (Weir, 1995). It explores the relationship between "the particular and the whole" (Drader, 2017 p.38), the individual and their social, cultural and political context. The current discourse around 'the family' as responsible for troublesome

behaviour, and as a legitimate focus of intervention needs be questioned and broken open; also the relationship between the private world of families and public scrutiny.

Critical theory therefore provides a useful starting point for exploring professional practice as both individual practice and as a political response to ideologically defined social problems. Critical theory is concerned with the institutions and cultural practices that create and reproduce social and cultural norms and the relationship between dominant and subordinate group (Giroux, 2017). This includes examining the discourse which publically defines groups and maintains the status quo. It can therefore offer a framework for questioning the discourse around families, children and young people in particular, perpetuated in policy and the media. Critical theory also has a political purpose beyond describing or explaining the social world, it is theory committed to change. Whilst my research does not engage in a philosophical debate with critical theory, it does concern itself with social justice and the role professional practice can play in transforming young people's lives. That is incredibly ambitious as critical theory itself highlights the power of hegemonic thinking and organisation. However, to claim social justice as an under-pinning principle of both personal commitment and professional practice demands "becoming critical" (Ledwith, 2016 p.37). Critical theory provides a process of critique as well as philosophical positon (Giroux, 2017) and it is that critical process which drives the questions I ask, and the way they are asked, explored and interpreted. Critical theories can underpin critical qualitative inquiry putting people and their lives at the centre of the research process (Winkle-Wagner & Lee-Johnson, 2019).

A Critical feminist perspective

Critical theory can be intimidating in its macro scale, its focus on patriarchal political and economic institutions and its predominance of white male theorists. It can seem far removed from the everyday experience of women, in particular working-class women and women of colour. Despite its emphasis on uncovering power relationships, the relationship between this colossal body of theory and the lived experience of many women is far from tangible.

As a feminist, I find critical feminist perspectives invaluable in helping me find an authentic connection with critical theory. Authentic because I can find a place, or a home in feminist theory where as a woman, struggling to find a place in academia, I find connections with the world 'as I know it' and methods which help me to connect with other women in developing a critique of 'our worlds'. Feminist research is research from the point of view of women's experience (Hesse-Biber et al; 2004) paying attention to social difference, power and social justice.

As a feminist researcher I aim to pay attention to and respond to the processes that silence women, and by extension children and young people. A critical feminist framework provides a congruent and

effective lens through which to explore women's voices, and the voices of other minorities such as children and young people, and question power structures within which they are defined and act. The majority of my adult research participants are working class – both practitioners and parents, and most are women. Therefore, careful and principled attention needs to be given to building a methodology which foregrounds the voices of those women and young people, and their role as creators of knowledge. This research is not feminist research in that feminist theory is not the central theoretical lens for data analysis. Neither does the research context allow for a purely feminist approach to be taken. However, my own and other feminist perspectives will inform both my methodology and knowledge building.

Feminist research questions the privileging of certain types of knowledge, bringing the voices of marginalised groups to the centre.

> Feminists bob and weave their threads of understanding, listening to the experiences of "the other/s" as legitimate knowledge. (Hesse-Biber, 2007 p.3)

I am particularly interested in furthering feminist questions about who can be the knower and the known in research.

I find it helpful and encouraging to engage with Sara Ahmed's ideas about ideas:

> Ideas would not be something generating through distance, a way of abstracting something from something, but from our involvement in a world that often leaves us, frankly, bewildered. Ideas might be how we work with as well as on our hunches, those senses that something is amiss, not quite right, which are part of ordinary living and a starting point for so much critical work (Ahmed , 2017 p.12.)

So, in Ahmed's terms, meaning unfolds from the usual everyday life. Meaning making is a shared activity working with the material of lived experience, but particular those aspects of our lives which 'aren't quite right, or in some way uncomfortable. Ideas don't have to be external hooks, created by someone else on which to hang our meaning making. Whilst theories, such as critical theory can give us clues about what to ask and cast a certain light on our experiences as we hold them up for examination, we can engage in theorising and build knowledge about our shared lives from a starting point of experience, intuition and our hunches. Whilst I was initially concerned that my own research may get stuck in description, Ahmed's explanation of the work that links description to conceptualising gave me both confidence that "concepts are in the world we are in" and that description is an authentic and effective starting point for the work of conceptualising.

descriptive work is conceptual work. A concept is worldly, but it is also a reorientation to a world, a way of turning things around, a different slant on the same thing (2017 p.13)

Ahmed (2017) hooks (1994, 2000) and Butler (1990, 2005) all inform my own commitment to an inclusive feminism defined by bell hooks as:

> not a comfortable feminism but [one that] invites attention to the intersectionality of class and race and gender, and the problematisation of issues such as female violence within families, and the domination of some women by other women (hooks, 2000).

Whilst my reach is not feminist research as such, these feminist priorities shape my epistemological beliefs and my methodology

> "The process of interlocking epistemology, methodology, and method in feminist research shapes a *synergistic perspective of research*" (Hesse-Biber, 2004 p.210).

3.2   Critical reflection

Critical reflection is central to my research methodology. It is the process by which I aim to engage with the practitioners in my study in collaborative storytelling and meaning making and also to influence future practice.

Reflective practice is common practice in youth work (Bamber & Murphy, 1999; QAA, 2009) social and caring professions (Thompson & Thompson, 2008). Models of reflection on and as professional practice have developed drawing on the work of Shon (1983, 1987) Dewey (1938) and Kolb (1984). Neil Thompson (2011) has been influential in developing critically reflective models of reflection that stress the importance of examining practice in its cultural and social contexts with a concern for social justice and equality (Thompson & Thompson, 2008). This model provides a starting point for my own reflection on the relationship between personal experience and broader social and political contexts. The practice of critical reflection has strong links to critical theory and the uncovering of the hegemonic assumptions which inform common sense and taken for granted explanations of social organisation maintaining the accepted status quo (Gramsci, 1971). To take a critical approach to reflection is to uncover and recognise those dominant ideologies which are embedded in everyday experiences and practice. My research is concerned both with individual practice and the organisations within which they are developed, with in an interest in why specific approaches to practice are taken up and developed (Habermas, 1978). Foucualt (1982) offers critiques of both the oppressive and positive operations of power and knowledge operate within professional practice and cultures. His ideas may be useful in reflecting upon the empowerment and powerlessness of practitioners within organisations and as translators of policy into practice.

Just as critical theory is concerned with social change and transformation (Habermas, 1987), critical reflection is about reframing and reimagining practice. As such it is congruent with the values of critical pedagogy and the development of praxis, the dynamic and transformative interaction of practice and action (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 2017; Ledwith, 2005). These are the values which I have aspired to in my own practice in youth and community development work and as a teacher. Critical pedagogy also challenges and redefines the power relationships that exist between the teacher and student as a "pedagogy that opens horizontally to know and be known" (Drader, 2017 p.97).

3.2.1 Reflection: creating narratives

Critical reflection is consistent with narrative research. It is my aim to create a methodology which creates opportunities for practitioners to narrate their practice experience and in so doing generate new and potential knowledge. Werst (2016) refers to this process as chronicling aspects of practice and seeing what sense can be made of it.

3.2.2 Divergent practices, models and theoretical frameworks

Critical reflection whilst relatively easy to define can be difficult to imagine and put into action. There are many models and theoretical frameworks which can be applied to the process.

As a teacher I draw on Brookfield's four lenses of critical reflection (2017). I aim to adapt this model in my role as researcher to illuminate different aspects of professional practice with families – that is, the lens of personal experience of 'family'; through the lens, or eyes of the young people and families who participate in the programmes; through the eyes of colleagues; and through the lens of theory. The process of reflection through these different lenses will be a collaborative process with practitioners. Therefore, it is a process of collective story making, of creating shared narratives

3.2.3 Starting with stories

Critical reflection aims to open up enquiry to a wide range of voices (Brookfield, 2016). It engages those voices in the collaborative creation of new knowledge. This valuing of voices outside the academy, and the valuing of everyday experiences as a starting point for knowing, is consistent with feminist epistemologies. There are different ways of naming the starting point for this reflective process: Dolan et al (2006) in their exploration of family support as reflective practice identify a process of description, clarification and definition which requires practitioners to engage in "description and questioning informed by action" (p.17). In this way, my own research begins with action, with a shared experience of practice with young people within their families.

Brookfield's pinpointing of the narrative process resonates with my own approach to research which values the storying of self and personal experience individually and collectively (2016). This starting

point is subjective and is an engaged process of description which acknowledges that stories are constructed, are reconstructed and their meanings change. Powerful links can be made with broader theories of narrative research which may begin with "stories of experience, rather than events" (Squire, 2008). The narrator's storying of who they are and the co-construction of stories through the interaction between the researcher and the story-teller are important aspects of narrative research. These are processes that I value in the reflective process as reflection shifts from personal to shared meaning making.

3.2.4 Critical reflexivity

The research story is also my story. Reflexivity is concerned with the impact of the research (or practitioner) on the research process. As such it foregrounds positionality and subjectivity and the person of the researcher (Dean, 2017). Exploring power relationships within practice therefore, has to begin and continue to involve consideration of my position and relationship to those who take part in this research. As a white, middle class woman, from a working-class background I have many experiences in common with the practitioners with whom I will be carrying out this research, but also some significant differences. As a mother I will have other commonalities with the parents we work with. Whilst I view myself as close to practice, my role as an academic places me in a position of power. In particular I am aware that I have taught some of the practitioners in the past – they know me as a tutor and therefor as an assessor. My pilot experience showed me how my experience as a practitioner over many years might give practitioners a confidence in me as I practice and carry out research alongside them as an informed sounding board for their reflections on practice. I appreciate that to welcome me into their practice as well as their reflections requires a high level of trust.

My approach to research demands an on-going process of critical reflection on my own part as well as well the practitioners. Feminist research acknowledges the importance of reflexivity in recognising that research is a social process which includes emotional engagement, empathy and relationship building (Oakley, 1981). The approach and data collection methods I propose to use rely on social processes (Oakley, 2016) in which I as the researcher play a full part. Being aware of when and how identification with research participants for example impacts on the questions I ask, what I see and what I don't, requires a commitment to personal and shared reflection on an ongoing basis.

3.3 Knowledge

My understanding of what constitutes knowledge and who has the power to create knowledge is informed by the work of Foucault (1977) and my position as a feminist. Building on the precept that meaning making starts with experience (Ahmed, 2017) my research aims to uncover, question and develop the knowledge of practitioners and their 'knowing' how to work with young

people and their families. As such my epistemological position is that knowledge is contextual, and that knowledge developed in one context can be developed to be relevant to other contexts (Austin, 2013 cited in Witkin, 2016). I also believe that knowledge is relational and is created in relationship to each other. Therefore, my role is as researcher, as colleague and co-producer of knowledge. This methodological commitment is particularly consistent with action research and guides my choice of approach and research methods. It is my aim to create an empowering methodology which supports practitioners in creating and developing their practice knowledge.   In this way research and practice equally contribute to the generation of knowledge.

In my research this process begins with shared experiences. It encourages individual and collaborative storytelling, reflecting upon and retelling these stories as we find meaning and new ways of knowing about, or knowledge of practice. Hunt (2016 p.41) describes critical reflection as drawing upon both the public and private domains of knowledge; for me this means bringing personal and lived experiences into dialogue with theories and ideas. One of my roles as researcher is to offer theoretical ideas into the reflective process (West, 2016). Theory should not be imposed nor should it silence the voices of the participants in this research. Theory can provide clues or ways into understanding the meaning of this practice in its personal, shared and public contexts. Taking Brookfield's model as a guide, theory is just one lens with which to examine practice (Brookfield, 2016). My pilot experience taught me the importance of sharing in experiences so that meaning can be explored as mutual learning process drawn from experience, rather than imposing theory from a real or perceived position of academic superiority.

Critical reflection straggles both the personal and social (Werst, 2016). Neil Thompson's PCS (personal, community, social/structural) model of analysis of anti-oppressive practice (2006), a familiar tool in youth work training and has been a tool for reflecting on and analysing anti-oppressive practice in my own practice and in my teaching. My model for critical reflection as research (fig. 1) takes Thompson's PCS model as its starting point alongside an adaptation of a model of domains of critical reflection by Smith A. (2011) and cited in Collington and Ross (2016). This model provides a process for the discussion and critical analysis of my research findings which centres on personal narrative and through a process of shared reflection creates practice based theory in critical dialogue with the social and economic context of that practice.

Personal experience:
feelings,thoughts, action
Described, narrated

Interpersonal:
relationships; interactions
organisational
shared narratives
community

Concepts
Ideas
Theories
Practice-theory

Social and policitical context
Discourse
Critical theory
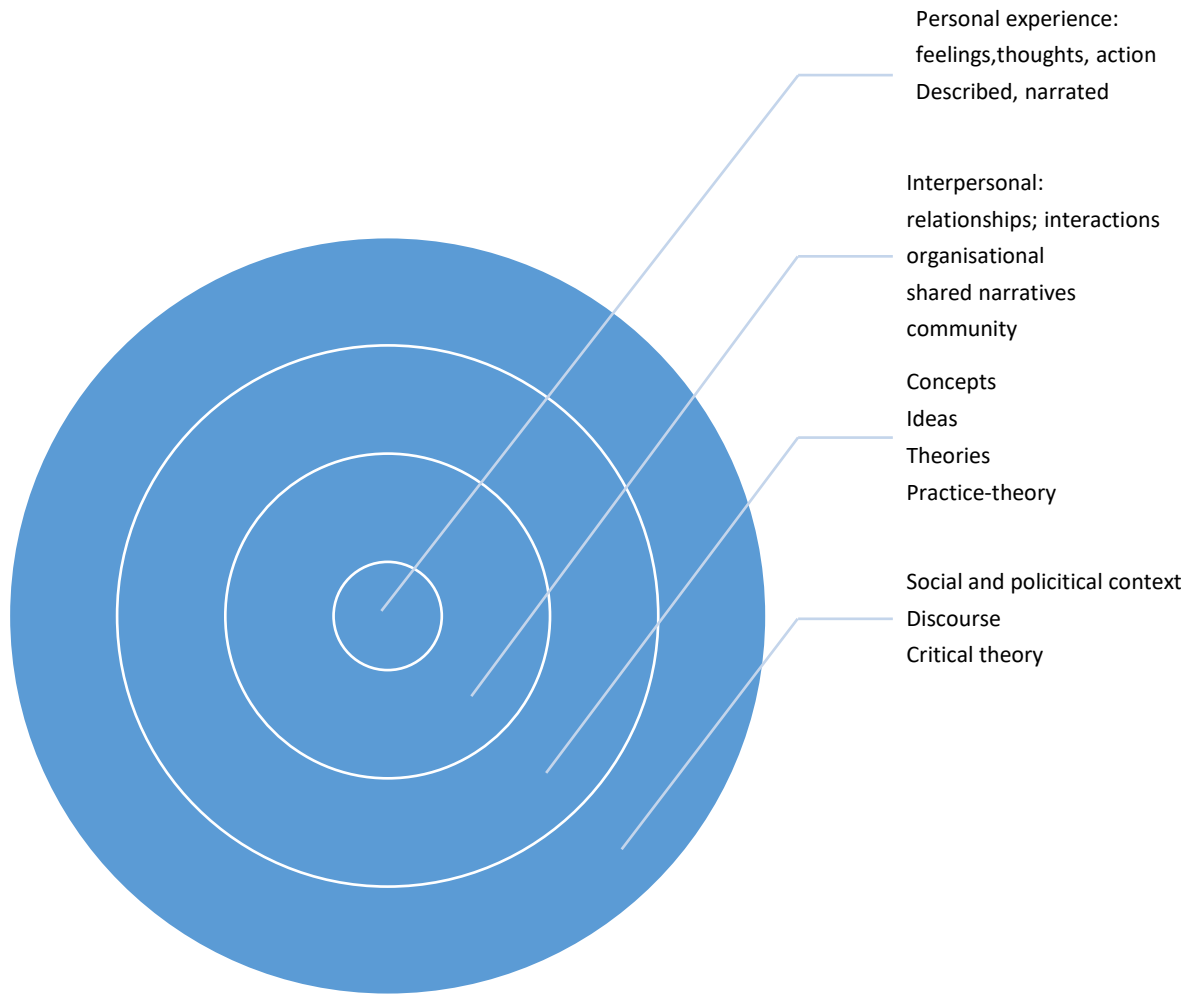
Figure 1 Breeze's model of critical reflection as research

It is important to identify and create spaces in which this reflective work is to be done. These dialogical spaces (McNiff, 2013) need to be ethically managed (Werst, 2016) in paying attention to privacy and confidentiality, and being safe. They are places to try out ideas, discuss failure as well as success. The relational skills and values that underpin this type of reflective activity are aligned to the youth work skills of building rapport and trust (Gormally & Coburn, 2014). Ethically they need to be respectful, inclusive spaces where thinking aloud is encouraged but where no one is pressured.

Thompson (2006) in his work on reflective processes within organisations warns that reflection on practice in teams and within organisational contexts is not always comfortable and can uncover conflicting ideas, values and evaluation of practice. My methodology aims to support a critically reflective process between practitioners and at an organisational level. The learning process will stem from practice, from knowledge in-action (Schön, 1983) and the organic process of practice development. However, it is important to include how the organisations support practice, how they

operate, understand and articulate that practice in the reflective process. This means supporting a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Vince, 2002) which shifts the reflective task and responsibility from individual practitioners to the collective process and ownership. The organisations in my research want to be part of that process and for the research to inform future practice.

According to Fook et al (2016) reflective practice is empowering practice that contributes to heightened professionalism. It

> takes us to the heart of what it is to be human. Not only might this enable a more ethical and compassionate engagement with the world and its moral dilemmas…but it also occasions a more troubled existence (Fook et al p.2)

There is the potential for reflective processes which focus on existing power relationships and may ask uncomfortable questions, to be seen as troublesome. Passilia & Vince, (2016) warn that the process may be met with resistance, may be avoided or individualised. Therefore, I will give careful attention to the care of practitioners, and the power relationships that exist between practitioners and their organisations. Absolute respect for confidentiality and anonymity in the shared analysis and discussion of data will be paramount.

3.4   Insider/ outsider

My research is ethnographic study in that it involves joining in or becoming part of the life and work of two organisations. It is an attempt to understand practice from both an inside and outside position. Even as participant observer and member of the staff team on the outdoor residentials I am positioned within the organisation (Whitehead & McNiff, 2006), but look outwards and bring a perspective of the university and my external experience and identity. Part of the reflexive process is to acknowledge my own position as researcher within and in relationship to the host organisations, what Madden refers to ethnographic reflexivity (2010). My position within the organisations is also open to movement and change as relationships grow and the research task changes. Below is a representation of my starting point within Organisations A and B.

3.4.1 Organisation A

Organisation A, the federation of schools, has invited me, as an outsider to research the work of the family residential programme acknowledging the relationship between the research and the programme funding body.
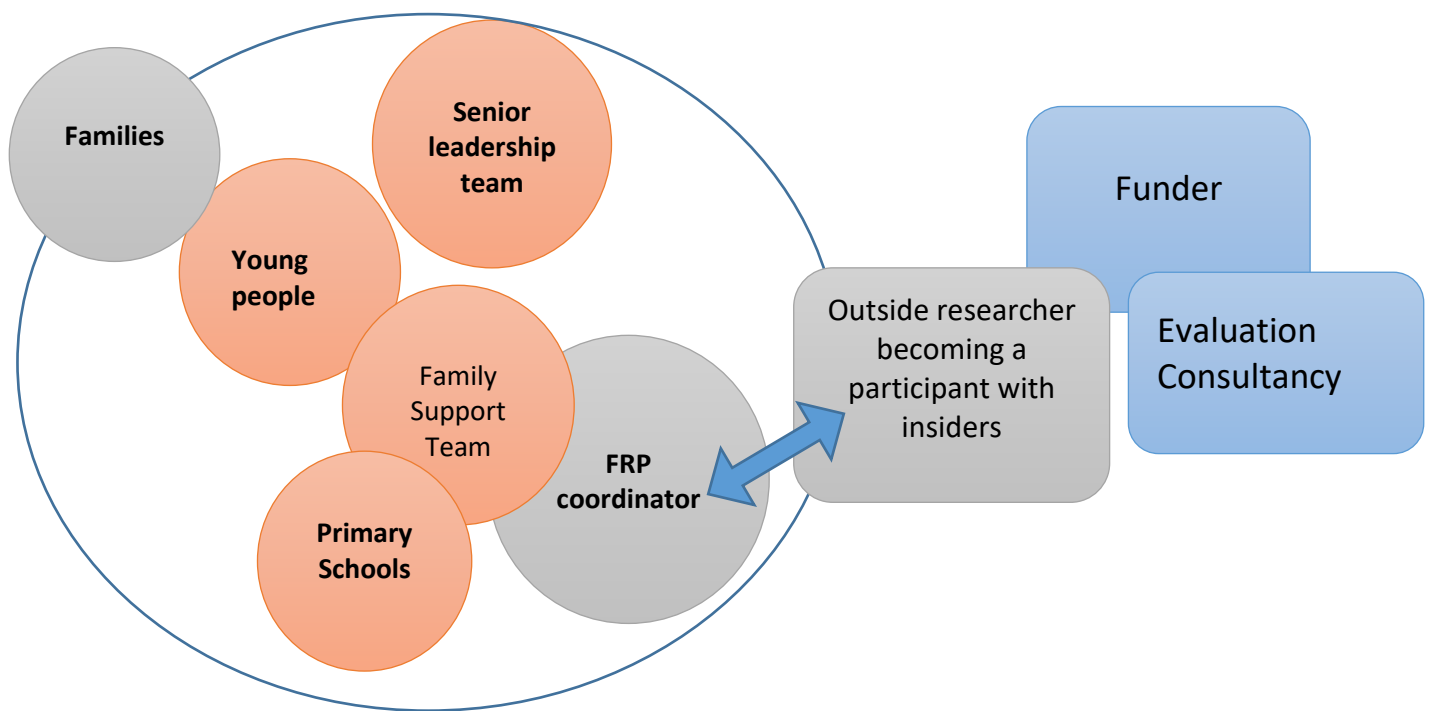
Figure 2 Positionality diagram Organisation A

Researcher as outsider – working through dialogue and reflection with Programme Coordinator and family support team. Reciprocal learning – becoming 'insider'. Building a collaborative relationship with worker and working relationships with staff. Outside the organisation but in close relationship to it. Reflecting back to the organisation. Collaboration with external evaluators.

3.4.2 Organisation B

I am a member of the research hub of the organisation and a member of staff on residentials working alongside associate staff and those from partner organisations. It is my job within the organisation to research their work with families. Having completed the fieldwork, my position shifted and I became more of an outsider.
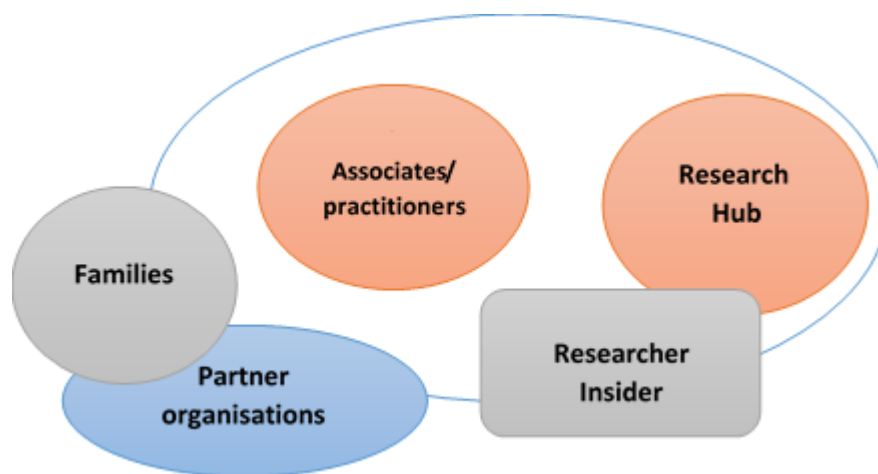
Figure 3 Positionality diagram Organisation B

Researcher as 'insider' – member of the research hub – reflecting on own and others' practice. Taking an active part in developing and practice. Part of the organisation but also working outside the organisation part of a wider research project

4   LITERATURE REVIEW

The primary focus of this initial literature review is 'whole family' policy and practice. This chapter will review key literature in relation to families and social policy including changing discourse of family; whole family practice and the contexts in which it is being developed with a specific focus on schools and youth work.

Empirical data collection took place over two years, 2013-2015, during a period of political instability. After a lengthy period of stable Labour government (1997 – 2010), a UK coalition government between Liberal Democrats and Conservatives took a new political direction focusing on financial deficit reduction, increased accountability of services and the beginning of payment by results for services for commissioned public services. In practice, youth workers and educationalist were still living and working with the legacy of the previous Labour Government but the shift from social democratic politics to neo-liberalism which began under the Blair Labour government meant a change in policy focus from a government committed to shared responsibility for the well-being of children and families, to a discourse of individual responsibility and accountability. The discourse of the family which emerged and transformed services during the first part of the twenty-first century in the UK, reflects the changes in political ideologies and economic priorities.

The family is on one hand a very private unit of social interaction and development, and historically has been subject to little public intervention. However, social policy in the UK, in the first decades of the 21st century has increasingly addressed the family as the site for intervention in addressing particular social problems. Those families impacted most by these policies are those who experience poverty and multiple disadvantage, or complex issues. The lives of a small minority of families have become open to public scrutiny, criticism, and intervention. Literature written over this period tracks the changing political discourse which have refocused State intervention from benefits led, and universal provision to intensive support targeted at a small number of 'troublesome' families. Supported by a contentious discourse which on the one hand has criticised any attempt to become a 'nanny-state' (Watt, 2012) – an interesting familial metaphor in the context of work with families– whilst identifying and arguably vilifying specific families as the cause of complex social problems and poor parenting.

4.1   Whole family interventions: policy and practice context

4.1.1   Discourse

'The family' has been and continues to be studied from multiple disciplines inducing sociology, psychology, feminist studies and childhood studies. The field of 'family studies' has emerged as a

further area of social study (James et al., 1998) and is most relevant to the study of emergent family policy and practice in the context of my study. Research from a family studies perspective includes research into children and young people's perspective of family (Morrow, 1998), children and their sibling relationships (Edwards et al, 2005; Edwards et al, 2006) and children, home and school (Edwards, 2002). These studies uncover the deeply ideological and political nature of 'the family' (Ribbens McCarthy & Edwards, 1998). These different perspectives have informed social and educational policy and services for children, young people and families. Gillies' (2003) review of sociological research into Family and intimate Relationships found that accounts are shaped by distinct conceptual frameworks and ideological perspectives. Perceptions of the scale and direction of change are dependent on the political prism through which they are viewed. The family as a social phenomenon has been constructed and reconstructed over history and as such is subject to dominant discourse (Murray & Barnes 2010). Ideas about the family are expressed through the use of certain language to describe, define and evaluate families. Based on the theories of Derrida (1930-2004) and Foucault (1926-84), the study of discourse examines how power is exercised by some groups in society to define and control others. Discourse can be viewed as both moral and political rhetoric (McCarthy & Edwards, 2011). The dominant discourse of 'family' has shifted from notions of the 'nuclear family' prevalent in the 1970's & 80s to more dynamic definitions focusing on what families do rather than who they are (Morrow, 1998). Feminist critiques of family (Kroll & Taylor, 2003; O'Reilly, 2001), postmodern, feminist and post-feminist studies acknowledge a diversity of family lifestyles and challenge normative version of family. Sexuality, culture, disability, changes to marriage, separation and reconstituted families each provide a different lens through which the family can be viewed. Feminist family studies study power within families to examine difference and its social value and political significance (Baber, 2009).

4.1.2 Changing discourse, changing priorities.

The New Labour years were a period of social liberalism, shaping family policy and making changes to accommodate different ways of being family (Henricson, 2012). Family laws which discriminated according to gender and sexuality were reformed including the recognition of same-sex parenting and the introduction of civil partnerships. Williams (2004) explores the extent to which there was an emergence of a new normativity of family within New Labour policy. Despite some reframing of normative models of family relationships, she identifies a "moral imperative on the importance of paid work" (p.38) a connection between parenting responsibilities, education and fight against poverty.

Of key interest in the literature is the debate about state of the family in the twenty-first century and how far change is positive or a source of moral panic about the breakdown of society. There are many

different ways of being and doing family which leave policy makers with choices to make about which model of family to promote; whether to privilege one kind of family or to present a neutral model of family (Carling 2002). Children being brought up in reconstituted families, with one or same-sex parents may be seen as a break down in family values or an authentic way of twenty-first century living (Gillies, 2003). Williams (2004) contrast the pessimism of the damage children supposedly sustain through marriage breakdown, lone parent living and absent fathers (associated with neo-conservative traditions) to the optimism of shifting away from oppressive conventions. Clarke and Roberts (2002) argue that UK policy interest in fathers and fatherhood is Anglo-centric, interested in financial support and some links with crime, and a discourse of the "dead-beat or dead broke dads" (p.169). Featherstone (2009) notes that a lot of UK social policy has been based on psychology and focussed on the family as a site for social regulation and control.   Although there appears to be on-going agreement that the family is a "lynchpin of social cohesion, civilisation and order" and embodiment of "the moral health of society" (Gillies 2003, p.4), there is little agreement about the extent to which family structures are changing and whether the family is indeed experiencing 'breakdown' (Frost, 2011. Whilst statistics appear to signal a reduction in nuclear families (www.ons.gov.uk, 2011), a reliance on simple statistics may also hide the diversity and complexities of family structures (Gillies, 2003).

The Millennium Cohort Study is a source of a wide variety of information and analysis. Changes in family structure in early childhood in the Millennium Cohort Study (Panico et al, 2010) suggests that oversimplified measures might hide the complexities of children's experiences particularly in relation to economic background and parental income.

4.1.3 Children, Young People and Families – the 21st century policy context

In terms of the interrelationship between research and politics, research around family issues and change has, for many years, been discussed as if in a 'war zone' (Featherstone, 2009, p.9). The family became one of the key sites for intervention relating to government economics and social priorities.

The beginning of the New Labour Government in 1997, marked an era of profound change for services for children, young people and families driven by an agenda to reduce social exclusion and end child poverty by 2020, but also characterised by the growth of new managerialism and increased government interference in professional issues. Support for children and parents in the context of their families resulted in an array of initiatives. Their policies were based on the premise that the life chances of young people are linked to economic status, health and education of parents (Henricson, 2017) and were driven by attempts to address child poverty and unemployment. Policy developed

with a focus on prevention, early intervention and 'breaking the cycle of disadvantage' rooted in a recognition of the impact of social class and economic inequality (Hirsch 2006), and recognising other factors such as mental health, drug and alcohol abuse, poor housing and contact with the criminal justice system. (Cabinet Office, 2008). Dolan et al (2006) recognised the importance of developing disciplinary approaches to practice in response to these converged agendas, but also described what was emerging as ill-defined and 'lacking in conceptual underpinning'.

Every Child Matters

One the most significant and lasting policies of the New Labour government was Every Child Matters which foregrounded children as a shared responsibility. *Every Child Matters* green paper (DFE, 2003) marked a shift towards the integration of children's and young peoples' services. Children's Trusts were established to manage and commission services at local levels. An emphasis on safe guarding led to a strengthening of policy and practice and the establishing of the Common Assessment framework (CAF). The Children's Workforce Development Unit was established, and a strategy launched for the training and development of the children and young people's work force, including the identification of a common core of professional competencies aiming to provide a base line for professional practice (CWDC 2010). This acknowledged the importance of working with parents and carers and families to help children achieve the five outcomes outlined in Every Child Matters (DfES, 2005), and also marked the shift taking place across professional practice towards greater inter-professional working. The Sure Start programme was implemented bringing universal services to parents and children under five aimed at providing a 'best start in life'. The Children Act (legislation.gov.uk, 2004) was of a major importance including it strengthened the rights of families in children in particular to play a much greater part in decision making about their futures.

Think Family

The first family policy **"Supporting Families"** Green Paper (The Home Office, 1998) put in place financial support and better support for families with serious problems (Maclean, 2002). Early research into families experiencing social exclusion identified over 6000 organisations providing support for families but highlighted the need for more practical support to get parents back to work and a strengthening of marriage as an institution (The Home Office, 1998).

From this point strategies published by the Labour Government had much more explicit commitment to holistic approaches to work with families including *Reaching Out* Families at risk review (SEU, 2006)*. Think Family: improving the life chances of Families at Risk* (SEU, 2008) marked the beginning of attempts to identify and work with the most excluded families. At this point there is a notable introduction of notions of 'families at risk' – until this point young people were more usually labelled

as 'at risk' (Smith et al, 2007; Eisenstadt, 2011). However, there was also a gradual shift from focus on the family to childhood vulnerability, well-being and parental responsibility (Parton, 2006). Over time the 'Family' became seen as extended network of the child (Morris, 2011). The emphasis of these reports focussed on prevention and 'breaking the cycle of disadvantage' rooted in a recognition of the impact of social class and economic inequality (Hirsch 2006), but they also began the process of counting the number of families of risk in the UK continued by the Coalition Government in its 'troubled families' agenda.

In 2007 the Government's *Children's Plan (*The Centre for Social Justice, 2007*)* was launched and the Department for Children, Schools and Families established. Further policy initiatives followed: *Every Family Matters* (The Centre for Social Justice, 2007) included sections on engaging fathers (Featherstone, 2009) and the provision of parenting classes. The document also discussed supporting parents to support their children's learning and identified the SEAL programme (Social & Emotional Aspects of Learning) as a possible way of addressing young people's emotional needs within educational settings. *Aiming High for Children: supporting families* (DfES, 2007) continued this commitment to strengthening parent's role in supporting their children's education aiming to develop "Active, responsible parents and empowered communities". Three further themes emerged at this point:

1. An emphasis on building resilience – the notion of resilience is to return in many more plans and strategies but what is meant by 'resilience is not always clear or mutually understood (see below).
2. Support for parents is coupled with the imposition of sanctions – in practice this will mean compulsory participation in some programmes and an ethical dilemma for organisations who work on the voluntary principle including youth work organisations (Banks, 2010).
3. The introduction of Family Intervention Projects, offering tailored intensive support packages for individual families 'caught in a cycle of low achievement' and experiencing multiple problems.

In 2008, 15 local authorities established FIP Pathfinder projects. An evaluation of these pathfinder projects was carried out (DfE, 2011) evaluating both impact on families and social return on investment - it is estimated that for every £1 spent Family Pathfinders generated a return of £1.90 from the negative outcomes and further interventions avoided (DfE 2010). Findings from this evaluation included practitioners recognising the importance of considering the needs of the whole family in their practice; of partnership working particularly with voluntary sector organisations; and of ensuring that partners have the skills and capacities to deliver what were at times very ambitious aims

and objectives. Al-Rousi (2011) questions how 'fit for purpose' the children's workforce is work with adults with complex needs in high need families.

The emphasis on families as a focus for social change and on the responsibilities of individual families to bring about that change is further reflected in the green paper published towards the end of the new Labour Government but which in many ways set the foundation for the Coalition Government developments in its own family's agenda.

> Parents' responsibility must go hand-in-hand with the privacy of family life. But, where behaviour or relationships are so irresponsible or damaging that people are being harmed in the family, or — as in the case of anti-social families —beyond it, it is right for firm action to be taken, whether it is invited and welcomed by the family or not. *Support for All: the Families and Relationships Green Paper* (DCSF, 2010, p.5)

This statement captures some of the contradictions inherent in State intervention in private family life.

Coalition and Conservative Family Policies

The Coalition Government continued this policy emphasis on the family. However, changes to the language of 'Troubled Families' reflects an ideological shift underpinning more punitive and interventionist approaches.

The Field report *(2010)* made a number of recommendations including establishing a way to measure the outcomes for children building on Labour's obsession with counting and measuring. Evidence-based practice continued to be a priority in service development. Efficiency cuts provided a backdrop for a move away from benefits reform and a shift to payment by results models of service provision and intervention. The report also examined the role of schools in breaking the transmission of intergenerational poverty through reducing the attainment gap between groups in society. It formed the basis of the Government's *Child Poverty Strategy* (DfE, 2011). The *Positive for Youth* policy statement (DFE, 2010) re-iterates the priorities of working with the most troubled families. It recommends setting up on-line and telephone support for parents as well as a focus on work with NEET young people. Each marked a shift in the relationship between children, families and the State (Frost, 2011).

All the policies and strategies for work with families above sit within the broader framework of "*Social Justice: Transforming Lives* (Dept. of Work & Pensions, 2012). The report claims to introduce a 'new ethos' of work with families that focuses on supporting relationships, early intervention and a shift away welfare support to return to work. The 'life cycle approach' which forms the basis for the strategy

in the report places a heavy emphasis on the importance of parenting. The Social Justice Outcomes Framework (HM Government, 2012) incudes indicators relating to stable, two-parent relationships. The promise of an inclusive discourse of family is all but gone.

Impact of 2011 riots and the Troubled Families strategy

Riots in some UK cities in 2011 provided a catalyst of the changing language and direction of family-focused policy. An interview with Geoffrey Pearson, author of 'Hooligan' (1983) stated the riots triggered a time of social anxiety with a focus on youth and "Repeated accusation of family decline and the break-up of parental discipline" (Pearson & Sinclair, 2011). Cavanagh (2011) accused the government and opposition as point scoring on the back of deep seated problems which need much more creative attention.

The Transforming Lives One Year On report (HMGov, 2013), a new vision for social justice, celebrates the new early intervention and prevention approaches, focussing on family breakdown, promoting work and "ensuring that interventions provide a fair deal for the tax payer". Policy became situated in a discourse of 'anti-social' and 'troubled families' reflecting the structural bias and mechanisms that stigmatised the family (Ball et al, 2016). The Riots panel found explanations for the riots were complex but identified poor parenting as an issue. They endorsed the work of the Troubled Families strategy but also cautioned that the overlap was limited (Riots Communities and Victims Panel, 2012).

The Troubled Families strategy was launched in 2011 initially targeting 120,000 families for intensive support. The main model of face to face delivery was the key worker and provision of 'hands on' 'persistent' and 'assertive support' over a period of six month (DCLG, 2012; Casey, 2012). The strategy introduced new commissioning and payment models (Communities and Local Government, 2012) working with charities and the voluntary sector to provide support for families experiencing a complexity of needs (New Philanthropy Capital, 2012). The strategy initially targeted families who experiencing a combination of unemployment, youth crime and anti-social behaviour, and truancy, later adding mental health, domestic abuse and drug and alcohol misuse as criteria for intervention. Success was and continues to be measured by a set of predefined outcomes

The Troubled Families strategy has been hailed as a success by the government (Ministry Housing Communities and Local Government, 2014; DCLG 2015; DCLG, 2016) with funding in place until 2020. However, success claims have met with criticism and questioning from academics and professionals (O'Connell, 2015; Crossley, 2016). The first independent interim evaluation of the strategy underlined how complex the process of gathering and making sense of data is (Ecorys UK 2014). Some research has found intensive support to be positive (Barry & Flint, 2012; Hodkinson & Jones, 2013) but research

has only been small scale and qualitative. Louise Casey's claims (2012) to listening to the stories of troubled families was criticised as meaningless and anecdotal.

Academics have criticised the process of stigmatising and labelling of families as 'troubled' and 'anti-social: Gregg (2010) in his examination of the evidence form the FIPs concluded that the projects had targeted the wrong people for the wrong reasons. He concluded that the FIPs were social engineering with the potential to help but instead demonised 'families from hell'. There was no evidence that they delivered sustained impact and were an example of popularist political rhetoric and policy-based evidence. McCarthy & Gillies (2018) argue that deciding who is troubled is as a complex moral question; they highlight the importance of inter-cultural dialogue and suggest that majority world moral frameworks and feminist care ethics should be employed when 'troubling children's families. Work by Sevenhüijsen (1998, 2002) explores alternatives to the concepts of responsibility and obligation as expressed in current family policy. She suggests the need for more creative policies which support parents' moral capabilities and sense of care, and existing rather than imposed notions of responsibility. Feminist care ethics also foreground the notion of democratic care practice instead of conservative, normative version of family and family values. Murray and Barnes (2010) reference feminist care ethics in their discussion of the narrowly defined concept of family in government policy. They identify how 'family' is used interchangeably with parents which in turn hides gendered assumptions about care and parenting (Lepper, 2012). Morris and Featherstone (2010) argue that 'bottom up' research informed by the ethic of care is urgently needed to inform policies and practices that help parents navigate between the tensions of care and protection. They identify a lack of understanding of family practices and contradictory policy drivers which position families to fail.

Welsham (2017) points out the longevity of rhetoric and concern for problem families. Indeed "The Problem of 'The Problem Family' (Philip & Timms, 1957) is a critical review of literature concerning the 'problem family' and its treatment. It opens with a quote from the Medical Officer of Health, Rotherham Rural District Council

> "I never did like the term "problem families" and think that is has the most unfortunate effects upon the staffs of Social Services... there is of course no clear-cut division between responsible citizens and those whose habits make them a nuisance or a burden to the rest of the community... I should be glad if I never heard the term again...."

From the same period, "Problem Families: an experiment in social rehabilitation (Stephens, 1945) provides an account of three projects in northern cities which worked intensively with 'problem families. The families are described as being disordered, having troubled getting children to school and poor discipline. The families are supported by a family case work who does practical jobs around

the home and negotiates health care for the family; keeps an even the conditions of the children; and may support women in leaving negative or abusive relationships. The report emphasises the importance of the human relationships between worker and family. It also describes the approach as social education

> Social education for families of this type must therefore not only be taken into the home, but must be linked to every possible form of assistance to make its lessons practicable, and must be given in the light of a clear understanding of their individual difficulties and abilities (p.53)

The similarity to the role of the Troubled Family key worker hardly needs pointing out.

Researchers identify the complexities in delivering whole family approaches (Morris, 2012). Ball et al (2016) argue that the figuration of 'troubled families' and 'anti-social' families is problematic. They also find that local practice continues to take an isolationist approach working with individual family members and with a lack of shared understanding of key working. Boddy et al (2016) found that intensive support can potentially make a significant difference to parents with significant mental health needs. However, payment by results does not recognise the complexity of need and may perpetuate existing barriers to accessing appropriate mental health care. The benefits of intensive, flexible one to one support is recognised in research by Hoggert & Frost, 2014, but they warn that continued cuts to resources threaten to undermine the strengths of the programme. A qualitative study by Bond-Taylor (2015) discovered key workers developing family-empowerment as an alternative discourse to government rhetoric. They discussed empowerment in terms of advocacy, access to resources and understanding power relationships within and beyond families.

Research highlight the links between poverty and ideas about poor parenting (Dermott, 2016). The impact of ongoing austerity is presented to counter the trend to blame individuals for social failure. The socioeconomic sources of poverty are largely ignored in policy (Belfrage & Montgomerie 2017)

4.1.4 Gendering policy

Whilst social policy in the last 30 years has increasingly focussed on the family as a site for intervention, critiques of policy and policy-outcomes highlight the continued gendering of both policy and practice. In many cases, 'family' can be replaced by 'parenting' and 'parenting' with 'mothering' (Murray & Barnes, 2010). There has been a continued gendering of family policy with much of its emphasis placed the role of the mother, and interest in single mothers, particularly those under 25. Belfrage and Montgomerie (2017) draw attention to the lack of data available about the gender and 'troubled families. However, they note that the bulk of households are headed by a female and that there is a gender bias to the programme. They conclude that the programme promotes heterosexual

monogamous relationships and is in effect a way of regulating the family. They note the contradiction of policies which are built on a derision of the 'nanny state' but perpetuate a paternalistic state. There has been an ambiguous interest in the role of fathers in the family, focussing on them as both risk and resource (Featherstone, 2009). Fathers barely feature in evaluations or research of the Troubled Families programme. Neither are BME groups and minority families recognised. The intersections of poverty and racism and cultural assumptions which underpin intervention (Collins & Bilge, 2016) have yet to be researched in relation to the Troubled Families strategy. Only nominal attention is paid to issues of diversity and culture in any of the above literature relating to policy and practice. Further research needs to explore sociological perspectives on family and identity to understand many of the implications in delivering current 'think family' strategies in multi-cultural communities.

4.1.5   Parental involvement in schools and education of their children

Family-based policy has and continues to make explicit links with children's' education. Every Parent Matters (DFSC, 2007) discusses supporting parents to support their children's learning and identifies the SEAL programme (Social & Emotional Aspects of Learning) as a possible way of addressing young people's emotional needs within educational settings. SEAL courses for parents were revised for 'hard to reach' parents and carers (Future Link n.d.) *Aiming High for Children: supporting families* (DfES, 2007) continued this commitment to strengthening parent's role in supporting their children's education aiming to develop "Active, responsible parents and empowered communities". Goodall & Montgomery, (2013) argue that initiatives often confuse the parent's relationship with school with the relationship with their children and their child's learning. They argue that parents can develop ownership and commitment to their child's learning despite difficult relationships with school drawing on the concept of parental agency. Relationships between schools and parents are changing. Declining support for families from external agencies means more emphases being placed on schools to deliver broader support for parents (Layard & Dunn, 2009; Hornby & Blackwell, 2018)

4.1.6   Family interventions – models and practices

A number of models have been used in the implementation of the above strategies and programmes. Some of these focus on the whole-family. Loveless & Hickling (2010) review early 'Think Family' initiatives.

The following are supported and endorsed in current government and professional literature.

SEAL: Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning.

SEAL is a whole-school approach to promoting the social and emotional skills. It is argued that these underpin positive behaviour, regular attendance, effective learning and the emotional health and

well-being of all who learn and work in schools. The Family SEAL programme encourages parents to share quality time and enjoy activities with their children whilst learning about the SEAL outcome sand how they can apply to both school and home life (Future Link n.d.). An evaluation carried out on behalf on the DCFS (Humphrey et al 2010) on the impact of SEAL found inconsistent outcomes and its recommendations highlighted the importance of engagement with parents and carers as an essential component in any future initiatives. In her research on the delivery of SEAL in primary education, Sue Bingham (n.d.) concludes that: "The pessimistic "deficit model" underpinning SEAL is not only overly-controlling but could potentially be counter-productive".

<u>Webster-Stratton programme</u> also known as <u>Incredible Years</u>

The Incredible Years is an evidence-based based programme aimed at reducing children's aggression and behaviour problems and increasing social competence at home and at school. Organisations such as the NHS, Barnardos and Sure Start have implemented it and evaluations are positive (The Incredible Years, 2013).

<u>Triple P (the Positive Parenting Programme</u>

An evidence-based parenting programme with over 30 years of delivery. The programme includes a Teen Triple P course which works with parents and their teenage children (Triple P n.d.).

<u>Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities (SFSC).</u>

"A strength based model to build or re-build relationships in the family, encourage children to work with parents not against them, improve parent knowledge of child development and its impact on behaviour and establish tools for becoming more involved with the community around them." (Molgaard & Spoth, 2001)

<u>Multisystemic Therapy</u>

Intensive, home-based support for teenagers and their families. Workers offer holistic, 24 hour support to keep the young person out of the criminal justice system. Research shows a reduction in re-offending and greater engagement of parents with voluntary and community support services (MST-UK, n.d.; Wells et al 2010).

<u>Family Conferencing</u>

A facilitated process, led by family members, to support decision-making and planning for children in a range of contexts including youth justice, domestic violence and young carers. (Holland & O'Neill, 2006; Family Rights Group, 2018)

Resilience and Well-being

My search discovered literature on a range theoretical frameworks and approaches to work with families which underpin many of the local implementations of whole-family strategies. These include resilience (Newman, 2004), family resilience (Walsh, 1998; McDonald & Walsh, 2013) and family well-being.

Resilience programmes have been implemented in schools as part of the strategy to improve well-being and educational attainment for instance Paul Hamlyn Foundation funded project *Right Here* (PHF, 2019). Shallon, Noden & West (2009) provide *An interim evaluation of resilience programmes in schools.* Resilience is "a universal capacity which allows a person, group or community to prevent, minimise or overcome the damaging effects of adversity (Grothberg cited in Sawyer & Burton, 2012).Sawyer & Burton, *Building resilience in families Under Stress* (2012) is a well-researched and practical resource for working with families affected by parental substance misuse. Family resilience is interpreted in different ways: as concerning the well-being of family members and the family as a whole (McCubbin & McCubbin, 1988), and the ability to 'bounce back' from adversity with better mental and physical health outcomes (Atkinson, Martin & Rankin, 2009). It can also apply to parents' capacity to supervise and keep children safe (Conger & Conger, 2002; Stoolmiller, 2001), and able to cope with change and adversity (McCubbin & McCubbin). This interpretation is linked to the provision of parenting support and training. One of the most consistent findings of studies of resilient children is that they have engaged in supportive long-term relationships with at least one caring adult. Particularly for children whose families have not been able to provide them with the support they need, the presence, or mentoring, of a non-parental, caring adult can be crucial (Luther & Zigler, 1991; Werner & Smith, 1982; Rhodes, 2002). Family resiliency can be conceptualised as a set of skills, competencies and protective factors (Black & Lobo, 2008).

There are powerful links between family intervention work and the understanding of both child and adult well-being. A report by Roberts et al (2009) on the delivery of government's parenting strategy through local Well-Being Projects concluded that much more attention needs to be given to the mental health and well-being of adults. The authors suggest that placing well-being at the heart of parenting programmes will improve outcomes for children, parents and local communities. They also challenge the negative, deficit models of many parenting strategies emphasising instead the need for fun and enjoyment in any programme.

The Children's Society survey *Children and Young Peoples' Subjective Well-being* (2008) provides another useful example of researching into and understanding notions of well-being. This report found that there is a strong link between well-being and levels of family conflict.

Families and Outdoor Activities

I found only one article that discussed working with families in the outdoors: The Thurston Family project: Working with families through outdoor activities and resiliency training" (McManus, 2012). This project worked with seven families over a six-month period which included two outdoor residentials. The project worked with families whose children were identified as having emotional and wellbeing needs. They were from an area of economic deprivation but were not known as families with complex needs. The programme focused specifically on building resiliency using the UK Resiliency programme (Challen et al, 2011). This focuses on individual resiliency and the author notes that an area of development would be to adapt this to focus more closely on the family. The project was led by staff trained in resiliency and well-being' programmes. Families practiced resiliency skills in outdoor activities and took part in reflections at the end of the day. They applied these skills at home for a further five months and then returned for a final weekend residential. Five of the seven families completed the programme. Outcomes were evaluated through the use of quantitative, social behaviour and life satisfaction scales. Families reported positive outcomes, but the author notes that these were mainly in areas where the project could have absolutely no influence, including more positive attitudes to school. They conclude that "perhaps most importantly, it enabled families to enjoy spending time together and to build some shared happy memories" (p.45). The project raises questions about the links between outdoor and resiliency programmes. The report itself has little theoretical underpinning and the authors recognise that this is an area of practice in which there has been little research.

This project has a number of features in common with the case study programmes in my research. They work with families through a combination of outdoor activities and home and school support. However, they do not specify an age range of the young people they work with and are not specific about the role or background of the staff who deliver the resiliency training. As in my case study programmes, this project appears to have developed through an intuitive or perhaps experiential belief that outdoor activities can offer positive experiences for families to practice relational skills. It has a specific theory base in focusing on resilience but struggles to articulate or theorise the approach to learning or the meaning of this experience for practitioners or families.

4.1.7 Young People, Youth Work and Policy

Young people and young people's services received early attention as New Labour developed its response to social exclusion. *Bridging the Gap* (SEU, 1999) focussed on the need to re-engage all young people in education, training and employment through a review of 14 -19 curriculum and the development of the Connexions service. Connexions offered both a universal and targeted advice and guidance service and included the new role of personal advisers. Many youth workers became part of the Connexions Service and as Personal Advisers found themselves in a much closer relationship with both schools and families and targeted work with young carers and young people in the care system. The Connexions Service despite some successes received a lot of criticism in its attempt to address issues of deep seated structural inequality through practices focussed on individual agency and a deficit model of youth (Colley & Hodkinson, 2001; Jeffs & Smith, 2001).

Transforming Youth work: developing youth services for young people (DfES 2001) and *Resourcing Excellent Youth Services* (DfES 2002) whilst supporting young peoples' rights to access to universal youth work provision, continued the development of targeting services to those most in need and danger of 'falling through the net' of existing support.

Positive for Youth (DfE 2010), a vision for young people rather than policy as such, includes a section on "putting families first". The document lists online and telephoning help for parents and notes the investment in the Troubled Families strategy. In line with other policy of the time, it names responsibilities but offloads them to other sectors and back onto families (Buckland, 2013).

Whilst youth and community workers have always worked with young people in the context of their communities and their families, during the last 20 years, practitioners have experienced the relocation of their work within children and young peoples' teams, family services and multi-disciplinary teams. UK social policy most recently focuses on the family as the 'problem' and the unit of change in addressing young peoples' issues such as anti-social behaviour, unemployment, youth offending and nonattendance at school. Schools, Youth Offending Teams, Drug and Alcohol projects and local authority Prevention and Early Intervention Teams have developed their practice in working with the 'whole family'. Many local authority youth services have become part of integrated children and young people's services in 0-19 services working alongside social workers and teams in children's' and family centres (NYA, 2014) creating 'teams around the child'. Youth workers regularly work as part of multi-agency teams addressing the needs for families as opposed to working discretely with 13 – 19-year olds.

The National Youth Agency in a recent report found that

the majority of local authority youth services were already engaged in some way with the TF agenda, with involvement ranging from youth workers taking on the key worker role, to involvement in multi-agency teams, to performing a 'triage' service, providing early intervention and targeted support (NYA, 2014).

In school's collaboration with parents and the local community has been recognised as instrumental in raising levels of attainment and key in addressing the inequalities related to social class and social disadvantage (Goodall & Vorhaus, 2010; DCSF 2010). Youth workers and family support workers are regularly employed in schools in youth work projects and multi-disciplinary teams to liaise with families (Education Scotland, 2019).

In England, there has been a move away from school-based youth club work to more integrated roles and functions such as pastoral work, support for young people experiencing difficulties in schools, homework, after school and holiday provision. Some of these roles along with family liaison work involve workers in relationship building with parents/carers. In their study of youth work in school in Northern Ireland, Morgan et al suggest that Youth workers can be conduit between young people and their families (Morgan et al, 2008).

Where possible, the employment of additional staff, such as a youth worker liaison or parental support advisor, to carry out welfare and support work connected to family engagement can make a large difference (Blackmore and Hutchinson 2010). Home-school liaison officers are good for targeted contact with 'hard to reach' or 'under-served' families, especially when there are limited language or literacy skills in the family (Emerson et al 2012).

Youth work has been subject to the same processes as other children's services. Neo-liberal ideologies and new managerialism have increased levels of accountability and demands for demonstrated impact. This has been met with both resistance (Tiffany, 2007; Davies, Taylor, Thompson, 2015) and pragmatism within the professional field (Stuart & Maynard, 2015; Centre for Youth Impact, 2018). Banks (2010) argues that youth workers can still exercise a moral voice in their professional practice. Work has become increasingly targeted to young people with specific problems, and local authority generic youth services have all but disappeared. Davies (2019) offers an in-depth analysis of austerity and the deconstruction of youth services. In some contexts, the radical traditions of youth work are being kept alive (IDYW n.d.). Ways of working with young people are being re-imagined in a number of ways, some of which is totally different practice (Bradford & Cullen, 2014), but also in ways which maintain a commitment to social justice and critical pedagogy (Cooper et al, 2015). One of the theoretical frameworks which may be able to offer an alternative vales-based alternative to current

youth work, target-based models, is social pedagogy (Coussee et al, 2010; Carter et al, 2012; Batsleer, 2013; Petrie, 2015; Slovenko & Thompson, 2016).

4.2   What does this mean? Out in the Cold

Practice with young people within their families is situated in a complex policy context. Within that context the dominant discourse of families and young people has become increasingly negative and stigmatising. Social policy has increasingly underlined the responsibility of parents for the behaviour of their children, offering parenting courses, helplines and imposing sanctions in relation to targeted problems. As part of the Troubled Families Targeted support, key workers, who may be youth workers offer intensive, assertive support to families and young people. There is still a lack of shared understanding of the key work approach and even less about what is meant by a whole family approach. However, the caring support of a key worker is acknowledged as beneficial for a lot of families. The value of relationship, and attention to relationships within the family appear to be important aspects of the key worker approach. Early intervention teams find some ways of creatively responding to young people's needs. Schools and voluntary organisations may have greater freedom to develop flexible and creative programmes for young people and their families which facilitate a whole family approach.

Many youth workers now find themselves working in unfamiliar contexts and in unfamiliar ways. They sometimes find themselves having to defend their ways of doing things, their values and their beliefs about young people in multi-disciplinary teams. Finding themselves outside youth work, effectively leaves them out in the cold.

4.3   Research questions

My research explores the hybrid space (Bradford & Cullen, 2014 p.103) that is emerging as work with young people within the families. This review of literature has raised a number of questions for me of which I shall be aware as I reflect alongside the practitioners in my study:

- What is the understanding of family in each of these organisations – what informs this?
- What political, philosophical and pedagogical paradigms underpin the work of each organisation?
- What is each project trying to do? What models and approaches inform delivery and understanding of practice?
- How can practice-based evidence be developed to identify, evaluate and reflect upon the models of family intervention work emerging from the specific contexts in which each organisation works?

I want to know what meaning practitioners bring to their practice in these contexts, how they theorise 'whole family work', and what sort of value base they establish for it. Will a new pedagogy of work with young people and families emerge and how might we name this?

METHODOLOGY

5   APPROACH

5.1   Case Study Research

This research focuses on two organisational case studies of practice which developed organically in response to a need and an opportunity. It is open-ended, exploratory research. Analysis of my data is both within-case and cross-case (Hammersley, 2014).

This thesis is the result of a dialogical process, dependent upon and facilitating interaction between funders, case study organisations and research participants and the families they work with. Whilst the funders and host organisations have an interest in the impact and outcomes of practice, the focus of this thesis is the meaning-making of that practice by the informal educators delivering it. In so doing, this research has to address some key challenges.

5.2   Challenges

- **Few models**

  There are few examples of 'whole family' research or research on work with families in the outdoors to draw on. Research into family-focused practice is underdeveloped; a critical a robust methodology is needed to articulate and understand practice with young people and their families (Clarke and Hughes, 2010 cited in Morris 2011).

- **Multiple voices**

  I had to develop a methodology to capture "the practice" and the multiple voices within it. I therefore had to consider complex power relationships and the dialogical nature of practice and context.

- **Competing voices**

  Families are complex and as such my methodology need to pay attention to the diverse and often competing voices within the participating families (Morrow, 1998; Harden et al, 2009; Heath et al, 2009).

- **Capture practice at different levels**

  The face to face work with families can only be understood from different perspectives. I need to create a critical methodology which can explore the relationships between practitioners, their organisations, managers and the socio-political context in which that practice sits, therefore at a micro, meso and macro level, locating practice within its political context.

- **A flexible and responsive methodology**

  The methodology has to be responsive to the different opportunities for engagement and data collection offered by the different host organisations and programmes. This methodology is a process which developed organically, reflectively and reflexively responding to the opportunities to work alongside and listen to practitioners and family members as they presented themselves – some of these were planned others required a degree of spontaneity and flexibility.

- **Researcher Reflexivity**

  I participated in some of the practice which is explored and as such my experience with the families I worked with become part of the research story and demanded my reflexive attention. The story of this research cannot be told without that being taken into account. Therefore the positioning of the researcher as participant, as part of the story is significant and, the observations of practice take place within a live and relational context.

5.3   Narrative inquiry

My research explores the stories of two organisations who have developed three different approaches to work with young people and their families including outdoor and residential experiences. Adding key working into the research sample added further diversity but also a different perspective within the story of the case study organisations. The research process begins with individual voices and stories, brings them together in teams and families, in organisational groups and then across both organisations. The presentation, analysis and discussion of these stories do not add up to one single story, but in considering them and the practice they represent through a critical lens, I draw out threads, or issues which have a wider relevance to practitioners, organisations and policy makers in relation to work with young people within their families.

5.3.1   Narrative and storytelling

This is narrative research based on the assumption that life is storied. We are positioned within different story lines (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) and our storying of events changes over time. Therefore, the narratives in this research capture moments in time and those moments may be reflections on or after an event (Schön, 1983). Telling stories can be an empowering activity. Adichie (2009) explains how the telling of their own stories repairs the dignity of marginalised people. She also stresses the importance of hearing more than the single story of any community or group of people whose definite stories are often told by someone else. The young people and families in this research are stigmatised by dominant discourse. This research is an opportunity for them to tell their stories and for those stories to hold an equal value alongside those of practitioners and decision makers.

Critiques of evaluative reports show how practitioners' stories can be used to sell programmes or create definitive accounts of 'successes'. However, this research is interested in the stories of struggle and of making sense of practice.

5.3.2 Including the stories of young people and their families

Whilst the central research question is '*How are practitioners articulating and making meaning of the work with young people and their families?'* their narratives sit within the experience of working with families, and within the relationships they build with those families. To completely ignore the narratives of participating family members would be to cut off parts of the body of their shared narrative. The practitioner's stories are their stories too – they are co-dependant. The collection of narratives creates a kaleidoscope view of the wider picture, corroborating, supporting, contradicting, challenging and celebrating one another.

With an underpinning feminist commitment to listening to the voices of people usually marginalised in both research and decision making (Harding, 2007; Gormally & Coburn, 2014), I value each story and insight offered by the children, young people, women and men involved in this work. I actively privilege the stories of young people and practitioners to ensure that their stories are not written out of accounts for practice and policy.

5.4 Limitations

There are significant limits in how far the experience of participant families themselves could be researched. Each programme with the case studies organisations had different relationships with the participating families – some very short-term, some longer, some continued to work with family members beyond the outdoor and residential programmes; this made it impossible to undertake a rigorous and systematic evaluation of the experience of participating families or draw any generalisable conclusions from their accounts. Even within the limitations of this research, the participants do speak and have things to say. There is so little existing research into the experience of work with young people within their families that I have a principled commitment to retain and work with their stories both as mirrors, or echo chambers, against which to bounce the reflections and conceptualising of the practitioners. They may also be a starting point for future, child and young person-centred research. Children and young people have a right to be heard and affect change through their participation (UNCRC, 1989, Montgomery, 2007); the voice and participation of young people lies at the heart of youth work practice and my professional values (NYA, 2004; Batsleer, 2008, Fitzsimons et al, 2011). The critical consideration of the contribution of the voices of children, young people and their parents is one of the ethical challenges my methodology has to address (Rogers & Ludhra, 2012).

Therefore, whilst my thesis focusses on the narratives of the practitioners who work with families in the case projects, these stories sit within the richer fabric of the combined stories of participants. Whilst the narratives of the practitioners are broken down and reflected upon in a reflective and reflexive process to develop new insights and theory, the stories of participants are presented as mirrors or windows.

5.5 Ethical considerations

Ethical approval for this research was gained from the University of Cumbria Ethics Advisory Panel (Appendix B).

I followed the British Educational Research Association (BERA) Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (2018).

I gained written data sharing agreements from each of the participating organisations.

5.5.1 From within a care ethic:

Research with families and children in the UK has developed largely from feminist standpoints and shaped by an ethic of care (Gabb, 2010). My research is underpinned with an ethic of care - as a feminist I am concerned with issues of power and voice; this is research about relationships and carried out in relationship to many different participants; as listening research, care needs to be given to the purpose and quality of that listening. I understand an ethic of care as moral theory and practice (Gilligan, 1982).

5.5.2 Relationships

My approach brings me into very close connection with my research participants and intense relationship building (Blazek et al, 2015). As a youth worker, I value building trusting and respectful relationships (Batsleer, 2008; Sercombe, 2010; Gormally & Coburn, 2014). However, there are complexities to manage within research relationships around intimacy and confidentiality and balancing a commitment to participants alongside the task of academic research (Gabb, 2010). During my research some of those relationships became friendships and involved informal conversions and sharing of intimate stories.

From my field notes:

> *Taking an ethic of care in research – finding out so much more than set out through evaluation relationship – when a worker tells you about their previous relationships – loss of child – mental health issues – drug use in the family – etc. How do you respond – how do you integrate this*

experience into the research process without vulnerability, respecting confidence but finding meaning in the process?

Ethically I had to establish very clear boundaries between what was shared with me as part of the research process (data) and what was personal information, taking care of the privacy of participants (Alderson, 2014). I addressed this is by being clear about when data gathering started and ended, what was recorded and checked out my selection and discussion of data with participants as part of a process of ongoing consent. Noddings (2003) notes that "To care is to act not by fixed rule but by affection and regard" (p24). My research process is mindful of and led by relationships out of a deep respect and care for participants.

Research with families and practitioners involves a complex set of relationships between practitioners, parents, young people and the researcher. These are not always hierarchical or linear and the caring dynamics within them needs to be appreciated. Relationships of care already exist in families, between participants and between the practitioners and the families they work with. The research process has to respect these relationships and contribute to the flourishing of them. This is what Sevenhüijsen (1998) refers to as the researcher as a participant in caring practices.

5.5.3 Ethical Listening

Listening is a basic principle in my research, as part of data collection but importantly as a way of showing respect and value, and in genuinely trying to understand other's perspectives. Ethically, care can be conceptualised as listening and listening as care (Bath, 2013; Brooker, 2010). Care in this case means caring as much about the relational impact of the research process as the objective findings; paying attention to the narrative and the context in which it is created and shared (Gilligan, 1982). In this narrative research, participants take part in an iterative storying of self and shared storying. However, their voices and telling of the same stories may conflict. This means being careful of the impact of telling stories together. Opportunities are created for individual story telling as well as shared narratives. Focus groups, family interviews and practitioner workshops provide opportunities for those stories to come together, for differences to expressed heard and make of sense of. This exploration of situated knowledge (Haraway, 1988) pays attention to plurality of voices, oppositional voices and the complexity of what is 'truth' in a social context.

5.5.4 Consent

I am mindful that the case study organisations are named as partners in the research proposal and that they invited me to research the practice of a number of practitioners. I provided each practitioner with a written explanation of the research process, and consent form, and explained that they did not have to agree to sharing parts or all of their practice with me if they did not want to.

However, I am also aware that it is difficult to feel able to say no within an organisational project. Therefore, I asked practitioners for their consent before each individual residential, visit, interview or group activity. I wanted to make sure that their consent was ongoing and that they felt able to withdraw consent at any point. I also made sure that all data was anonymised, and the confidentiality of all participants maintained in the data and writing up of the project.

Gaining the consent of young people and families to be part of the research project presented a number of challenges. The programme coordinator of the school's family residential programme is the gatekeeper in the school and my contact with families has to go through her. This is advantageous in that they trust her and she supports them in taking part in the research. The disadvantage is that only families who have a positive experience of the residential programme are amongst the sample. I did not speak to families who had decided not to take part in the programme. If this research were about family perspectives this would need to be addressed. I sent the families information about the research via the programme coordinator and provided an information sheet to each family who took part in the research. I gained the written consent of parents and all children and young people to take part. The research residentials with the young people required further consent from parents and young people.

Home visits were arranged through the coordinator, but I did these alone. In each case the children were around and joined in at some point. The focus group I planned for parents never happened because we couldn't get the group together – this is reflective of some of the pressures that parents deal with on a daily basis. Parents were happy to meet me in their homes at times that suited them.

Organisation B have a consent form which all participants on their programmes complete which gives permission for their evaluations and photographs to be used in publicity and research. I attended some of the residentials as one of the staff team but explained my role to participants at the beginning of each residential. I produced a young person friendly leaflet about the research which I gave each family with my contact details and how to contact my supervisors if they had any questions (Alderson & Morrow, 2011). I produced one consent form per family which each member of the family signed at the beginning of the residential in addition to the organisational consent form.

I also sent partner organisations written details of my research so that their practitioners understood my role. I discussed the research with lead workers before each residential either in person or by telephone.   I asked for their written individual consent to engage in reflection with them about their experience of the family residentials.

Each individual and shared reflective workshop and interview with practitioners began with an explanation of the purpose and checking out of consent to participate. Participants were kept up to date with the research process and encouraged to ask questions at any point.

5.5.5 Power

Feminist standpoint epistemology gives priority to the voices of the less powerful and marginalised in society (Devine & Heath, 1999) and I aim to privilege the voices of those least heard, in this context, practitioners, and children/young people and then their parents/carers. My methodology resects the gatekeeping role of school and organisational staff whilst ensuring that young people have plenty of opportunity to share their views. Children's views about school and family life may differ from those of adults such as teachers, parents, policy makers (Morrow 2009); a methodological challenge for me is to ensure that those views can be explored and heard with minimal adult intervention or interpretation, and with room to challenge or contradict adult perspectives (Fine, 1992).

Young people are relatively powerless in research processes generally (Heath et al, 2009). My aim is to develop a methodology which views children and young people as competent and knowers about their own lives, not dependant on adult interpretation (James & Prout, 1997, Fraser et al, 2014). This means listening to young peoples' ideas about the best ways to tell and gather their stories and ensuring that they have opportunities to tell those stories without parents or teachers present. At the same time, I respect that the children and young people in this study may feel more comfortable and safer with familiar adults present.

5.6 Research with Families

Families are a dynamic collection of people of different ages and roles having multiple perspectives on even their shared experiences (Song 1998, Gillies, 2003; Warin, 2006; Law et al, 2012). My methodology requires multi-layered, in-depth approaches to bring together individual and family narratives and case studies (Gabb, 2010). Within the story of each family are different stories which may involve contradictions. There is no need to look for or expect one 'truthful' family narrative (Warin, 2006). The research stories are co-constructed; I see my role as the researcher to facilitate the shared authoring of those stories, having an influence on the telling, but to give each story space to stand in its own right. Part of my role is to reflect the task of the family worker, in finding ways to share stories so that they are heard by the other participants.

5.7   Research between schools and home

The Family Residential Programme builds a bridge between school life and the private sphere of family life. I was concerned that my own research role, talking with parents as well as children and going into homes might be unwelcome or intrusive particularly from young peoples' perspective. Children may experience a "risky dissonance" when exploring the relationship between home and school (Alldred et al 2002 p.121). Furthermore, these public and private spheres may be significantly boundaried making exploration of their interface ethically and practically challenging (Edwards & Ribbens 1998). The interface between home and school may involve a complex relationship between regulation and autonomy (Backe-Hansen, 2002).   I was rigorous in seeking informed consent from the young people at every step of my research, ensuring that they as well as their parents were happy for me visit their homes. I also paid attention to the double-gatekeeping of school and parents (Hill 2005) by arranging to meet young people out of school and sometimes away from home.

5.8   Research with young people and schools

Schools-based research involves multi-dimensional power dynamics which exist within the school, between the school and parents, the school and young people, and within families. It is important to consider how parents experience their relationship with schools and be aware that the family residential programme aims to build strong relationships between home and school. In principle my role should support that aim whilst respecting parents' voice.

 I first met the young people who wanted to be part of the research project, in school, during school time, in the board room, as arranged by the FRP coordinator. This was uncomfortable; meeting around a large table felt unnatural and imbued with power. The next time I met with the group we discussed other times and places to meet and the young people asked if we could go on a residential. The school agreed to fund two three-day residentials for primary and secondary age young people. The FRP coordinator and I ran these together, with the young people choosing what activities they wanted to do or show me. The format of the residential was familiar to the young people, the research activities were different – we used cameras and video cameras, games, and art work to tell individual and collective stories of their family residentials (Heath et al, 2009). The young people decided on these activities and even devised a story telling game. They interviewed each other setting up a video booth. Overall the young people became co-researchers and co-learners in this part of the research process (Kellet 2010). It was valuable time to spend with young people, put them in control of some aspects of the research, and was also a lot of fun. The relationship building between us all on these residentials played an important part in gaining the young peoples' trust and enjoyment in telling their stories. There is a dynamic relationship between the 'teller and the told' (Warin 2010).   Being an active

participant in some of the residentials meant that I also gradually became part of the story along with other members of staff. The children regularly delighted in telling stories about the staff, how they burnt cakes, told jokes, got the minibus out of a snow drift.   Stories of me falling over, laughing a lot and treading in sheep poo also became part of the children's narrative. In this way I became an insider, someone who made myself open to the young people, giving something of myself to them and to the experience rather than only taking from them. When I visited their homes to talk with their parents the young people were able to introduce me, and we shared our stories with their parents. This was an important feature of this collaborative methodology.

On the residentials I was participant observer, this helped reduce the power imbalance between me and the young people (Montgomery, 2014). We could build reciprocal relationships and play together whilst I continued to share responsibility for the young peoples' safety and wellbeing. The most challenging aspect of this arrangement was working with the FRP coordinator who I experienced as having a parenting role with the group, and at times with me! I had to be respectful of her way of working and her relationship with the young people whilst negotiating space of the young people to take some control of the process.

Creative methods such as film and photography, in attempting to empower young people, also raise significant ethical issues. Privacy and respect for others are important ethical issues to address with the young people as co-researchers (Greene & Hoggan, 2005). Ground rules had to be set about where and when cameras could go as a couple of young people began to use them to pester and intimidate others. Cameras are a source of power in their own right and need to be carefully managed. The power dynamics between young people in groups need to be paid attention to and attention given to the different and unequal voices within the group (Lomax, 2012). On the other hand, the photographs and videos taken by some of the young people provided a completely unique view and perspective on the residential experience. These were discussed with the young people to minimise the adult voice in their interpretation. I was careful to gain permission from the young people to be included in images (Hearn & Thomson, 2014). The young people were given copies of all the photographs they took and were asked permission to use individual phots and film clips in the research.

Pahl and Pool (2011) stress the importance of not imposing methods but allowing them to emerge in the field in an 'apparently chaotic' and 'serendipitous' way. I had to slip into the ways of working and playing that had already been established on the residentials but create spaces for things to happen. This approach depends on establishing a high level of trust, having time to work it out, and personal reflexivity. I kept a research journal throughout the process and regularly discussed it with my supervisory team. In developing my research methodology, I learnt to play, to be reflexive and to "hold

[my] nerve and persevere" (Rogers & Ludhra, 2012 p.56). I also appreciate and defend the messiness of research, and "the loose ends that characterise stories of individuals' emotional-social worlds (Gabb, 2010 p. 462), as reflective of the messiness of everyday lives of families and family practice.

5.9 Sample

5.9.1 Practitioners

A convenience sample (Denscombe, 2007) of practitioners who took part in family residential programmes:

19 practitioners took part; 17 worked for the case study organisations, a further two, the YOT workers, were partner staff on outdoor residential programmes.

The practitioners who participated in this research come from a range of professional backgrounds.

Professional background	Total	Male	Female
Youth work (qualified)	4	2	2
Youth work (trainee)	3	1	2
Outdoor Education	3	2	1
Family worker (qualified)	1		1
Family worker (unqualified)	1		1
Teacher	1	1	
Social worker	1		1
Other - psychology	1		1
Dual qualified: teacher/youth worker/outdoor education	2	2	
YOT (qualified)	2	2	

Figure 4 Breakdown of practitioner sample

The majority of them are in the 40 -50 age bracket with only three below 30 and four over 50.

Age spread:

- Under 20: 1
- 20-30: 2
- 30 – 40: 3
- 40 – 50: 9
- 50 – 60: 3
- 60+: 1

5.9.2 Families

In total thirty-two families took part in the research. These families were part of programmes across the two case-study organisations.

Project	Organisation A - School's Family Residential Programme	Organisation B	
		Outdoor residential	Key working
No of Families	7	22	3
No of adults	9	23	5
No of young people	23	35	5

Figure 5 Breakdown of sample families

5.10 Research Design: Organisation A – Outsider Case Study

I began my research with the school's family residential team as an outsider, as a professional researcher (Greenwood & Levin, 2007) and known to one of the practitioners as a university tutor. One of my tasks was to also win the trust of the programme co-ordinator as an experienced practitioner. It was my identity as a fellow practitioner that I presented as a way of levelling the power relationship between us.

The programme was already in its second year when I began my research. I had to slip into existing ways of working and existing relationships between the family support team and families. The external funders also had a presence and I shared some of my findings with them. However, I found it was important to establish my own relationships within the school and my own ways of working. I only attended one residential with a group of siblings, as a participant observer. We planned that I would attend a whole programme with another family, but they eventually did not take part. Because the residentials are very intimate and particularly challenging for parents, we agreed that it would not be appropriate for me to observe a residential with a whole family group.

I attended a group family residential at the beginning of my research which was an excellent way to meet families, explain the research to them and start to build relationships with them.

My challenge therefore was to find ways of hearing the stories of participating families – parents and young people – and explore the perspectives of participating staff. The programme has one coordinator, an apprentice worker and has also been staffed by a number of the school family support team. The school Head is a key stakeholder and has provided the vision for the programme. The coordinator is managed by an assistant head who has developed additional residentials with young people in an alternative curriculum group.

5.10.1 Bricolage

I found the concept of bricolage helpful in conceptualising the relevance and appropriateness of drawing together existing data alongside a strategy for primary data collection.

Bricolage draws on an interpretivist view of ontology and epistemology (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009 p.2). It takes account of the developing a rich, collective narrative from a range of resources and perspectives. I found the image of weaving a narrative cloth particularly useful.

> Because all physical, social, cultural, psychological and education dynamics are connected in a larger fabric, researchers will produce different description of an object of inquiry depending on what part of the fabric they have focussed. (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005, p.319)

Bricolage recognises knowing as a collaborative activity, in which each person has a part to play in constructing knowledge, created through inter-subjectivity. I relate to the role of the bricoleur who attends to many voices, to those that are privileged and those that are ignored, examining how power operates to validate or exclude certain forms of knowledge and knowledge-making and why (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005). They constantly question where power is located and how it is used in creating particular forms of knowledge. It is a concept which supports narrative research and the gathering of narratives in diverse ways from a number of different sources.

Bricolage demands a creative approach to the identification and gathering of data. In the case of the school's programme there were already case notes, action plans, participant diaries, and photographs which told the stories of previous residential experiences. Practitioners and families gave me their permission to draw on these. This was raw data which captured the voices and perspectives of participants and practitioners 'in the moment'. They provided excellent starting points for reflective discussion with the programme coordinator in particular, and the young people's photos were useful prompts for their focus group discussions.

I also had to create methods of data collection which were appropriate to the needs of research participants – practitioners and family members - and their context.

5.10.2 Methods

Participant observation

Participant observation is a data collection method which can support the rebalancing of the power between the researcher and the young people and adults they are researching (Montgomery, 2014). Whilst this was my aim, and therefore one of my preferred methods of data collection, it proved to be more appropriate for use with Organisation B than Organisation A. I was a participant observer on just one residential with a sibling group, and one group family residential. Because the individual

family groups are small, particularly when only siblings are present, the addition of just one more adult to the team can make the power imbalance even more significant and over-power the young people. The family residentials also followed a very structured pattern repeated in each of the three residential per family, which could have been disrupted by the additional of an additional adult. Therefore, we agreed that it would more effective for me to discuss their experience of the residential programmes with young people and their parents in their own home after the events (also see chapter 5.8). The exception being the residential for a number of families which really needed the participation of an extra practitioner and young people and parents welcomed me as an additional person to listen and undertake activities with.

Interviews

Regular interviews with the Family Residential Coordinator. These were unstructured reflective interviews where we discussed recent residential experiences and I could ask questions from my work with secondary data.

Individual, semi-structured interviews with family support team members. A number of prepared questions provided a structure for the interviews but flexibility to allow the interviewee to talk about their experiences in their own ways (Denscombe, 2007). The team come from different backgrounds and the interviews provided space for them to make connections between their previous experiences, and what they do now.

Interviews with parents in their own homes. Children joined in these interviews which became opportunities for shared storytelling.

Focus Groups

Staff focus group with the funders as part of the programme evaluation. Members of the family support team and their manager gave their individual perspectives on the family residentials programme and their ways of conceptualising their practice. This revealed differences within the team as well as shared perspectives (Denscombe, 2007). It was an opportunity for staff to find out about each other in ways they had not done before and be challenged by their differences (Choak, 2012).

Two focus groups with young people focussing on questions identified by the funder's evaluation team as part of our collaborative practice but carried out by me. I devised visual prompts to use in these groups. However, they were limited in that whilst they are an efficient way of getting a number of people together at one time and gathering a range of perspectives, they assume that members will listen to each other (Heath et al 2009) and develop a group response to questions (Choak, 2012). In this case the young people did not know each other or me very well and did not listen to each other.

They did all want to talk which was a positive. Despite employing a number of strategies to listen to each other, an around the table discussion was not the best way to engage with the young people. I needed to find a way of engaging them with each other as well as me and on their own terms.

Young people's research residentials

Two research residentials planned with the young people, took place at the Cottage. Using a variety of creative methods including film, photos, art, interviews (see section 5.8 for discussion of ethical issues). Most of these methods are visual methods and work well with young people for a variety of reasons. They complement verbal accounts given in interviews and conversations (Mitchell, 2011). These methods reflected the methods I am familiar with as a youth worker to engage young people – games, art-work and drama. Therefore, they built on my skills as a youth worker as well as researcher providing prompts for further critical reflection and discussion (Cullen et al, 2012). They can also provide alternative perspectives that wouldn't be heard in discussion alone. The young people chose which methods they wanted to use on the residentials which became a collective story telling of the Cottage and their experiences there. They provided ways of showing experiences in wide public spaces and in the private spaces. These methods encouraged the young people to work together – for instance, they decided to set up an interview booth and interview each other. They also provided highly individualised ways of expression (see Louise's photos in section 12.1.5). Back's image of the still voice in photography (2007) is particularly poignant and relevant when considering someone like Louise who said so much more in her photographs than she was able to in a group. Back also advocates multi-sensory ways of listening that slow down the listening process. This visual data presented challenges of representation and interpretation. I encouraged the young people to use visuals to support their story telling (Allen, 2014); I did not attempt to interpret them on behalf of the young people however I am aware that ultimately, I, the researcher chose which visual representations to draw on as data in the same way as I selected other narrative excerpts.

5.10.3 Data

A wide variety of data was generated form my research with Organisation A. Some of this was primary data, some was existing – photos, practitioner notes (fig. 6).

Young peoples' focus group – flip chart and transcripts	2
Young peoples' photographs	collection
Young person's video (resi) & transcript	2
Resi games - Video & transcript	3
Young person's picture	1
Ipoems & stories - Young peoples	3

Interview – school family support workers	4
Interview Family Residential Co-Ordinator	3
Interview – young people	9
Family case studies (from variety of notes, diaries, evaluations)	5
Interview with parent	2
Parent group	2
Staff focus group	1
KB reflection	1

Figure 6 Range of data collected Organisation A

5.11 Research Design: Organisation B – Insider Case Study

Developing a methodology for research with organisation B was a dynamic, collaborative process. Welcomed as a member of the research hub, I began my research within the organisation as an insider. I was a member of staff on residential weekends. I joined the staff team as a practitioner researcher. Therefore, it was 'our' practice that I was researching as a participant observer (Reason & Bradbury, 2008). But I was also reflecting on 'my' practice in relation to the other practitioners (McNiff, 2011). This position only changed in the latter part of my research when I began to find it necessary to take a step outside and gain a greater level of critical distance as the questioning of 'your' practice as an organisation became more searching and critical. Action research can operate all three levels – first, second- and third-person inquiry (Marshall, 2016).

5.11.1 Collaborative Action Research

We decided on action research as the most appropriate way to engage with emerging practice. Action research provides an effective and appropriate framework for critical reflection (Marshall, 2016). Critical reflection and action research are concerned with knowledge in and from practice. Action research explores collective, praxis orientated knowledge (Greenwood & Levin, 2001, 2005). Knowledge is found in experience, is uncertain, and explores truths that "won't stand still (Pelias, 2004). My research aims to uncover, share and negotiate the knowledge that practitioners bring to and develop in their work with young people and families. Knowledge can be technical (how do we do it), interpretive (this is why we do it), and critical. Critical reflection captured all three levels, however, my interest is in this third aspect, in the deconstruction and reconstruction of 'knowing', and examination of power (Greenwood & Levin, 2007; McNIff & Whitehead, 2011). Action research drawing on a critically reflective process moves beyond problem-solving. Whilst the organisation wanted to identify its 'offer' and approach in relation to its work with families, the process also engaged in practice at macro level, exploring its social and political meaning.

Action research offers practitioners an opportunity to take a step back from the immediate pressures of practice (Eikeland, 2012), to review and reflect on practice issues. The organisation supported this process by agreeing to meetings at different levels and in different combinations. These included conversations with practitioners without managers present. I had to advocate for sessional workers to be paid to attend workshops - casual contracts mean that part-time workers are usually excluded from research activities. As a researcher there is a fine line to tread in terms of whose side you are on and being aware of colluding to one point of view or another (McNiff & Whitehead, 2011). This was particularly relevant for me as I already knew some of the practitioners from my work with them as a tutor.

My research design had to be developed collaboratively with the practitioners, listening to their ideas about how best to view practice and how to create safe but challenging reflective spaces (fig. 7).

Figure 7 Dialogical spaces

Research in organisation B involved creating a multi-layered structure creating and giving access to 'dialogical spaces' (McNiff, 2013). These spaces provided opportunity for reflection on and in practice with participating families, practitioners, their managers and others involved at an organisational level in the marketing and contracting processes (fig. 8).

Figure 8 Action Research Process. Organisation B January 2012 – December 2013

Family Residential 1. (family centre)

Family Residential 2. and follow up visits (adult drug and alcohol service)

Residential worker interviews and reflections (1.)

Special Interest Group (1.)

Setting up Key Worker contract

Special Interest Group (2)

Key Worker team meetings

Key worker interviews and initial visits

Sharing good practice day (organisations 1 &2)

Family Residential 3. (YOT Dads & Lads)

Family Residential 4. (YOT Mums and Daughters)

Residential worker interviews and reflections

Key worker interviews

Staff development: working as a team around the family. Partner organisation

Staff development: working with the whole family. Partner organisation

Family Residential 5. (YOT)

6 month review of key working

Planning future family work.

Family work training - key workers and managers

Residential workers reflection day

5.11.2 Methods

Participant Observation

My involvement in the action research process began with participant observation on two family residentials. I was an extra member of staff on teams which included two outdoor education specialists and a technician. No staff from the partner organisations were present. Whilst I was able to have an active support role in the delivery of the residential programmes, I could also talk with participants about their experiences, and reflect in and on practice with the team. I took part in the course evaluation immediately after each residential. In Organisation B I found that participant observation was much more congruent with our shared youth work aims and approaches. Because these were group residentials, an extra member of staff enhanced practice rather than disrupted established ways of working. The outdoor practitioners created the basic programme for each residential but the actual practice with the young people and their families was co-created. I was also participant researcher on two later residentials with youth offending team partner organisations. I explain in chapter 5.5.4 how these relationships were negotiated.

I undertook just three home visits with key workers. Whilst these gave me an important insight into the experience of practitioners going into peoples' homes and building relationships from scratch, I decided it was not appropriate for me to continue as I could not be a participant – I could not offer to 'work with 'the families. I was clearly only an observer and the power imbalance did not sit easy with me.

I kept field notes of my residential experiences and of my home visits.

Practitioner recordings

The staff team recorded their course evaluation on a Dictaphone.

Interviews

Individual reflective interviews with practitioners after each residential. These were unstructured interviews which allowed space for the practitioners to identify the most important points for them, but were also dialogical. I could ask questions within them to develop my understanding of our/their practice. Whilst this was an iterative process, the questions and depth of reflection changed each time. Interviews were recorded on a Dictaphone and later transcribed.

Individual, unstructured interviews with key workers, and also with pairs of workers. The paired interviews were creative in terms bringing perspectives and building ideas together. Individual interviews were more personally reflective. In both cases I was aware that I sometimes had a coaching

role but had to be mindful that I did not become another layer of the supervision structures. I did this by encouraging practitioners to take issues back into team meetings.

One interview with a key worker and a parent (woman) that she was working with, and one interview with a different key worker and a family (a mother and two teenagers). In both cases the parent asked for the key worker to be present. I asked the young people if they would like to talk to me separately, but they wanted to stay with their mum. This negotiated format respected the families' relationships with each other and their worker. I worked hard to ensure that they had as much control as possible. Parents on these programmes already feel judged – I wanted to avoid research adding an additional layer of pressure.

 I recorded these interviews on a Dictaphone and later transcribed them. These were effectively group interviews. They had a lot of energy and were great fun as each person enjoyed telling their story. There was a lot affection expressed during these interviews. They were carried out as the key worker was ending their work with the family and had a secondary purpose of evaluation and contributed to a managed positive ending.

Team meetings and special interest groups

The organisation is committed to embedding the learning from the research process across all sections. A Special Interest Group was set up which met approximately three times to address strategic developments building on my reflections, feedback from participants and the on-going dissemination process for my research. I kept notes of these meetings which provided a record of the progression of ideas and organisational approach.

Reflective workshops

In the second year of data collection, I organised a number of staff development days for partner organisations looking at whole family approaches. These drew on the early analysis and findings and provided an additional point of reflection and reference in the process of critical debate. Workshops were then delivered to key worker staff at the organisation and their managers focusing on the development of the key working model and its contribution to the organisation's family work offer

I also ran a reflective workshop for outdoor practitioners towards the end of the second year. I used excerpts from my field notes, photographs, participant feedback and my own critical reflections as optional starting points for five reflective sessions. These were the most critically reflective sessions engaging directly with critical issues form practice, working with concepts and tested out different perspectives, including perspectives from recent research. I recorded these sessions on a Dictaphone

and later transcribed them. I found transcription although taking a long time, was an excellent way of revisiting, familiarising myself with and engaging with data at depth.

In these sessions I used excerpts from my field notes as examples of reflection and critical questioning (Moon, 2004). Although Moon (2004) and Bolton (2010) have developed some exciting ways to encourage reflective writing for professional development, I was mindful not to fall into a tutoring role, or in any way set up a quasi-teaching situation. Given that I have tutored some of the practitioners, this could easily have become the case and repositioned my relationships with them. It is also my experience that youth workers prefer conversational reflection to written reflection. However, I did draw on Brookfield's ideas about reflective lenses (2017) to bring in perspectives from young people, and colleagues, and encourage practitioners to draw on their previous experiences (what they already know) as well as their current experiences. This way of working could be built on to develop looking at practice from other perspectives including theoretical concepts and approaches.

I took an inductive approach to my research and data analysis. Key underpinning themes of power and gender were identified during my pilot, in the very first residential experience and continued to speak through the whole research process. Other themes emerged as we worked through the action research process. I offered my observations and reflection back to the practitioners at regular intervals and used their feedback, and the feedback of participants to open out discussion within the organisation. Themes became more focused and more critical as time moved on and my working relationship with practitioners developed (fig. 9). Many of the same themes were arising in research with Organisation A.

Sharing Good Practice Day

My research with practitioners included organising a Sharing Good Practice Day bringing workers together from both research partner organisations. Despite having developed different organic models, many of the issues involved in their work with families, and significantly, their aspirations for that work were similar and coming together provided an opportunity to articulate and question their practice. Part of this day was spent telling each other about their work with young people and families – this process of articulating practice to someone else clarified aims and approaches. The practitioners compared and contrasted their approaches and identified common values. Articulating aspirations clarified both concerns practitioners had about organisational support for their work and their vison for it. We created visual records of these discussions using flipcharts and post-it notes throughout the day.

Marketing

Worker role/reflexivity   Family residentials 1 & 2

Power/ Gender

Interviews & reflections/SIG

Sharing Good Practice Day

Developing contract

Role/Activity/safe guarding   Key Working

Working with whole family/focus

Visits/interviews workers and families

Creating a definition and

articulating approach

and values

Gendered work/ space and place   Residentials 3, 4 &5

Worker interviews and reflections

Staff training

Key workers and

residential staff

Gender/power/personal story

Figure 9 Action research cycles

Worker role and

critical issues

5.11.3 Organisation B data

Data collected with Organisation B was mainly primary data created during reflective interviews and group session, and from my own field notes (fig. 10.). Excerpts from participant evaluations of individual residential programmes were also drawn upon to gain insight into the experience of young people and their parents.

Interviews: key workers (transcripts)	9
Interview: family (key work)	1
Interview: parent (key work)	1
Interviews: outdoor residential workers	3
Interviews: outdoor residential participants	5
Field notes and reflections – Kate Breeze	16
Interviews: partner workers	2
Notes of SIG meetings	2
Photos	2
Sharing Good Practice Day write up	1
Outcome star	1
Case studies	3
Meeting notes	1
Word cloud – from staff training	1
Key Worker Training plan	1
Key Worker Training transcript	3
Residential Worker Training plan	1
Residential Worker Training transcript	5
Individual Residential Evaluation reports	2

Figure 10 Summary of data Organisation B

5.12 Data Creation and Analysis

The data listed in the previous sections are the data that I selected from my field-data as relevant to my research. Generating this field data was an absorbing and creative task. I realised that I had far more data, and far more diverse data than was required for this study. Selecting visual data was particularly challenging there being a temptation to only select visual data which is explained in text, but there is some data which speaks in the silence (Back, 2007). I chose some visual data which spoke to me.

I experimented with transcription, preferring eventually to produce whole transcripts so that I didn't miss or overlook anything that hadn't immediately grasped my attention. I then had to find those parts of the transcripts which had something to say.

I also experimented with ipoems as a way of condensing and capturing the intense and personal voice of some participants. I particularly value finding the voice of knowing and not knowing in ipoems (Gilligan, 2015; Edwards & Weller, 2015). I only tried this with some of young peoples' shorter narratives, but they do provide a clear reflection of experience with which to interact. These could be used in future research which focuses on young peoples' narratives.

I took some of my data back to the practitioners and invited them to interact with it. In this way I tested out what I thought was relevant and of interest. This presentation of interim data also helped me to think about how data is edited and presented.

I did "fall in love" with my participants and their texts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) and wanted them to speak for themselves. Particularly in my concern to include the voices of young people and the voices of experience (practitioners) I did not want to edit them out. I hope I have retained their voices and present the dialogue that emerged between the different participants. I am also aware that this is my thesis and ultimately, I own the voice.

Overall, I undertook cross-case analysis (Hammersley, 2014). I took a thematic approach to my data analysis, initially looking for themes that arise from the individual narratives. This meant constructing research texts in ways that allow thematic analysis. I colour coded sections of my written data according to themes. I used Atlas ti as a tool for sorting and grouping themes drawing on the basic principles of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin 2009). Corbin notes that the analytical process starts with thinking, this was my experience. Computer-based software cannot replace the thinking process which happens throughout the data analysis process. Once inputted to Atlas ti, I used the colours to create codes (Appendix 2). I also inputted annotated photos and videos which could also be drawn into the thematic sets. In addition, I printed out my transcripts and physically grouped them according to themes and perspectives. As I re-read and coded my data, using memos in Atlas ti and post-it notes on hard copies, I was able to draw codes together into themes such as learning and activities, and issues such as power and gender. In this way the data from the two different organisations gradually became one data set as both individual and shared themes emerged.

5.12.1 Emergent themes

Power

- Within family relationships

- Between practitioners and participating young people and their families
- Power to define the work with families

Gendered power relationships

Space and place

- Residential spaces: home from home
- Activities: Indoor/Outdoor

Learning

- social learning, social education, informal learning
- Learning and being outdoors

Practitioners

- Practitioner role
- Practitioner skills and knowledge
- Personal story
- Multi-disciplinary teams
- Inter-relational work
- Ways of being
- Worker reflexivity

Young peoples' experiences

- sibling relationships
- relationships with parents
- relationships with workers
- Learning
- Play

Parent's perspectives

- Of their children
- Of practitioners
- Of themselves/family

Organisational commitment

Gender: feminist perspectives and masculinity

Finding a focus in work with whole families

Having identified key themes, I took those back to the research participants, the practitioners, for reflection. This iterative process developed reflection on these issues moving from description to

shared reflection, to thinking conceptually.   This process is represented in the way I have chosen to present my findings, each with a new layer of discussion.   I also bring my own critical perspective to these reflections.   I was part of the collaborative data analysis process. What emerged from this process of collaborative reflection was an exploration of the pedagogical basis for work with young people within their families.

Meaning making and the co-creation of new knowledge is a slow and tentative process for those of us (women and practitioners) who may not be used to having an authoritative voice (Noddings, 1992; Ahmed, 2017). Theory does not just emerge from data (Corbin 2009), it has to be coaxed and encouraged. I have tried to create a conversation with theoretical ideas and concepts in order to discover our own knowing.   I presented theory alongside the data to practitioners in the group workshops. I started a conversion with and about theoretical perspectives which I then took forward in my own consideration of theoretical frameworks.

Ethically, I return to feminist care ethics and Nodding's idea of narrative processes as inter-personal reasoning (Noddings, 1991). I aim to analyse my data with an attitude of care, being careful not claim to 'know' but to identify suggestions and possibilities in the research process. Stories change and differ over even short periods of time depending on the context of their telling and the audience to which they are told therefore there will always be provisionality in meaning drawn from them.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

**Personal experience:
feelings,thoughts, action
Described, narrated**

**Interpersonal:
relationships; interactions
organisational
shared narratives
community**
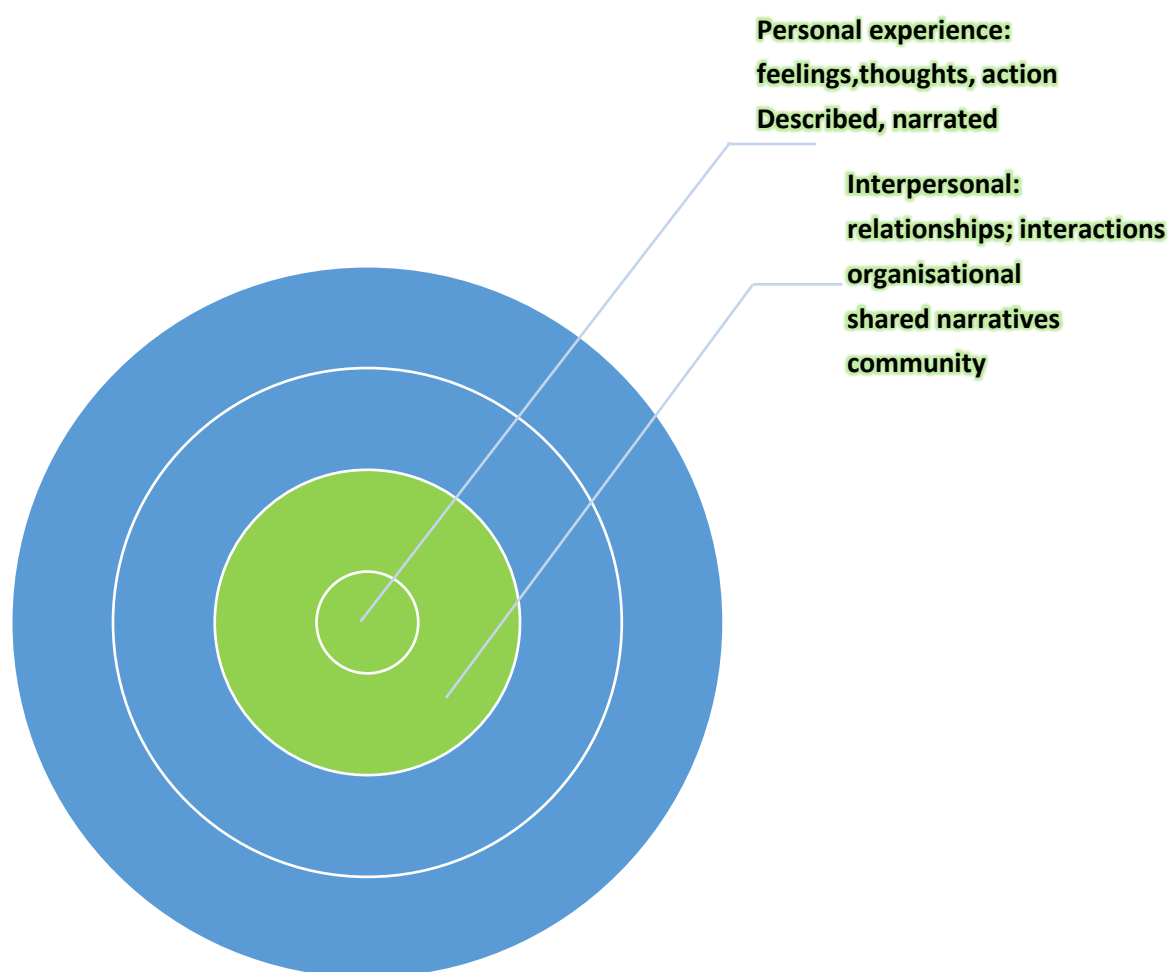
Figure 11 Breeze's model of critical reflection as research. Inner circles

The discussion of findings is broken into a number of chapters which organise the themes from the data as an exploration the pedagogical basis of working with young people within their families. This begins with personal experience and narratives developed through dialogue to identify shared narratives as in the two inner rings of my model of critical reflection (fig.11). Practice is discussed and conceptualised by practitioners in a variety of ways, individually and collectively. They draw on well-established theories, but practice based theory also emerges which critically explores the challenges of working with young people in the context of their family groups.

This section begins with discussion of the different ways in which practitioners talk about their work with young people and families as learning including an exploration of whether this practice with families is actually about parenting. Work with whole families is complex and at times chaotic; chapter

7 considers how practitioners negotiate the challenges of where to focus their work with family groups.

In chapter 8 the person and practice of the practitioner as pedagogue is explored through critical discussion of the complex interplay between personal story and professional knowledge. Practitioners refer to their own experience of childhood and parenting both to validate their involvement with families but also as a means for establishing empathic and caring relationships with parents in particular. The following chapter builds on discussions of identity and gender to consider the significance of intersectionality in critical practice. Gender, class and 'race' powerfully intersect in work with families in multi-ethnic communities. Practitioners reflect on the challenges of building relationships with families across boundaries of gender and race and of finding commonalities of identity and experience which 'level out' the inherent power differences between them. The programmes which the practitioners have developed sometimes focus specifically on gendered work and uncover some of the possibilities of exploring both masculinity and feminist perspectives. However, findings also highlight the importance of safe reflective spaces to develop critically reflexive practice and the responsibility of individuals and organisations to commit to anti-oppressive family work.

The concept of working with the whole family is fraught with challenges including how to boundary work with extended family groups and how to negotiate the demands of some adults as gatekeepers to family members. Chapter 10 considers the challenges involved in keeping young people at the centre of practice with family groups. Family work provides a unique opportunity to work with young people within their relationships with parents and siblings and other significant adults. Hierarchies of power within families are very significant but practitioners' narratives also identify the complexities of caring relationships and shifting power dynamics that may exist between parents and young people.

Working with young people and families in their own homes provides unique opportunities to gain an insight into the private aspects of young people's lives and to develop experiential learning opportunities rooted in the lived experiences of families. Chapters 11 discusses the significance of different spaces and places in work with families.

Finally, chapter 12 is an extended chapter which explores the contribution outdoor and residential programmes make to work with young people and their families. Findings show how residential settings can provide new and different spaces in which to experience different ways of being family. Practitioners' articulation of their practice as experiential learning are explored including the importance of building reflection into activity-based programmes. The significance of play and informal, non-programmed time is also discussed. Work with families is relational and demands a re-

assessment of the positioning of outdoor practice. Practitioners reflect on the strengths and limitations of familiar outdoors activity in working with both young children and adults and the need for creativity to develop inclusive and positive experiences for all family members. Outdoor and residential programmes can provide opportunities for multi-agency partnerships, but assumptions need to be articulated and aims shared and agreed.

Each chapter includes data from individual and group reflections, and also data collected from young people and their parents. I try to retain their voices in this section of the thesis as mirrors which reflect the experience of the practitioners.

6 TALKING ABOUT LEARNING: SOCIAL AND INFORMED LEARNING

Kate: Tell me the stories about things you remember …. tell me about one bit that's really stuck in your memory… the first things that come to your mind?

Michael: Making dinner. Me and my little brother made a curry.

And we went into the caves with the boats. And we went underground.

Kate: Did you learn to make curry or did you already know how to make curry?

Michael: We learnt. And I didn't know… I liked learning … it's good for you.

(Michael, aged 7)

Figure 12 The researcher discusses learning with Michael, aged 7

One of the ongoing questions raised by work with families is what sort of work it is. This chapter discusses evidence within the data to support an analysis of this work as learning. Young people readily talk about learning in my interviews with them (fig. 12). Practitioners use different concepts and theories of learning to articulate their practice but confirm that learning underpins their approach to their work with families. Talk of the work with families as an educational process is embedded in most of the conversations and interviews undertaken with practitioners, sometimes as description, sometimes as reflection on process and occasionally as the expression of philosophy. In the midst of the doing and the talking about 'what we do', practitioners gradually begin to unpick their ideas about learning. The data uncovers different ways of conceptualising and applying ideas about informal learning and social learning. These are not always consistent with accepted theoretical definitions but help these practitioners to articulate their understanding of their informal approach to work with young people and their families in contrast to formal education.

Within the interviews with staff at the school, the work of the Family Residential Programme was framed as informal and social learning by those practitioners who are specifically youth work trained.

6.1   Social learning/social education

The following section focuses on conversations with and between two of these practitioners.

Mike, a school family support worker is youth work trained but says he has never actually worked as a youth worker. He began his work at the school as an assistant social worker moving into the family support team when the school appointed a qualified social worker to its staff. Mike worked with the programme coordinator on some of the early residential experiences. He maintains an enthusiasm and commitment to the FRP and provides some of the 'in-school' on-going support for young people who take part on the programme. Of all those interviewed, Mike makes the most explicit link between the work of the family residential programme and youth work. Conversation with Mike uncovered the complexity in defining work with families but framing it within the purpose and values of youth work:

> *As a trained youth worker I value the importance of what I call social learning. All learning has to be done in a form of you can get a lot out of just being with people socially. Working with them* (Mike, school family support worker)

Mike places learning within a social context and as such affirms learning as relational.

> *for me youth work is like social education*

When Mike talks about his work as social education, the social context is important. In the case of the FRP, this includes the social setting in which the families live, as well as the social contexts of peers, of the school, of the community. He develops this idea shifting from social learning to social education. From his conversation it could be construed that 'youth work is like social education' and work with families is like youth work.

6.2   Informal education

> *You know it's not formal education but its education of such and that's why I was interested to get involved with this, this residential project because I could see the hidden agenda, which was to get the family working and playing together… and in some ways hopefully that would transfer to formal education.* (Mike, school family support worker)

Mike's narrative reflects the ambiguity of youth work theory. He appears to use social learning, social education and informal learning interchangeably. In relation to informal education, Mike identifies two distinguishing features: it is about "hidden learning" and it is distinct from but has a relationship to formal education. The informality of the FRP approach provides a contrast to the formal education context it sits in. One thing that characterises informal educational for Mike is its

'hidden' agenda. However, he appears to confuse informal methods with 'hidden' educational aims and with no questioning of who sets the agenda, or curriculum. Informal education is traditionally not curriculum based but establishes its starting point with its participants. It is, in this sense, without agenda. But it is not without purpose. It is not predictable and is co-created through a process of dialogue and critical conversation (Jeffs & Smith, 2005). Mike's notion of 'hidden agenda' is contradictory to the notion that informal education is without agenda. Perhaps what Mike means is that the very idea that this is a learning activity is 'hidden' or implicit. To name the programme as a learning activity might alienate those involved with an immediate association to the formal learning agendas of school or the implication that this is about teaching parenting.

> *For me it's about the implicit learning that they don't realise that they are doing* (Mike, school family support worker)

However, there is also a more critical question to be explored about the underlying agendas of the school and policy makers and indeed practitioners themselves. The notion of a hidden agenda may imply a condoning of predetermined outcomes and targets which remain hidden to the participants. If so, this sits in contradiction to the principles of informal education which relies on working relationships underpinned with honesty and integrity, and where the learning is young-person or participant led.

An alternative perspective is that in fact the agenda is not hidden at all in the eyes of the participants. Narratives of family participants include explicit references to learning. Therefore, the notion of a hidden agenda may be confused with 'the hidden curriculum' in schools or a lack of confidence on the part of the practitioner in explicitly articulating their work as educational as well as relational.

6.3   Informal education as critical pedagogy

Mike goes on in the interview to refer to a political and more radical agenda for social change underpinning this work. He makes explicit links between his personal experience as a black man, and of his own educational experience as informing his vision and approach to his work in the school:

> *I think the theory behind working with young people is very important, in terms of the sociology of it all. You know in terms of class, race, gender. Understanding we are a sexist, racist society... So .. we do tell black kids that teachers see you first in the corridor, we do, it's a fact, I've seen it, I think it's important they you have an understanding of the theory why you're doing it… in terms of class, race, all genders.* (Mike, school family support worker)

Mike's 'theorising' of his practice makes powerful links between the 'raising aspirations' agenda (DCSF, 2004) and the addressing of social inequality, in particular racism. His discussion of working with young

people is rooted in one of the key principles of youth work: to contribute towards the promotion of social justice for young people and society in general (NYA, 2004). His expressed aims and values resonate with those definitions of social education which relate to social change and participation. They are however in direct contrast to those of social conformity. He also outlines in a very practical way his own approach to anti-oppressive practice both with work colleagues and families:

> *I think you have to challenge families. Certainly they're teaching their kids, the kids try to tell a racist joke .. it's a challenge … Its' how you get your point over… informal setting isn't it.*

So Mike identifies the informal setting as an effective context for challenging racism, working with young people within the context of their families where many of their behaviours and opinions are formed.

6.3.1   Challenging stereotypes

Mike sees his role to challenge both adults and children.

> *I think one of the things it does also in terms of building relationships is it humanises us. The children think I 'm a teacher but when you work in an informal setting like around The Cottage, it gives you a chance to show some young people that a man can wash pots and cook. It's about reinforcing stereotypes isn't it, men don't do that, but I think it goes a long way in a lot of the things we do.* (Mike, school family support worker)

He gives examples of providing verbal challenges to parents but also in challenging through his actions at The Cottage. He identifies the 'informality' of the setting as key in the learning process.

Dave (Assistant Head) picks up on the idea of forming relationships which allow him to challenge parents' behaviour. The residentials provide a shared, lived experience, and an opportunity to reflect on engrained behaviours. For instance, at the group family residential we saw young people throwing themselves into team-work games and really working well together. In contrast their parents stood back and the women in particular allowed the couple of dads that were there to do most of the physical tasks. Dave raised this with them later:

> *So what was lovely about that, was because of the relationships that we had, we joked about that afterwards, 'that was a bit unfair, how come other people didn't do something, and it was because we had that relationship that we could hand that back to them.* (Dave, Assistant Head)

6.3.2 Informal Education in the context of formal education

The interplay between formal and informal education is picked up with Dave, an advocate of residential learning opportunities. Dave came into this role from youth work. He identifies the potential of the FRP as a learning experience for staff as well as participating families:

> *I think for a lot of staff … … it's a great experience for them because actually it's about getting that confidence back; you can have different ways of being with students, you can deal with these situations differently and like that self-disclosure really. And so I think as much as it is about the parents and the families and the children learning, actually I think staff sometimes come away with those moments of .. light bulb moments* (Dave, Assistant Head)

The opportunity to take part in the residentials for teachers, involves doing things differently: different interactions, different ways of being with young people, different ways of seeing things, different ways of dealing with behaviour. Interestingly Dave twice refers to gaining confidence. He picks up on this as having the confidence to try different things and relate to young people in different ways, including a degree of self-disclosure. He notes that what may be construed as making yourself vulnerable, is a source of confidence for some. Dave is dual qualified; he works through some of the professional differences and the dissonance he experienced moving from informal to formal education settings.

> *[it was] very useful for me, who's been for many year in informal education work, now coming back into formal education, it was a really useful term for me to go on residentials to find the balance for myself personally, how much of me is teacher and how much of me is youth worker, and how can I bring those two roles to complement each other into something that is useful for the children and young people.* (Dave, Assistant Head)

Mike also identifies the importance of confidence

> *I think if you are confident in your own ability and your own skill ... you have to be patient, you have to be a good listener, I think if you are confident I think you find it easier* (Mike, school family support worker)

The Family Residential Programme appears to provide a meeting place for formal and informal education and a setting in which practitioners from different backgrounds can create a mutual learning environment. The idea of role modelling extends beyond modelling positive behaviours to family participants, to modelling informal approaches to staff. The mutuality of the learning process is significant and powerful in Dave's comments and reflects one of the principles of informal education which is about dialogue and shared learning.

6.4 Relationships

The idea of mutuality is also linked to that of humanising staff. Returning to Mike's earlier statement that living together in The Cottage 'humanises us", the power relationships inherent in the teacher/staff-pupil relationship are reconfigured in an informal setting.

> *The children think I'm a teacher but when you work in an informal setting like around The Cottage, it gives you a chance to show some young people that a man can wash pots and cook…*(Mike, school family support worker)

Informal education is defined by the relationship established between those involved. It is a relational activity based upon mutuality and respect. Youth work has at its heart 'developing trusting relationships with young people' (Davies, 2010):

> *you just build relationships with the kids, don't you?* (Stuart, family support team)

Stuart is the apprentice family worker, 19 years old and ex-pupil at the school. He is very popular with young people who take part in the residential programme and provides some of the on-going support in school. Whilst he understands the importance of relationship building, he struggles to articulate how it is achieved or its purpose. It is the qualified and experienced practitioners, such as Mike and Dave, who identify the significance of changes to relationships with young people and their parents as a result of participation in the programme.   It would be naive to claim that relationships between teachers, support staff and young people are equalised, the power differentials between adults and young people still exist but the status that school staff hold is stripped away to some extent in the informal setting of The Cottage, outside the institution.

6.5 Discussion

6.5.1 Social Learning, Social Education, Informal Education

The above discussion illustrates the diverse ways in which professionally trained youth workers articulate and theorise their work with families. It is important to note their positionality in that they are working in a formal education setting and therefore may be readier to understand their practice drawing on educational and pedagogical points of reference.

Their reference to social education reflects contrasting and possibility conflicting ideas which are also mirrored in changing youth work theory. Social education may be closely linked to critical theory and critical community practice (Butcher et al, 2007) and social change. However, in practice its meaning shifts between radical forms of youth work and individualised versions of work with young people (Belton, 2009). Social education may focus on social structures, on work in social contexts, and young

people as social actors. Youth workers have historically worked with groups of young people in communities, schools, associations and institutions (Coburn & Wallace, 2011). Their emphasis on working together and fostering a sense of identity and belonging has been developed in different social settings as sites of education (Jeffs & Smith, 2005). Social education may however be viewed as education for sociability supporting the young people's development as responsible and active citizens (Spense, 2004). It may hold in tension the teaching of social expectations whilst encouraging a questioning of their place in society.

Whilst social education became a key principle of youth work in the UK following the Abermale Report in 1960, Smith (1988) argues that it has become redundant as the emphasis of youth work shifted to a "personalist/ethnocentric" orientation. In practice this has involved focusing on individual development. Social education has become part of the curriculum of schools and further education providers, and as a term continues to be used as means of disguising informal education from formal (Batsleer, 2013). It has found a place in mainstream education in the PHSE curriculum, but its emphasis has arguably moved from a focus on social relationships and participation to social and life skills. This is suggested in the narratives of the family residential workers which place a greater emphasis on social and life skills which may reflect

> The long standing criticisms of youth work as merely enabling better manners and a certain amount of social order (Batsleer, 2013 p. 294)

In many schools, including the case study school, the focus on individual development can be seen in the adoption of programmes focussing on wellbeing, resilience (Challen et al, 2011; Seligman, 2019) and social and emotional skills as promoted through national initiatives such as the SEAL programme.

The case study school has invested significant resources in these rapidly expanding school-based programmes focussing on individual health and well-being (Ecclestone & Hayes, 2009). The narratives of the family residential practitioners reflect the language and concepts of these diverse manifestations of social education and learning in the school's formal and informal curriculum.

6.5.2 Connecting formal and informal education

The Family Residential Programme has a clear aim to "increase attendance and attainment". These are outcomes directly related to school targets and the inspection system. In its early work with families the programme identified learning objectives connected to the school's curriculum attempting to make explicit links between the informal learning context and the formal learning taking place in school. Therefore, the model might be described as non-formal although none of the participating practitioners use this concept in their narratives. As the programme developed so the

action planning and objectives became simplified and focus far more on family functioning and interpersonal skills.

Social learning and informal learning share a number of key aspects of practice with outdoor and experiential learning.

> The approximation between social educational objectives and the outcomes of engagement in activities is particularly apparent within the field of outdoor activities. Within mainstream activities programmes, these are perennial favourites with practitioners and young people alike. Outdoor activities seem to encapsulate in concentrated form the whole range of possibilities inscribed within a recreational and social educational approach to youth work. (Spence 2001, p.167)

This chapter has identified ways in which practitioners talk about their individual practice as informal social learning but has discovered that these concepts are understood and emphasised in different ways by different practitioners even within the same programme and organisation. The following chapter extends this discussion focussing on what is being learnt whilst chapters 11 and 12 further explore the connections between social and informal learning and outdoor and experiential learning.

7   IS THIS WORK ABOUT PARENTING?

Critiques of family-focused social policy highlight the confusion of concepts of the whole family interventions, work with parents (more often mothers) and with parenting (see literature review chapter). Whilst the case study programmes focus on 'the family', the narratives of practitioners reflect this inherent confusion. Reflections with individual practitioners in and on practice uncover uncertainties about just what they are doing in their work with adults in the family groups. This is a key area of discussion, contention and contraction. Each of the case studies focuses on work with the family as the unit of change in the process. However, there is a lack of clarity both formally and informally about how far this practice actually focuses on bringing about change within family dynamics and how much it emphasises a change in parenting practices. Asking the question "Is this about parenting" of practitioners and of the wider data facilitated some reflection on this tension. A distinction is also made between parenting skills and 'being a good parent' which engages practitioners in reflection about personal values and professional approach.

This section will examine discussions with practitioners from each case study that highlight different elements of the debate about whether this work is about parenting. Key issues highlighted are the identity of the practitioner as parent personally, empathy and role modelling.

Is this work about parenting? The replies to this question differ enormously from an emphatic 'Absolutely' to a definite 'No' even within the same programme. This question uncovered layers of assumption and invited critical questioning of the purpose and intent.

The outdoor residential practitioners are the most resistant to seeing their work with families as about parenting. Reflective conversations were punctuated with comments such as "This is not the Walton's" and there was an expressed aversion to popular media representations of parenting boot camps and 'super-nanny' interventions. This cultural starting point sits alongside a professional approach based on personal development with young people and adults. The outdoor residential practitioners focus on personal development and relationship building in their reflection on their practice. They see work with families as focusing on relationships and communication skills and initially there is no acknowledgement of the uniqueness of family relationships nor the structural power dynamics within them.

7.1   Practice as Parenting

One practitioner, Neil, emphatically dismissed this work as being about parenting,

It's about ways of relating essentially…. We don't want to turn it into a parenting course because it is not a parenting course. (Neil, outdoor practitioner)

In later reflections Neil identifies a different way of thinking about parenting in his work with families. As he talks about how he uses Transactional Analysis to reflect on his own adult state 'in practice', he begins to reflect on how he parents groups. For him this involves "holding" participants, a powerful image which for me speaks of care, protection and tenderness. His role he explains is to create experiences, opportunities to experiment and try new and challenging ways to do things. He aims to hold and guide but not control every element of these experiences. Here is a picture of pedagogue as carer, protector and nurturer. In this way Neil reflects upon how he enacts the parenting role:

> Its' not exactly parenting but it feels like its transferable, almost subconscious potential for learning for the parent, that's part of the intent. (Neil, outdoor practitioner)

So, having started with an emphatic 'no, this is not about parenting', Neil uncovers the complexities of the relationship that exists between him and parents. He may also parent groups in other contexts, but it is of particular significance when working with families. What the practitioner does and how they do it has significance in terms of the relational context. The parenting of the groups holds within it "potential learning for the parent". Neil goes on:

> So I might observe a father doing X with his son, and say OK when I intervene with the son or talk to the son in front of the father, my intention will be to model another way to the father.

The skills that this practitioner is modelling are in one sense generic communication skills and yet they are described as "another way to father". Neil's reflection implies his interventions will provide a model to the fathers present. In this way he aligns his presence and his influence with the fathers. He talks about his impact on the fathers present, but not on the young people; this is implicit perhaps. The learning focuses then on the parent and the looked for change in family functioning is adult led.

7.1.1 Parenting or personal development

The above account highlights a contradiction between what a practitioner might believe about their work and the complexity of working with both adults and young people together. Neil makes a passing distinction between work with young people and with parents, his starting point being that there is no difference. His focus on individuals and groups rather than families appears to ignore any significance of the power relationship that exists within family roles and relationships. This brings into question how far work with families can focus on personal development or whether the work will always be relational within family roles.

Conversations with a second outdoor residential practitioner, Phil, around 'what is the difference between addressing parenting and facilitating personal development?' revealed another layer of complexity. He focused on the distinctiveness of the parenting relationship: *"It's about love and*

attachment". He acknowledges the powerful emotions that exist in family relationships. Working with these emotions is for him a significant part of his role.

Phil draws on his own experiences of being a parent to understand the relational aspects of the work. There is an interplay between his reflections on being a parent himself and his professional practice.

> *What's the difference between facilitating for just personal development and parenting? I'm not kind of sure what the difference is really, other than you love them, you can get angry with them, you can display all the emotions with them.* (Phil, outdoor practitioner)

This depth of connection and empathy requires an advanced level of self-reflection and reflexivity to understand the potential and challenges of working with parents as a parent. This is also articulated clearly by a worker from a Youth Offending Team - he has been advocating for and delivering work with parents for a number of years.

> *Parents have a lot to deal with – professionals judging them all the time. Standing in court whilst people insult you, tell you how bad your child is. Parenting orders are the worst thing ever – putting all responsibility (and blame) on parents.*
>
> *Do practitioners need to be parents themselves? Absolutely! To know what it feels like in our very core – empathy.* (Neville, YOT worker)

For this worker, mutuality based on empathy and shared experience is a must.

7.2 Relationships with parents

Practitioners on the schools' Family Residential Programme are less troubled by the challenges of working with parents. Karen, the programme co-ordinator articulates her approach to her work firstly in terms of how she works with young people and then their parents. The schools based residentials begin with the child or young person; they are known to the practitioners and their needs drive the programme.

The school has a specific relationship with participating adults. They begin working with adults specifically as the parents (or carers) of children and young people in school. The programme coordinator spends time in young peoples' homes and purposefully builds relationships with parents that will extend beyond the life of the residential programme if needed. She gets to know parents by name and as individuals. She is particularly skilled at building empathetic relationships with women using her own experience as a mother and grandmother to underpin relationships of mutual respect and learning. However, the adult is always positioned as parent within the programme.

The FRP takes children away on two residentials before the parents join the third. During these early residentials, the practitioners take on a parenting role although they don't name it as such. They negotiate boundaries with the young people, keep them safe, and provide physical and emotional support and discipline. These are parenting tasks. However, the parenting role is also dependant on the individual worker's identity. The coordinator, Karen, is the authority figure on residentials and maintains a strong power base with young people and other staff. She creates a matriarchal model of family. With no parents present on the first two residentials, she takes on the parental role –she is the care giver and also sets boundaries and discipline. There were times when I was working alongside Karen that I noted how different this is from residential work with young people, the youth work which I know. Partly because of the age of some of the participating children, but also because she recreates a family environment at The Cottage with familiar adult roles rather than youth work relationships. Pinpointing the difference is difficult but has something to do with givens about power and authority.

Karen notes that when the parents joined the third residential, the young people often turned to her for permission and discipline.

> *On all residentials, because the kids have been before, they do tend to come to us before coming to mum. We say to parents: "Watch how we deal with situations and how calm we are them; and they try to mirror that... you don't have to tell them ... see, mirror, learnt behaviour…* (Karen, FRP Coordinator)

This is a complex element of the programme and process. Karen stresses the importance of standing back to let the parents have a go. She describes her role as demonstrating how issues might be approached but helping parents reflect on 'what else can you try?' She places emphasis on doing and modelling rather than telling. I observed and interpreted this as a process of 'parenting with'.

> *We're just doing it and they are looking on – thinking "that worked really well. I'll try that"* *Compared to parenting classes: we're demonstrating. We are doing it in a different way - we are living it* (Karen, FRP Coordinator)

Karen continued to function in a parenting role with parents present but was careful not to take the role away from them.

> *I wanted to say things but couldn't always – I was careful not to overrule Sandy and Dave. They would chat in the evening; how did they feel it went? Reflect on stress and coping, offer different ways of dealing with it… Sandy and Dave were very open to the process.*
>
> *(Karen,* FRP Co-ordinator discussing working with parents)

Karen is careful not to undermine parents but takes part in a shared process of practicing and reflecting on different parenting skills with the parents.

Family work is reflected upon as a deeply emotional experience, this may be because of that close identification as both professional and parent. Karen and Mike speaking of the school's family residential programme, identify the emotional element of working with family groups.

> Karen*: [it's about] routines, boundaries and consequences. There's no 'if you do that again, if you do that again, if you do that again…' That's the consequence and that is what is going to happen. And sometimes, it really, really upset me, cus I'd stopped them from doing an activity, I said you need to come home...*

> Mike*: tough love isn't it?*

> Karen*: and that really, really hurts me. But I've done it, it's something which I find very, very hard to do.*

They identify the tension that can arise when they have to uphold boundaries. It is something that a lot of youth workers find hard to do and can be a point of contention when youth workers undertake residential work with young people. It can also be hard for parents and becomes a focus for work with them on the family residential programme.   Mike and Karen appear to speak as both youth workers and parents in this discussion.   The parenting functions of the youth worker on residential become the modelling of parental skills to parents and the young people. But the practitioner is not the parent and stepping back is a vital part of repositioning the practitioner as a trusted adult when the parenting role is handed back to the parent on the third residential.

7.3 Modelling parenting

Modelling parenting can be reduced to a set of skills – clear communication, managing conflict, setting boundaries and using appropriate discipline. Many parenting courses focus on these skills. The research data however, raises critical questions about what version of family life workers are actually modelling.

Phil, an outdoor residential practitioner, notes that:

> *It's your version of parenting that you are modelling. …. The thing about parenting that worries me is that we are saying 'there is a way to be a parent. ..It's not about us transplanting our understanding of parenting - the right/wrong way of doing things.* (Phil, outdoor practitioner)

The practitioners from both organisations talk about taking a non-judgemental, non-directive approach to their work with parents. Phil's statement above though recognises that even with these explicit aims, worker's ways of being can communicate a powerful message about being family.

The way teams are staffed also gives powerful messages about heteronormative family structures. The school family residential programme for instance deliberately employs a male apprentice to work on the programme alongside the female lead worker on the basis that boys need a male role model. The assumptions underpinning this assertion were not explored but do raise questions about the deficit perceptions of female headed families. This theme is developed in chapter 9.

7.4 Discussion

Considering work with families as being about parenting is a contentious issue. Practitioners' opinions vary about the importance of parenting in the programmes, but all agree that their work includes a significant amount of modelling parenting skills. Many of these are generic skills, for instance communication skills and problem solving, however, on the family programmes they are explored and modelled within specific familial relationships. Whilst their work with families may be articulated as personal development, the family as a context for working with young people has implications for how the practitioner locates themselves. Most practitioners express empathy for parents based on their own experiences. This empathy can be part of effective working with the emotional aspects of family relationships however, practitioners need to develop a level of critical reflexivity which equips them to monitor and evaluate how their own models of family may be imposed on those they work with. This level of identification with the parent also raises the question of 'whose side am I on?'

Discussion of family work as having a parenting focus can render young people largely invisible. Parenting focuses on the needs and skills of the adult and their capacity to change. Focussing on parenting may ignore the agency of the young person based on the premise that any positive changes that parents make will be to the benefit of their children. The school based FRP challenges these assumptions by starting with the young person. Parenting issues are addressed but are primarily informed by the young person's experience of being part of the family. The Cottage provides a context for practicing 'being' family. The role of the practitioner as facilitator, teacher, as 'parent' and role model is complex. In this programme the practitioners actually purposefully engage in parenting tasks but on a temporary basis and within a different relationship with the young people. Those tasks are then shared and reflected on with the parents.

The troublesome nature of this discussion about parenting lies within the resistance of most practitioners on the family residential programmes to see themselves as parenting experts, and to

even want to be involved in showing adults how to parent. This reluctance appears to stem from at least three sources: empathy in terms of the challenges of parenting, which in turn challenges any assumption of the practitioner as expert or as judge, and finally a tension in where this positions them in relation to the young person. Contrast this with an evaluation of the Troubled Families programme and the role of the key worker carried out on behalf of the government:

> Giving help and direction to parents is often vital – workers focus on helping parents develop practical strategies for managing their own and their children's behaviour. The impact of this support features strongly in families' accounts. In particular, mothers often talk of finding this support invaluable and regaining control after struggling to cope and losing authority over their children.

> *"She [the family intervention worker] helped me with the kids' behaviour, my daughter challenged me in certain ways, she showed me how to put set boundaries in without actually using physical abuse… When I came to look at it and talk about it, they were trying to re-educate me in the way that I was disciplining my children"* (DCLG, 2012).

As a youth worker I find this description uncomfortable as the emphasis of the practice is on behaviour management. Perhaps this model is not so very far from the practice on the residential programmes in that it mentions education and support. But, there is no perspective of the young person in this account; the worker 'directs' and 'shows'; the problem is located in how the parent disciplines their child; the focus is on behaviour rather than relationship. This account is too brief to draw any conclusions but, in some ways, it helps to capture some the critical issues which demand careful, and honest reflection. The positioning of young people in this discussion is still troublesome. When the practitioner's attention is on parenting, their gaze is not on the young person. Equally, the power dynamics between practitioners and adults in family programmes shift when an emphasis is placed on parenting. This underlines the importance of engaging in critically reflexive practice. That is about recognising our values and assumptions and how we understand and construct our social reality (Husain, 2006), in this case our ideas about family, and how these impact on our practice and relationships with the young people and adults we work with.

8   THE PRACTITIONER: THE PEDAGOGUE

This chapter explores the different ways in which practitioners working with young people within their families identify and explain themselves, in what is a very new context of practice for them. There are some external factors which define their professional identity, but these are limited, and practitioners often resort to explaining themselves to families they work with in relationship to, and in contrast to other professional roles. This chapter also explores how practitioners are using their own personal narratives of parenting and struggle to establish empathetic and democratic relationships with the parents they work with. In the absence of clearly articulated approaches and theories of practice, practitioners emphasize aspects of their role as pedagogue as 'walking with' as guide and mentor.

8.1   "Who am I to go in there and tell them what to do?"

This rhetorical question was regularly asked by practitioners about their working relationships with families. The question 'Who am I?' was also implicitly explored as practitioners told their stories of establishing relationships with families. At no point did I explicitly ask participants about their professional identity although in later group-based reflections I did refer to professional backgrounds. It cannot be assumed that participants hold a common understanding of the notion of professional identity. Rather, the discussion of 'who am I' emerges from stories of practice. Williams (2000 cited in Banks, 2005 p.136) concludes that identity matters are most effectively explored in the "socially organised practices of everyday life". Professional identity and personal identity are profoundly inter-related in the data. The participants' narratives demonstrate a complex relationship between personal and professional identities and values.

8.1.1   What am I? Identifying myself

Practitioners' narratives touch on their professional identify in a number of ways – how they self-identify, how they identify themselves to others, how they are identified by others and the relationship between personal and professional role.

The practitioners working in the schools-based programme and in the outdoor centre have job titles which provide them with professional identities or at least descriptive labels which they can use to introduce themselves to the families they work with: Family Residential Co-Ordinator, Family Support Worker, Youth Development Worker. Whilst their narratives reveal struggles in articulating what it is they do and why, they display little uncertainty about who they are and their professional role.

For the key workers this is quite different. They have to create their initial contact with families on the doorstep of homes and describe the challenge of explaining who they were. A regular starting point is stating who they were not:

> *I suppose the first thing we do is tell them we are not social workers, police and not there to judge. So straight away the barriers start to come down from them, straight away.* (Josh, key worker)

Within this description is a distancing of self from stigmatised professional roles. Josh explains why he finds this necessary:

> *They are very nervous because they don't know why you are round there really. 'Who are you?' and they are always stone faced when you come to the door. They're like - what do you want? So I'm like we're not social workers, police don't worry - sort of make them laugh about. …Then I explain what we do - that we're there to support them rather than say we want you to do this… rather than if you don't do this you'll go to prison… so it's that supportive kind of role. And that first impression is so that they feel safe and that we actually care about them.* (Josh, key worker)

In the context of the door step and the first, sometimes cold call encounter, key workers identify themselves in relation to, or addressing the fears and suspicions of the family member they were talking to. Families' fears varied according to the programme they were part of and their relationship with the referring organisation. Some families referred to key workers may not even be aware of the referral. They are usually identified because of police involvement or poor school attendance; they may also have had previous social work involvement. Therefore, the starting point for their relationship with their key workers is often from a deficit experience. The key workers' first task was to position themselves differently.

> *we've also got to make it clear that we are not social workers. We're trying to put support in place for them to stop things getting any worse. But also that we do communicate with those people as well. And that we're working together for the best outcomes for that family. Cus we have to let them know that we do talk to the social workers, police and school.* (Lynn, key worker)

This statement captures the complexity of the role in relation to other professionals. The key worker identifies their role as different from social work but is actually part of the same professional processes and agenda. The implication of this definition is that social workers do not support families. There is an implied 'othering' and reference to a mythology about social workers (Banks, 2005). There is in

these definitions a danger of vilifying other professionals in an attempt to side with the families. However, in the above case the worker acknowledges their working relationship with other professionals whilst what actually sets the key workers apart is still unclear.

8.1.2 Professional role

When talking about their professional approach key workers continued to define themselves as different to other professionals.

I have a different technique and different way of working…

I'm different, I don't do what social workers do, I have a different role. I don't do what the YOT person does. I probably do all of them actually but not just one thing. (Lynn, key worker)

There is an underlying confusion in these definitions that highlights the diversity of task - supporting young people back into education, supporting young people in court, advocacy, mentoring etc. – and the struggle to locate the key worker role within a specific professional domain. Banks (2005) picks up on this notion of 'role release' where the primary function of one professional group is undertaken by other members of a multi-disciplinary team. Certainly the key worker role includes tasks previously carried out by educational and children's social workers. Banks' research also found that this could undermine attempts to maintain professional roles and practice and compromise a sense of professional identity. Key workers raise critical questions about the purpose and agenda underpinning their role:

Underpaid social workers, is that what we are? (Stephen, key worker)

Many of the families the key workers work with are known to social services, some have previously been on the child protection register, and others raise safe guarding concerns during their work with the key workers. "Children who need help" was added as a referral criterion in 2014 (DCLG 2017) bringing safe guarding into a clearer focus and a closer relationship between key workers and social workers. The recognition of their subordinate relationship to social workers suggests a self-identification of a semi-professional status (Etzioni, 1969). One key worker located themselves in and between other professionals rather than below

I work in-between some of the main services (Josh, key worker)

This provides a different perspective on the key worker identity situated in a hierarchy of power expressed and experienced by other practitioners.

Interestingly, none of the youth work trained key workers introduce themselves as youth workers in the first instance. The setting aside of their youth work identity was something I later questioned in

terms of practice and which became a point of critical discussion in the reflective sessions with practitioners from Organisation B. In these initial introductions and discussions there is no reference to the needs of the young person being the focus of their work.

8.1.3 Defined by others

Whilst 'key worker' lacks specificity and is used in many contexts, 'family support work' at least locates the role and identifies its supportive function. Ironically, one of the clearest explanations of the identity of the schools' family workers is expressed by a social worker who is part of the school's family support team. Her definition also begins with the statement that family workers are not social workers, but she was able to see and to identify what is distinct about their practice:

> *workers who are working with the families aren't 'social workers', and very often are seen as friendly people, they lose the kind of professionalism in terms of they remain professional in their conduct, they are very clear about why they are there, but by virtue of the kind of work they are doing, that close proximity, that nurturing, that enabling, that advocacy, they build those professional friendships up that allow them to speak to parents at a lower level and critique constructively, so parents don't then see it that they are being condemned or their parenting is poor (school social worker)*

This social worker locates the distinction of identity within the kind of work the family worker does and the way they communicate and build relationships. Their relationship of 'professional friendship' allows them to offer constructive criticism without condemnation. The relationship is not one of telling but of accompanying and reflection. Within the data collected, this is the statement which most clearly aligns the identity of the family worker with that of social pedagogue. It also identifies the contradictory professional positioning of the family worker – they are professional in their conduct' but they 'lose' an element of professionalism. The reference of 'speaking on a lower level to parents' is an uncomfortable inference of professional hierarchy.

8.2 Who am I? The narrated self

8.2.1 Working with personal stories

The research process involved interviews with a number of practitioners who are or had been involved in work with families. The longitudinal basis of the study also meant that I was privileged to get to know some of my research partners personally. Over time they told their own stories of parenting, of relationships, and of their own children. In interviews and in the focus groups, the practitioners told their stories of strength, resilience and survival which provided much of the motivation for their work with young people and their families.

In their accounts, practitioners refer to their own identities and experience as much as they do to any other form of knowledge. The reflective model I use recognises the importance of connecting reflection on practice with personal experience. Whilst parts of the narrative data include reflection on theoretical models of practice, personal experiences are referred to consistently throughout the process. Indeed, within the data there is an ongoing debate about whether personal experience of parenting is in fact the most important quality that a practitioner can bring to their work with families.

This section is concerned with how practitioners are using their personal stories in their practice including how they contribute to relationship building. The personal stories contained in the research data can be analysed in a number of ways including life events, personal values and life-style, sharing an identity and empathy as parents.

8.2.2 Making connections

The narratives of practitioners regularly refer to personal experience as a way of establishing a connection with the families they work with. In nearly every case the connection is being made with the parent. The importance of personal experience came up repeatedly. In some of the data this is expressed as earning the right to work with parents.

> *Having your own life experience, feeling you've had experience yourself, having my own family……. take me back 8 years ago and 'who am I to? … I would have felt that I was completely … being patronising* (Rachel, family support worker)

To identify a shared story, a shared experience of parenting is one way that practitioners address the power imbalance between practitioners and parent. It is a leveller. In the interviews this came across as a tool for relationship building but also as an emotional connection and genuine empathy with parents.

> *I think it basically comes from our own nurturing. .. from us growing up.. from experience… respect and inclusion as well (Key worker)*

> *Working with families… saying, 'I've been there, I've done that.' it might not work, but try this…' or 'this worked for me it may be worth giving it a go.' 'If you're saying things are so bad at the moment, what have you got to lose?'* (Rachel, family support worker)

Practitioners also refer to their personal stories during the research as a way of validating their own 'knowing'.

> *My life skills have helped me with this. My mum was single mum, she was on benefits, we had no money, we were in foster care, and she was an alcoholic, health problems so when I visit*

these families I know what it's like... I know what it's like to have no money... I'm starving or I'm going to nick something... (Dawn, key worker)

Having shared experiences means that 'I know what I'm talking about'. Through close identification this practitioner established an empathy with the mum and the children in the family. Childhood experiences are as significant as adult experiences as sources of learning and empathy.

Personal stories and disclosures are used for a number of reasons beyond making an empathetic response. Some practitioners use their own examples of asking for help to reassure parents.

I know for myself if I was asked to go on this experience, and then I met someone who was looking down on me and judging me, or appeared to be even if they weren't, or was there in a suit and tie. I'd be thinking I don't want to go where they'll be making judgements about my family; I want to protect my family and keep you out. (Rachel, family support worker)

These stories establish a non-patronising message of 'we're in this together'. Acknowledging that parenting is a hard task that anyone might struggle with immediately addresses parent's concerns about being judged or singled out as inadequate.

I think they have to recognise that they do need some help. …..in our private lives we think, we are alright, we're doing alright, it's that realisation that we could look for some improvement…, you realise at the time you think you better get some help here, different families at different times…"(Jane, family support worker)

Experience of asking for help and developing strategies for change are an important aspect of these stories of self. Practitioners use their experience to encourage parents to take up the offer of support and stress that it is not unusual for parents to need this at some point.

when we are talking to parents when we are on residential…we're members of staff in a school so they automatically think teachers… and I know I used to do it… think of them as busy-bodies… they have this perfect life, and their kids are perfect and they never do anything wrong ….if we let them into our lives, and .. make things up or things that actually happened where our parenting skills haven't been that good, when our kids were little but we got through it, it's not about what's gone wrong, it's not about the issue, it's about how you dealt with it, then that makes them feel a lot better about being able to talk to us, and they'll have that bond then (Jane, family support worker)

Finding common ground and sharing experience can contribute to building a bond with parents. Sharing stories can humanise a practitioner. Here the practitioner appears to be saying 'I am like you'

and is challenging the misconceptions that the parent might hold about them. This particular discussion identifies the potential barriers that being a professional might create and complexities of developing a professional identity. The school in fact employs a number of local people in its family support team. Actively identifying with parents may address the power imbalance between practitioners and parents, and in particular the power that the school has. The practitioners share their understanding that schools and teachers can be intimidating in much the same way as key workers often introduce themselves as 'not a social worker'.

8.2.3 Motivating stories

Some of the practitioners share their personal stories as a means of motivating parents. Not only is their message 'I have been there, but they also say 'and look where I am now'. This can only be effective if there is an authentic and genuine connection with parents

> *I'm a single mum now, I'm at uni so you can do it…* (Dawn, key worker)

> *Also I brought up 4 children and it's kind of like gives the parents encouragement cus I did it so I sort of off-load what I did on to them, showing them different ways of bringing up children and different things to do.* (Jane, family support worker)

In building a connection with parents Jane describes how she shares her experience with parents – not by dictating but by telling her story. She also describes the process as collaborative in that 'we give each other ideas', acknowledging that she still has things to learn from the parents she works with.

> *I've kind of worked and used my parenting and my life through working here over past 13 years. But I seem to do it more on the residentials. I don't tell them how to do it.. I'll say have you tried it this way, have you tried it that way? Cus yes I brought up 4 kids, single parent, been there done most of what these children are going through so it's just sharing ideas and different things. Things that help me, I pass onto them.* (Jane, family support worker)

Being with parents on residential opens up opportunities to talk about the challenges of parenting and share stories. The informal context of The Cottage and the informal approach allows workers to make suggestions and ask questions rather than teach or tell. Getting alongside parents as a peer rather than an expert is a recurrent theme in the data. Telling stories of their own struggles and the things they have learnt supports the offer to walk with the parent.

8.2.4 Experience as a political motivator – creating theory from personal stories

A practitioner's own story can also be the starting point for a boarder political analysis and understanding of and issues faced by communities.

If you've never been poor it's difficult to understand poverty. I come from inner city London - my mother was a cleaner... she believed education was the key for getting out of poverty (John, School Head)

John uses his childhood experiences as a spring board for his own analysis and activism. In an interview he returned to stories of his own family to establish common links the families in school, socially and as a parent but also as a motivation for change. His story drives his political passion and professional commitment.

Mike uses his story to inspire young people. Again, he picks up on the importance of education in giving you choices and ways forward.

And I think it is a valuable tool to give something back, to give some of yourself to them, when I talk I wasn't always a good boy and I'm actually honest with young people and say I've experienced sitting I a prison cell I've experienced being in a detention centre, and it gives you chance to wipe out what you would do different and just tell them how it is; the fact that education's a way forward...even sat on the minibus, the journey gives you chance to talk about that experience like that, hopefully ,some of those teenagers are on the brink of crime, they listen. (Mike, family support worker)

The school's family residential programme is inspired by this political aim to break the cycle of poverty in this community and give young people the chance to gain employment. It is an aspiration that is role modelled in the family support team.

Personal stories are used in other ways to model behaviour

I'm not a very fit person and I don't like the walks.. and on occasions I've refused to go up... It's telling the young people it's okay to say no, it's ok to say no you can't do it, I think there's a little lesson to be learnt (David, Assistant Head)

In this case David uses his story to give the young people permission to say no. This example works on a number of levels: in context it is saying you don't have to do an activity if you don't want to do it. However, it is the Assistant Head of the school saying "you can say no". This is a message that is not shared in schools very often unless it relates to taking drugs or getting involved in gangs. It is also a different message within the context of the family residentials themselves. With an emphasis on positive family functioning, many of the messages of the residentials are about saying yes, agreeing rules together and some extent compliance. In the context of family living "it's OK to say no" may have a very different meaning and significance particularly when young people experience bullying

and or abuse in the home or local community. This communicates a definite focus on the autonomy of the young person rather than on parenting. It also talks to the theme of power.

An exchange between David and Stuart, the apprentice FRP worker communicated a similar message about turning things round:

> *…and I think there is great value in the fact that you were a student in this school. You've got a lot of staff who look at you with quite different eyes who might have looked at you 3 or 4 years ago …you weren't a straight forward kind of student who always did the right thing. You occasionally got yourself into spats and trouble and I think that's a great testimony to the students to say you know what I didn't always get it right, but I could turn it around, I could move on and I can still be here, and I think that is a great example.* (David, Assistant Head)

Valuing the personal stories of colleagues is one way of expressing what practitioners' value in their work with young people.

8.2.5   Imagining Change

Within the data there are many examples of practitioners talking about what they have learnt from experience as a source of knowledge and developing critical skills.

> *I was going through a bad time with my husband I had this spiritual adviser... she sorted out all my problems without doing anything.. - and I'd think for myself… maybe that's what I do with them... ask them why are you scared... why do you think you are ugly… why do you think people think you are this or that? And I think I'm doing what she did. I don't know if I should… it just comes natural doesn't it? You want to know why and you want them to think and question. And when they think and question they'll grow and become different people. I did.* (Sharon, key worker)

This reflection identifies an approach to practice as critical learning, or critical pedagogy (hooks, 1994; Ledwith, 2011). Sharon talks about growth through questioning. Sharing her experience models the strength and skills needed to bring about personal change rather than just modelling how to parent differently.

8.3   Developing practice theory from personal experience

It is in this and the following reflections that there is evidence of practitioners applying their personal experience to practice theories. In this next quote Karen reviews her experience in the light of a theoretical framework, speech and language, which is being used to develop practice across the school.

for me my biggie …is communicating with the young people in a way that they understand, making sure that when you ask them to do something they understand what you are asking them to do.   And when I am talking about things I am saying it in words that they understand.…It's not my job to teach them a whole new vocabulary. I don't want to do that and I'm not very good at doing that. It's like my job is to speak at a level that they understand and with words that they understand. (Karen, FRP Co-Ordinator)

'Speech and language' (The Communication Trust n.d.) is identified by the School Head as a major determinant in young peoples' lives. A whole school approach is being taken to develop young peoples' speech and language. Karen reflects on her role in applying this model to her work on the family residentials. There is evidence of her identifying, in this case with the young people she is working with. As in earlier data, there is a distancing of the practitioner from the teaching role and being a bridge between teachers and the young people.

Sometimes if I'm reading a book for my studies….. [I think] why do they have to use them big words…. I'm sure that's what goes on in a child's mind. If you don't come from a very educated background, how are you going to understand… (Karen, FRP Co-ordinator)

Within the same interview she makes links between her practice and her personal story. Theory and experience come together as Karen critically reflects on her practice and professional identity.

It's very much about you looking at your practice and how you do things rather than you broadening their vocabulary. What about your role in terms of communication within the family? Developing communication not just between you and the children but between the child and their family? (Karen, FRP Co-Ordinator)

Karen reflects on her own experience to better understand the young people she works with. She is not claiming that 'I am like you' but she is saying 'I understand where you're coming from'. She also takes a reflexive approach to her practice. Her reflections take her beyond what I have done to what that means and what I must now do, and a more developed understanding of her professional role. This same theory informs how she models communication to parents on residentials.

Other practitioners also express an identification with the young people and parents as learners.

…going on these residentials, it made me look at myself more as well. I started to read a book and I've not read a book in 20 years, so now I'm reading a book every couple of weeks and stuff , it just gives you that bit of time out, cus I have a family as well, you know it just makes you look and reflect. (Jane, Family Support Worker)

The experience of residentials as co-learning also impacts on practitioners' ideas about their own learning and education. This is expressed even more clearly in the interview with the school's social worker.

> *if we as professionals or as parents listen to our children, and that is listen and not interrupt, we can be begin to learn what the issues are, or what their thoughts are, or what their concerns are. By virtue of learning we can then be more appropriately responsive and help them and aid them to overcome or promote change.* (Dena, School Social Worker)

Dena positions herself as both parent and professional and identifies with parents in the task of achieving a better understanding children's need. Her emphasis is not understanding the parent but on standing alongside the parent as they try to understand the young person as starting point for intervention.

8.4 Discussion

8.4.1 Relationships

The data all emphasize the quality of the relation between the practitioner (or pedagogue) and young person/service user as central to the learning process. Trust and respect underpin relationships and practitioners are positioned as walking alongside or accompanying learners, young people, parents etc. They are relationships that value equality and learning as a shared experience.

The personal narratives of practitioners in this study demonstrate the value of drawing on personal story to establish trust and openness. They also communicate a commitment to equality. They reject the role of expert, and even teacher, in favour of co-learner and peer. As such they reflect the values of love and hope as expressed in Paulo Freire's writing about the critical pedagogy (Freire, 1997, 2014). This appears to be a deliberate deconstruction and resistance to a professional role (Fook & Gardner, 2007 cited in Rogowski, 2013). Critical social work rejects authoritarianism and embraces the complexities of relationship between practitioners and 'service user' that disrupt the given power relationships and develop more inclusive, and democratic models of practice (Rogowski, 2013). This idea has a real resonance in my data. Whilst the practitioners may not articulate their approach as radical, the result is a levelling of power relationships and authentic practice.

> *I am everything – a youth worker, family support worker, aunty, cousin* (Dawn, Key worker)

Parents recognise and respond positively to practitioners who take this approach. In interviews they refer to the family residential workers and key worker as family members – "she reminds me of my mother-in-law", "aunty", "big sister".

However, this reconstructing or re-conceptualising of the professional role is complex and, in some ways, problematic. Without an engagement in reflection and the development of reflexive skills and insight, there is danger that practitioners over-identify with the families they work with.

> *It's like with my children, when I work with families, I just do what I would do for my own children.* (Dawn, Key worker)

The practitioners' accounts of their practice reflect deep levels of compassion and empathy. Within professional practice there is tension between maintaining personal and professional boundaries (NYA, 2004) and making a genuine, emotional connection (Sercombe, 2010). These boundaries in youth work for instance, may be narrower than in other professions where professional distance is valued (Ord, 2007). The practitioners in this study use their stories of a way of expressing that they genuinely care for the families they work with.

However, over-identification will risk seeing our own personal experiences as being the same as their exceptional circumstances. It is important to acknowledge that every young person and family is different (Murphy & Ord, 20130) and that each person holds their own knowledge and resources. Practitioners may become stuck in attending to their own story. This concern is paralleled within the research process which demands a high level of critical reflexivity (Etherington, 2004) so that the researcher does not get drawn into a retelling of their own story through an over identification with research participants, creating a barrier to seeing and understanding difference (Swaminathan & Mulvihill, 2017). Furthermore, our own version of how families ought to be, and our own values may provide a motivation and vison for our practice or become oppressive versions of normativity that deny the individually and agency of young people and parents. Only one practitioner in the research process questioned 'whose version of family are we promoting?' acknowledging the power of his own experience and professional position.

The data underlines the importance of critical reflexivity in professional practice with young people and their families. Reflexive practice uncovers the complex relationship between practice and personal story. Practice knowledge, skills and approach are closely tied into personal experience and biography. Identification and exploration of this relationship is necessary but also troubling. It may be "a reflexivity that produces troubling and ethically connected knowledge that is not so easily captured and integrated" (Thomson, 2010 p.277). The school in this study places a lot of value on the experience and skills of local people; the family support team includes a number of local people and supports their ongoing professional training. However, in their articulation of their work with families, personal stories dominate their discussion. The integration of these stories into a coherent expression of professional practice is not easy as is demonstrated in my data. As such it raises critical questions

about the provision of reflective supervision which engages the practitioner in exploring the intersection between personal and professional experience and knowledge.

It also questions the relationship between gender and the use of personal story in professional practice with families, and how personal experience can be integrated in practice knowledge and meaning making.

8.4.2 Gender

Social care professionals (including youth workers, social workers and family support workers) are predominantly female (Thomson, 2010). The practitioners in this study are also mainly women. The men in the school hold senior management posts, only one is a family support worker. There are more male practitioners in the outdoor centre. A more detached notion of empathy than those discussed above is expressed by one of the outdoor workers who interestingly is male and does not have children:

> *I think I know what empathy is and I can practice empathy, which means I don't have to have, or have lived your experience but where ever I can put my point of reference in your shoes and understand that, and therefore I feel I can be effective as a practitioner with a massive range of groups and individuals* (Neil, outdoor practitioner).

This is a very different standpoint to that described by many of the female practitioners.

It is not possible to draw any conclusions about the relationship between gender and personal story in professional practice from such a small data set. However, my data suggests that female key workers and school family support workers have strong empathetic relationships with the women they work with. Women are generally the more active or only parent participating in the case study programmes. The male workers speak of a closer connection to the young people as role models rather than their relationship with parents. This is a very different power dynamic. Whilst the narratives of female practitioners may express a commitment to democratic forms of practice which minimise the power dynamic between professionals and participant, there is an inherent tension between how they emotionally and empathetically align themselves, and recognition of themselves as professionals and knowledge creators.

8.4.3 Tasks and roles

Rixon (2007) questions whether in fact in relation to work with young people, the labels ascribed to practitioners are less important than the quality of relationships established. This could also be true of this practice with young people and families – once their initial trust has been gained and consent to work together established, professional labels become almost irrelevant. The

practitioner appointed to lead on family programmes in the school began her work with young people as an unqualified worker. Therefore her sense of professional identity was being formed within the role. She later chose to pursue professional youth work training as appropriate to what they did and what she aspired to be. Those practitioners who were already youth work trained but are now in key worker roles had the greatest difficulty in articulating their professional identity. None of them referred to themselves as youth workers in relation to the work with families. It was only in the action research process of critical reflection that I encouraged them to consider their practice from the perspective of youth work. This lack of connection between their individual professional identity and the work they are now engaged in spoke of disorientation. Social aspects of the professional youth worker's identity appear to have been stripped away and it is only in joining in shared conversation and revisiting values that the practitioners appear to be re-connected with their youth work background (Goffman, 1956). In contrast, left alone on a doorstep, their uncertainty and isolation led them to use explanations that seek to distance themselves from the authorities that the families may find negative but unable to assert a succinct and positive professional identity of their own. Outside on the doorstep, they are also outside their previous professional arena (Coburn, 2010).

Key work is defined by the government in terms of task but not in terms of professional role or identity.

> The family intervention model is of a nominated key worker being assigned to each family who gets an understanding of the whole family's inter-connected issues and of the family dynamics. S/he adopts a persistent and assertive approach, establishing a relationship with the family and working closely with them to 'grip' the family and their problems as well as the agencies that will typically have been dipping in and out of the family's lives. The key worker agrees a plan of action, with clear outcomes, with the family and with relevant services. S/he will offer both practical assistance in the home (routines, domestic tasks) and help the family address issues such as ill health, debt and addiction, bringing in specialist services where necessary (DCLG, 2016 p.6)

According to this description, key work is the main model of direct intervention adapted as part of the Troubled Families strategy. It is a model of *intervention,* not of support*.* The task is laid out but there is no reference to how. The political agendas and values behind the strategy are articulated in the relevant policy statements but the professional values underpinning the actual work with families are not addressed. Key working as a means to support individual clients is used across a number of professions. However, whether the role builds on existing professional skills within a professional context or becomes distinct from any one professional practice appears to be the issue here.

Laxtonis (2012) questions the confusion between the 'key person approach' and the 'key workers system' in early year's settings. She advocates for training for practitioners taking on the key person role. She concludes that practitioners need additional training to understand the skills and knowledge required in the key person role. Furthermore, she advocates for the eradication of the 'key worker system' in favour of the 'key person' who establishes an emotional bond with the child. Whilst related to the specific early year's context, her conclusions raise questions about the role, skills and knowledge of the worker within a key working system with families, and the nature of the relationships they establish with family members. When practitioners come from professions such as youth work, where relationship is fundamental to all other practice, an emphasis on systems and task is a cultural shift in language and values which may leave a practitioner struggling to redefine their professional role. Interestingly within my data, workers counter their negative statements – "I am not a social worker" with statements about the relationship they will establish with the family: "I am here to support you"; "to work it out with you"; "to work with you".

Persistence and assertiveness are familiar characteristics of youth work practice, although usefully expressed in terms of patience, tenacity and perseverance. They are not words that practitioners would place at the centre of their approach or locate within their value base. Rather 'trust', 'integrity' and being 'non-judgmental' feature in both professional value statements and personal accounts. If the language of the underpinning strategy does not reflect these professional values, it is little wonder that practitioners struggle to articulate who they are and have to find their words to explain what sort of relationship they offer to the families they work with. Youth work practice and literature also emphases helping qualities and empathy (Belton, 2009). These are qualities embedded in the work of the pedagogue and the youth worker as informal educator. The practice of pedagogy is as dependant on the person of the pedagogue as in what they do (Jeffs & Smith, 2008; Smith, 2012). Early accounts of the pedagogue in Greek times describe the status of the pedagogue as that of servant and below that of teacher (Smith 2012), but in the role of moral guide and mentor, walking with' as guide and counsellor. The person of the pedagogue was and continues to be very present in any discussion of the role of the pedagogue, the way they work and the status they hold.

8.4.4 Invitation to further research

To view this section of data through a feminist lens uncovers issues around the power of women's narratives and voice and how they may contribute to the development of professional practice with women. The data suggests that personal narratives of practice are gendered and a deeper exploration of them would uncover new layers of knowing about the meaning and impact of women's' practice with young people and their families. Further research could draw on the work of Carol Gilligan (1982; 2011) Blenky et al (1997) and work collected by Wetherall & Noddings (1991) to explore women

practitioners' narratives of self in relation to others. To explore the narratives of women practitioners together with the narratives of the women they work with could provide a powerful, women-centred dynamic and insight into the this highly gendered area of social policy and practice – work with families. There is now a growing body of research particularly in the fields of nursing and social work which explores the connection between personal narrative and practice (Gaydos, 2003; Craig, 2007). This exploration could be extended by examining women's practice with families and a feminist care of ethic (Noddings, 2012; Eaker-Rich and Van Galen, 1996; Tronto, 1993).

The practitioners frequently return to an exploration of their own identity, their personal stories and life experience during discussion of what they do and why. The negotiation of self and professional identity in new contexts is complex and in the case of work with families, and whilst some have confidently embraced this new context of practice, it has left some practitioners struggling to define who they are. Practitioners in my study, often define themselves in relation to other professionals' roles with as much emphasis on who I am not, then who I am. However, they continue to emphasise the centrality of relationship in their professional practice. Work with families is highly contextualised practice (Fook, 2004). Practitioners draw extensively on their own experiences of being family, of parenting and of overcoming challenges to establish a credible identity for themselves, and empathy with the young people and parents that they work with. Practitioners share their own stories to establish relationships and ways of working based on co-learning and shard knowledge making. It is an approach to learning which contrasts sharply with other models of parenting courses and family intervention.

9 GENDER AND INTERSECTIONALITY

Practitioner narratives of both personal and professional relationships and experiences highlight the importance of moving from personal meaning to the social and political significance of gender, class and race.

Examining research data through the lens of gender raises a wide range of issues which are explored at different points in this thesis. Most of these issues are about how women as mothers are problematized in policy and practice, and the empowerment of women. The following section, however, begins with a discussion that troubles work with fathers – an area often overlooked in policy and practice with families. Beginning with an examination of data about work with men on residentials it considers the challenges of managing the power imbalance between practitioners, dads and their sons. Data from the key workers also identifies issues about female practitioners working with men, and how in particular male practitioners can challenge assumptions about male role models. Discussion of gender and power is difficult to develop without consideration of the intersectionality of gender, class and race. This chapter also explores the complex relationship between these aspects of identity and their impact on the relationships between practitioners, young people and adults in the context of their families. Consideration is given to the contribution that learning from youth work with young men, and with Muslim young people, can make to critical reflection on practice with young people and their families in diverse communities.

This section draws on challenging and sometimes difficult conversations with individual practitioners and some shared reflection. They highlight the very different experiences and identities which practitioners bring as well as different competencies in identifying and addressing issues of power and diversity.

9.1 Working with Fathers

Featherstone (2009) identifies a number of 'troubling questions' about the role of fathers both in policy and in practice based on the image of the absent or distant father. He argues that a normalising process has taken place within social policy which constructs fathers as a resource to families and advocates for their participation in family intervention. Under the New Labour government fathers were pursued in terms of their financial contribution to their families, but it was also asserted that fathers had a positive role to play in child development and that male role models are needed particularly by their sons. As a result, projects received funding specifically to engage with fathers. However, practitioners continue to acknowledge that encouraging fathers to participate in parenting programmes can be difficult. Featherstone (2014) notes that in the child protection arena, practitioners and researchers are engaging with the 'troublesome' nature of fatherhood. Women's

organisations addressing domestic violence such as the refuge movement work on the basis of all men as risks rather than resource to families. Directing fathers to programmes such as Triple P might be seen as an attempt to redirect fathers from risk to resource.

The majority of parents who took part in the outdoor family residentials were mothers. Of the six individual programmes which were part of our action research, only two included fathers: a programme for a group from an adult drug and alcohol service included one man, and a programme for 'dads and lads' run with a youth offending team. Whilst these were very different programmes they shared the common aim of building trust and communication following some kind of separation or significant event.

9.1.1 Youth Offending Team: working with' dads and lads'

Residential programmes for 'dads and lads' were run on behalf of a youth offending team by Organisation B. These programmes grew out of work with young people involved in gang culture. Whilst the commissioning service is a young people's service, the aims of the residentials were: "To strengthen relationships between fathers and sons and understanding of self and others". The lead YOT worker has clear aims for the programmes in terms of their relationship not just with each other but also with the service itself: "I want dads to see the YOT not just as punishment but as prevention and support". This discussion is based on data from one dads and lads residential.

9.1.2 Power balance

A total of four male practitioners and three fathers weighted the power balance on this residential almost totally towards adults. Whilst the young people in their feedback reported having enjoyed the activities and spending time with their dads, the young people were very quiet in the reflective session that I observed, and it was the fathers who were vocal in their discussions with me.

The young people were quite quiet – one was fairly quiet anyway - one very quiet… not confident enough to speak together. (Neil, outdoor practitioner and programme leader)

The men were able to articulate some of their feelings and aspirations in a way that the boys appeared to find more difficult. This raised questions for me about whether the reflective process was aimed at the men rather than their sons and whether it is actually possible for discussion-based reflection to involve both parents and young people as equals when young people are so outnumbered by adults. Working with the young people separately might have given them much more space to explore how they felt about and wanted from their relationship with the dads.

The lead YOT worker, Trevor, had a powerful conviction of the importance of the father as role model. Underlying what was said and not said was a power dynamic which reinforced a hierarchy of power

during the residential with the lead worker at its head. He had an authoritarian style of leadership. I wondered if he saw himself as modelling parenting behaviour and what his ideal model of 'fathering' is.

> *Trevor is quite alpha-male in what he does with young people. If there is stuff he doesn't like his approach is alpha-male. It sort of works. For instance a lad fiddled with his watch in feedback session. He said "You need to stop that now" – no discussion or negotiation.*
>
> *On a previous residential I did hear Trevor say "I am not responsible for your son" but when he sees an issue he goes in there to sort it out immediately.* (Neil, outdoor practitioner and programme leader)

The power dynamic was palpable within the group of men. It appeared to be about re-establishing the power relationship between father and son modelled by the practitioners. However, when I questioned the programme leader about whether this residential was essentially about parenting. He thought not:

> *There may be elements – however that's not the direction we take. It's about relationships, it's almost like an abstract step out of the scenario – let's step out as two people and find out about each other. What do you need from me? May be as a parent, maybe as a person.* (Neil, outdoor practitioner and programme leader)

Neil is an experienced outdoor education leader and uses reflection and some transactional analysis in his practice. He emphasises facilitating quality conversation between father and sons as equals. The lead worker from the YOT had a similar understanding of the aims and approach to this residential

> *It's about informal learning. It's about conversation – even in silence there is conversation* (Trevor, YOT worker)

But I wanted to know more about the ideas behind this residential and why specifically they worked with young men and their fathers. If it is not about parenting, is this about examining masculinity? The programme leader did not see this as gendered work as such, but his reflections began to identify gendered practice issues:

> Neil*: We are providing a course for them like for anyone else – I don't see much problem …like any other course…. We are just providing a service.*
>
> Kate*: are there any ideas or approaches about masculinity that you bring to that work?*
>
> Neil*: No, I haven't done, it's not a concept that I have touched on I don't think.*

> Kate: *Some of the reflections you have shared with me indicate that you have observed things that are about masculinity. You talked about "smelling the fear in the room" and dads not wanting to appear vulnerable or failing in front of their sons. To me that's about masculinity.*
>
> Neil: *I suppose it is, I hadn't really thought about it in that... So that was very much a case of the fear, you know when you don't live with somebody, you're not able to make those connections and therefore you protect yourself. You have your own notions, you make a stand, 'this is where I stand'. You are my son you must do this*

I was troubled by the assumption that the "you" in the above statement was clearly male and that the practitioner was drawing generalisations based upon male behaviours.

Neil and the lead worker from the YOT have notably different personal styles to their work with fathers. Perhaps some of this difference is value based, perhaps cultural. But even with different values underpinning their work, they were able to put together a coherent learning experience which reflected the needs and cultural background of the group. Feedback on evaluation forms by participating fathers confirmed this. All the workers from the YOT and the all the participants were from Black Afro-Caribbean backgrounds. There was a cultural significance to the way this group worked together which I saw reflected in the language used, and in expressions of authority. As a white, female researcher this experience made my whiteness visible, and I felt on the outside. The programme leader from the host organisation was the only white male member of staff on the residential. I later questioned him about that experience. At first he was dismissive claiming that there was no issue. When I introduced discussion of cultural difference into a group discussion with the team in a follow up session, the discussion was difficult and challenged both the practitioners and me. Robb (2004) explores the part played by gender when men undertake research about men and intersubjectivity in the research process. His conclusions resonate with my own experience. He argues that gender identities and unconscious motivations impact on research and can interact to produce a subconscious defence reaction in both the interviewer and interviewee. He also contends that assuming that men work best with men is not unproblematic and that fathers may have ambivalent feeling about fatherhood and masculinity. The intersection of class, gender and racialized identities create further complexities in defining notions of good fathering. These are difficult issues without talking about power and acknowledging the power dynamics that exist within teams of practitioners (and researchers) as well with participants. However, I suggest that they are essential in establishing a clear theory and value base for practice with young people, and families.

Politically there is a discourse of absent fathers and assumption that they should be present and involved but this may not always in the children's and mothers' best interest. However, Featherstone

(2004) highlights the importance of recognising that a number of men, other than the birth father, may have a significant presence in the life of a young person over time – some of these will take on a fathering role. It is important to recognise that partners and boyfriends may also be present in family life. This has implications for work with families. Work with families carried out by key workers in the family home brings workers into contact with a range of men – brothers, grandfathers, siblings – who may act as significant gatekeepers in terms of access to other family members.

9.2 Intersectionality

As discussed above, the family is a site of intersectionality where gender, culture and class meet to provide a dynamic system which practitioners have to understand and negotiate. For instance, some key workers speak of visiting the homes of South Asian families where their initial contact is with the father or more often, the older brothers of a young person referred to them. Fathers and brothers can be gatekeepers agreeing to or denying access to women and to young people in their families.

> *I was aware of our cultural identity. A Black male and an Asian female driving around … in a big black car. I was aware of looks we were getting and of a car following us. We stopped at the house – a car pulled in front of us and 2 guys got out. "I saw you driving around". They were a bit aggressive with the female worker but she stood her ground. I explained who we were….. They said they had a daughter in there who was being home-educated. I explained there may be some support we can give and left phone number. Later, the son phoned – asked me to explain who we were – asked 'what about disabilities?' I arranged a meeting with him. Son rang up again later to cancel it. The Father rang on Wednesday and arranged further meeting.* (Stephen, key worker).

The complexities within this scenario are endless and reflect cultural and gender uncertainties of the work and how to begin to negotiate them. Even when key workers are invited in, these complex dynamics continue particularly in trying to talk with women when men are present.

> *Last week I cold called on a family. I was nervous – it's rough there. The door was opened by a big man – white salwar kameez – big beard – clean, peaceful. He asked me inside – it's importance not stay on the doorstep. In the front room his wife joined us. He said he didn't want a white worker meddling with his family – diluting his children's brains. White people don't pray – imposing culture – he doesn't want that for his children.*
>
> *The referral is about a daughter who has been out of school since 2008. Where are the women? How do we gain access to the women?* (Dawn, key worker)

Dawn had to win the trust of a male gate keeper before gaining access to the women and children in the family. Finding a quick win for a male member of the family may be a way of building a relationship and a bridge to other family members. Key workers were successful in meeting with the adult and young women in families. However, their contact and conversations often continued to be monitored by a male family member. It is difficult to know when a woman is being restrained or even silenced by male presence. I observed that female practitioners have to be assertive and position themselves in a very different power relationship with the men in the family than female family members. Overall, the data demonstrates the complex dynamics between the gender and race of key workers and the family members they work with.

9.2.1 Women working with men

As noted above, the residential work with fathers and sons was facilitated by an all-male staff team. When I visited this residential as a researcher, and a woman, I felt as though I didn't belong. Whilst the fathers and practitioners were happy to talk to me I felt as though I was interrupting something and my identity as a white woman led me to ask myself questions about how appropriate my presence was and how far I was able to understand the experience of these men.

This raises a wider question about significance of gender. Looking back at my field notes I only questioned practitioner gender identity when an all-male staff team was put in place to work with a mixed group. In the interview and focus group data from the school's residential programme very little is said about fathers and no mention is made of separate work with young men on the residential programmes. This silence may be reflective of the unspoken assumptions underlying work with families that parent actually means mother. Equally it might be based on a normative, heterosexual model of family. Indeed, the body of youth work literature which discusses young people in general makes no distinction of either race or gender.

Discussions with female key workers uncovered uncertainties and some concerns about working with men.

> .. they might fancy you as well which a bit is awkward, they might wonder why you are asking them questions, if you fancy them. I don't know. (Dawn, key worker)

The concerns expressed in this statement uncover some of the more complex and taboo topics about how sexuality and power operate in the inter-personal relationships between practitioners and service users. The threat of sexual harassment is very real but rarely acknowledged. The quote below talks about a man 'hating' a female worker. This key worker explains how she won over a father (Jez) who "hated her guts".

> *Lynn: One day I went round … and I'd encouraged Jez to do this football group so we had a chat and a big sheet of paper on the floor, and we did it like youth worker style, why do you want to do it, what's the need, what's the outcomes, and he was buzzing - this was Jez who hated my guts when I started working with them… about 6 weeks ago he said to me, "I couldn't stand you when you first came in this door, I thought you were a little busy body.. I've total respect for you now…"*
>
> *Kate: How did you get there with him?*
>
> *Lynn: By leaving him… space, letting him watch… you've just got to leave him to make his own mind up about me, and it did, and he's running his own football group now.*

In the data, there are very few examples of how women practitioners work with men, and few of women engaging men. However, this example demonstrates the potential of informal learning approaches in engaging with fathers. This process may not have taken so long had the key worker been a man; but it may have been equally as challenging had the key worker been a middle-class man.

9.2.2   Male practitioners

I asked key workers whether they felt there were any limitations in the work men could undertake with families in their homes.

> *What I struggle with is, when we were younger, if we were visited, if it were a bloke we wouldn't entertain him - most of these families we work with are single mums, rarely mum and dad… so when you've got a young bloke coming to a house women can't talk about their periods… my family ladies talk about their periods… lady stuff.. and some women are scared of men because they've had domestic violence, so when a man comes. It's still a man isn't it?*
> (Dawn, key worker)

Dawn identifies the power men have to silence women. She highlights the need for gender sensitive, and culturally sensitive work taking into account the experiences of the women she is working with. Given that many of the families referred to the Troubled Families programme had experienced domestic abuse, the impact of a male worker going into the home needs to be carefully considered and reflected upon.

I asked this same practitioner if there was an advantage to male key workers working with young men. Her answer demonstrates the ambivalence that seems to exist in practice about the role of male workers.

Not at all. Some of these teenage boys have only ever had a mum so when it's a man they might not have had a good experience. The families I work with haven't had a good experience with their dads, one is scared of his dad, or doesn't see his dad. It depends on them... I think they do need a male figure, definitely, young boys... (Dawn, key worker)

Assumptions about the positive role modelling of male workers need to be tested out against young men's experience of their own fathers. It is potentially fraught with contradiction. The assumption appears to be that young men need positive role models and that may extend to modelling parenting skills as discussed by the residential works.

9.3 Discussion

The intersectionality of gender, class and race is very powerful. This means that all workers, male and female, need to be adequately trained and supported to build appropriate relationships based on an understanding of the power dynamics that might exist in any given work context. This includes developing reflexive practice which responds to the power and positionality of the practitioner in relationship to the women and men they are working with. This is all the more important when working with young men and their fathers where a further, generational power dynamic exists.

It's not to say that white men who aren't parents can't work with families - it's about understanding that perspective... and challenges all of us about our identity and what we bring to our work so... and again what working with families has brought up for me personally is the importance of understanding our own personal identity in the middle of that work. Be it my ethnicity or my gender or my status as a parent, I know that this work has touched my sense of who I am more deeply than any other piece of work because it's touches so many elements of my identity. (Phil, outdoor practitioner)

When working with partner organisations, it is important to have an explicit discussion about assumptions that are being made about gendered relationships and about fathering in particular as these may differ between workers. Practitioners may have different normative versions of family life which may reflect their own cultural experience. On the outdoor residential programmes working closely with practitioners from the partner organisations who know the participants and their communities is important in understanding how working together can achieve the most appropriate ways of working with those families.

Batsleer (2014) argues that youth work with young men has traditionally privileged physical activity and 'respectable' versions of masculinity. She challenges claims that youth work has failed to address

the need for and impact of male role models. Historically youth work has developed around the needs and policies relating to young men. More recently mentoring projects in schools and projects specifically for Black young men have sought to provide positive male role models. Currently concerns about gangs, youth violence and knife crime are driving debate about young people. However, gender is rarely explicitly named in relation to youth violence (Walsh, 2018). Walsh argues that a gender conscious approach is needed to both policy and practice. The gendered outdoor residentials run in partnership with the YOT suggest ways in which outdoor learning can provide a safe and different space in which to explore gender.

Batsleer (2014) refers to the "anti-role models" that are offered by some organisations that have developed positive alternatives to gang membership including outdoor residential programmes. However, she challenges the limitations of individualised concepts of role which fail to take into account the social context of the young people concerned:

> Rooted in social learning theory of a rather mechanistic kind, role-modelling as a basis for practice enables a further neglect of the role of structural disempowerment in young peoples' lives, promoting an individualistic model of empowerment largely devoid of any wider critical consciousness (2014, p. 18)

Batsleer not only challenges the relevance of the 'respectable' role models available to young men, but also the lack of critical engagement with the social context of work with young men. Furthermore, she warns against role models of pro-social behaviour which are based on heteronormative models of family, and mothering and fathering roles in particular. Key working has uncovered a high level of families significantly affected by domestic violence, usually perpetrated by men but also involving young peoples' violence against other family members. Critical reflection on work with families invites an unpacking of respectable forms of family, including masculinity and what it is to be a mother/father. This underlines the importance of practitioners having the opportunity to re-exam whose version of family, masculinity, and femininity is being promoted in their work with families and critically question the relevance of those models within the social and economic context of the families they work with.

These same issues apply to work with young people and families from minority ethnic communities. There is a wealth of expertise and research within social work that practitioners and organisations may draw on to develop their cultural competency in practice with families and anti-oppressive practice more generally (Dominelli, 2002, Lavalett & Penketh, 2013, Thompson, 2016). It is also important to engage with research that challenges the avoidance of difficult issues such as male violence against women in Muslim communities and practice which essentialises minority ethnic communities.

Work with young people from minority ethnic communities is represented in some youth work literature and research (Belton & Hamid, 2011). Ahmed, (2009) argues that cultural differences in young peoples' mental health need to be understand. Picking up on Batsleer's point about social contexts, she highlights that there is a prevalence of mental health needs amongst young people who live in one parent families, where parents have no education, and those living on low incomes (Green et al, 2004 cited in Ahmed, 2009). Whilst this includes many Muslim young people in UK cities, Muslim young people do not approach services because they feel they do not understand Muslim youth. Khan (2013) is critical of the problematisation of the family in relation to the experience of Muslim young people in the UK. He also warns against defining Muslim youth work by gender rather than values and principles. Whilst some youth workers have developed work with Muslim young women as space away from the male gaze and as a means of addressing the needs of young women which go ignored in mixed groups (Spence, 2006), others have challenged perceptions that work with Muslim young women reinforces the separation of young women and 'the power of the veil' (Cressey, 2007). Khan (2013) concludes that:

> The strength of Muslim stereotypes makes it difficult to see where gendered space can empower and support criticality (p.30).

One of the spaces that female key workers discovered is in their work in the homes of Muslim women when there were no men present.

> *Talking with Zainab (mother). She shared that when Sharon first visited her she was worried that this white woman was going to come in and meddle. (*Researcher's field notes*)*

> *Many Asian women are very suspicious of white workers - don't want white workers coming in. But we are both women. We have a laugh together. Sharon has made a difference.* (Zainab, mother)

In some instances, the shared identity of being a woman is more powerful than cultural difference. Being from outside a community can offer the opportunity of exploring a situation without being judged or intimidated from within the community. It is important that practitioners continue to question the stereotypes and assumptions that they bring to their practice, but these should inform rather than become barriers to practice which builds support and solidarity across cultural divides.

Summary

This discussion of points of intersectionality in work with young people and their families has highlighted some of the complexities that practitioners encounter in their work in and with diverse communities. These issues require careful and critical consideration. Opportunities for practitioners

to critically reflect on their practice are essential for safe and anti-oppressive practice. However, the responsibility for the development of critical practice does not only lie with individual practitioners; organisations have a responsibility to consider how they appoint, train and support staff. They also need to give careful consideration to their working practices and strategies to develop culturally appropriate and challenging programmes. A critically reflexive approach to practice will support practitioners in their negotiation of complexities such as understanding and working within a family's hierarchy of power as explored in the following chapter.

10 FINDING A FOCUS IN WORK WITH A FAMILY

A key challenge in work with young people and their families is finding a focus for that work. Whilst policies discuss working with the 'whole family', defining family and whole-family approaches, is very much open to debate.

This chapter focuses on how practitioners find a focus for their work with families discussing how family is defined and the importance of families self-defining. Working with sibling groups and the extended family presents a number of challenges and possibilities. The key issue identified in this chapter is the challenge of keeping young people at the centre of practice with families when adult agendas and voices are more powerful than the sometimes unheard voices of children and young people.

10.1 Self-defining

A key feature of each of the programmes is their openness to work with the family as they define themselves. Parents and practitioners see this as important. Each programme invites parents to participate with whichever members of their family they chose. The decision is adult led but requires the consent of young people to participate. Young people who do not want to participate in the residential programmes either decline the initial offer or vote with their feet, not turning up on the day or, in the case of the school's programme, dropping out after the first residential. Maintaining a commitment to voluntary participation is key to the process as the self-motivation for change within families is seen by practitioners to be an essential starting point.

The key working programme is different in that families are referred to the programme on the basis of the needs of named individuals within them. Therefore young people might be identified as a primary concern and become a focus for intervention regardless of their initial consent or voluntary participation in the programme. All referrals to Organisation B key workers include poor school attendance as one of referral criteria and therefore establish an immediate focus on the needs for one or more young people.

In the residential programmes it is the adults in the family who decide who should take part in the programme. It cannot be assumed that young people would chose to work with the same family members as their parent(s). The power to nominate who takes part remains with the adults, whilst young people only have the power not to engage. Whilst a range of adults may play a significant role in young peoples' care, those adults may or may not be parents or immediate family. This is sometimes acknowledged in the programmes. One outdoor residential weekend run in partnership with an adult drug and alcohol service included a child who was at that point being cared for by his

aunt who attended alongside his mum. The residential experience contributed to the process of rebuilding their relationship and work towards his mother being able to care for him again. Two young people when interviewed noted that they would like a grandparent to attend a residential with them. This didn't happen.

Having the power to focus on specific relationships within the family rather than work with the whole family can be extremely effective. Parents, in choosing who to come away with, are not split between the competing needs and demands of a number of children and other adults, and young people gain the attention of an adult. The residentials provide an opportunity for parents/carers to identify specific relationships which they want to give time to. For example, a parent choosing to come away with a younger child because she felt that she had neglected her relationship with him whilst coping with the violent behaviour of an older son.

The school's residential programme coordinator meets with family members in their home therefore considering the whole resident family. However, not all siblings attend the residentials – some may be too young, and young people with significant disabilities do not always take part whilst some older siblings chose not to be involved. The youngest child to participate in the schools residential programme was three years old. Practitioners found working with a child of such a young age challenging and recognised the need for further consideration of safe-guarding and personal care practices.

Not all parents were happy to participate in the residential element of the programme despite the enthusiasm of their children and working with the Co-ordinator in their home. Where parents did not commit, the young people had a positive experience and completed the programme without their parents. Whilst the young people talked about their enjoyment of the programme its impact on their family was limited and the young people expressed disappointment that their parents had not come along. Conflicting levels of commitment between different family members was evident in a number of the families involved in the programmes.

10.2 Working with the extended family

Whilst working with families in their own homes engages with the everyday experiences of families, it can, despite the specificity of referral, prove to be a chaotic and ill-defined environment. Key workers report examples of older siblings coming and going, male family members acting as gatekeepers and people who were never introduced being present during their visits,

I work with extended family... I've sat in a room with 23 people. (Lynn, key worker)

Practitioners can find it extremely difficult to maintain a focus on the needs of children and young people when adults demand attention and help. To talk of 'whole family' approaches over-simplifies the dynamic nature of the 'family' which is rarely a static entity and may include non-familial members within its influence.

> *With a family of 10 - you can't just exclude, you have to say hello to all 10 of them… you've got to say even just one little thing that makes a difference to each one of them. (*Stuart, key worker)

Key working in the family home is unpredictable and brings the worker into contact with a variety of people, some of whom will be part of the referral, others not. In this sense this is an informal learning environment rooting the relationships and the engagement in the everyday experiences of the family. However, having unknown adults present in the house raises safe-guarding issues in some instances and limits what a worker is able to do. Practitioners have to be aware of the influence of all people present and resident and if necessary identify alternative times and places to work with key adults and young people. In contrast, the residential programmes offer the opportunity to work in new spaces and places free of the influence of others.

In some cases, boundaries have to be established when practitioners are asked to act on behalf of someone not mentioned on the referral, such as an older son asking for help to sort out his benefits and find somewhere of his own to live, or a daughter with her own small child living nearby. Key workers relate how the temptation at times is to say 'yes' to such requests, because it is a way of getting into a family and winning the trust of key gate keepers. The danger is being side-tracked into addressing the needs of vociferous adults at the expense of really seeing and hearing the needs of the children and young people in the family. Workers speak of beginning their work focussing on one family member and gradually refocussing on another as circumstances change or trust and permission to work with more difficult to reach individuals is gained. This usually involves responding to an adult's need or demands first. The process key workers engage in regularly begins with the needs of one parent, but sometimes an older sibling or key gatekeeper. These were described as 'easy wins' – sometimes getting a room decorated or more often sorting out a benefit issue. Practical wins also include getting boilers fixed, arranging and accompanying young people and/or their mothers to medical appointments.

10.3 The young person as focus

Referrals to the school's family residential programme focus on the needs of a child or a group of siblings as identified by the one of the primary schools or the high school. The first two of the three residentials are purely for the sibling group. It is significant that the format of this programme provides an opportunity for practitioners to focus specifically on the needs of and building relationships with the children and young people whilst on residential, but at the same allows the lead worker to work with parents before and in-between residentials. This is the only programme within the research that works separately with young people. The programme aims to put young people in the driving seat, developing their ability to guide and teach their parents.

Relationships with the young people begin in school. In most cases the worker establishes relationships with parents in their homes, focussing on the parenting relationship, but also allows space for personal development and change. For example, the mother of one family, with the support of the worker, decided to leave her husband and found employment. During the residential programme it was identified that her husband's needs and their behaviours as parents were having a negative impact on their children. To make positive changes for the children required a significant change in their adult relationship. The practitioners in the school provided continued support and development opportunities for the young people in this family during this period of change. This exemplifies the complexity of the dynamics of any family, and the skill and insight required in making decisions about where to focus effort and resources. A more contentious situation arose within the same programme where the lead worker worked with a mother with significant mental health issues forming a working relationship which she argued to continue beyond the three months of the residential programme. It had taken a long time to establish the trust of the mother and her needs were extremely complex impacting significantly on her children. Over time a key worker was identified to take over the work with this family but the FRP co-ordinator found it very hard to give up working with the mother. I noted in my field notes that she appeared to have a strong identification with the woman. The school argued that the worker was employed to focus on the children and she was instructed to stop working with the mother. Day to day support continued to the children in the family through the school's family support team beyond the residential programme as is often the case.

As practitioners described their practice and some of its challenges two questions emerged:

- Does work with a family at home run the risk of distracting from young person's need?"

and

- What are the limits of the workers' relationships with parents within the family residential programme?

10.4 Challenges of the sibling group

Working with sibling groups is a further complexity in work with young people within their families. Some of the young people who participated in the school's residential programme identified the opportunity to spend time with brothers/sisters as the best thing about the programme. Younger siblings were most likely to want to have that time with an older brother or sister. However, there were some young people who wanted to have a break from a sibling:

Usually I have [] to be the responsible one… I feel, my brothers got ADSD so... autism so I've got to be more sensible (Ruth, 13)

Therefore, it cannot be assumed that to go away with siblings is always in the best interest of all of the young people involved. When interviewed many of the young people expressed views which were at once in tension, that they would prefer to go away with friends, whilst at the same time enjoying time away with 'mum' and siblings. This contradiction of loving yet regularly fighting with siblings also features in research by Morrow (1998).

10.5 Starting with the young person

As described above, whether young people are identified as the primary focus varies from programme to programme.   The school's family residential programme takes the need of the child(ren) as its starting point and continued focus; for the Key Workers the needs of a child(ren) are included in each referral. The outdoor residential programmes vary depending upon on the partner organisation as programmes are developed and delivered on behalf of a range of young person and adult-focussed organisations.

Hughes (2010) identifies three categories of approaches to family based policy and service provision:

1. Developing support networks focusing on the needs of the primary 'client' or service user

2. Supporting those who provide care for the primary 'client' or service user

3. Supporting the development and functioning of a support network focusing on the needs and strengths of the whole family unit and individuals in it.

These categories provide one way to analyse where young people fit into the different programmes. In the case of the schools residential programme the young person is always, at the point of referral the primary client. The programme works on developing the family as support network focusing on

the needs of the child/young person. The point at which the practitioners' approach came under scrutiny from the school was when the needs of a parent became the primary focus of the worker's intervention. For this practitioner the professional pain of this challenge lay in her emphasis on relationships, and 'walking with' which she had applied just as much to her relationship with a parent as to her work with the young people. The organisation's priority, the child, defined the limitations of her work with this parent.

Most the outdoor residential programmes are delivered in partnership with organisations focused on the child or young person's needs – youth offending teams, children's centres. However, in programmes delivered on behalf of adult drug and alcohol services the adult is the 'primary client'. These residentials focus on developing the family as support network for that adult. Within the research process I explored with practitioners whether there was an opportunity (all be it missed) to use these residentials as opportunities to focus on those young people who were affected by their parent's behaviour and were in some cases the carers for those adults. Could or should family residential programmes be an opportunity to build young people's resilience in terms of coping with and surviving in chaotic families with adults with a high level of need and therefore refocus on the young person as primary client? Sawyer & Burton, *Building resilience in families Under Stress* (2012) make a powerful case for the specific needs of young people whose parents misuse drugs or alcohol to be understood and addressed.

Practitioners on the outdoor residential programme explored this question further:

> *What were the motives of an adult service being involved in a family residential? The point is dad's addiction... If the dad has a problem the reason we are dealing with it is for the greater good of the young person. Whereas with this example, I don't think you chunk up to the young person. You chunk up to adult drug and alcohol issue.* (Emily, outdoor practitioner)

The practitioners in this discussion identify how their own professional aims and energies, to focus on the young person, are redirected towards the adult unconscious of the impact on the young people or children involved. This uncritical adoption of the aims of the partner organisation resulted in practitioners becoming absorbed in the needs of the adult and only later, acknowledging that they had taken their eyes off the needs of the young people involved, particularly the younger children.

> *just thinking about [Don's] five year old daughter - what she wanted to do on that family treat day… she just wanted to go for a walk with the dog and take a photograph, didn't she? And we never got round to doing that because, I think that's what happened… the dad's issues overwhelmed all of that. And stuff got lost. And lost value quickly and became devalued in the*

wake of dad's stuff. I can see that's where I've experienced that happening. Not consciously.
(Phil, outdoor practitioner)

As the reflective process with practitioners developed so a number of critical questions emerged in relation to focusing on the adult. I asked a group of outdoor practitioners:

as devil's advocate… are we doing the children and young people a dis-serve if we take our eye off the parenting relationship and start focussing on personal development in relation to the adults? (Researcher)

This discussion led to the identification of a series of further critical questions which are relevant to work with young people and their families in broader contexts:

- Should the success of work with families be judged on the quality of outcomes for individuals, or the impact on relationships?
- Is there a temptation for adult practitioners to identify with adults on the family programmes and in so doing be distracted from young person focused work?
- For those practitioners more used to working with adults, as in the case of some of the outdoor specialists, is it more difficult or challenging to deliberately work from the child's perspective and take a child-centred approach to work with families?
- What happens when we become overly focussed on the need of a parent?

10.6 Focussing on the needs and strengths of the whole family

The targets which accompany referrals to key workers focus on the needs and outcomes for individuals, both adults and young people - to get children back into school, reduce youth crime and anti-social behaviour, put adults on a path back to work and reduce the high costs these families place on the public sector each year.

The government in the Troubled Families strategy advocate working in ways that 'evidence showed effective'. This is achieved by dealing with each family's problems as a whole rather than responding to each problem, or person, separately and appointing a single key worker to get to grips with the family's problems and work intensively with them to change their lives for the better for the long term. (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 2015)

Critically, this directive identifies an approach focussed on "each families' _problems_ as a whole (my stress) in contrast to "the needs and strengths of the whole family unit and individuals in it" as discussed by Hughes. My observations of key work practice and interview data demonstrate

practitioners addressing the multiple "problems" (needs) of families, within an understanding of the whole, and how the lives of young people are significantly affected by the needs and behaviours of adults. As the Key Worker programme has developed under the payment by results framework, a greater emphasis has been placed on individual need, intervention and outcome. However, improved outcomes for individuals, young people and adults, in some cases lead to positive outcomes for the family as a whole. This correlation though cannot be assumed.

10.7 Hierarchies of power

As explored in the previous section, deciding upon a focus for relationship building and intervention within a family group or groups, is a complex process in which the practitioners, the referrer and individual family members play a part. In practice the power dynamics between those involved and how these are worked with, play a significant part in determining the approach taken. To assume a static binary power relationship between parents and their children however is neither realistic nor useful. Observations and interviews evidence the complex and shifting power dynamics that exist within families and between individuals and groups.

The issue of hierarchies of power was explored further on the one of the reflection days.

> *Is there an additional challenge that when we are used to working with older teenagers - our professional inclinations lean towards the older people in the group, we hear them more easily than if we hear children necessarily... I wonder if we have to have more of a conscious approach to our work with children…..* (Researcher field notes)

I offered this reflection to a group of outdoor residential practitioners as an invitation to explore how we work with children. In response, one of the practitioners noted:

> *I had forgotten about little children… because I have got young people and teenagers in my head* (Phil, outdoor practitioner)

I observed that listening to and responding to the younger children on family residential programmes was much easier when adults were not present. None of the outdoor residential programmes planned to work separately with adults and young people because of the 'whole family' brief; some practitioners paid more attention to young children than others. I observed examples of spontaneous games and play on some residentials which engaged the young people of all ages, creating an atmosphere of fun, and one of inclusion, in those spaces which existed around the planned programme. Equally in free time which left children to their own devises, where parents opted to relax with each other rather than with their children, I observed examples of children engaging in some very negative behaviours. Practitioners became increasingly aware of the potential of outdoor

activities such as rope courses to engage young people with their parents but that these same activities could be beyond the ability of younger children. Having younger children present means that "the usual programme of outdoor activities" had to be reviewed and reinvented.

10.7.1 Power and authority – empowering young people, or not?

Having a parent present is challenging for some of the practitioners, particularly those used to work with groups of young people and who are youth work trained.

> *cus as a youth worker, when I started with this work I was a bit confused because when I've come on residentials with youth groups and I've worked with youth groups it's very much about the members of that group being equal and it's about the worker facilitating their decision making, autonomy and gaining of power and confidence and yet when you put a parent into the equation it kind of displaces that doesn't it, and I struggled to put words to my experience of that displacement but some of the parenting stuff that's out there, that's alternative ways of working with families is very much asserting the parent's authority and almost like training the young people to accept authority because they haven't been accepting authority. So it's based on presumed or assumed hierarchies of power… and they are a bit alien to youth work I think. When I put my youth work hat on I find this alien and disorientating* (Phil, outdoor practitioner)

Phil struggles to identify what he found uncomfortable about working with parents present but on reflection pinpoints the issue of hierarchies of power within family. He highlights that assumptions may be made within family work that certain hierarchies exist and that it is in everyone's best interests that they are reinforced. For youth workers, the empowerment of young people and working with young people to strengthen their voice is a taken for granted when undertaking discrete work with young people; however, the basic values of equality and voice (NYA, 2015) take on new meanings or are at least contested when working with young people in the context of their family.

10.7.2 Reflections on Mother and Daughters outdoor residential weekend - a different story

> *When the mums and daughters group arrived a hierarchy of power was immediately visible – young women first, then the workers, then the mothers* (Mags, outdoor practitioner)

This residential was organised in partnership with a Youth Offending Team for young women involved in gangs and their parents. Six families attended, some with siblings and therefore the group was large with a strong peer group of young women. As a group they were powerful. However, the power relationships between the young women and their mothers were complex.

I asked the practitioners what it is like to work with young people with their mothers present.

> *I thought it was a bit funny actually. I mean I spoke to them as I would if mum wasn't there, but it was nice to know that you had a bit of back up... 'cus mum would normally back you up or rein them in ...* (Mags, outdoor practitioner)

Practitioners talk about parents in conflicting and contradictory ways. In the above case the Mags referred to parents as authority figures, there for back up when discipline was needed. Yet in another instance she speaks about having to model how to challenge young people and deal with conflict that was as much the making of a parent as a young person.

> *One thing I picked up on was when there were niggles between one another, hurtful things to say ... there were some put downs which was hard... I didn't want to tread on mum's toes, but at the same time it's how do you deal with that? That's not OK.... like 'don't embarrass your daughter' type thing* (Mags, outdoor practitioner)

Overall, a number of practitioners commented on how hard it is to challenge a parent's behaviour. The instinct to protect the young person is overtaken by the need to maintain the parents' dignity and authority. This raises further questions about adult power:

> *Do we prioritise adult authority because young peoples' rights to dignity and respect come second within the hierarchy of power within which they live?*

> *Does the worker actually prioritise their relationship with the parent by choosing not to challenge their negative behaviours?* (Researcher field notes)

In relation to the same residential programme, the lead worker also reflected on the impact parental presence has on her own relationship building with the young people:

> *I didn't feel as though I could work as much with the young women because their mums were there. And actually there were sometimes when I would have built a different relationship with that young person, because I would have gone and had some conversation and found out more information, but because mum's there, that's not what this is about. It was about them having their time together and setting that up so that mum and daughter could have conversations, not me and daughter, or me and mum. So I felt a little bit like I was one step removed from what was going on and couldn't quite influence it just as much. (*Mags, outdoor practitioner)

In this case Mags acknowledges that her role is different when working with a family. The priority of relationship building in youth work encounters is displaced by the task of facilitating a more positive relationship between parent and child. Her focus is explicitly the relationship between rather than on

individuals. The stepping aside and refocussing signals a shift in power dynamic away from the authority of the worker. Some of the residential work with families shifted between these two positions but this particular worker pinpointed how the focus of her work had to change when working with family groups.

However, the power of the voice of the young people is not unproblematic.

> *It was difficult to meet the outcomes as the young women were so determined to get what they wanted – an activity weekend* (Mags, outdoor practitioner)

This was by far the most assertive group of young people we worked with during the research perhaps because they were all in their teens and also because of the size of the peer group. The practitioners commented that they tried hard to *"hear quieter voices"* but *"there was so much going on for each family – we couldn't deal or respond to each".* The complexities of this group in some ways over-powered the practitioners.

The parent/child relationships and complexities within them, overpowered the commonalities of gender and the practitioners struggled to find a focus.

> *It would have been good to have a weekend with mums – and a separate weekend with daughters – then bring them together* (Mags, outdoor practitioner)

Whilst in this case the voices of the young people appear to overpower the voices of the adults (parents), the practitioners identified the need to work with them as separate groups first so that all voices could be heard and a more focused piece of girls work/women's work developed.

Summary

Each of the examples discussed above illustrate the complexity of power relationships within families and challenge any assumptions that successful family functioning is as simple as putting the adult 'back in the driving seat'

Practitioners sometimes struggle to identify a focus for their work with families. Ideas about whole-family working are difficult to implement when adults are demanding or when practitioners experience a close identification with them. The data raises a number of critical issues for practitioners, one being whether we should be developing a model of working with families that places young people in the centre of all our practice.

11 SPACES AND PLACES

This chapter explores the meanings, opportunities and challenges of the spaces and places in which the practice explored in this study takes place. It discusses what it means to work with young people and their families in their own homes and 'away' on residential.

Key working largely takes place in the family's home. Working in homes opens up possibilities for gaining different perspectives on young people's lives which may not be known in more public settings. Data identifies the tension between respecting the privacy of parents whilst needing to develop an extended understanding of safeguarding issues. The complexity of these issues underline the importance of supportive and skilled supervision, and the importance of sharing expertise in multi-disciplinary working.

Work with families referred to the school's Family Residential Programme begins with a home visit from the programme coordinator. She continues home visits in between the sibling residentials supporting and scaffolding the learning that develops from the residential experiences. In this way there is a connection between what happens on residential and what happens at home based on a working knowledge of daily home life that informs the work of the programme.

In contrast, the outdoor residential workers usually have no contact with the family at home and are dependent on the referring organisation to support the application of learning on residentials to daily home life.

11.1 What it means to work with young people and their families in their own homes: Privacy or public interference

The Troubled Families Programme emphasises changing behaviour rather than economic circumstances (Hayden & Jenkins 2014) focusing on working directly and personally with individuals and family groups. Much of the related intervention is delivered by a "dedicated worker" or key workers, offering hands-on support; taking a persistent, assertive and challenging approach (DCLG, 2012). These workers provide support in the families' own homes at times when it is needed including weekends and evenings. The type of approach required is described as hands-on, persistent and assertive. The key workers are not initially invited by the families to visit their homes; the worker initiates contact and visits the home based on a referral from the local authority. Key workers note how difficult it can be to explain why they were there at all, giving accounts of being kept on the doorstep, being turned away or being ignored:

> *I went to one home and the son answered the door and said to me 'my mums not here', but I*
>
> *could see her sandals and her feet when the door was open. I didn't want to embarrass her. I*

just thought maybe she can't be bothered. Sometimes you don't want someone bothering you

(Jules, key worker)

Key workers describe different approaches to getting beyond the doorstep but the persistence that they are expected to exercise does not always sit comfortably with them, as Kruger puts it, being directed to 'muscle' into the home of dysfunctional families (2016). The empathy displayed by most of the key workers extended to recognising that some people want to be left alone. However, assumptions may also lead to the overlooking of critical safeguarding issues or other significant needs. As noted earlier, key workers describe how they have to clearly identify themselves as 'not police and social workers' as their presence on the doorstep is regularly associated with punitive interventions. The presence of a worker on the doorstep for some families carries an element of shame.

in some of the S Asian communities… if there is white person knocking at your door it is usually Police or social services. And it's a real taboo and word will get round very quickly. The workers are finding with some Asian families, you can't generalise, but say 'come in' and shut the door - and the worker hasn't had time to work out whether it's safe to go in or not but that family want you through the door and the door shut cus they don't want their neighbours seeing you stood on the doorstep... and [we need to] understand that, and not take offence, not take it personally, understand the politics and power dynamics within all of that (Lynn, key worker)

In the published evaluations of the TFP little is written about families who do not engage nor any discussion of cultural differences. It is difficult to draw any conclusions about the impact of initial home visits and adults' decisions whether to take up the offer of support or not.

11.1.1 Privacy

The privacy of both families and communities is challenged in the Troubled Families programme. Links between privacy, secrecy and just 'not knowing' are also present in the worker's narratives. Working in the home raises concerns about worker safety, not knowing enough about the family they are working with, or knowingly working in situations in which individuals in the family could be violent. At the start of the key working contract, practitioners raised a number of concerns about risk and safety that challenged the naivety of the key worker model and un-preparedness of their organisation in taking on work with young people in such a different context. These concerns included the lack of information in initial referrals. Some workers found it difficult to establish on what grounds they should not visit a home, or ask that a colleague go with them, and what was considered a minimal amount of information needed to make such a decision. Sometimes very little was known about other professional involvement with a family. How risk assessments should be made

and recorded was not clear at first. Work taking place in the evening and out of the organisation's usual hours of service presented the organisation with additional challenges about management support and personal safety. Protocols had to be developed to take these issues into account. Whilst these are common issues in the field of social work, they are not common in youth and community development practice where contact with young people and adults tends to happen in public spaces and buildings. This is another example of the tensions in shifting practice from the public spaces to the privacy of the home and breaking down the boundaries of private and public. It also reflects the theoretical and professional shift from learning to care. The impact of shifting the primary work setting from youth centre to the home raises significant professional issues around safety, accountability and support. Practices such as families having a worker's mobile phone number, and workers being available at weekends and evenings also challenged the workers ideas about their own right to privacy.

Significantly the nature of the key worker contracts between the organisation and local authority place the organisation under pressure to deliver work within a given timescale and within a very tight budget. These constraints mean that workers feel that their critical questioning of the role and suggested approach are sometimes welcomed but sometimes brushed aside. This is experienced as compromise of safety and professionalism. Pressures of time scale also compromise workers' ability to build trusted relationships with different family members. The need to meet specific funding targets dictates the focus of relationship building. Payment by results increases the pressure to evidence specific outcomes within a tight timescale.

11.1.2 Privacy vs secrecy

Experiences of working with families in their homes varies massively. Some key workers found themselves at the centre of a seemingly chaotic scene with up to 23 people coming and going within one visit. Other visits were controlled by key gatekeepers who decided whether the worker could come in, how far into the home they would be allowed, and who they could see. These gatekeepers are usually adults, parents or 'uncles', usually male. Some visits allow the worker to be part of daily life whilst others clearly restrict the worker's access to people and family behaviours. The most extreme and disturbing examples of this behaviour involved adults denying access to the young people in the home raising very significant safeguarding concerns.

11.2 Possibilities

Overcoming resistance in those initial doorstep encounters is acknowledged as crucial in establishing positive working relationships with parents (DCLG, 2012). Some families welcomed the key workers into their homes and spoke about how much they appreciated the involvement of

someone at such a personal level. This positive feedback was usually associated with the quality of the relationship built with the worker including respect and empathy and availability.

 Much of the focus of work with families however centres on the behaviour and needs of the parent (usually the mother) (Wenham, 2017). This is also true of some of the work observed in this research. For instance, the social worker in the school's FRP talked about the potential of the Family Residential Programme to provide a different, far less threatening way of assessing parenting skills and needs. Regularly visiting the home can also provide significant opportunity to gain an insight into the lives of the young people who are usually the focus of the initial referral. Guidance in "Working with Troubled Families" (DCLG 2012) describes how key workers will be able to understand the dynamics of the family as a whole by working with them "from the inside out" (p.4). Young people are part of 'the family as a whole' and yet attention to their stories and perspectives is often secondary. Addressed in the Children Act (Great Britain 2004) and Working Together to Safeguard Children (HM Government, 2018) this continues to be a challenge for workers who are overwhelmed by a multiplicity of voices and needs.

11.2.1 Working with young people at home

Practitioners gave accounts of how home visits could provide an insight into young peoples' behaviour and opportunities to directly challenge interaction between young people and their parents:

> I suppose for me as well it's showing 'em.. so it's right weird because I do challenge the kids.. so if they say "for fucks sake mum you didn't leave me no spending money what the fucks going on?" and mum might say "just hold on a minute - give me 20 minutes and I'll give you what's left in my purse".. so it's like "let's stop there… let's take that conversation right back.. what did you just come in and say?" And because I can challenge, and mum can see she's still getting respect and challenge.. then I think she's going forward in those footsteps as well (Jules, key worker).

However, changing behaviours in the home needs to be underpinned with an understanding of the experience of young people within their families and the complexities of familial relationships. The privilege of getting to know young people in their privacy of their homes creates opportunities to move beyond deficit focused assessment of young peoples' needs (Wenham 2017). Young people are often protective of their parents and siblings even in very difficult and violent circumstances. This is evidenced in my own research where expressions of affection and love and anxiety about the well-being of parents figure regularly in young people's accounts of their family relationships. This dimension of relationships is more difficult to witness in public arenas. Whilst youth workers will have

experience of young people talking about these conflicts, it is less likely that they will have addressed these issues with other family members.

Case studies from my own research (fig 13 & 14) illustrate how engaging with young people in their home provides opportunity to work with young people at an inter-relational level, encouraging their participation and agency in addressing 'family' issues.

The Khan family illustrates the partnership that can develop between workers, young people and their parents. Samir talks protectively of his mum but also acknowledges that there are things she can't do that they need help with. He recognises that she struggles to communicate with the school and that she is often not understood. He does not blame his mum. His account also acknowledges the importance of his key worker's practical help such as getting the boiler mended and showing him how to set up an internet account. There is an intimacy and fondness to Samir's account which is achieved through work with this family in the privacy and safety of their home. At times Samir's narrative has an element of 'us against the world' (my interpretation) which speaks of the struggle some Pakistani heritage families have in being acknowledged and understood within institutional systems. In this way this glimpse of the personal shines a light on very public and systemic issues. (Researcher, family case study)

Figure 13 Case Study. Khan Family

Working with young people in their own homes opens up possibilities to understand and address issues which young people might not disclose in a public setting such as a school or youth club. Young people may experience complex and conflicting feelings about their parents resulting in anxiety and withdrawal from education and other social contexts. Key workers may undertake significant advocacy work with and on behalf of young people.

However, working in the home is a new context of practice for many practitioners from a youth work background. Advance safeguarding knowledge and skills are essential in working safely and effectively in the home. Having the insight and confidence to challenge adult behaviours and address abusive and neglectful behaviours is crucial. As the key worker programme developed these issues were being acknowledged and some training put in place. However, practice needs to be supported with on-going, skilled supervision. This research project provided practitioners with opportunities to critically explore and develop reflexive insights into their practice. The research brought additional expertise into the organisation and encouraged the asking of difficult questions. In this case research served to advocate for the support of practitioners who were working with young people and their families in new and challenging contexts.

John (16 yrs). Visiting the home was difficult for the key worker who could not always gain the cooperation of John's mum who was alcohol dependant. However, home visits uncovered the reason for John's absence from school – his anxiety about leaving his mum. It also uncovered ongoing neglect and emotional abuse. John's relationship with his mum illustrated the complex relationships that can exist between young people and a parent who cannot care for them, but who they care about. The key worker was able to support John in moving out of his family home into supported accommodation, taking the first steps to independent living. This notion of supporting transitions is familiar to youth workers but more often happens in a college, once a young person is already homeless or leaving the care system. Working in the family home gave an opportunity to support his transition to independent living despite a benefits system which refuses to recognise the need for some 16 year to live independently and without John entering the care system or becoming homeless. (Researcher, family case study)

Figure 14 Case Study. John

This aspect of practice with families also underlines the importance of inter-disciplinary working. However, key workers experience a contentious relationship with their social work colleagues. Part of the role of the key worker is to advocate for families in gaining appropriate support from other services. This sometimes means challenging social work provision. As discussed above, it may also involve a distancing of themselves from statutory services to gain the trust of families. Good working relationships between key workers, social work colleagues and other professionals is essential in developing effective support for families. These relationships need to be underpinned by organisational and inter-disciplinary protocols which facilitate the sharing of information, skills and expertise.

11.3 Residentials

The school's family residential programme began with a conviction that working with individual families away from home can be beneficial to children and young people who were struggling in school. External funding for the programme provided an opportunity for the school to try something different. The school developed its programme organically beginning with the identification of a cottage out in the countryside, not too far away but far enough to provide a good quality, home from home experience. So the initial emphasis for them was 'being away'.

> *It's about helping to build those relationships in a completely neutral setting, with amazing scenery, all those positives around it. Being able to get back to basics in terms of things like cooking, the television not being on. Being in a setting in which relationships can be built between staff and students and parents.* (Rachel, family support worker)

In contrast, organisation B developed its family residential programmes in response to requests from partner organisations. These requests were usually to find a way to work with family groups away from their usual contexts (fig. 15).

Programme Aims

• This programme is designed to provide an experience that allows for time and space to reflect on current situations, an opportunity to highlight ways in which to support one another and discuss future opportunities to stabilise family relationships.

- Intended Outcomes: Each family unit to have a better understanding of each other's needs, the requirement for their own time / space and the value of the family relationships

By: Creating a relaxed atmosphere where in-depth discussion can take place and real changes can be made will be facilitated through a mixture of active, reflective and creative activities. Each activity will have a frame around it to create a sense of moving forward in not only relationships, also as individuals.

Figure 15 Aims of one family residential

Both examples demonstrate the complex relationship between place and space and time. They also identify the possibility of doing different things in a different environment, away from home.

The setting of the residential programmes includes the physical environment, where families stay, where they spend their time and the broader geographical context of those places. These are spaces and places where activities can be best undertaken to achieve the aims of the programme. The choice

of place supports the approach to learning. But more than that the programmes happen in spaces that are created by practitioners and the participating families. Exploring how practitioners understand these spaces opens up important debates about the notion of home, identity and power.

My observations of the different programmes emphasised the significance of place and space, and the fact that place is rarely, if ever, neutral. These places and spaces are highly significant but are experienced by and held different meanings for different participants and practitioners. In this way they are socially constructed. Each of the residential programmes take place within spaces which are different, 'other' from the daily, familiar home and community. The significance of each of these contexts to young people and practitioners is a powerful theme in the research data including the notion of home and 'home from home' and being 'away'.

11.3.1 Programme settings and spaces

The two case study organisations work in very different residential spaces. The outdoor family residential programmes take place in a rural outdoor education centre where families are housed in groups in lodges or a large house. Families sleep in dormitories and their food is provided and cooked for them. There are no domestic chores to do, the emphasis of the programmes is on being outdoors and participation in a range of outdoor activities. Some time is spent indoors in the evenings playing games, working with arts and crafts and some reflective activities. This is an environment, both indoors and out, that provides a complete contrast to the home environment and facilitates a shift out of familiar roles.

The schools' FRP residentials take place in 'The Cottage' which is rented to the school for a number of weeks each year. It is located in a rural setting just a one-hour drive from school. It is beautifully furnished and well-equipped accommodation. Participants have to cook for themselves and contribute to daily chores and routines – this is a fundamental value and practice on the residentials.

11.3.2 Creating a home from home

> *"The Cottage that we go to has all the amenities of home, so it's a home from home base rather than a residential youth hostel or tents which is very different from being at home"* (Karen, FRP programme coordinator)

It is the aim of the FRP Coordinator to create a home from home environment in The Cottage. In her descriptions of the residentials she associates familiar activities with her notion of home – cooking, cleaning, preparing food, making beds etc.   Her definition of 'home' is one of order, domesticity, and routine and focusses on the needs of the child. These priorities are reflected in many of the physical aspects of The Cottage – a large dining table, powerful heating, a big, cosy bathroom.

Meals, bath time and bedtime are seen as important parts of each day. In this way there is a valuing of care, physical warmth, and an interplay between proximity and privacy and the emotional value of each.

The Coordinator describes her version of home as being based upon her own experiences of and vision of family life. It is based on her version of 'being family'. In this way it is adult led and establishes a hierarchical power relationship between adults and children and young people. It is also a professionally defined model in that it is constructed around the safety and well-being of the child. This may provide a contrasting experience of ideas about home for those adults and young people participating in the programme. This contrast between what home is as lived every day experience and the ideal created at The Cottage occurs in many of the accounts of both practitioners and young people.

> *The house was kind of beautiful. I like the bedroom. I didn't like that we did not watch TV* (Daniel, aged 7).

> *Both children liked going back to The Cottage, and the security of knowing where they were going. [Matthew] was swearing and kicking in the car but said he was looking forward to seeing the views from The Cottage.* (Karen, FRP co-ordinator)

So, The Cottage is a "beautiful' home, it is different but at the same time in repeating the residential experiences it becomes familiar and no longer strange. During the research residentials it was soon apparent to me that the young people knew where everything was, where the games were kept, where their bedrooms were, and that this familiarity was important to them. The young people were very much at ease there. It also demonstrated an embedding of shared norms of behaviour.

On residential, some young people share rooms with siblings, others if the co-ordinator sees it as beneficial, have rooms and space of their own. The bedroom spaces are to some extent private spaces. However, the young people only have limited access to their rooms during the day. The space within The Cottage and its immediate surroundings is monitored and controlled by adults; it is subject to ongoing adult surveillance. Photos that young people took of their time in The Cottage were often of groups around the table talking, playing games, and painting. However, on the research residentials they wanted to have their conversions about their residential experiences in their bedrooms. Negotiating this uncovered uncertainties and assumptions about safe guarding young people in private spaces. As a compromise these interviews and storytelling took place on the landing, by bedroom doors in small groups but that sense of 'my private space', and 'our space' as a sibling group was clearly important.

11.3.3 In contrast to home

The young people who take part in the family residentials have various experiences of home life which range from extremely positive through to significant and ongoing conflict with parents and siblings. Some of the older young people who were referred to the programme had already chosen to live at least part of the time somewhere other than the family home – with a relative, a friend, neighbour, and even in a tent. Some lived with both birth parents, others with just one, some in reconstituted families. The programmes include some young people who were adopted, others living with a relative because their parent couldn't care for them. So, not all young people live in their family home and not all have a positive experience of home.

The school's FRP has limited success in working with older young people. Whilst they might have been the trigger for the initial referral to the FRP, some young people are already so alienated from school and from home that they do not engage with the FRP. Records about different families note that 'A' did not come home last night, or that 'B' is no longer living at home. Some parents speak about an older child's absence as both a source of sadness and relief. Sometimes their absence or running away meant that parents were not able to be part of the FRP.

For young people from violent or abusive homes, home may carry very negative connotations. Whilst some young people find space at home to express their growing identity and claim spaces for themselves in their bedrooms, this is not the case for all young people. Home can be a site of resistance, and anger (Blunt & Varley 2004). Staying in The Cottage appeared to offer a break from the conflicts experienced at home and an opportunity to establish ways of being family in a home that was more influenced by the views and needs of younger children.

> *The Cottage is "less noisy"* (Darren, 12)

Ways of being in The Cottage reflected the type of home practitioners tried to support. They worked hard to create a calm and nurturing environment by limiting access to TV, no mobile phone use, and in the way that they spoke and related to the young people.

11.3.4 Work space, home space

Family residential programmes don't always attempt to provide a home from home. It is possible to provide an environment in which young people, and their families, feel at home, without attempting to replicate being at home. In the outdoor residential centre this was sometimes my experience. One of the residential venues, a lodge in the woods seemed to provide this more than the alternative accommodation in a large house perhaps because of its seclusion and separation from other centre staff and groups. This 'making yourself at home' was particularly evident on one

residential facilitated by a female YOT worker who came with the group. During this residential weekend the families were housed in the lodge in woodland. They ate, slept and played in this lodge. Two points in my recordings stand out in relation to space and home: the lead worker on this residential was adamant that we would not have flip charts in the lounge area of the lodge asserting that this was not a workspace. She clearly demarked the domestic, relaxation space from workspace, physically separating informal, family time and activity, from planned activity.   She physically distinguished between programmed time (worker led) and informal (participant led) time and space. This demarcation of space also marked the sharing of power and control between practitioners and parents in different aspects of the residential. Only two families took part in the residential. The two mothers gradually decorated the living area of the lodge with things they collected from around them, flowers, feather etc., and things they and their children made during downtime including paper birds. This was the most powerful ownership of space that I observed in all the programmes. These parents were not required to decorate the space, rather they chose to create an environment which recognised the contribution of their children and their own expressions of being at home. Their creations expressed some of the interplay between indoors and outdoors and owning the process.   I suspect these two points were related. Because parents were present there could be a distinction between the parenting role and the staff role even in creating the learning and living space.

In the lodge, there were opportunities for parents and children to interact alone, free from worker surveillance and intervention. One simple but powerful example is described in the case below below:

> *Mel came on a residential with a Youth Offending Team. Her elder son had a YOT worker but she chose to attend the residential with her younger son, John, because she had had very little time for him in recent months. When they arrived, there was very little interaction between them, no physical contact and little eye contact. Later, as we evaluated the weekend with them, they both laughed as they described 'creeping down to the kitchen in the night and making toast together'. It was something very simple and yet it is was hugely important to them and became part of their shared story. This level of intimacy and interaction cannot be planned or engineered. It arose in private time and space.* (Researcher field notes)

Figure 16 An example of parent/child interaction

This is different at The Cottage where, even on the third residential when parents are present, the space is managed by the staff. Children and adults contribute to the living and playing environment, but the power remains with the staff throughout. So, in talk of home from home, there

has to be an honest and critical reflection on whose version of home is being created and who has control over its creation. Potentially, residential spaces provide opportunities to create the types of spaces families would like to live in – to play at and rehearse different ways of living together. They can provide spaces for creativity and self-expression and ways for individuals to contribute based on different power relations. The residentials at The Cottage empowered the children and young people to renegotiate boundaries and routines with practitioners who were then their advocates in representing them to their parents and suggesting how they might be implemented back at home.

11.3.5 Young people and being away from home

The experience of being away from home varied for different young people on the residential programmes. Feedback from young people offers important insight into how they experience the spaces and places of residential opportunities, and significantly how that relates to the aims and assumptions made by practitioners.

When I asked young people at the school what it was like to go away with staff from school a number answered that at first it was 'weird': "It was weird, but it got better". Both primary and secondary focus groups used the word 'weird' to describe this initial experience. It was voiced collectively:

> *It's good … but like at the beginning I didn't know who Karen was and then she showed up at my house and then we went and I didn't know who she was. So, I was just going away with a stranger…* (Katie, 13)

This was a difficult aspect of the residential experience for young people to talk about. This part of the discussion was hesitant perhaps reflecting how difficult it is for young people to express views which they perceive may not be acceptable to adults or betray a significant adult (Alldred et al, 2002). The young people built upon each other's contributions indicating that this was a shared experience for some. Clearly some of the strangeness of the initial residentials was about being away with school staff. 'Home' is as much people as place. Over time The Cottage became a familiar place which made it somewhere they wanted to return to. But initially this was not 'home'. One young person spoke about how she didn't like it at first and had to go home the first night. She was brought back again the next day. This young person eventually visited The Cottage on a number of occasions with her family and peers. The Cottage as a different place, with different people, may not always be a positive place for the young people. Interview data evidences the quality of the relationships which were quickly built with participating young people, but their narratives raise important considerations about assumptions practitioners may make that young people are happy to be in this alternative 'home' environment. I noted in my research journal:

When others describe what happened when Beverley went on residential - she wouldn't stay the first night and cried a lot - it is explained as her problem… she was insecure, fearful etc… but where is the critique of the process the adults worked through? It is clear from the focus group that her 'dis'ease was shared by most young people (both focus groups used the word '>weird<'). Does this response belie a deficit model of practice? (Researcher, reflective notes)

Practitioners in schools and youth clubs who include residentials in their work with children and young people are usually prepared for some children to be home sick, to want to go home and may have to be taken home. This is not unusual. However, in the case of the FRP there is an additional layer of complexity in that the residential experience aspires to provide an ideal version of 'being at home' assuming that the young people will want to buy into this. How young people actually conceptualise the relationship between their experience at The Cottage and their home lives is barely touched on in the research but is clearly something which would benefit from research in future programmes. The privacy of home life becomes open to scrutiny and the simulated privacy of The Cottage open to exposition and intervention.

11.3.6 Discussion – home and away

Alldred et al (2002) argues that children may experience a "risky dissonance" when exploring the relationship between home and school. The public and private spheres of home and school may be significantly boundaried making exploration of their interface ethically and practically challenging (Edwards & Ribbens, 1998). These boundaries may make the exploration of the private experiences of home very difficult for young people. In practice as well as in research, the shift from one sphere to the other, and the 'half-way house' between private and public that The Cottage represents may be uncomfortable for young people. It certainly can't be assumed that it is easy for them.

Elisabeth Backe-Hansen identifies that:

> there will be a complex interrelationship between the enactment of autonomy, connectedness and regulation when home and school are seen in conjunction. (Backe-Hansen, 2002. p.173)

The concepts of autonomy, connectedness and regulation provide a critical framework for analysing and understanding some of the challenges of working with young people in the context of a 'home from home' environment. Work with young people has to negotiate the tensions between autonomy and control both in terms of the individual practitioner's intent and the underlying agendas of funders and policy makers. Relationships between adults and young people on the school's family residential programmes are complex because adult roles shift between 'teacher' and authority figure, to carer

and nurturer and work at a much more intimate level. Issues of autonomy and regulation are at the heart of the family residential experience. These tensions are consciously present for some practitioners in their work with families but are mostly explored in relation to the challenges of sharing power and authority with parents rather than consideration of the young person's experience and perspective.

Some of the young people describe how being away was an opportunity to have a break from home and the responsibilities they have for other family members. Some of them have caring roles at home, for parents or siblings. This break was possible when only some of the family group went along. Having a break from a sick parent or brother with ADHD for instance was a welcome break from 'home'. So 'being at home' or feeling at home in these cases would have held different significance. The value therefore of working with sibling groups needs to be assessed on a case by case basis appreciating the impact of one child on another. Young carers are now recognised as a group of young people who struggle to access education and other services, and whose participation in public life is limited by their private experiences of caring (The Children's Society, 2019). Much of the work undertaken with young carers is carried out away from the home and focusses on the needs of the young person. The family residential programmes in both case study organisations highlighted the potential of work with families to identify the significance of caring relationships on the well-being of children and young people. However, and conversely, residentials may take for granted such relationships and fail to provide young people with the opportunity to critically reflect on their perspectives and needs.

The dynamics of home life are very powerful and may create within them gendered expectations and roles. Secondary data includes practitioners' recordings of young people continuing their caring roles at The Cottage, getting a younger sibling ready and dressed, providing comfort of a younger sibling. Sometimes these tasks were carried out by boys, sometimes by girls. At The Cottage this created a tension – being 'at home' for some young people meant continuing to look after their siblings. Practitioners' notes record that the young people chose to do this, and workers chose to allow this to continue. This was 'home for home' for some young people but I wondered whether they were given the opportunity to reflect on this aspect of family experience and have the opportunity to do things differently as they would if the younger sibling had not been present.

> *The oldest girls looked after the boys by helping them get dressed and ironing their clothes. Later that morning the girls went upstairs to get ready themselves and they sat happily chatting away and relaxing with each other. This does not happen at home as they are usually running around looking after the boys and helping mum.* (Karen, FRP Coordinator)

In this case the girls continue to look after the boys and have opportunity to relax together. The residential does not provide a complete break for these girls because their brothers are there, and they continue to care for them. They don't do 'care' differently. Residential programmes may provide opportunities to reflect on and challenge the way families do things at home by giving young people the opportunity to talk about their experience of caring. Experiential learning can provide opportunity to reflect on what is taken for granted and a given. The residentials at The Cottage appeared to do this in relation to some aspects of family functioning, usually in relation to parent and child interactions, but not others. What a practitioner facilitates learning on may depend upon what is acceptable in the practitioners' version of family and home life and their ontological position.

What gives this model of home legitimacy is worth critical consideration. Whilst it places the well-being of the child at its centre, it is culturally specific and gender normative. One of the FRP workers expressed some critique of this model in his attempts to model alternative ways of being a man in the home, washing dishes, allowing the young people to pamper him and paint his nails. However, within this programme a woman plays the central role in organising and managing 'the home'. The resultant model of home reflects the dynamics of a single-parent family, centred on the mother, with supportive male input. It is heteronormative. Whilst boys and young men in this home are encouraged to take a full role in the domestic activities, there is no attempt to question or provide alternatives for traditional female family roles. In this respect re-creating a home from home has the potential to challenge and de-gender practice if approached critically. However, without a significant level of critical reflection and explicit commitment to an alternative expression of family relationships, it can easily and unconsciously replicate gendered power relationships which reinforce gender inequality in the home.

11.4 Unfamiliar places

'Being away' is an important factor in all family residential programmes: away from the house, away from people (who make demands), away from other family members, away from the city. The setting is important to practitioners – in this case the practitioner describes the importance of neutrality – the setting is new to everyone.

> *You are in it together and you are in a strange place…which is different from home…different dynamics really.* (Mags, outdoor practitioner)

This account recognises how moving away from familiar places, and from familiar roles, may create a blank sheet or at least an undoing of familiar roles and patterns of behaviour. Space is a social construct (Massey, 1994) and is also where identities and relationships can be examined and reconstructed. Massey notes that "geography matters to constructions of gender" (p.2). The

residential spaces are potentially spaces where familiar and accepted constructs of gender can be unpicked. The link between where people are and who they can be is made in my data. Whilst Massey is concerned with the social construction of 'woman' in the home, her work is equally relevant to the construction of the identity of young people within the home and the possibilities for deconstructing entrenched roles in unfamiliar places.

Summary

Analysis of the data uncovers the significance of the place in which work with young people and their families takes place. The physical locations of practice are social spaces where existing relationships and power dynamics have an impact. Key working has identified some of the benefits of working with young people in their own homes within family dynamics. Visiting a young person's home may provide important insights and opportunities to advocate for young people facing abusive or problematic relationships or circumstances. Residential programmes on the other hand provide opportunities to move outside familiar ways of being in families. Ideas about home and being family can be re-evaluated and imagined in safe and creative spaces. Critical reflection uncovered the importance of paying attention to power dynamics and questioning assumptions about adult/young person relationships.

The next chapter develops a deeper discussion of the opportunities that outdoor residentials offer in work with young people and their families.

12 OUTDOOR RESIDENTIAL EXPERIENCES

The initial focus of my research was the work undertaken by two organisations in developing residential experiences for families which included some degree of outdoor learning. The approaches of the organisations and the programmes they developed are distinctly different, but the reflective research process with practitioners from these organisations separately and latterly together, aimed to share perspectives and learning. This extended chapter explores aspects of outdoor learning. Outdoor learning is explored as activity, as place and as relational learning. Exploration of the data uncovers different meanings attributed to the outdoors and outdoor activities. Learning outdoors is reflected through the eyes of young people drawing on visual data. Discussion focuses on how the outdoors can provide spaces and opportunities for relational learning and creating new stories of self and family. The chapter ends with a brief discussion of attempts by the case study organisations to sustain learning and support change when participants return home.

12.1.1 Being outdoors

The research process found that two case study organisations have different approaches to working in the outdoors.

Outdoor residentials (centre)	Family residential programme (The Cottage)
Participants spend most of their time outdoors	Participants spend some of each day outdoors
Minimal time indoors	A lot of time spent indoors
Outside as the main context for learning	Indoors and outdoors as contexts for learning
Outdoor activities are novel and challenging	Outdoor activities are familiar but also challenging
Outdoor activities are place orientated – hill walking , ghyll scrambling	Outdoor activities could be repeated at home – visits to parks, walking, cycling
Outdoor activities require trained 'expert' leadership	Outdoor activities could be led by parents and youth workers

Figure 17 Comparison between organisations of approaches to working in the outdoors

12.1.2 Why outdoors?

Data from the discussions with practitioners on the outdoor residential programmes contains very little reference to the significance of being outdoors. It appears that being outdoors is taken for granted; it is the everyday context for their practice and what they do. Being outdoors is a given. The location is already set. The emphasis for them is on what they do in the outdoors.

The school's family residential practitioners, however, have a more clearly articulated purpose in the choices they make about where to go and what to do outdoors. The Cottage, the indoor location is set but the outdoor contexts are not. The time spent outdoors is negotiated with the young people who are given choices about activities and places to go. There is a clear educational purpose in most of these options although some are also about creating opportunities for outdoor play. Visits to country parks caves and museums are combined with hill walking and cycling.

12.1.3 Physicality

In the school's FRP the stories of the children and young people are rich and vivid and funny. They include accounts of the physical experience of being outdoors, particularly the weather.

It was cold.

I was too cold. Windy

His leg was soaking wet and he was cold

Do you like the wind? Yes

Was it really windy then – how did that feel? Scary

Did you like being up a mountain? No, it was too cold

It was good… and it was wet

(Young people talking about their experiences of school's family residential programme*)*

The windy hill and the broken road (broken through landslide) come up time again in the young peoples' accounts of their residential experiences. Theses physical experiences of being wet and cold and scared and happy feature heavily in their individual and shared stories. These physical and emotional responses to a place and environmental conditions are recounted with enthusiasm, lots of smiles and energy. Walking up a hill in the wind and sometimes the rain was challenging and elicited an emotional as well as physical engagement. This was shared with the parents when they visited those same places with their children. One of the most powerful images of the family residential experience is a photograph of a family group on top of that hill. The physicality of the experience appears to give it an energy and excitement which makes it memorable. Being outdoors stimulated a variety of emotional responses, sometimes fear and discomfort, but mostly joy and happiness. These are most vividly captured in their photographs which capture that engagement of young people with their physical environment.

Whilst practitioners were able to talk about physical engagement it was more difficult to find an articulation of the meaning of that engagement in the data. However, one story was told repeatedly: Daniel, on his first residential experience was very angry and upset, he hated getting his feet wet and he cried a lot. Then, out on the hillside he was introduced to mud sliding.

> *"Going up [The hillside] Daniel seemed to have forgotten about his aching legs. He ran around, loved finding clues. Daniel found his walking legs."* (Daniel's sister, 13, diary note).

Daniel found a joy in getting wet and muddy. Whilst this seems quite an obvious benefit of outdoor learning what was most significant was that this activity unlocked something for Daniel which had developed in response to his dad's Obsessive Compulsion Disorder and the restrictions placed upon him and his siblings by his dad. On the third residential when his parents (Sandy and Dave) were also present:

> *Daniel showed Sandy and Dave about sliding down hill. Dave told him to come down, he was too young. Stu (a worker) encouraged him to go up too… eventually. What a fantastic sight, a family untied, forgetting about everything and having fun.* (FRP coordinator notes)

For the practitioners, the muddiness became a metaphor for letting go of restraints which were causing distress for the children and placing huge pressures on the family relationships. Physical experiences of the outdoors can have significant impact, and which may include therapeutic qualities.

12.1.4 Learning outdoors

From its very beginnings, the school's family residential programme looked for opportunities to connect with the school curriculum, identifying objectives for each child and young person with links to curriculum areas such as maths, English and art. These objectives mainly related to planned activities such as meal planning and shopping, cooking, diary writing and art – activities which take place in The Cottage. These are aspects of learning which the co-ordinator discusses as life skills.

The young people told their own stories of learning. Some of these relate to indoor activities such as cooking and knitting, but many more relate to their informal learning outdoors. During the research residential I spent half an hour on the broken road digging in the dirt looking for fossils, looking at rocks and pebbles and discussing geology with a ten-year-old boy. This is where he spoke to me most. Being on that road in the middle of nowhere engaged his imagination and helped him to build on what he had read and learn at school. This was his autonomous experience. It was also a leveller, somewhere that he could engage with me, an adult. It was a conversation of great intelligence and he taught me a lot. His conclusions of me: "You're quite clever, aren't you?" Not half as clever as him!

For this residential programme, informal learning such as this was not incidental but a part of the aims of the programme. Being child-focused, the residentials place the learning of the young people at the centre and whilst learning about their families is important, there is a valuing of learning at an individual level and in particular of informal learning. Being part of a school's programme, making explicit links with curriculum reinforces claims that such work reengages young people with their learning. However, regardless of organisational priorities, my data demonstrates how young people will, if encouraged, create their own learning opportunities in their engagement with the outdoors

Pictures and discussion of them with young people show what young people found on the hillsides for example, what they saw and the stories behind them.

"I found a bird's egg" (Sophie, 11)

Figure 18 Photo: Sophie holds a bird's egg

12.1.5 Listening with our eyes

Young people on the FRP research residential were given cameras to capture significant aspects of their residential experiences. Two data collections stand out for me: film taken climbing the 'windy hill in which the young person (Emily, 12) narrates the whole climb up the hill taking in panoramic views of the surrounding countryside, and Louise's collection of photographs. Like Emily's film, her photos communicate a looking at and awareness of her surroundings in a way which is more than descriptions of what she did. Her diary entries include observations of her surroundings:

> it was funny watching Daniel and Stu slide down the hill. When we got to the ..mountain we
> trekked to the top. When we got to the top we could see shadows of clouds, it was strange!

Whilst her photos place herself in relation to her surroundings and give a very poignant sense of wonder at the outdoors. Each of her pictures capture space, colour and light.

Some of Louise's photos from the Research Residential

Figure 19 Three photographs of trees taken by Louise

These photos provide just a glimpse of the young peoples' experience of the outdoors but invite the further use of visual methods to capture young peoples' perspectives.

12.2 Outdoor learning as relational

As demonstrated in the earlier residential programme aims, relationships within family groups are the main focus for outdoor family residentials. The outdoor activities are the means or tools for exploring relationships and identifying positive ways forward for those relationships. Improving communication, looking at how to address conflict and seeing each other's perspectives are regular objectives names by partner originations.

This relational work takes place in these new, outdoor spaces, in relation to the physical environment. For the families, the living together in a different environment is important. This is particularly the case in family groups that don't live together on a daily base such as some of those on the dads and lads residential. It's about:

Sharing a room – seeing what you look like in a morning. (Trevor, YOT worker)

Even for parents and young people who live together they can find the residential a revelation in terms of seeing family members in new ways. The spaces created during the residential experiences create opportunities and time for relating to one another in ways that may not be possible at home. Conversations during the night, drinking tea and snacking together during the night feature regularly in family stories of the residential experiences as particularly significant.

These private interactions also take place outdoors and at night. The emotional impact of mountains and night skies feature in the stories of the dads & lads residential.

> *Outside … at night – looking at mountains, being outdoors – calming. Able to have conversations without shouting and fighting.* (Dad)

> *Being outside. Talking with dad at night. It was good having proper conversations with my dad.* (Son, 15. Dads and lads residential)

There is a lot of emphasis on 'being 'together in the accounts of the dads and their sons rather than emphasising the activities possibly because they were not used to spending time together.

Parents and practitioners identify the lack of the internet, telephone signals and mobile devices as important in getting rid of distractions and supporting interaction.

> *space away from face book, phones, email. For him not having computer* (Dad. Dads and lads residential)

Seeing a son or a mother or a daughter differently and getting a better understanding of their perspective is a key feature in feedback from the residentials. Activities are built into the outdoor residentials to support this process, for instance the use of praise cards, award nominations and group discussions. The feedback below from young women on the mums & daughters residential provides an insight into the importance of not only considering family work as focussed on how parents see and respond to their children, but to pay attention to ways which young people can learn about their parents.

> *I actually got to spend time with my mum and sister and had good laugh and support; Relationships are about compromising and trust; Try to get along with mum and sister and actually have a love and caring relationship* (Young person. Mums and daughters residential)

> *I enjoyed spending time together and doing challenging activities, didn't enjoy the rain and tiredness; I learned that people might not say anything but are thinking about hurtful things you've said in the past.* (Young person. Mums and daughters residential)

Outdoor residentials provide both the space and time to experience and reassess family relationships.

12.3 Working with the group

In the example below (fig 20) a practitioner reflects on **a** residential with mums & daughters.

The young women in this group held a lot of the power. Quite a few mums lacked confidence and were pacifying the girls. The young women were determined to get what they wanted – an activity weekend. The young women wanted more – 'we like taking risks, 'push us'.

The peer group was very strong, we had to prize them away from each other to spend time with their mums

There was so much going on for each family – we couldn't deal or respond to each. Being a buffer, rescuing. So many people, issues, never time.

It became coping, try to hit outcomes, manage the experience

It felt like crowd control, the noise was immense.

We tried to hear the quieter voices

On Friday a young woman disappeared, she was hiding. The staff said 'get mum to deal with it' but we were concerned that we were reinforcing something that already happens, a pattern.

It was competitive: expectations that mum should be better.

How did we work?

- Board games – conversations.
- On the wall, going up together – "tell me more about that"
- Letter home – really useful process
- Letters to mum
- Gratitude cards – what they liked about each other, encouraging
- We reinforce all the time – achieve, praise, possibilities
- We played games in the dark; made games up
- Orienteering and canoeing in family groups

Mums grew in confidence so much

It would be good to have a weekend with mums and a separate weekend with daughters – then bring them together

To create support networks together

We could have discussed identity, boys, confidence. We needed to talk about how to be around men. Men and safe spaces. Ethically we couldn't: if you open this can of worms you need support, it needs follow up, needs a safe pathway, support at next stage.

We could put emphasis on 'how do you support your daughter, relationships and support mum in what she wants to do.

Figure 20 Practitioner reflection

Mag's evaluation of a mothers and daughters residential, above, identifies some of the challenges and possibilities of family residentials. Working with a number of families at a time can be particularly challenging if the young people, or adults, form a strong peer group. Whilst peer groups can provide support and encourage shared learning, they can also become a hiding place or distract from the task of getting families to work together. This same issue was apparent on my pilot programme and, in the school's joint family residential. In each of these instances my field notes reflect on the difficulties staff have in encouraging parents to play with their own children rather than sitting to one side with other parents. Whilst young people also enjoyed doing things together, they were mostly much readier to interact with their parents. Positively, Mags and her colleagues note the planned and spontaneous activities they facilitated to encourage positive communication and feedback between participants. At the same time, they found themselves being buffers and rescuers in moments of family conflict. At points their narratives speak of being overwhelmed by the size, energy and challenges of the group.

Practitioners from both organisations at the Sharing Good Practice Day reflected on the benefits of working with young people, and parents separately before bringing them together; the schools residential programme practitioners advocating this. In this way they could create spaces away from each other to ask and explore challenging questions and possibilities before putting them into action.

12.4 Opportunities and challenges for gendered work with families in the outdoors

The practitioners in the above case are experienced in girls and women's work. Whilst they recognised the potential to do some focused work around gender on the mums and daughters residential, they were clear that in itself it was not women's or girls work. The whole residential centre was not a women-only site that weekend and although contact with males was very limited, only male catering and site staff around, they still had some influence on the behaviour of the participants. Furthermore, the practitioners recognised that reflection on experiences of being women requires ongoing support; this is deep work which requires follow up on behalf of the partner organisation staff. The leadership of the weekend was all female and therefore provided strong role models for the participants and challenged female stereotypes of passivity and lack of adventure. However, to take a planned and overt feminist approach to the residential would have required the commitment of all staff. Whilst this residential created opportunities to reflect and build on the personal relationships between daughters and their mums, it did not include critical reflection about the gendered aspects of those relationships or their place in the wider family relationships or community.

The dads & lads residential in contrast, had a clear focus on relationships and an exploration of masculinity. The staff team from the centre and the YOT had a shared agenda and plan. In my interviews with them they referred to being 'locked in' as a group asking questions that had to be answered. The leadership in that sense was very authoritarian and masculine.

> *You could just come and do all activities and go away – but that wouldn't work. The talking is important. As a group and individually.* (Neville, YOT worker)

They described the work as informal learning focusing on conversation. They developed a communal reflective space with quotes around the walls:

> Even a journey of a thousand miles starts with one small step. Lao Tzu (The Art of War)

> Don't look back at where you fell: look at where you slipped.

> Leave your glasses at the door

My reflections explore the difference between these two experiences and the intentionality of the dads and lads residential. The practitioners knew and agreed what their focus would be. They definitely exercised more power than the staff on the mums and daughters residential, but they also created critically reflective spaces for supported and difficult conversations. The YOT workers had a close identification with the participating fathers – they were both fathers themselves and they were also Black. This created a relational space that was robust enough to hold and support the exploration of difficult questions. Being a much smaller group, three fathers and three sons, was also much easier to manage and didn't risk overwhelming the workers.

The feedback (fig 21) from a father on this residential is a powerful account of how supported time out encouraged him to re-view his relationship with his son. Being part of a group meant taking part in activities and conversations which supported his learning about his relationship with his son and identification with other fathers.

One Dad's feedback

When he was born I held in him in my arms and thought he was going to be the prime minister. I wanted so much for him. Now I am just trying to get him though school safely! I've got to learn to let go but it's hard - his mum finds it even harder.

What do you think you have learned?

- that all fathers face conflict, but the time spent here was to learn to be better communications between sons/fathers

What do you think you will do differently as a result of this programme, how will you use what you have learned?

- The biggest thing I have learned to tell my son I LOVE YOU. This can be hard when conflict hits, but I must tell him
- The benefits of the stepping out of the day-to-day environment and how the challenges made us work better together. I will take my kids out of the regular environment more often

How have we helped you to learn?

- By talking to me, By supporting me, By encouraging me

Why do you think that?

- They were helpful always ready to listen. ALWAYS ENCOURAGES. Always gives us risks that challenge us

What will you remember the most about your experience on the programme?

- Talking with my son, see him take on leadership roles and see him smile. When he has succeeded. Being helpful to others, hearing him speaking out

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Figure 21- Participant dad's feedback

12.5 "Why do we do the all singing, all dancing activities?"

Together we, I and the practitioners, worked through a process of reflecting on the value of each activity in work with family groups, and questioned assumptions about their value.

The planning of the outdoor residential weekends usually began by choosing from a menu of tried and trusted outdoor activities. Individual staff teams approached their planning differently.

Below is the story of one residential. In this particular case it was a small group and the families decided for themselves which activities they would share in – pamper pole, ropes course, kayaking. These were activities that everyone could take part in and also provided a high level of individual challenge.

> *On one hand it was an 'easy' weekend. The course leader commented to me that he felt as though he had just been facilitating and activity weekend – that he really hadn't had to do much. But do we really know what it is we are facilitating when we don't know the families and their back story?* (Researcher field notes)

Two incidents stand out for me in my memory of the residential:

Young person Mo, 17-year-old male, was being supported by the YOT; he had been giving his mother and the local community the run around for the last few months. Mo was outwardly confident on the residential – willing to take risks and be challenged, particularly in relation to his fear of heights. But on the high ropes course Mo got stuck – he froze... he cried... he got very angry with himself.

Figure 22 Workers encouraging Mo

His Mum who had almost completed the course in front of him having conquered many of her own fears saw his situation and immediately turned around high up the trees shouting, 'Don't worry Mo, I'm coming for you' and made her way back easily. A couple of practitioners joined his mum, up on the course at either end of the section that Mo was stuck on. The programme leader stood underneath giving encouragement and instruction. Together they talked to him back to the tower (fig 22).

It was a powerful image of the 'team around the child'.

> *that was one of the most powerful interventions I have seen with a family. After months of being out of control, this put mum back in the driving seat.* (Neville, YOT worker)

Mel had chosen to bring her younger son, Stephen on the residential because she felt that all her attention had most recently been given to her older son who had been working with the YOT for a number of years.

Figure 23 Stephen at top of the pamper pole

Stephen didn't have much to say for himself in the early part of the residential. He was here with his mum because as she said, "he is often neglected". At first, they were very distant with each other – their apparent lack of interest in each other bothered me. But then came the pamper pole......Stephen made several attempts at the pole, each one he got more confident and chattier (fig. 23). He laughed, he interacted with the whole group, and his mum became attentive to what he was doing. By the end of the activity they were smiling at each other and shared this hug (fig. 24).
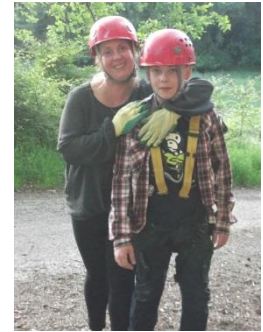
Figure 24 Stephen and his mum

This demonstrated the benefits of trusting the participants to share in the creating of a learning experience which they want and feel they can manage. The practitioners supported this process in many ways but were guided by the families themselves.

Activities such as high ropes and the pamper pole focus on individual challenge and achievement. They are relational in that they involve others in encouraging and seeing each other's achievements. However, they are not accessible to family groups with smaller children and have a limited value in terms of team work and problem solving. Orienteering, group walks, ghyll scrambling and whaling boats are all used to get families working together. Whilst they are don't appear to be the more exciting activities, practitioners see them as significant in getting young people and their parents to work together (fig. 25). They are also opportunities for young people to exercise leadership and therefore power in their relationships. The outdoor practitioners are familiar and confident in using and adapting these activities to meet the specific demands of family work.

Figure 25 Families celebrate their achievements at ghyll scrambling

In addition to the "all singing, all dancing activities" that form the basis of many outdoor residentials, practitioners on the family residentials demonstrated creativity and spontaneity in making up games and activities on the spot. These included team games outside and indoors, singing and drumming, night time walks. These were developed in response to the specific needs of each residential group, individual families and their members. The practitioners drew on their extensive experience and expertise to develop tailor made activities which made the most of being outdoors together but were not always about physical challenge. Sometimes the 'usual' programme had to shelved or rethought.

In my field notes, I noted the significance of playfulness and opportunities to play. Encouraging parents to play with their children is sometimes challenging. Practitioners on all the residential programmes all worked hard to create opportunities to play to model how to play. The programmes' outdoor activities particularly encouraged adult participation in terms of individual achievement which in turn encouraged interaction. However, it is the informal games which engage parents and young people in direct interaction and shared enjoyment. These activities range from board games to outdoor team challenges to mud sliding and outdoor playgrounds.

Playfulness is a key aspect of each of the residentials. Seeing their parents play featured in a lot of the feedback from young people on all residential programmes.

> *Kate: What was it like to come with your mum? Cus I've never been on a residential where a mum's come. What was that like?*
>
> *Aaron: It was sick, it was*
>
> *Kate: In what way?*
>
> *Aaron: Cus my mum came with me and [mum] and was doing stuff with us..*

Kate: And you liked that did you?

Aaron: Yes. Like she was playing tig. We was climbing through the nets and everything..doing like she was a kid or summat. And she was doing loads of things like jumping and just run, and climb, and running fast.

Kate: That sounds brilliant – where were you doing that?

Aaron: In [the park]. In the nets. I was climbing on top of the net and I fell and I was dangling off it. And mum tug me and I dropped. And mum started running and I couldn't catch up to her so I just sat down. So I had to go for my brothers. And they were just too fast for her.. (Aaron, 7)

The schools residential programme includes outdoor play in parks and adventure playgrounds, child-focused activities and in child-focused environments. The practitioners encourage parents to continue to visit parks with their children after the residential programme.

These playful times became as much part of the shared story telling as the more challenging activities.

12.6 New stories

Residential experiences provide space for creating and telling stories, in minibuses, on hillsides, in bedrooms. Story-telling and the reading of stories is an important part of the school family residential experiences. Opportunities for creativity and developing imagination are built into the residential programmes. This was evident during the research residentials when the young people decided to spend two days in fancy dress; they made short films about the residential experiences and told stories. They approached the research activity as a type of performance finding various ways to perform and tell their stories. Some of those stories were very literal, others more fictional, and some appear to be a tentative storying of self. Here Sophie (aged 11) tells a story of The Cottage:

It's like a big massive table and you sit there...and there's a rocking chair and it rocks by itself. It's that girl who usually sits on it...the rocking chair.. on YouTube…its some girl whose always on everyone's rocking chair… but yous can't see it … I can … she's got brown hair, ugly face and she's always wearing a dress with shoes on. She's invisible. On the rocking chair but sometimes you can see her.

Kate*: does that scare you?*

Sophie*: No .. I still sit on it..*

The Cottage is a place where the young people are encouraged to talk, to share conversation and tell stories. In this way it is an empowering place with young peoples' voices at the centre of its life. Those stories are shared with the school workers and eventually with their parents. What struck me about the stories is that they each demonstrate the importance of qualitative data in capturing young peoples' experiences and ideas as well as trying to measure the impact of residential experiences. The very different accounts below (fig. 26) are the stories of a brother (6) and sister (13) who went on the residentials together.

Louise (13)	Daniel (6)
The most thing I got out of that was bonding with Daniel more.	*it helped me to calm my anger down because like, the first residential, Karen had this thing, like this door hanger... you hang them on your door and it says 'chill out' so anytime I was in a mood I could just look at that and calm down*
(Cus when we're at home it's me, my mum, Paul as well and my step dad)	
Speaking to him more… we were, but not very nicely	
Usually when Danial and Paul are together I get a lot more stressed out ... cus they are both really annoying…	*I learnt to share and be kind and share.*
when they are both not together they're alright, but when they are together…	*It's special coming away because my brother like always winds me up and it's just good to get fresh the air open and like and do different activities.*
It's nice to get along with my mum..	*Normally it's nice to get all my family together because normally they're always fighting in the house and everything so it's nice to just like get a happy family back...*
I can't remember when I came with my dad… I think I did but I can't' remember.	*that they have smiles on their face. And that they're really enjoying it by the expression on their face.*
It's just better to be in one house with people that you know more than being in school with loads of people…	*it's about friendship and encouragement.*
When you're at home there's not enough to do is there,	*First residential was with Karen and Tony… that's when Tony burnt the flapjacks…*
Small city... and it was free. Most of it was free.	*We went to a castle then we went to a market then...I remember…. I had a chart, every sticker I got in the week that I could do something nice with my dad… so I chose.. I let him choose really because I didn't really care, I would do anything he chooses so I didn't really mind...*
When you're at home everything's money isn't it. To do things…	
I've learnt I have more confidence, I can get along with people, and…	
Daniel is still scared of being on his own at night….	
A lot of people are asking about coming on the trips… a few of my friends, yes…	*I see Karen and Tony sometimes, Stuart, you… Tania (School social worker)*
I say I don't know why I've been chosen,	*Tania comes to school and she has this little group... me...now she's not working with me no more...*
I think it's because it's like a family thing... yes, that's what I tell them	
I say I don't know because it's a family thing isn't it…	*It was funny on the cameras... they were alright… really funny... Craig started to do a dance about bedtime and food..*

Figure 26 Louise and Daniel's stories

An important aspect of all the family residentials is the opportunity for families and practitioners to create new stories together. My interviews with families about the school's residential programme demonstrated the process of co-creating and shared story-telling. The young people told stories of

parents and practitioners – these stories reconfigured relationships and repositioned adults as play mates rather than authority figures.

My interview with Helen (7 years) and her mum, Maggie:

Kate *: Do you remember showing your mum things when she went to The Cottage?*

Helen*: Yes. I showed her… [?].. then I showed her the bedrooms then the kitchen and the other kitchen.*

Kate*: Mmmm good. Did you show your mum anything? Did you see Helen do anything that you hadn't seen her do before?*

Maggie*: Just helping with the baking and measuring*

Helen*: we did go up that big hill.. it was really windy…*

Maggie*: It was really cold wasn't it?*

Kate*: You know when people talk about that hill they always say that is was cold and windy and I think 'well did you enjoy it? Did you enjoy going up that hill?*

Helen*: It was cold…*

Mum*: It was cold wasn't it up there (talking at once)*

Kate*: Do you remember when we went up?*

Helen*: Yeh!*

Kate*: cus you looked as though you liked that hill actually. I think you were the first to the top weren't you?*

Helen*: then Stuart (worker) was*

Kate*: Yes, that's right. Cus I was 'wow what a star!' You know, girls are really good at climbing hills..*

Helen*: You're not!*

Kate*: Excuse me?!! (laugh)*

Helen*: You was well slow.*

Kate*: I was talking.. I was gassing… (laugh)*

Maggie*: There's no secrets now..*

Kate*: (laugh) Did you enjoy being on that hill?*

(talking at once)

Maggie*: yes it was nice for them…*

Helen*: and mummy looked like a purple jelly bean. Like a clown*

Stories like these were told and retold in my interviews and usually with great warmth and laughter. They provided a contrast to parents' accounts of older children running away or being violent towards them and their siblings. Maggie's husband had died, and she was keen to find ways to get her children

out and away from home for a break. The residential was an opportunity for them to make new and positive stories and whilst building supportive relationships with the school staff who worked with Maggie's older son.

The residentials also provide opportunities for parents to retell their own stories and explore their storied-selves (Tennant, 2012). In the example below, June retells part of her life story making connections between her own childhood and her current challenges, finding in them a narrative coherence:

> *I remember when I was a little girl and I was terrified of thunder storms. I used to feel terror hot in my stomach. Then one day I had been for a long walk and a big storm broke. The only way home was to walk through the storm. After that I realised that I would be OK.*
>
> *This weekend I have faced some fears. It has given me courage to face some of the difficult things in front of me.* (June, parent)

12.7 Discussion

The learning opportunities and benefits of working with children and young people in the outdoors is well documented (Waite, 2016; Beames et al, 2012; Fuller et al, 2016). Most of the writing about outdoor education has been written specifically about young people. Taking young people away and into the outdoors to participate in physical, challenging activity has a long history closely related to the development of youth work more generally (Mills & Kraftl, 2014). My research adds to that literature drilling into the meaning of outdoor and experiential opportunities for young people with their families.

12.7.1 What's so special about being outdoors?

Outdoor education has a history of taking young people away from the cities and associated poverty and unhealthy environment.

> Our rickety children, our cramped and …deformed children, get back to earth with its magnetic currents, and the free blowing wind….to let them run and work and experiment, sleep, have regular meals, the sights and sounds of winter and spring, autumn and summer, birds, and the near presence of mothers… (McMillan, 1919, cited in Steedman, 1990, p.91)

Learning outdoors was promoted by Margaret McMillan over a hundred years ago both as an educational setting and to promote children's physical wellbeing. Interestingly, McMillan also appreciated the value of including mothers in some of these opportunities but despite her pioneering

work, there is little evidence of family residential models from an educational perspective ever being developed in schools.

Historically outdoors has been imbued with romantic notions of nature and wilderness, adventure and freedom (Roberts, 2012). As such it exists in stark contrast to urban geographies. The romanticising of the outdoors has become part of the discourse of outdoor education and the underlying assumption that being outdoors is good, and that outdoor activities are powerful and meaningful.

Assumptions about the benefits of outdoor learning appear to provide a starting point for the outdoor family residentials. The reputation of outdoor residentials as powerful opportunities for personal development, empowerment and skills development (Maynard & Stuart, 2018) led partner organisations to turn to the outdoor team to develop something for work with young people and their families. However, critical reflection demands that these givens are questioned. Whilst a body of research literature exists which identifies the opportunities for individual development and non-formal learning opportunities for young people, work with families in the outdoors is poorly researched so far. Very few models exist for working with families in the outdoors. The programmes in this study have developed organically from a sense or intuition that residential and outdoor learning opportunities have a lot of offer work with family groups built upon extensive experience of working with young people in the outdoors.

The research process has encouraged practitioners to revisit some of the basic assumptions that underpin their work with families; moving from description and uncovering layers of complexity around meaning and power. Critical reflection has enabled the asking of challenging questions about who has the power to define what is 'good' in terms of approach, place and ways of being family. Additionally, reflection has revealed the complexities of working with families and their complex networks of relationships. Recognising the social and power relationships that exist within families and which underpin the policy agendas which drive work with young people within their families is imperative in developing relevant and anti-oppressive practice.

The work of New Zealander Robyn Zink is particularly useful in exploring critical questions about outdoor education and learning in the outdoors. Drawing on the work of Foucault and feminist perspectives, Zink encourages critical question of some of the core assumptions of outdoor learning as powerful and meaningful, and the relationship between individual development and working with others. Her critical discussion focusses on work with young people in the outdoors and therefore has some limitations in its appreciation of the complexities of the social relationships that exist in family residentials. However, her ideas can inform critical reflection on 'why are we working with families in the outdoors at all?'

12.8 Critical perspectives

Zink and Burrows (2008) problematise the binary notion of indoor and outdoor drawing on the work of Foucault on power and meaning (Foucault, 2000, 2002 cited in Zink & Burrows, 2006). They respond to the 'slipperiness' of defining the 'outdoors' in outdoor education by identifying the complex relationship between place, space, activity, process and 'ways of being' in outdoor education. They suggest that the power of outdoor education, or learning in the outdoors, resides not so much in what it 'is' but in relationships of difference. Schools for instance, are ordered by hierarchal power structures which define their cultural norms and behaviour. 'The classroom' is where young people experience formal education within the confines of those norms. The classroom may be experienced as liberatory in its opening up of ways of understanding the world and at the same time insist on conformity and normativity (hooks, 1994; Fielding & Moss, 2011). This has a significant resonance with the discussion of spaces and places in chapter 11.3.

Learning outside the classroom can effectively be defined as anywhere outside, or not in the classroom. In my study, the outdoors is somewhere different from school, where different learning activities are carried out in a different environment. It is an opportunity to do things and 'to be' differently; for seeing different things and seeing familiar people in different ways. Being away from school changes some of the social rules. Young people and staff talk about staff being seen in different ways, as human beings rather than authority figures. Therefore, learning away from the classroom may shift established relationships of power. However, who defines and gives meaning to the new or different context for learning is still open to question. Whilst the outdoors is often presented as neutral, unproblematic space, the meaning given to it and the activities carried out in the outdoors are still subject to normalising practices and ideas (Zink & Burrows, 2008).

12.8.1 Strangely familiar

At The Cottage strangeness and familiarity are held in tension. The strangeness or other-ness of the residential experience is not dependant on the physical contrasts of outdoor adventure activities but on being with other adults, in a different home, doing some familiar and some not so familiar activities.

The school's residential programme provides an opportunity to 'do' home and 'do' family in a different way both indoors and out. Families establish powerful hierarchies in the home where roles and expectations are defined usually by adults. Being away creates opportunities for families to be family and do family differently. Stepping away from the everyday demands and responsibilities of 'home' creates chances to do things differently.

Being away at The Cottage holds the familiar and the strange in tension and brings into question just how different the context needs to be and what meaning is brought to that difference by practitioners and participants. The strangeness of the residential setting and the people present may well be more powerful than the physical, outdoor environment and outdoor activity. For young people on the schools residential having someone else in the parental role was strange, and for parents seeing their children respond differently to the school was strange.

In outdoor education there is a tendency to universalise strangeness to all participants (Zink & Burrows, 2006), but also to assume that it is good. It can be assumed that being away, and being outdoors, can provide families and practitioners with an empty slate on which to work. However, no space is neutral. Recognising the social construction of space is important. Just as classrooms and homes are socially constructed, so residential settings and the outdoor spaces they use are given meaning, usually by adults. In the schools based residentials it is clear that the staff define the space and create a specific environment. Another way of describing that difference between home and The Cottage may be to think about the contrast between young people's lived, every day experience of home and an ideal of home. Practitioners' versions of what The Cottage aims to be draw on personal versions of home and parenting, knowledge of parenting skills and diverse aspects of professional knowledge including safe guarding. Only the social worker, a black woman, referred to cultural norms in my interview with her. It appeared that the taken for granted neutrality of the outdoors extended to The Cottage itself and yet it is clearly a socially and culturally constructed space.

Throughout the research process practitioners at the outdoor centre and their colleagues within the organisation questioning whether it would be preferable to provide families with a more discrete facility in which they could live as 'a family'. Evaluating some of the strengths of the key work model practiced by colleagues from the organisation's community hubs, and also sharing reflections with staff from the school's residential programme led the organisation to consider developing a house at the outdoor centre for work with individual families. Practitioners shared an aspiration to have a house nearer the community hub which could directly complement the work of the key workers. These alternatives raise critical questions about places and spaces and the meanings that are attached to them. Strangeness potentially presents something new or different, whilst familiarity relates to some kind of norm. These choices require a clear articulation of the ideas which underpin these different contexts particularly in terms of possibilities that each offers to practice. Working with an individual family in a house potentially replicates rather than explores an alternative to every day roles. That level of familiarity risks normalising a model of family life and home which restricts opportunities for doing things differently. For example, in The Cottage young people continue to perform caring roles for younger siblings; the female programme coordinator organises all the

domestic chores; the school felt that a male leader was important to provide a balance to the team because 'boys need a male role model'. Each of these examples invite critical reflection on the underlying assumptions and discourse particularly in relation to gender roles and family models. The stability and familiarity which may underpin a safe and nurturing environment to undertake the challenges of family work, have to be balanced against the 'risky' possibilities offered in a new environment where many of the normal rules and expectations are removed.

12.8.2 Third spaces

These case studies challenge the sanctity of the indoor/outdoor distinction (Zink & Burrow, 2006). Another perspective on the meaning given to spaces is the concept of 'third spaces'. Research by Phal and Kelly (2005) identifies the possibility of creating a third space between home and school which facilitates collaborative learning between children and their parents. These third spaces are different from the spaces of home. Guttierez (2008) in his work with migrant students identified the need for spaces which allowed participants the opportunities to learn in authentic spaces and explore identify free from the constraints of societal and cultural norms. Maynard and Stuart (2018) argue that young people need spaces in which they can develop their questioning of their worlds. These spaces need to be free of the dominant, hegemonic constraints of schools and home. Third spaces may open up the possibility of new perspectives when embedded power relationship are disrupted (Bhabha, 1990 cited in Mythen, 2012). Third spaces may re-arrange or unsettle existing power relationships. In them, parents may become learners alongside their children; images and artefacts may challenge the hegemonic messages that dominate young peoples' lives. In this sense, strangeness results in a redressing of given power imbalances. Work with families in The Cottage may in the same way as Phal and Kelly's family literacy project, operate 'at the threshold of home and school' (2005, p.96.). However, the more objectives the school place upon the residential experiences, the more power they are exercising in the construction and meaning of that space. The extent to which children and young people own and shape that space will determine whether it is in fact a third space or an extension of either home or school or both.

The outdoor residentials may offer a clearer version of third space in that both the physical space and the relationships with the facilitators are separate from home and school. Young people and their parents come into that space as a new and different space free from the constraints of home life, allowing for the possibility of doing and being together in a new way. The task of the practitioner is to shape that space so that it is inclusive and values each participant (Maynard & Stuart 2018). To do this in the context of family work practitioners need to engage in a reflexive process of naming and understanding how they may impose their own ideas about family relationships. Spaces are socially defined and shaped by dominant power relationships (Foucault, 2000). Therefore, to equate third

space with neutrality is problematic. However, the concept of third space does, in the context of work with families, raise important critical questions about the possibilities for creativity and imaging different ways of being in spaces that sit beyond, or even on the threshold of the constraining spaces of home and school.

The task of the worker in negotiating the balance between the strange and familiar is summarise by Loynes (2018):

> There is some merit… in seeing the conflict of space and place as a productive tension between familiarity and divergence or difference, one of which the educator needs to balance and creatively exploit within the context of outdoor residential experiences! *(p. 30)*

12.8.3 **The challenges of peer and family relationships**

Whilst family residentials have a specific purpose of focussing on family interactions, the importance young people place on sibling and peer relationships is an important consideration in deciding who participates. When family residentials work with one family at a time, there is an assumption that they will undertake all activities together.

Don chose to come on an outdoor residential with three of his children to repair this relationship with them following a period of alcoholism. Whilst the programme leader encouraged families to work together throughout the weekend, there was an element of choice built into the programme in terms of what groups they worked in. There were some activities which Don's two sons decided to undertake with other families on the programme. There was an evening activity in family groups which Don chose not to take part in. Whilst these were not comfortable choices in terms of the programme leader's intentions, the programme allowed space and opportunity for family members to choose to work together or not to. The families on this residential had experienced a lot of pressure on their relationships through adult drug and alcohol misuse. It could not be assumed that their children wanted to spend all their time with their parents. The intensity of undertaking all activities together was possibly too much. The possibility of taking a break from one another as well as spending time together appeared to be important for some of the family members. Relationships between young people and other adults on the residential were also significant.

Figure 27 Families don't always want to spend time together - an example

Going away with a group of families introduces a further layer of dynamics and possibilities and introduces opportunities to opt out of staying together as a family (fig. 27). Practitioners have

decisions to make about how far to build a programme around family-based activities and how much autonomy to offer participants in choosing who they work with. When to trust participants to make those decisions as in the example above, and when to cajole families to work together is an issue of professional judgement but may also draw on personal ideas about what families ought to be doing together. In some of my observations I was very aware of some young people who were struggling and doing their very best to stay with and support parents who were unkind to them or apparently unable to encourage and care for them. One practitioner in an interview recalled the confusion and shock she felt when she saw a parent deliberately and vindictively push her daughter into the lake. In her eyes it wasn't alright, but she didn't know how to challenge this behaviour with young people present. The data demonstrates the challenges for practitioners in addressing negative parenting behaviours but also questions what sort of support they need to offer the young people. Does an assumption that families need to spend all their time away together risk placing uncomfortable demands on young people who would benefit from the positive attention of other adults?

Supporting young people's autonomy and ability to make their own decisions is a very different discourse to that of reinstating boundaries and discipline within family interactions. Maynard and Stuart (2018) note the potentially conflicting discourse of "me-personal" and family-based discourse in their model of nested layers of structure (p.79). Such conflicts may create a dissonance in practice with families which leaves practitioners uncertain about what their response should be. Zink and Burrows (2006) suggest that the layers of social repression and conditioning are loosened in an outdoor or natural environment encouraging young people to act autonomously and independently. However, work with families may have to negotiate the potentially conflicting interests of young people and their parents when autonomy is encouraged and exercised. One way to explore this further is to take a step away from the discourse of family functioning and focus instead on the activities that takes place in outdoor learning between individuals and groups.

12.8.4 Storying self

Issues raised in the research data require an unpicking of the relationship between outdoor learning as self-development and what that learning means when it happens in the relational context of family groups. Zink (2010) turns to Foucault to critically explore self in relation to others in outdoor and experiential learning. Foucault attempted to identify the technologies, or processes by which the self is created. He understood 'self' as subjective and open to change and self-formation (Foucault 2000). He was interested not so much in 'who am I' as 'who can I become?' To know yourself, Foucault argues requires us to turn away from distractions and completely turn in and centre on self. This process is recognisable in versions of experiential learning which encourage focus and reflection on self. Family outdoor experiences brought into question whether there is still a useful place for

activities which emphasise individual achievement in work with families or whether some activities as the staple diet of outdoor residentials have been, have to be put aside. As a practitioner it is powerful to see a woman or a young person glowing with pride and self-confidence when they have achieved something they thought they could not do, be it jumping from a great height or climbing a mountain. However, the dissonance in practice lies in how individual development benefits young people and the family as a whole.

Part of the answer to the above question lies in the importance of seeing and witnessing as well as doing. Activities which encourage individual participation and achievement such as the pamper pole take on a different meaning when everyone is involved either having a go at climbing the pole or holding the safety rope. Participation in individually challenging activities does not necessarily have to mean everyone doing the same thing, but what it can promote is an exploration of self which is performed in front of and witnessed by others. During the family residentials both parents and their children experience moments where they see not only who they 'can be' but also who other people can be. Realising that mum can be playful or strong, or that a child can be a leader or can be weak, are powerful and empathetic insights that can be fostered through outdoor activity.

Figure 28 Photo: Boys observing whilst themselves being observed

Self-development then has a social context. It is preformed and witnessed and acknowledged – given meaning by both the individual and those who share in it (fig. 28). Zink (2010) develops her questioning of self-knowing by drawing on the work of Judith Butler on ethics and identity. Butler (2005) argues that to give account of oneself, there always has to be another to whom that self is addressed. Therefore, learning about self finds its power in the performing or narrating of self to someone else. The process of experiential learning supports that giving account of self. Not only does the reflective process facilitate the exploration and expression of learning about self but also feedback to others: "this is what I learnt about you". Zink argues that experiential learning is based on the premise that

learning about self-facilitates learning about others, whilst Butler takes an opposing view. Butler claims that recognising others and understanding them develops self-knowledge.

It is difficult to decide which perspective is most evident in work with families. However, what both positions affirm is the tight and complex dynamic between individual achievement (or giving account of oneself) and relationships with others. Outdoor practice with families contextualises individual achievement within family relationships. It creates opportunities for participants to explore self in relation to others. The reflective sessions during each day are points at which the outdoor practitioners create opportunities for the recognition and articulation of these links. Within these sessions, creative activities are used which provide opportunities for individuals to tell their own stories – to develop their narration of self (Zink 2010). Reflective activities such as gratitude cards and letters home or to mum, cement these moments of recognition of what 'I can be' and 'what you can be'. Creative activities which include touch and relaxation, such as plaster mask making create an opportunity for a physical and emotional response, a tending to the vulnerability that reflection may entail.

It is important to recognise that the residential context and the modelling of staff have a significant role to play in encouraging what is acknowledged and the meanings made. Butler (2005) applies Foucault's ideas of social normativity to the process of recognition. What is recognised and valued is determined by social norms. Equally the ethical question of "How I ought to treat you now I have seen you" (p.25), sits within the same problematic power relationships that define what is normal or acceptable. So, the practitioner has the power to choose what activities are included, and what meaning is made of those activities. This may mean the recognition and praise of prosocial actions, or accounts of learning about self which fit within the practitioner's version of what is desirable in family relationships. Potentially this means accounts of self-development and recognition will be viewed through the lens of the practitioners. If the practitioner is a youth worker, they may privilege accounts of growing independence and young peoples' achievements over conformity, for instance making independent decisions over following rules or doing as you are told. This may also explain why some practitioners were so unhappy when asked to support parenting courses such as Teen Triple P.

Feedback from participants on the mums and daughters residential reflects the inter-relationship between learning about self, recognising others and asking what this might mean:

> *[I learnt] About my mum and sister and how much I can do that I didn't know about; I will use it as knowing what my mum likes and how to challenge her and motivate her to do it* (Daughter. Mums and daughters residential)

[I learnt] Sophia is not fearless and does need my support at times. I am scared of heights (Mum. Mums and daughters residential)

In a family residential context, attention needs to be paid to both individuals and relationships. The ideas of Foucault, Zink and Butler highlight possibilities of new ways of being self within family relationships that experiential learning offers. To shift normative power relationships frees up the possibility of experiencing self differently and seeing other people in new ways and asking again 'how ought I to treat you'. Feedback from young people on some of the residentials not only identified what they had learnt about their mum, but what that meant in terms of how they would treat them differently in future. Equally some parents in their accounts of seeing what their children were capable of, communicated a change in their understanding of what their child could be and how they ought to be treated. This is powerful and is only possible when individual development can take place in the context of social group, in this case with family members.

Researcher Jo Warin in "Stories of Self" (2010) sounds a cautionary note about the narrating of self. She argues that it is the task of teachers and carers (and I would suggest youth workers) to facilitate young people's capacity for telling stories of self rather than creating a strong identity and sense of self. Self-identify is developed in social contexts and changes according to those contexts. My research supports this position. One of the challenges for practitioners working with young people within their families is to encourage the storying of self in the family context, and to facilitate the creating of new stories by young person in place of old and tired stories. Young people have different selves and many stories. Identify isn't static; the storying of self may begin with articulating how things are today but is much more about how things may be in the future.

12.9 Conceptualising Outdoor Learning

12.9.1 Experiential Learning

Outdoor learning draws heavily on the concept of experiential learning and is often discussed in terms of its engagement with experiential learning. This chapter reviews aspects of my data through the lens of experiential learning. It asks some new questions but also revisits some of the ideas of the previous section from a different perspective. In particular it explores the role of the practitioners in facilitating the reflective process. This is informed by informal education and youth work literature.

Organisation B who run the outdoor family residentials take an experiential approach to most of their work with young people. It is significant that they frame their work with young people as learning.

We believe that young people learn best through experience, which we achieve through outdoor and creative activities that unlock their potential (Mission statement. Organisation B)

Strangely whilst experiential learning can be identified as a thread which connects the two residential programmes, neither experiential learning nor experiential education is actually named by any of the practitioners in my study. For practitioners from Organisation B it appears that experiential learning is so foundational to their practice that is has become a given, an assumption which no longer needs to be named. Practitioners at the sharing good practice day described their practice as:

Participants are:

➢ Challenged
➢ Co-existing as a community

We start with objectives but work with what we have in front of us - reviewed and what next. ACTION - REFLECTION – STOP AND LEARN

Am, pm, eve – framed by discussion. Reviewed after. Links to life.

Work with families – less emphasis on activities – more on 'being'. Facilitation – challenging questions. Drawing out. PING moments. May model/May question

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Figure 29 Flip chart notes. Sharing Good Practice Day

On the other hand, practitioners from the school's programme refer to other learning approaches – informal learning, social learning but not experiential learning. It does not appear to be part of their working vocabulary or conceptualisation of their practice with young people or their families. However, there is plenty of evidence in the data to suggest that their approach to learning is based on a model of experiential learning.

The school-based practitioners talk about observing, listening to and discussing 'what you do'. They describe their work as making meaning out of lived experience: "we don't tell, we do it". Those experiences are shared, collaborative, 'lived' learning opportunities. To consider data in the light of experiential learning may shine a new light on elements of practice and develop articulation of what takes place on family residentials.

Experiential learning is embedded in youth work practice as informal education which most of the school practitioners relate to, and emphasises relationship building and social learning (Ord, 2007). Experiential learning is learning by doing (Ord, 2012). It engages the learner in direct experiences and focused reflection guided by key principles of experiential education:

- Experiential learning occurs when carefully chosen experiences are supported by reflection, critical analysis and synthesis.

- Experiences are structured to require the learner to take initiative, make decisions and be accountable for results.

- Learners are engaged intellectually, emotionally, socially, soulfully and/or physically. This involvement produces a perception that the learning task is authentic. (AfEE, n.d.)

One way of exploring experiential learning is to continue the discussion of Zink and Burrows' critical discussion of outdoor education as place, space, activity, process and 'ways of being' in outdoor (2008).

12.9.2 Activities

Not all activities equate to experiences. Discussion of experiential learning in youth work literature (Jeffs and Smith, 2005; Young 2006) identify a tension between experience as participation in everyday life events, and experience which is manufactured or deliberately created to involve learning. Either way, experiences are chosen (by someone) as opportunities for learning. Youth work involves the "deliberate use of experiential learning" (Wylie, 2008); so, learning doesn't just happen, and activity isn't automatically the basis for learning.

The data suggest that family residentials focus on experience as opportunity for learning. The schools programme involves different ways of drawing learning from experience and different ways of articulating that learning. Some of the learning activities such as those that the young people participate in up on the broken road or on a hillside are recognisable as informal learning activities that schools would use in learning outside the classroom, as opportunities to know things in different ways through direct experience (Beames et al, 2012). Initially action plans for each family included the detailed identification of learning objectives linked to the school's curriculum but achieved through experiential learning both in The Cottage and outdoors. Learning how to budget and how to measure ingredients in baking for instance would be linked to the maths curriculum whilst creative writing and reading together linked to literacy and the English curriculum. Latterly the practitioners made more clearly articulated links to theories such as speech and language as the schools responded to new research and initiatives (The Communication Trust, n.d.) These informal and non-formal learning activities run alongside opportunities for social learning based on participation in activities in The Cottage such as cooking, playing board games and art work. These activities can be replicated at home. Some of them are very familiar and others are new to the young people. It is the context that make these activities potential learning experiences beyond obvious skills development. The

combination of activities provides an authentic and coherent experience of living and playing together that is the basis for ongoing reflection and learning. The intensity and inter-relational nature of this experience on residential makes it all the more powerful.

Similarly, the outdoor residentials offer an intense experience of living and 'doing' together. Clearer distinction is made between activities that are created and led by staff, and those which happen in the informal, participant-led times. The residentials provide opportunities for both planned and spontaneous activities which may be the basis for reflective learning.

Two comments made in interviews hint at the way in which family residentials challenge taken for granted ideas and practices. As the programmes developed, practitioners were challenged to reconsider their initial ideas:

> "We just provided one of our usual courses and then stood back (Phil, Outdoor practitioner)

> "As we got into it, we actually realised there was as awful lot more to it (Shaun, School Head)

Outdoor activity programmes may provide a menu of activities based on a standard model of experiential learning of do – reflect – plan. Residential outdoor youth work programmes may in fact give little consideration to the actual activities at all because they are so familiar (Cooper, 2018). Both family residential programmes highlight the distinction between providing activities and creating a living, learning environment. Experiential learning activities are more than individual problem-solving exercises and they do not exist in isolation from one another and from participant's wider context. Working on family residentials challenge outdoor practitioners to rethink activities troubling what sort of experiences are we aim to create and why (Zink and Burrows, 2007).

12.9.3 Relational experiences

Experiential learning is a process illustrated in Kolb's four stage model (Kolb, 1984). Kolb presents this process as cyclical but there is a tendency to conceptualise experiential learning as linear – Action: Reflection: Stop and Learn – as illustrated in fig. 29 at the beginning of this chapter. To conceptualise learning in this way risks seeing a programme as a stop-start series of unconnected activities each leading to clearly predefined packages of learning. Ord (2012) challenges simplistic representations which fail to grasp the dynamic relationship between thought and action. Knowledge and understanding are not static or to be 'achieved'. To shape experience and reflection in relation to predefined outcomes and versions of knowing is to ignore the role of the individual in the process in terms of what they bring, what they know and what they do with the experience. Kolb's model built upon Dewey's ideas about reflection and reflective practice (Dewey, 1938), seeks to represent the importance of links between experience and lived experience, not separate from but relating

directly to that experience (Ord, 2012). It is a process which reflects the critical pedagogy of Paulo Freire which begins with the student's experience (Freire, 1970, Coburn & Wallace, 2011) creating a dialogue between doing and reflection, what is already known and what may be known, which informs action.

Many definitions of experiential learning relate to the individual. However, one of the challenges of family residentials is that the emphasis of learning shifts away from the individual to the shared experience. Experiential learning in this context is relational. The experience is in being as well as doing. In fact, some of the most powerful learning appears to take place in spontaneous, undirected spaces in 'living together'. Just as the residentials challenge the dichotomy of home and away, inside and outside, so the division between doing and reflection as a linear process is broken down. Individual activities are included in the residential programme but meaning making continues in the gaps and social spaces, in the bedrooms at night, around the dining table. Many youth workers favour residential work with young people because they provide opportunity to focus on group work processes. They are a chance for young people to leave behind some of the constraints and norms of their daily lives and experience and imagine new ways of being with others (Cooper, 2018). Whilst experiential learning with families in outdoor contexts can draw on some of the same group work theory, working with families requires a more nuanced consideration of the inter-relational aspects of the experience and the social context in which it sits. It is the relationships rather than individual experience that are open for scrutiny, feedback and reflection. 'The group' becomes a complex network of relationships between siblings and parents, and between participating families, adult and peer groups. It is a network of relationships that is underpinned by pre-existing power-relationships. Young people cannot come away with members of their families and leave behind the constraints of parental expectations or their sibling roles. These power relationships may be disrupted during the residential experiences (Cooper, 2018) but will continue to be defined by cultural and personal concepts of family and place within family. Youth work requires workers to be mindful of the power relationships that exist between them and the young people they work with. Work with families reconfigures those power relationships privileging the relationship between family members rather than between worker and participant. Experiential learning can be described as a transactional process between the learner and the environment (Dewey, 1916 cited in Ord, 2018). The notion of 'environment' can be conceptualised in many different ways in work with families in the outdoors as can the idea of transaction. Transaction is usually a two- way process however, in outdoor work with families it is inter-relational, involving interaction within the family as well as with the physical and emotional environment.

12.9.4 Reflection

Opportunities for reflection are identified in many places and at many points during the residentials. Reflective sessions are also part of the programme. One of the outdoor practitioners talked about his role as "framing" activities acknowledging the importance of reflection in preparation for activity as well as looking back on activity. Reflection may start even before the residential begins. Deciding whether to take part in a family residential requires a process of questioning and commitment. The data recognises the importance of this preparation: families who arrive on residentials motivated and knowing why they are taking part are more likely to take ownership of the experience.

On the school's residential programme, reflection continues throughout the residential programmes and beyond it. A key part of the reflective process is connecting the specific experiences to wider, lived experience – to what came before and what's to come. One of the questions that has to asked of residential experiences is how do they link to real life? The school's family residential programme makes that link explicit by reviewing residential experiences back in the homes of participating families. The home visits between residentials facilitate an ongoing process of reflection, identifying and testing out new ideas. The reflection happens as part of the shared story telling between young people and the workers. The role of staff from the partner organisation becomes key in making those links with families on the outdoor residentials.

12.9.5 The role of the practitioner

The role of the practitioner on family residentials is complex and highlights the need for collaboration with other workers. Apart from setting up the physical environment – in the case of the schools residential this includes transporting participants and picking up food on the way, practitioners identify and agree the programme, facilitate or support activities and facilitate reflection on all of these experiences. The activities may extend to informal 'down time' which can be as significant as planned experiences. I observed that this is an exhausting task. The school's family residentials include only two members of staff on a residential. Although they work with just one family at a time and therefore small numbers, the complexity of the role is physically and emotionally demanding. Residentials are notoriously tiring because staff are responsible and are available to participants twenty-four hours a day (Cooper, 2018). In The Cottage, the programme team are in loco parentis for the entirety of the residential experience and are therefore vulnerable to experiencing the same tiredness and pressure of multi-demands as any parent. Coping with these demands requires a high level of self-reflection to ensure that this does not lead to a replication of the very negative behaviour that residentials are attempting to leave behind. The FRP Coordinator recognised this is a resourcing issue which needs serious consideration if staff are not to burn out.

In contrast, the outdoor residentials work on a different and arguably less stressful model. The centre staff set up and run the programme of activities each day. However, they go away at night leaving the families to look after themselves. They hand-over responsibility to the participating families. In some cases, but not all, staff from the partner organisation remain with the participants throughout. Handing back responsibility for the care and safety of their children and the withdrawal of the care and authority of professionals leads to a significantly different experience than when staff remain present. It is therefore not surprising that stories of the outdoor residentials include stories of getting up in the middle of the night and making toast together. In this way the families create their own experiences. Further reflection needs to consider just how far a residential experience needs to or should give families a break from their responsibilities, and where the tipping point is between giving parents a break and disempowering them. This may of course be different for each family.

Reflection does not only frame experience on residentials, but it is an on-going and essential aspect of the whole experience, not separate from activity. Finding opportunities for reflection is an important role for the practitioner. Reflection during activities is important but may leave workers struggling to give their attention to physical and safety aspects of activities and to the relational experience. Even then, paying attention to different participants during the same task can be very challenging.

> *I suppose it's part and parcel of why it didn't work for some of them. I mean it was great… we had some real moments … but you just couldn't keep up with it all… I couldn't keep up with it all… in that it was 6 families… 6 mothers and 8 young women… everyone had their own issues really... individually and as a family... if you multiply that by 14 people... oh shit!* (Mags, Outdoor worker)

Team work and the active participation of staff from visiting organisations is extremely important in seeing and reflecting. Those residentials which were supported by staff who knew the group, and were fully committed to the reflective task, were much easier to manage.

12.9.6 Methods

The challenges of inclusivity and capturing and valuing everyone's voice in these reflective activities is closely linked to the challenges of research with young people and families. Spoken forms of reflection can depend upon participants' ability to conceptualise and articulate ideas, having the cognitive and linguistic skills to express thoughts and ideas. Conversation is one of the skills of youth work as is asking questions (Jeffs & Smith, 2005; Sapin, 2009; Cooper, 2018), however, experiential learning which includes relatively young children needs to find creative ways to engage everyone in the reflective process. Practitioners on both programmes use a range of creative activities to engage

families in their story telling and reviewing of those stories. In both cases photos and short films are used to recall parts of the experience. The outdoor residentials use photos in the evenings and end of residential sessions to engage participants in a very immediate process of looking back and creating links between one part of the programme and the next. They also create activities which recognise achievements during the day and encourage praise.

The school's programme encourages young people to keep dairies during their residential experiences and also uses art to capture their experiences. These are discussed around the table as the young people create them and are kept for later reflection. Children and young people are encouraged to keep a photographic log of their residentials. During the research residentials which I shared with the young people, they chose to continue using these methods to tell their stories. They tend to include photographs of places and interesting things as well as people. These pictures provide a starting point for reflective conversations about activities, relationships and self. The photographs used in the outdoor residentials are taken throughout the day by the centre workers. They are well practiced in capturing key moments and these photographs tend to be more specifically of faces and expressions. These photographs tell a different story with a specific purpose of capturing significant moments for later reflection. They are shared in reflective sessions which are shaped by the workers. In this way reflection is much more adult led and focused. The practitioner has the power to decide who holds the camera and whose perspective is reflected upon.

The practitioner has the power to consciously shape the reflection and learning of participants. Their choice of activities can facilitate the learning process by creating direct experience, but also by connecting those experiences, scaffolding reflection and learning.

> *I think doing that role play... the bit with the scenarios, the one inside, in terms of how you set it up with that story about the gate was good and then it gave the language to use for them doing the scenarios. It was nice because the girls then talked about how mum might feel and they tried to think about how the daughter might feel. That was good... and it gave language for on the climbing wall as well. That was a good thread.* (Mags, outdoor practitioner)

In this case the practitioners think about 'giving the language' for both participation and conversation. Activities can paint pictures and create metaphors that can open up conversation about difficult issues and feelings. They can provide new ways of looking. The practitioners facilitate a conversation between the young women and their mums. They create an opportunity and then stand back. However, practitioners may take a more direct role in the reflective process through the asking of questions.

12.9.7 Asking Questions

On Saturday night session. I put several questions to them
- *What have you noticed about your dad/son?*
- *What do you need from them?*
- *Regarding what they'd done … have they switched to life back home?*

These sparked off long conversations. They spread themselves around and I wandered around, sitting down when needed… time, quiet, sat down, communicated. (Neil, outdoor practitioner)

A key thing about these questions is that whilst they are guided by the worker, they are answered to each other, again opening up conversation. Formal sessions may create a safe space to name and ask more challenging questions. Residentials may also create spaces for participants to identify and ask their own questions which may link more specifically into their lives beyond their residential experience. For instance:

It's about talking about things calmly. Asking questions that are never asked. Having to answer the questions. Being away from all the other demands. (Dad)

For this parent the questions aren't new but the experience of being away on residential provides the safety and space to ask them.

12.9.8 Relationships of trust.

Experiential learning centres on trusted and respectful relationships. The schools' family residential programme is built upon strong relationships between the programme coordinator and participating families. The outdoor residential workers face the challenge of gaining the trust of participants in a very short space of time. The intensity of that time together in most cases facilitates this and earns the worker the right to share in challenging experiences and ask difficult questions. The complex makeup of family groups challenges the practitioner to pay attention to everyone, finding ways to build relationships with young children, teenagers and adults. To neglect this runs the risk of adults undertaking reflection about young people rather than engaging in an equal and collaborative process.

12.9.9 Difficult questions

There are emotionally very powerful moments in the residentials. Engaging with emotions is an important aspect of reflection. Reflective sessions can bring together very different and opposing emotions such as fear, pride, frustration and joy to facilitate a process of recognition and exploration. Different people will have different emotional experiences of the same activities and events. The family residentials that take an experiential learning approach are not therapeutic. They may support a therapeutic process which is led by a partner organisation, but the practitioners are not therapists.

Experiential activities have been used in family therapy (Thompson et al, 2011) and therapeutic work is carried out with young people in the outdoors (Richards, 2001, 2003, 2016). Potentially there is a lot to learn in bringing these multi-disciplinary approaches together to learn more about developing work with families in the outdoors. This would be a useful topic for further research.

12.10 Outdoor Experiential Learning as Critical Practice

This research project has identified some of the potential in outdoor and experiential learning for meaningful work with young people within their families. There is little existing research into work with families in the outdoors and most of the literature relates to therapeutic work and family leisure (Freeman & Zabriskie, 2003; Garst et al, 2013; Melton, 2017). The research undertaken with outdoor practitioners in this study has just begun to scrape the surface of what outdoor and experiential learning with young people within their families might offer to complement other models of work with families. In taking a critical, reflexive approach, this study has identified questions about what that practice does and might mean for young people, families and practitioners. In particular reflection has uncovered issues around power and gender, masculinity, reflexivity and political agendas that demand closer attention.

My interest is the contribution of viewing outdoor experiential learning through a critical lens. This is perhaps the least well -developed theoretical framework in this research field. As already established, taking a critical perspective involves examining practice in its social and political context, and reflectively, and reflexivity examining the operation of power within and on the relationships that are part of that practice.

12.11 Outdoor experiential learning and gender

Outdoor learning education continues to be a domain which is dominated by white middle-class men (Loynes 2018; Warren, 2016). There appears to be little self-conscious reflection on the processes which continue to exclude women, and people from minority ethnic and other marginalised communities. Within my own research, questions about power, white-ness and gender are identified but the exploration of them is clearly challenging for the group of practitioners.

> *..there's just a perception because let's face it, throughout history and today, there's a white male dominance and if we are replicating that, why are we doing that? Shouldn't we be doing things to challenge that rather than replicating it and reinforcing it? And those challenges could be the people we are, being white, but having those conversations and stuff. But also, as an organisation we are replicating that…* (Emily, outdoor practitioner)

'Noticing' difference and naming the assumptions which underpin personal practice and the organisation and questioning the perpetuation of structural inequalities all bubbled up through the discussion of power with outdoor practitioners. As in the relevant literature (Warren, 2016; Humberstone, 2000) the questions are asked by a small group of women and meet with some resistance form male colleagues who 'can't see the problem'. A critical approach to practice demands that attention is paid to how voices are silenced (Barnfield & Humberstone, 2008) and how constructs of gender are maintained within the predominantly male, heterosexist culture of outdoor education.

Zink (2010, 2013), and Zink & Burrows (2006, 2008) draw on Foucauldian theoretical insights to explore how meaning is constructed in outdoor learning. They question social practices in outdoor learning relating Foucault's ideas about power, surveillance and governmentality (2002). Zink questions how activity directs human behaviour and what behaviours are promoted and rewarded in outdoor settings. This has a particular relevance to my own research in reflecting on what behaviours are encouraged and reinforced in outdoor activities and in the school's residentials at The Cottage. The residentials offer an opportunity to step outside everyday roles and expectations and the labels which define the young people and families we work with. However, without open and collaborative reflection on these issues practice will be shaped by possibly conflicting, unspoken assumptions and different versions of experience.

Critical theory invites the exploration of hegemonic reproductions of gender in outdoor education. Much of the research from feminist perspectives relates to women's leadership and employment in the outdoor industry (Gray, 2016; Wall, 2017). The value of single-gendered work in outdoor experiential learning has been established in research (Maynard, 2011; Whittington et al, 2011 and 2015) but much more work needs to be done to understand the experiences of young women from working class and minority ethnic communities. Humberstone (2000) is one of the few pieces of research which explores hegemonic (and non-hegemonic) masculinities in outdoor education. She argues that external pressures make the exploration of alterative identities in an outdoor educator difficult and proposes that further critical reflection on social and cultural perspectives is needed.

My research has demonstrated some of the many ways in which work with young people within their families is gendered work. In particular the outdoor residentials have raised questions about social roles and norms within families and as presented by outdoor practitioners. The gendered residentials with the YOT have opened up discussion of the potential for exploring both women's experiences/feminist perspectives and masculinity. To develop this however requires an agreed approach between the organisations, practitioners and visiting partners underpinned with a critical understanding of gendered power dynamics in families. This includes challenging stereotypes and

normative versions of family which practitioners bring to their practice.   Further critical attention needs to be given to addressing gender dynamics in mixed groups, particularly intergenerational groups such as families. This includes paying attention to relationships of care and dependency which may run in different directions and counter to expectations. Mitten (1996) proposes opening up experiential learning to consideration of feminist ethics of care. This would also invite practitioners to define their own ethical and value base. Further research considering outdoor learning and feminist care ethics would potentially offer more insight into the potential for work with families through experiential and outdoor learning, and for engaging more effectively with feminist perspectives on the whole.

Outdoor experiential learning offers opportunities for creativity and doing things differently. Work with families has challenged practitioners to question their approach and the activities they rely on in relation to their relevance and meaning to participants (Zink, 2013). A greater valuing of play in favour of more physical and challenging activities has been an outcome. This needn't be seen as a feminisation of outdoor practice, rather a response to the diverse needs of groups which include children and young people with disabilities. In contrast, outdoor learning can also challenge notions of femininity. Wall (2017) draws on Sara Ahmed's work "Living a Feminist Life" (2017) to find inspiration to overcome feminist fatigue in outdoor education where challenge has met with so much resistance and apathy. Ahmed's call for feminists to be wilful and counter what society expects of women challenges female practitioners to insist on something different in outdoor experiential learning. Wall concludes that:

> Women in OE can seek to acquire or utilize wilful tongues and speak out in order to resist being straightened out (p.48)

This resistance to 'be straightened out' could just as well apply to young people and members of their families. This reflection has a direct relevance to the mums and daughters outdoor residential in this study where despite initial expectations expressed by the YOT, that the mums might not want to do all the physical stuff, the young women insisted, in very loud voices, on a programme of challenging activities. Genuinely listening to what women and young women want and think could give a new energy and direction for tired outdoor learning programmes and the safety of the familiar for outdoor practitioners.

Outdoor and experiential learning can offer something different, something other than 'assertive' and 'persistent' approaches (Langan, 2011 p.158; NYA, 2012) of key working. Starting with participants' own definition of their strengths and aspirations experiential education offers a chance to explore their relationships and their wider experiences from different perspectives and through new eyes; to

engage in critical conversation about their struggles and frustrations, but also their hopes and aspirations and imagine new ways of being. bell hooks refers to this critical education process as "writing a new narrative of freedom and power" from the experience and ways of knowing of oppressed and exploited groups (hooks, 1994).

Summary

This research has opened up an ongoing exploration of the opportunities that outdoor residential experiences can offer for work with young people within their families. Creating inclusive spaces and opportunities requires a re-evaluation of tried and tested outdoor activities, whilst critically rethinking assumptions about the benefits of outdoor and residential experiences. Critical reflection demands that the role and power and positioning of the practitioner is unpicked. Work with families is relational and as such pushes current understandings of outdoor learning and what is already recognised as the possibilities of residential experiences.

Finally, outdoor residential centres and activities are still male dominated domains. It is imperative that organisations and individual practitioners are willing to join family practitioners in pushing the boundaries of class, gender and race that maintain male privilege. Extending personal development focussed outdoor experiences to whole family groups requires a high level of critical reflexivity that explores the social and economic contexts of the families we work with but also the positioning of outdoor practice within those same structures and context. Only then can it offer something different with confidence and integrity.

13 FAMILY WORK AS ORGANISATIONAL 'PROBLEM CHILD': DEVELOPING AN ORGANISATIONAL APPROACH TO WORK WITH YOUNG PEOPLE WITHIN THEIR FAMILIES

This chapter captures some of the joint reflections of the practitioners and other staff across organisation B as they worked together to articulate and critically evaluate their work with families. The previous chapter considered practitioners' approach to work with families in residential and outdoor settings. Organisation B has a long history of outdoor and residential work with young people; the challenge for the organisation was to re-think its approach when working with young people in the context of their family groups. At the beginning of the action research project, the organisation had run a handful of family residentials developed organically following approaches from partner organisations. The organisation had also recently completed pilot work on Family Intervention Projects (White et al, 2008), a precursor of the Troubled Families strategy. During the first year of our research, the organisation also agreed a contract to deliver key working as one of a group of voluntary organisations commissioned by the local authority. Key working was a new and different way of working for the organisation and many of its practitioners. Interestingly though, critical reflection stemming from the experience of key working shone a new light on the outdoor and residential work with families supporting the questioning of assumptions and providing an opportunity for the organisation to establish a coherent and critiqued offer in relation to all its work with families.

This chapter summarises and discusses the emerging articulation of the purpose of the organisation's work with families, key principles and values that underpin that work, and future aspiration for its work with families. It discusses collective ideas about the organisation's work with families demonstrating the dynamic inter-play between individual, practitioner critical reflection, and reflection at an organisational level. The chapter begins with a review of current research into key working as a means of setting the context for the work and identifying the key challenges facing the organisation in establishing its own approach. Discussion is organised into themes from the data generated from the reflective work with the organisation during the action research process. This includes establishing a value-base of the work, identifying the opportunities and challenges of an asset-based approach, and theories of change. Working with a target and outcome driven agenda within pre-defined timescales has presented a range of challenges and has made the work uncomfortable. However, the action research process developed a confidence within the organisation about its aims and aspirations for its work with families and the value-base of that work.

The chapter ends with a summary of points of convergence and difference identified at a Sharing Good Practice Day organised for practitioners from both case study organisations during which work with young people and their families was identified as the possible "the problem-child" of the organisation.

13.1 Process

An important aspect of the action research process with Organisation B was involving people from different parts of the organisation in reflection on the work with families. The organisation supported my research in partnership with a local university and the work of its own research team to do this. Research is highly valued in this organisation taking seriously its role in better understanding practice, practice and policy development.

A number of different spaces were created across the organisation for reflection:

- Meetings of the Key Worker team including three reflective training sessions.
- A Special Interest Group (SIG) for work with families – three-monthly meetings for managers, marketing, research team, practitioners
- Two reflective day workshops for outdoor practitioners
- Sharing Good practice day for practitioners from both organisations.

At this point the organisation was clear that family work was one of their main areas of work and that they needed to develop a sustainable model for it. They acknowledged that there were significant questions about the different ways they could engage in this agenda and that policy led agendas were problematic. They also wanted to develop practice that was fit for purpose and ways of evidencing the outcomes of that practice. Together they aimed to develop an understanding of the range and boundaries of their work with families based on a common process rather than a rigid framework or 'product' (Special Interest Group).

13.2 Key working with young people: the research context

Independent and academic research is now emerging to explore some of the critical issues arising out of the Troubled Families strategy, and which can inform critical reflection on the work of key workers. Some of that research recognises the short-term benefits of intensive work with key workers where improvement in school and college attendance, and housing and benefits support and reduction offending has occurred (Hayden & Jenkins, 2014). However, the notion of 'Troubled Families' is itself troublesome. Much of the current research of the strategy focuses on critical questions about the discourse of 'troubled families' and questions of how and when the troubles of 'normal' families become troubling matters of public policy (McCarthy et al, 2014). Identifying principles and practices that define family practices as troubling is highly complex particularly and requires a commitment to ongoing, inter-cultural dialogue (McCarthy & Gillies, 2018). Even the then Communities secretary,

James Brokenshire (Swerling, 2019), acknowledged that the branding of 'Troubled Families' may leave families feeling isolated and blamed. McCarthy & Gillies suggest considering a possible moral framework such as children's rights and feminist care ethic, to explore the moral and value conflicts that arise in practice with families.

Power and equality feature significantly in the research data. Securing the voluntary participation of family members and establishing a family's agenda for change are at times at odds with the pressures of imposed timescales and targets. Bond-Taylor (2015) carried out research with key workers and families exploring the discourses of family empowerment and highlights how the Troubled Families approach exercises power from the top down in how families are identified and referred, and in the identification of specific 'problems' on which to focus. This is a deficit model which reinforces passivity and powerlessness. Within the strategy empowerment is defined as parents taking greater responsibility for the functioning of the families and individuals in it and having less need of services and support. Bond-Taylor argues that whist the key workers are effective in strengthening the relationship between families and key services, these relationships in themselves might signal compliance as opposed to empowerment. She argues for a clear distinction to be made between participation and empowerment. Participation can only be empowering when the family members choose what is important to them, shape the intervention and are able to challenge what they perceive as oppressive practices. She also discusses gendered power relationships within the home and the impact of long-term domestic abuse and mental health concerns. Empowerment for many women involves support in making changes to rebalance power in the family. Whilst this is a limited discussion of gender and power it is a starting point for a more in-depth exploration of the significance of gender and power in key working and the problematisation of the family.

13.2.1 Young people and key working

Struggles and Silences: Young People and the 'Troubled Families' Programme by Aniela Wenham (2016) appears to be the only existing research which focuses on the perspective of young people who are members of 'troubled families'. As previously noted, research with families is often dominated by the voice of the mother. Voices of young people who experience multiple disadvantages are silent in research with troubled families and in the creation of public discourse. The Troubled Families strategy presents troubled families as a homogenous group with a given set of problems (Bond-Taylor, 2015b cited in Wenham, 2016). Indeed, the majority of families identified as troubled are white working class. However, the needs of those families are diverse, and the biographies of the young people in those families are complex. Yet little is known about the lives of those young people despite the programme focussing on changing their behaviour (Wenham, 2016). Wenham finds that young people are protective of their parents and demonstrate a moral connection to their families expressed in

discussion of family togetherness. They talked about their valuing of quality family time but also how opportunities to go out together or share in holidays are very limited through financial hardship. The young people emphasised the importance of trusting relationships with their key worker. However, Wenham's research highlights the limitations of short-term interventions in young peoples' lives. Targets may be met but then the relationship that supported that change is removed and the assumption is that they are now able to 'go it alone'. In this way there is no valuing of the quality or long term contribution of that positive relationship. Young people who are part of a 'troubled family' have complex biographies of their own and often deal with very difficult and stressful circumstances including parental mental health, or substance misuse or domestic abuse. The Troubled Families criteria reduce young people's needs to a few criteria – school attendance, anti-social behaviour, offending – without regard for or listening to their stories or how they express their needs.

There are many resonances between my own research and Wenham's. Young people in the families I met on all the programmes did indeed have complex lives which involved caring for others as well as being cared for, or not, and caring deeply about their families. Those young people who had worked with a key worker often formed a very good relationship with that worker and experienced distress when that relationship was ended.   The outdoor residentials and the schools FRP provide important opportunities for families to spend quality time together and to build relationships with practitioners. The value of this should not be underestimated.

What happens when a young person reaches sixteen is an important point which is drawn out of Wenham's research and again is relevant to my own research project. For instance, supporting a young person to move into independent living at sixteen is difficult and one of the key workers in my research described how she was constrained by the boundaries imposed only able to provide support as a young person approached sixteen but was unable to continue beyond his sixteenth birthday. The school's FRP experienced different issues in relation to age and key transitions. Whilst they established good relationships with younger children workers struggled to maintain contact with older young people who had already disengaged from school and in some respects, their families. It is the outdoor residential programme which demonstrates most opportunities for engaging older teenagers who come along voluntarily, experience the centre as somewhere other than school or the home.

Despite the criticism of lack of evidence of impact, the government continues to support the Troubled Families Strategy and its roll out across local authorities. As youth services have been disbanded or reconfigured youth workers are being deployed into teams that work with young people and their families. A survey by the National Youth Agency in 2012 found "widespread involvement by youth services in the Troubled Families programme, with the vast majority either actively playing a

role or considering how this can be achieved" (p.6). The report describes this work as "an extension of what youth workers already do". The language used in the introduction to this report by Robert McCulloch-Graham (Troubled Families team, Department of Communities and Local Government) reflects the muscular, deficit language of the wider Troubled Families strategy:

> The youth sector has something really important to offer in terms of the upfront, assertive and honest approach that is needed to make an impact with these families and get to the root causes of what is going wrong for them as a family (p.3)

This language of 'upfront, assertive relationships' is in stark contrast to that of asset-based, young-person led informal education. This language implies a lack of voluntary participation and coercion rather than challenge. Contrast this to Tony Taylor's affirmation of the youth worker as someone:

> Whose outlook, integrity and autonomy is at the heart of fashioning a serious yet humorous, improvisatory yet rehearsed educational practice (Taylor, 2009).

In my study key workers talk about having to challenge young people and 'say it how it is' - this is not a romantic version of youth work (Wylie, 2010). However, the relationship does depend on the worker's ability to establish caring, humorous and trusting relationships with young people in contrast to the existing authority figures within school, social work or policing.

The NYA survey (2012) gives examples of youth workers in the key worker role, working in multi-disciplinary teams with difficult to engage families, and triaging those young people who are at risk of getting into trouble. Since then local authorities have continued to develop a range of services in response to the troubled family's agenda including 'Think Family' and early intervention teams. The discourse of troubled families and troublesome young people is stronger as concerns for gun and knife crime increase. In 2018 the government announced a new fund: "Troubled family: supporting families against youth crime to enhance current Troubled Family's initiatives and 'scale up' whole family working" (MHCLG, 2018). More emphasis is now explicitly placed on keeping children and young people out of the care system (Parkes, 2019).

These are very different contexts and ways of working for youth work practitioners. The report acknowledges the importance workforce development as youth work practitioners are required to work in these new contexts.

> "There's no point in telling staff to do things differently without thinking about the support, training and back-up they need", Allan Cadzow, Suffolk Assistant Director, Integrated Service Delivery. Many discussions stressed the need to build youth workers' confidence in their ability to use their existing skills in different contexts, as well as specific skills training (p.11)

Findings from my research resonate with many of the above points. It is important that this and future research considers not only the practice of individual key workers, but also critically considers the role of voluntary sector organisations, such as Organisation B, in delivering the Troubled Family strategy. The rest of this chapter focuses on the process of critical reflection with people at all levels of the organisation.

13.3 Articulating practice

Figure 30 Describing the organisation's approach to key working

Unpacking practice: Themes/key words

- nurturing
- Workers don't just sit and listen – they listen and act
- They spend time building trust
- We provide support around issues
- We have an "informal" approach
- This is family-led. Friendly approach
- never give up
- The key is convincing them you're on their side" "here to help"
- non-judgemental
- non-threatening
- Intuitive
- Voluntary relationship
- Moving forwards
- Asking what's most urgent for you? - "You are the first person who has asked me what I want"
- We only want to work if we can manage without the bonus – only if it works for the families
- Moving beyond isolation – work in groups
- Avoiding target culture

At the beginning of the research process, the special interest described the organisation's approach to key working (fig. 30). The informal approach and values expressed in this exercise reflect the youth work foundation of the organisation. This process confirmed that these values and principles (fig. 31) can apply across all areas of organisational practice including work with families.

The following values were identified as specifically underpinning work with families

Figure 31 Values word cloud from key worker training day

Reflections on the key worker role were developed with reference to the Principles and Values of Social Work (BASW, 2012) Family Support Work, Youth Work (NYA, 2004), Family Support (Dolan et al, 2006) and Work with Parents (LLUK, 2011). Practitioners noted the similarities between these and in particular their focus on children and young peoples' rights.

13.3.1 Young people's rights

The rights of the child (UNCRC, 1989) are central to each of these professional approaches to work with young people in the context of their families. The key workers agreed that although balancing the rights of a young person and the rights of parents can be "tricky", it is important to support young people in making their own decisions and working with consequences of those decisions.

> Sandra*: I think it is trying to get the family to engage to see that they might sometimes need to compromise. …. But sometimes its massively, massively important that young people make their own decisions and choices but sometimes they've got to know that the choices they are making are detrimental to themselves and their family life*
>
> Kate*: do you think it is your job to work out who's right and who's wrong?*
>
> Sandra*: No I don't. I think you've got to try and get in there and do summat haven't you?*
>
> *Equipping them about how to put good boundaries in place and keep consequences in place …so you can't make them do it but you can try to educate them so to speak.*
>
> (Sandra, key worker)

Practitioners acknowledge that a lack of trust and respect in family relationships has a big impact on young people.

> To have a trust that they are going to want the best for you but obviously when your parents aren't doing it then that's part of them problem because kids don't trust their parents because they've been let down. But then they are looking to their parents for boundaries because every child does that to feel safe. So it's trying to restore hope and trust again. At the same time not squashing their future ambitious and pushing them boundaries, they dream about..

> I went on a visit to see [Jay] and his mum with a social worker .. he spent nearly 14 years of his life watching his dad beat his mum senseless and they both drink and they've now separated but he thinks it's quite alright if he gets angry with his mum to beat his mum because that's what you do… I try and keep that as safe as possible.. but also try to re-educate him about thinking about other people. The effects that has on other people as well as on himself.

> (Sandra, key worker)

Young people's violence against family members may not be recognised as a safe guarding issue. However, practitioners note that those young people need to be recognised and supported. This is just one complex issue that key workers have to regularly deal with. Their practice often involves working at the interface of social work and the care system. In order to address the possibility that key workers are "social workers on the cheap", it is important to establish the specific approach offered by key workers in this organisation, and how that differs from social work. As was noted previously and in the six-month evaluation of the key working programme, key workers usually introduce themselves as 'not social workers, or Police' in an attempt to communicate a difference.

13.3.2 An asset-based model of practice

Two principals were highlighted as important when establishing their role with families: taking a "family – led" approach and focussing on a family's strengths.

Critical reflection with the key workers began by identifying the deficit discourse which frames work with families:

> Anti-social behaviour: chavs; unemployment; NEET; criminality; delinquent; drugs; crime; council estates; The Social; mental health; teenage pregnancy; economic downturn; poverty; underclass.

They were then encouraged to reframe these ideas to produce an alternative, asset-based discourse:

> Employment; Education; pro-social behaviour; Health and well-being

Young parents; the Law; Citizenship' Participation; Respecting others; Equality; Diversity; Integrity

The organisation takes an asset-based approach to all its youth development work. That means 'Start with where they are at'. It was greed that this can be applied to all family members. Initial key work contact with families involves an assessment of need which practitioners discussed turning around to focus on assets:

> *I always want to say a strength and build on a strength rather than saying that's shit, that's shit, that's…*

> *I do talk about the need to assess what you're doing really well and how we can help you – find the right support for you and your family. Then I do the assessment. Try and keep it brief and basic, current unless it's relevant, always try and put in positives. They need to hear it.*

> (Lynn, key worker)

When parents assess themselves, they don't always recognise strengths, these need to be discussed and pointed out.

> *It's a story – it's their life.*

> *You can turn these negatives into positives* (Lynn, key worker)

The organisation also emphasises resiliency in its work with young people and practitioners considered what this means in a family context.

> *I think resilience is like a strength – when something bad happens you can push through to get a good outcome.*

> *Keep going and keep going, chipping away* (Dawn, key worker)

Reflection uncovered assumptions that children are in some way more resilient than adult and more likely to bounce back 'because they are young'. This was tested by the group. The group agreed that taking a shared problem-solving approach with families is a way of modelling and developing resilience. At this point the organisation did not have a concept of family resiliency on which to base their work (Walsh, 2013).

13.3.3 An emerging model and theory of change

As experience and confidence increased the key worker approach was articulated further by the Special Interest Group:

- Challenging
- Never make families feel that we know better – ever
- Parenting vs family. Teaching how to parent or facilitating a functioning family?
- Asset model
- Learning – facilitating learning
- Relationship – finding out
- Skill & capability development leads to empowerment model
- Timescales
- Learning types
- Not didactic. Choice vs. enforced
- Going into someone's home shifts the balance of power
- Do you want to change?
- Exciting... opportunity
- Facilitate transition... choice
- Focus on relationships within families. Commonalities. Shared experiences

Figure 32 Key worker approach

The sixth month evaluation of the key worker programme located practice within a theoretical framework of informal learning and approaches. It recognised that the role is dependent upon establishing trusted relationships which support conversation and asking challenging questions. Practitioners are "authentically inquisitive", empathic, non-judgemental, persistent and consistent.

Support is emphasized rather than activity – practical support such as cleaning and accompanying young people to school and court. Practitioners have an important role in advocating for and helping families to access specialist services.

The range of issues which key workers address is complex including conflict resolution, domestic abuse, alcohol and drug misuse and mental health. As part of the city's Troubled Families strategy, these were fed back into wider evaluative processes and these issues were later acknowledged within the national strategy (Bate, 2018). Key workers acknowledge the use of a range of practice models including building resilience, parenting, nurturing, communication, emotional literature, positive discipline and problem solving.

13.4 A model for outdoor residentials

Outdoor practitioners in this organisation were initially very clear about their approach to outdoor residentials. However, a lot of assumptions were surfaced and unpicked over time including how contracts are negotiated, staffing identified, and programmes organised. Evaluation of the

individual family residential programmes highlight some more specific aspects of the practice that are not so visible or possible in the key working approach. The outdoor residentials emphasise activities to stimulate reflection and conversation. Activities need be tailored for different groups and individuals and need to be nurturing as well as challenging. The activities aim to be positive and motivational and are opportunities to experience success. Outdoor residentials contribute to positive relationship building. The success of the outdoor residentials is to some extent dependant on the relationship with other practitioners from partner organisations. They provide excellent opportunities for team work and access to a range of different professional skills.

The outdoor residentials address many of the aspirations of the key workers but are also free of some of the barriers that the key workers face. They provide an alternative, positive, short term context in which change can be experienced and reflected upon. They are separate from the pressures of home and daily pressures. They are also freed up from the demand of targets and specified outcomes.

The residential workers struggled to articulate their approach to working with parents and were more troubled about boundary setting and discipline when parents were present.

13.5 Issues and challenges

13.5.1 Target driven funding

Key work was introduced as a way of addressing specific "problems" of disengagement from school, anti-social behaviour, youth offending, and unemployment but under the broader aim of reducing public spending on families with multiple needs. Therefore, the success of the strategy and the success of key workers is measured in terms of targets and savings met. The independent evaluation of phase one (2012-2015) (White, 2016) - the period during which our research took place - found no strong evidence of savings or positive outcomes that could be directly attributed to the Troubled Families programme and work of the key workers. Claims to have "turned around" 99% of participating families have met with stinging criticism (Crossley & Lambert, 2017). When organisations are paid by results it is tempting and possible to engineer outcomes, and tick boxes and make claims to success without demonstrating any clear link between intervention and outcome. Indeed, it is argued that many of the outcomes recorded may well have been achieved without any key worker intervention (Portes, 2016; Crossley, 2016).

The organisation is responding to the increasing pressure to demonstrate outcomes. It has developed an outcomes framework for young people which includes a reference to family functioning but recognises that further work needs to be done to identify appropriate indicators and evidence of its work with families.

Practitioners are clear that payment arrangements tied to achieving specified outcomes which include bonuses and payment results are barriers to working with families in ways that they aspire to.

> *We only want to work if we can manage without the bonus – only if it works for the families Avoiding target culture*   (Key Workers group discussion)

The prescribed timescales and individual key work model make working in groups difficult to fund. The organisation has to find ways to develop and fund these within its wider community-based provision. The restricted funding is not enough to offer outdoor residentials to families who have key workers. This is a significant contention in the organisation's work with families.

13.5.2 Work with partner organisation

Key working is about developing support networks for families through advocacy and persistent contact and co-working with other professionals and services.

The outdoor family residentials provide opportunities for practitioners to work together across organisations, in a more intense but positive context. Setting up these partnerships when residentials are requested is important. The staffing team acknowledged that more critical attention needs to be given to the staffing of residentials. Practitioners agree that critical questions need to be explored with partner organisations to establish a shared understanding of purpose and approach at organisational level and between individual practitioners working on programmes.

> *Even though our approach isn't to tell people how to parent or whatever, there's still a message in staffing those programmes, so you are a white male with the power in the situation, are you a parent? There's so much to it and nothing is ever said, there's just the presence of it. It's a big old message* (Phil, outdoor practitioner)

> *So when we are asked to do a residential for mothers and their children is it important that we go back to the person who has asked for that resi and actually get them to think a little bit harder about whether it is actually a piece of work for women and young women that they are asking for or whether it is something that is more about parents and children. Because it is different. And we need to be conscious of the difference I think* (Mags, outdoor practitioner)

13.6 Critical practice

The organisation's evaluation of the key worker programme states that their practice is situated within a critical paradigm and uses an experiential methodology. It acknowledges that possibilities for reflective work with families is dependent upon establishing rapport and trusting relationships.

> *They also ensure that all voices are heard in the family and illuminate silenced voices*
> (Organisation's 6 monthly evaluation of key work programme)

My data suggests that this is aspirational. Whilst there is some evidence of hearing silenced voices, there is still some lack of confidence in ensuring that children and young people's voices are equally heard and acted upon.

In this way practice aspires to attend to issues of power and equality and supports families in developing new perspectives on their shared lives. When families engage in this process they develop the confidence and skills to act, supported by the key workers, but eventually for themselves. This is practice at its best and aligned to the organisation's approach to its work with young people. However, short-term time scales, predefined outcomes and referral processes may compromise practitioners' ability to establish in-depth relationships and engage in what can be a long-term process.

Research and reflection

The different reflective processes used in this research were effective in articulating and informing practice development through shared critical reflection. Outdoor practitioners note that families work is complex and challenging but that the opportunity to engage in reflection is highly motivating.

Whilst key working and outdoor residential work are very different approaches to work with families, engaging in shared reflection supported an articulation of each and went some way to achieving an identification of an organisational approach to its work with families overall.

Critical reflection can uncover very different perspectives and assumptions across the organisation

> *do we keep churning out the same old, same old with outcomes based on aspiration of the government? Some of it is an age-old discussion; the feminist discussion isn't new is it? But for this organisation and many youth workers the family is a new context in which to have that discussion.* (Phil, outdoor practitioner)

New work contexts and approaches can bring into question taken for granted ideas about practice, values and principles. In the same way new funding arrangements may make new areas of work possible but raise issues which need to be addressed with creativity and criticality.

> *I have no problem buying into an agenda that looks for value for money and efficiency. It's about applying your mind to it* (Carol, key work manager)

A commitment to shared critical reflection across the organisation is highly valued however it needs to be funded and supported by all managers. Funding needs to be found to facilitate the participation

of sessional workers and those who are paid 'by results' as well as central staff in strategic reflection and visioning of practice. Whilst the key work programme is part of a city-wide strategy which provides training in response to identified issues, the process highlighted the complex and challenging practice that practitioners are engaged in and the need for ongoing, skilled supervision and training. The NYA report (2012) acknowledges the importance workforce development as youth work practitioners are required to work in these new contexts.

13.7 Reflecting together across organisations

The research process also included a day which brought together practitioners from the school's family residential programme and the outdoor family residentials. They had not met before; they met on the basis that they are part of the wider research project. The day included explaining and analysing the different programmes, identifying commonalties and challenges. These discussions identified concerns that hadn't surfaced or been named at other levels. They present a perspective shaped by critical reflection on the political and institutional context of the work.

The practitioners identified shared values and similarities in their approach including informal and experiential learning. They acknowledged that their work borders on therapeutic at times. They also identified a number of organisational challenges particularly around the funding and prioritisation of work with young people and their families (fig. 33).

> **Challenges:**
>
> **Organisational:**
>
> • Losing interest through perceived lack of interest from others
>
> • Funding, lack of commitment from senior managers
>
> • Lack of understanding from other staff
>
> Embedding our work in school and other contexts
>
> Political context: short-term, quick-fix funding
>
> Short-term/ long term: short term programmes contributing to long term strategies
>
> What we need to do:
>
> Working together, putting some language around what we do – firming up models

Figure 33 Sharing Good Practice Day: commonalities across organisations

Practitioners from both organisations raised similar concerns about the organisational context of their work with families, asking

Is family work 'the problem child' in our organisations? (Phil, outdoor practitioner)

They agreed that wider staff teams do not necessarily appreciate the potential impact of their work. Both programmes are limited by short term funding and practitioners see this as a lack of organisational commitment to the work. They recognise that it is necessary to clarify what family workers do:

A model to underpin our approach but it doesn't answer all the questions

(Emily, outdoor practitioner)

Conclusion

Opportunities for shared reflection across and between organisations have contributed to an articulation of emerging practices with families. There are distinct differences between key working and the individual outdoor residential programmes with families, but the reflection with practitioners has facilitated an identification of an asset-based, informal approach, centring on relationship building. Payment by results and the inconsistency of funding for residentials raises questions about the long-term commitment of the organisation; this concern is shared by the school's residential practitioners. The research process has gone some way to strengthening the commitment of Organisation B to its work with families in creating a shared understanding of that practice and a vision for it led by practitioners. Working together across the organisation clarified a vison and commitment for the work and a confidence in articulating its strengths.

Carrying out research across the organisation raised some challenges in terms of ensuring the participation of practitioners alongside administrators and managers. Different priorities and critiques of practice had to be heard and worked with. Addressing practice not only as an individual issue but as an organisational issue however, means that action can be taken to address emerging issues and that the challenges of practice become a shared responsibility. The message to practitioners is that their expertise is valued and that they have an important part to play in shaping organisational practice and policy with a deeper understanding of the possibilities and limitations of funding criteria.

14 COMING IN FROM THE COLD: A MODEL OF CRITICAL PRACTICE WITH YOUNG PEOPLE WITHIN THEIR FAMILIES
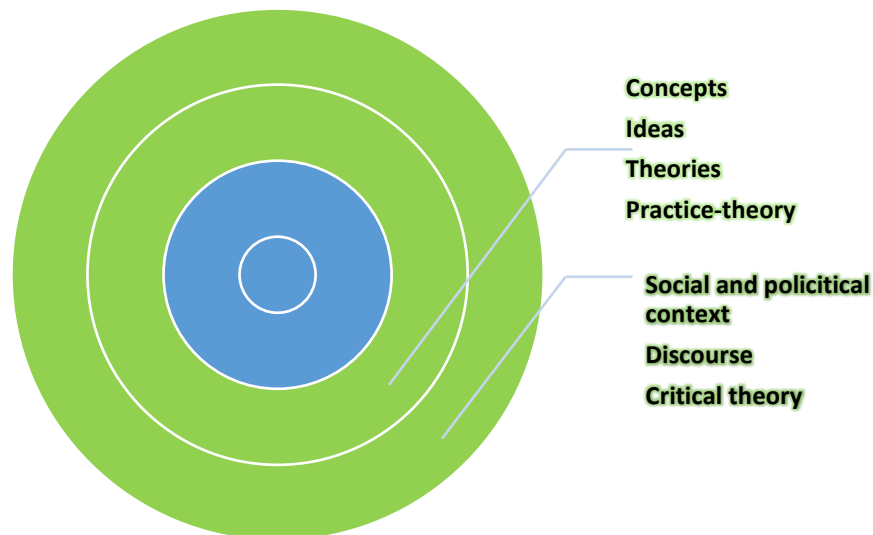
Figure 34 Breeze's model of Critical Reflection - outer circles

Returning to my original research questions, discussion of my findings has identified how individual practitioners and the case study organisations collectively, at this point, articulate and interpret their work with young people and their families. Emerging models of practice have been evaluated and reflected upon identifying key critical issues in terms of reflexive practice and the political and philosophical values which underpin the work, in particular gender, intersectionality and shifting power dynamics. However, I also wanted to know what pedagogical paradigms underpin the work of each organisation and ultimately whether a new pedagogy of work with young people and families is emerging and how might we name this?

Earlier chapters have explored how different parts of the practice with young people and their families can be understood within different theoretical frameworks: informal education, social learning, and outdoor learning (fig 34, third ring of critical reflection). These theoretical perspectives all focus on practice as education, and for learning. They each have different emphasis on learning, relationship and place. However, there are elements in the data which it is difficult to find or explore within these frameworks. For example, I identify feminist care ethics as a possible lens through which to examine practice with young peoples and their families. This suggestion grew out of identification of a dynamic of care between practitioners and the families they work with, which is difficult to pinpoint and can't

find place in any of the above theories. This aspect of care is seemingly aligned with ideas about parenting – supporting the parenting of young people but also the worker as parent, or carer, parenting the group within the practice context. This is directly related to the role and person of the pedagogue. Practitioners bring their own stories to their work with families and use them to build relationships and to make claim to a credible role as counsellor or role model. Through the lens of learning theories this may be interpreted as lacking in theoretical justification or academic rigour. However, if examined in terms of the relationship between the pedagogue and family members, some insight might be gained into the qualities which facilitate learning and flourishing in the complex context of this practice.

This chapter situates the articulation of practice with young people and their families within a framework of critical pedagogy (fig. 34, fourth ring of critical reflection). In particula*r* I suggest that social pedagogy may provide an over-arching theoretical framework which embraces the key elements of critical practice.

Whist I conclude that a new pedagogy of practice has not merged from this research, I have identified a model of critical practice which supports the continued development of practice with young people within their families by youth workers and other related professionals. This model questions the underlying assumptions of social policy and the practice approaches which it espouses and supports the re-imagining of practice grounded in a pedagogy of informal and experiential learning.

14.1 Pedagogy

 Pedagogy is the art of teaching and learning (Young, 2006). It encompasses the approach to learning and underpinning values. Pedagogy as a concept finds its way into the vocabulary of professional youth work training and practice as connections are made between learning for empowerment, relationships and social justice (Ledwith, 2011; Maynard & Stuart, 2018). It provides a framework that begins with an analysis of the ideological constructions and uses of power in the world as experienced by the people and communities we live and work in, inspired by a passion for social justice and a redressing of power imbalances which produce inordinate inequalities in society. Paulo Freire was one of the greatest thinkers and visionaries about the political nature of education and its power to liberate or domesticate (Freire, 1972). Freire "achieves a synthesis of theory and practice" (Ledwith, 2011, p.53) connecting critical theory with concrete ways of being and lived experience. Critical pedagogy is about understanding the world we live in and preparing to transform it (Maynard & Stuart, 2018).

Critical pedagogy has inspired a radical tradition in youth work that continues to call both practitioners and policy makers to account (Belton, 2010). It is being defended, endorsed and progressed in the

work of the In Defence of Youth Work campaign.   The campaign's focus on youth work as critical, emancipatory and democratic education has inspired a new articulation of the purpose and place of youth work within a neo-liberalism political climate of cuts to education and services for young people. It has created a space for critical debate grounded in practice. However, it has also created dissent and has been an unsettling force as well as an advocate to youth work in the political arena.

There are many challenges to developing and maintaining critical practice in youth work and with young people. Maynard & Stuart (2018) explore how practice which promotes the well-being of young people can be understood and evaluated within a framework of critical pedagogy. Whilst their chapter on family work is welcome given the separation that continues to exist between family work and work with young people. It is light in engaging with critical issues of power within families and discourse. Their case study does not reflect the complexities of working with families within policy led programmes. "Socially Just, Radical Alternatives for Education and Youth Work Practice" (Cooper et al, 2015) explores a number of different ways of thinking about radical practice with young people in the light of the challenges of neo-liberal discourse and agendas. The writers in this collection also forge strong links between theory and practice. The collection challenges practitioners to re-imagine practice, moving beyond renaming and reshaping practice to re-thinking it. It is the chapters by Rippingdale on the value base of practice, and Petrie on Social Pedagogy that offer particularly relevant and resonant ideas for the articulation of and the re-imaging of practice with young people within their families.

14.2 Re-imagining practice with young people and their families as Social Pedagogy

Social Pedagogy provides an extension of notions of learning to include aspects of care. As such, it provides a credible theoretical paradigm within which to framework with young people and their families. It is a theoretical framework commonly used across Europe in relation to social practice with children, young people and adults (Hämäläinen, 2003; Petrie et al, 2006). As a professional field it is distinct from social work in that it takes a very broad educational perspective. It has been described as 'where care and education meet' (Cameron & Moss, 2011) and as a broad educational approach to addressing social problems. In the UK, most interest has been expressed in relation to work with children and young people, particularly within the care system (Cameron & Moss, 20111). It is less well known within social professional training and universities in the UK with the Thomas Coram Research Unit at the University of London leading at the forefront of research.

Social pedagogy draws together theory, values and practice and the role of the pedagogue within a framework that is wide enough to encompass the approaches and practice discussed so far in this

study with a significant emphasis on critical understanding of the social and political context of practice. It is relevant to the practice in this study because of its focus on the relationship between social learning and social context. Social education in a youth work context in the UK has become confused as learning for social participation has transformed into learning social skills and sociability (Batsleer, 2013). Social pedagogy goes some way to reclaim this ground in providing a worked out and clear articulation of the meeting of social and educational practice. It offers a model of social learning distinct from individualised models of intervention and case work practice. It emphasises interpersonal and cultural skills (Petrie, 2011) as opposed to personal and life skills. This is a strengths based approach with less emphasis on learning to behave and more on learning to live cooperatively (Stephens, 2013). The practitioners from the school's FRP struggle to articulate the connection with the wider, social vision of the Head of the school; the political vision is his. This vision is consistent however with Social Pedagogy that is built on the conviction that social circumstances can be significantly influenced by educational approaches (Hämäläinen, 2003; Moss & Cameron, 2011; Euteneuer & Uhlendorff, 2014).

Social pedagogy is concerned with how learning takes place, not only in terms of activity but also as a social process. With echoes of Freire's critical education theories (1970), the roles of expert and novice may be interchangeable. It supports an informal, dialogical approach based on democratic principles and focusing on empowerment rather than conformity or compliance. Practitioners recognise and draw out the implicit, knowledge and experience of participants working problems out together and encouraging an experiential approach to learning.

14.2.1 The pedagogue

As discussed earlier, the practitioners in this research struggled to name themselves professionally. They find it much easier to identify who they are not, than who they are. Social pedagogy straddles education and social work (Stephens 2013) and therefore can create a positive space and identity for the practitioner, the pedagogue. This is not a term or role that the family residential and key workers recognise or relate to. However, I believe it is an identity that is entirely relevant should be discussed and certainly explored during professional training.

The pedagogue relates to young people and families as whole people, within the wider context of their lives. They also bring their whole-selves into their professional relationships. Linked to this is the notion that social pedagogy as an approach engages the pedagogue at the level of head, heart and hands (Carter, 2012; Stephens, 2013; Ruch et al, 2017). It is an approach that involves practical activity, reflection and emotional connection. It requires the practitioners to bring their practical, rational and emotional selves to the role. The practitioners in my study talk in different ways about the relationship

between self and practice. Their narratives dismantle theoretical barriers between the personal and professional self. They frequently intersperse their stories of practice with their personal narratives of family life. They explain how they share these stories with parents and young people to deconstruct power relationships and present their humanness. They bring what they know from their own experience of family and as parents sharing experiences of frustration and getting it wrong as well things that worked for them. Their role is not to offer solutions or solve a problem but to share in the exploration of what will work best for the families they work with. In this way there is an authenticity to their relationships with families which could not be achieved in a formal, or didactical education context.

In place of technical expertise, the social pedagogue brings themselves to the educational process. They 'walk with' participants in a relationship between equals. It is a model of learning which values the personal rather than ignoring their impact on the process. Teaching and youth worker have traditionally advocated for a professional relationship in which self-disclosure is minimal and censored (Murphy & Ord, 2013). 'Walking with' validates the sharing of stories of struggle and success as authentic contributions to the learning relationship. Trust and respect are also core values. Each of these qualities are recognised and discussed in my data.

14.2.2 An ethic of care

Rippingdale (2015) argues for a common-value base of care in practice which is social learning. Social pedagogue, not only recognisees care as action but care as authenticity. Authentic relationships are forged through empathy and care. Within feminist care ethics this is expressed as caring about as well as caring for (Noddings, 2003, 2013). The practitioner listens carefully, and pays careful attention to develop their understanding of the situation and of the person and in this way, they develop empathy. It is a quality which is evident in my data not only in female participants' accounts, but also in males' where an empathy for participants is expressed, for instance in the feelings of love and anger. When I interviewed families who had worked with the key workers, and Karen on the school's FRP, I was struck by the mutual care that was expressed. Many of the participants clearly knew that they were cared about. The interview with Aisha and Ishmael (young people who had a key worker) for instance, fizzed with laughter and affection as they told me about their time with their key worker, Sharon. They clearly felt cared for, even loved by her, and cared for her in return. It is also a care that is infectious. Being valued and cared for makes it more possible to notice and care for others. Care ethics recognise reciprocity with the caring relationship (Nodding, 2012) as mutual recognition and part of the ongoing exploration of need.

Rather than supporting a model of objective practitioner, social pedagogy values care, compassion and passion for social justice (Petrie, 2015). Rippingdale (2015) argues that care in itself is not enough but must be exercised thoughtfully and ethically. Practitioners may want the best for the young people and families they work with but care also means exercising respect for their autonomy. The practitioners in my study want something for the families they work with; they are happy to walk with them but then to let go. It is learning for empowerment, therefore supports growth and change and autonomy.

14.2.3 Life space

My research data raises questions and ideas about the spaces that the work with young people and families takes place in, as well as the activities they share in. Social pedagogy is described as happening in every day places and "life spaces" (Hatton, 2013). This is where people live and learn together - around the dining table in The Cottage, and in the kitchen spaces in the outdoor lodge. Both The Cottage and the outdoor residential centre offer nurturing life spaces where people are 'at home' with one another whilst being supported to challenge and be challenged. The concept of 'life space' is a more engaged and subjective definition of space than that of 'third space' (Pahl & Kelly, 2005; Maynard & Stuart, 2018). Life space in the family residential programmes are constructed but they provide a home and a place of living as well as a place learning. They provide an intense experience of a different way of living together. In contrast key work in the home takes place in authentic life spaces which are likely to be filled with activity, voices and demands. These may be stressful, chaotic spaces. This is a much harder environment to work in but more authentic and certainly not removed from real life. How participants make sense of their everyday experiences is the starting point for working towards change (Euteneuer & Uhlendorff, 2014).

14.2.4 Young people

Work with young people within their families means working with multiple perspectives and multiple needs. It is inter-relational and demands careful attention to ensure that each voice is heard and valued. In placing children's rights at the centre of practice (UNCRC 1989), social pedagogy strengthens the voice of children and young people in the context of the family and wider community. It is about listening to children in a way that is not decontextualized from society. It also situates them as equal participants in the social learning process. The programmes in this study create opportunities for young people's perspectives to be heard alongside other family members. Social pedagogy involves listening to and gaining an understanding of the world view of participants and encouraging them to see each other's different perspectives. It also means trusting that those participants will be able to imagine change in ways that you as a practitioner cannot.

The current targeting of resources and emphasis on achieving specific and individual outcomes supports practice which problematises specific issues over others, to meet specifies outcomes. This is one of the challenges of key work which starts with a deficit, stigmatised perspective of the young person and their family. An organisational commitment to an asset-based approach and starting where the young person (or parent) is at, supports the worker in reframing the direction of their work with the family. It starts with the family not the target. One worker told me that if a targeted outcome is achieved along the way then so be it, but that would not drive her work.

14.2.5 Reflective practice

Finally, social pedagogy stresses the importance of ongoing reflection and critical review of practice. This is political practice which seeks to understand how pedagogy is informed by society, and how society is informed by its pedagogic policies and practices (Petrie, 2015). This means developing a critical understanding of the relationship between policy and practice. It also means being able to deconstruct the relationship between pedagogy and care to maintain the space of a critical, questioning and empowering pedagogy. In this way it is critical of dominant discourse which defines and stigmatises young people and families and practices which pathologise or blame. Social pedagogues are critical of the ideas which define the young people they work with, and ways of working which perpetuate social inequality. This research has engaged practitioners in critical reflection which has encouraged them to look beyond familiar and prescribed ways of working, and to question the expression of power in policy and practice (Hatten, 2013). Critical reflection makes connections between practice and the political, economic and social context in which it sits. It also explores the social structures that situate children and young people (Petrie, 2015) and explores ways in which they can be disrupted or challenged.

The political interest in the family and intervention strategies which take practitioners into families' homes have made the private lives of some people (poor and already marginalised families) very public. Practitioners, in their work with families, sometimes find themselves in roles more aligned to care than education, and to doing things for rather than with; caring but not having time to care. To undertake a pedagogical approach to social problems is a reframing of involvement in families' lives and reconstructing the family as "a field of learning" (Euteneuer & Uhlendorff 2014, p.708).

Like any other theoretical framework, social pedagogy has its limitations and challenges. It is a broad concept and there are many versions of social pedagogy in practice. Stephens (2013) argues that the power of social pedagogy is seriously understated, partly due to a lack of a well-articulated theoretical basis.   I am not suggesting that work with young people and their families is social pedagogy necessarily. However, it is able to embrace other approaches to learning such as outdoor learning and

experiential learning and provide a clearer definition of the social context of that learning. In this way it brings a social and political purpose to approaches to learning which struggle to define their impact and direction beyond individual development.

14.3 A Model of Critical Practice

Figure 35 Word Cloud of this thesis

My research has provided an overview of some of the emerging work with young people within their families (fig. 35) as well as identifying some of the critical issues it raises for practitioners and organisations. In the UK, the family has become and continues to be a focus for intervention to address a range of social issues. The discourse which surrounds families targeted for intervention through the Troubled Families strategy is one which stigmatises and discredits them (Petrie,2015). The young people who are part of these 'troubled' families, are themselves targeted and defined by a specific set of problems. Multidisciplinary team working, a priority under the New Labour government has continued with the creation of teams in local authorise focusing on children, young people and families. At the same time statutory youth services have been massively reduced or completely dismantled. Local authorities are now each developing their own 'Think Family' strategies and guidance. These are closely tied into safe guarding children (such as Warwickshire Safeguarding Board, 2017; Cambridgeshire County Council, 2019). Youth workers are increasingly being attached to teams working with families or in response the 'Think Family' agenda.

Work with young people within their families is mainly inter-disciplinary practice. There is significant work to be done in negotiating the role and contribution to youth workers in these teams. There is still a lack of clarity about what a "whole- family" approach actually looks like. In most cases, 'thinking family' appears to mean considering significant family members and circumstances when planning

services for children and adults. This includes considering responsibilities within the family and parenting in particular (SCIE, 2011). In practice, this sometimes results in a lack of confidence in determining who should be the focus of this work. Despite multi-disciplinary approaches, individual practitioners such as key workers, work with adults and young people and attempt to work with and within the relational dynamics of the family. This is a complex position to hold.

In the changing youth work landscape, the family's agenda is not going to go away but there is a still a lack of theory base to support it. Clearly this is not youth work, but I argue that it <u>is </u>work with young people <u>within</u> their families. It has not been possible to identify within my research data a new pedagogy of work with young people and their families, however, what has emerged is the need for, and significant features of a critical model of practice with young people within families that attends to pedagogical, political and professional issues.

The following recommendations relate to work with young people within their families across the contexts considered in my research study. Some of the following points are more relevant to key workers, others to those working in schools or residential settings. Despite the variety of settings and approaches considered in this study, there are, I believe, certain challenges, principles and theoretical positions which apply to them all. These in turn inform a model of critical practice with young people within their families.

14.3.1 Whole family/whole person

Practitioners in my study value the relationships they build with young people and adults who in turn enjoy and benefit from the quality of attention and care. However, they find themselves trying to attend to the stories and needs of individuals as well as family relationships. It could be argued that this is inevitable and that there would be no care in professional relationships which ignore the needs of individual participants. However, with a strong tradition of personal development, there is a danger that outdoor practitioners in particular, might fall back on familiar styles of working which favour individual interaction and development rather than inter-relational dynamics. My research also finds that some practitioners closely identify with the parents they work with. They come with similar stories and use them as a starting point for building empathetic relationships with parents. These shared stories provide the basis for democratic relationships and collaborative learning.

Research by Bunting et al (2017) into parents' perspectives on Troubled Families interventions challenges the deficit approach of the strategy which ignores the impact of structural disadvantage on the lives of the families it seeks to support. Recognising that the stories of parents involve multiple challenges over many years including relationships, loss, health and poverty, my research supports

their argument that a whole person approach is needed as well as a whole family approach, and that practitioners need to develop reflexivity and time to build relationships with parents and children

14.3.2 Young people at the centre

However, practice which claims to be 'whole family' practice can run the risk of privileging the voices and needs of adults. To address this, a conscious centring of the needs of children and young people is required to address the inherent power imbalance between adults and young people.

Families are dynamic and power shifts within them. Normative models of families are based on fixed notions of hierarchies of power which place children and young people under adults. Politically and economically, children and young people inhabit a position of subordination. Children are one of the most governed groups, and also the biggest groups of users of state services (Hill et al, 2004). Therefore, practitioners need to have a critical understanding of young peoples' needs but also of the powers that define and decide how they are met.

14.3.3 Youth workers

When considering what youth workers bring to the table of whole family approaches, facilitating, listening to, understanding and advocating for the voice of young people is fundamental.   One of the problems of work which claims to be about the 'whole family' is defining its aims. There is an "obfuscation of aims" of work with families which raises questions about who the focus of the work is, but also why they are the focus (Warin, 2006). Within social policy the answers to these questions have changed over time from successive governments. The Troubled Families strategy is about reducing the costs to the tax payer of state care and services. Underpinned by neoliberal ideology, practice is measured and valued by its cost cutting efficiency. However, such priorities may leave room for practitioners to establish a firm value base for their work. With only tool kits and 'to do' lists available to key workers for instance, there is opportunity for practitioners to develop a clear theory and value base for their work with families.

14.3.4 Challenges of Multi-disciplinary practice

Work with families in the contexts of this research study, is multi-disciplinary practice. Inter-agency working is not new for youth workers but working within teams focusing on the needs of young people and adults, is. Working in multi-disciplinary teams continues to be challenging in that it can be taken for granted that everyone shares the same aims, the same understanding and conceptualising of families (Warin, 2006; Anning, 2005) and of practice. This is clearly not the case.

Families are not homogenous even though policy implies that they are. Ways of being and doing family varies according to class, sexuality, culture, politics; the list is endless. Neither can families be

defined as a single, static unit. Families are constantly changing and include individuals with competing needs (Warin, 2007). Professional practices have developed in response to different policy conceptions of family and prioritisation of individuals with families. Practitioners from different professional backgrounds will hear, see and interpret families' needs differently and develop different responses to them.

14.3.5 Working with young people <u>within</u> their families

During my research I put forward the following argument to the practitioners I worked with:

> The family is not a homogenous or static unit but a group of individuals with differing needs which *may* coincide…but which *may not*…We may need to re-conceptualise the 'family' in a child-centred way in order to provide a clearer basis for the integration of services. This clarification would ensure that children's services prioritise, and act as advocates for, the needs of children. Such a clarification of purpose would then in turn influence the ideal of joined-up thinking, facilitating interprofessional cooperation and making it a more practicable reality. (Warin, 2006 p.10).

Warin is responding to the challenges of whole-family work experienced in inter-disciplinary teams. However, I find her perspective equally pertinent in considering the challenges that individual practitioner's experience. Warin's argument met with a mixture of responses from my research participants: some of the key workers said 'of course', but some of the outdoor practitioners worried that this meant placing the child at the centre of all their interactions with families. This troubled their own values and perspectives on the place of the child in the family. Perhaps this is also because residential and outdoor learning, whilst working with other partners is not tied into statutory, inter-disciplinary systems and structures in the same way as key working, or work in schools is. Whilst some the practitioners agreed to this in principle their practice demonstrates less clarity and confidence in its focus. Youth workers may find it particularly challenging when working in multi-disciplinary teams and with families when the principles of informal education no longer guide professional decision-making (Burgess, 2018).

14.3.6 Remembering why we work with young people – finding confidence

Family support work and social pedagogy place the child at the centre of practice with families (Cameron & Moss, 2011). It is practice centred on the rights of the child (UNCRC 1989). Sercombe (2010) states that what makes youth work distinctive is focusing on the young person as primary client, however, youth work as rights based practice may be less clearly articulated then in other related professions.

I contend that re-conceptualising work with families as centred on the rights of young people refocuses work with families and addresses some of the tensions and uncertainties raised by practitioners in my study. Focusing on rights means focusing on young peoples' voice, participation and empowerment. Youth work is all actively listening to young peoples' stories, opinions and aspirations. It is also listening with a purpose. Active listening supports the telling, supports the voice and uses story as the basis for critical questioning.

My research has found that practitioners are inconsistent in their listening to young people when working in the context of their families. To re-sate a commitment to the voice of young people is a reminder to listen, to attend to and be mindful of them. This extends to listening to children. To do this consistently does not mean not listening to parents, but it does challenge the privileging of the adult voice over that of the young person. Young people's narratives are also complex (Wenham, 2016) but response to their needs is too often defined within a range of policy defined, targeted 'problems'.

Conversation and listening to young people are part of a process of empowerment (Batsleer, 2008). Empowerment is a process of developing personal, interpersonal and political power (Maynard & Stuart, 2018). Youth work is about tipping the balance of power (Davies, 2005), not to over-rule adult power, but to ensure that young people are able to exercise their right to an equal voice, agency and control in their lives (Gormally & Coburn, 2014). The school's residential programme is an example of practice with families, which forefronts the young person. Young people work alongside adults (practitioners) to imagine ways in which their family relationships and ways of living together might be different. Practitioners walk a tightrope in creating a safe and nurturing environment whilst creating the space of young peoples' stories to be told and imaginations to be exercised. Parental power is not disregarded but young peoples' voices are privileged. The programme 'sides' with the young people whilst respecting and showing care for the participating adults (parents).

In asset-based practice with families, which begins with the needs, strengths and aspirations as defined by 'the family' young people need to have an equal voice. Young people will have their own ways of defining their family (Wenham, 2016) which may include significant people other than their parents – grandparents, aunties, and friends. The importance of sibling relationships also needs to be appreciated from the young person's point of view (Edwards et al 2005).

My research suggests there is an important task to be done in critically reflecting on the exercise and processes of power in work with young people within their families. It involves identifying those processes which disempower young people inter-personally, and also politically in discourse and practices which marginalise or discriminate against them (Maynard & Stuart, 2018). In this way

practice is not only mindful of processes which silence young people in their families and in their contact with professionals but is aware and resistant to deficit discourse which shapes practice which disempowers young people rather than being a catalyst for empowerment.

14.3.7 Learning

My research with the school's family outdoor programme and the outdoor family residentials has highlighted the importance of framing work with young people within their families as learning. Experiential learning, outdoor learning and informal learning provide robust theoretical frameworks with which to analyse and articulate practice. These are approaches to learning which shape the learning process with a value base that favours dialogical learning that is grounded in the experience of participants.

Social pedagogy as an umbrella framework, conceptualises learning in its broadest sense in which learning, care, health, and well-being are inseparable (Boddy et al, 2005 cited in Fielding & Moss, 2011). It is a theory and practice that fits with the values of informal education, as argued by Slovenko and Thompson (2016), and can hold together work with young people and adults and families.

> Practitioners, young people, and families are seen as inhabiting the same life space, not existing in separate hierarchical domains (Pilch & Lepalczyck, 1995 cited in Slovenko & Thompson, 2016).

In this way there is a positive justification for working with young people within their families as social learning which challenges hierarchies of power. Youth work values of trust and respect for the young person sit alongside an attention to the quality of care within the relationship between young person, parent and the pedagogue.

14.3.8 Social justice

Critical pedagogy and social pedagogy, grounded in the work of Freire, build upon the contested versions of social education (Batsleer, 2013) to critique the ideological basis of social policy and practice and young people. Practice with young people and their families is politically defined. Experiences of young people within their families are defined as troublesome within a discourse that marginalises and stigmatises certain groups in society. Practitioners therefore need to critically question what they do and how they do it – what learning means in their practice.

Social policy and to some extent youth work, address young people as a homogenous group. The tensions between generic and targeted youth work communicate a tendency to talk about social justice without a recognition that some young people are more powerful than others or the intersectionality of race, gender, class, sexuality and disability in young peoples' lived experiences.

Positively focussing on work with specific groups of young people can address some of the imbalances of power which exist between young people as well as on a broader societal level. The work undertaken on the outdoor residentials with the youth offending teams demonstrates the possibilities for work with families to take account of gender and to differentiate between gendered experiences of family. Outdoor and experiential education offer spaces to explore feminist ways of working, and work around masculinity which may involve single-gendered learning experiences as well as mixed family groups. Batsleer (2013) warns that

> Youth work, like other educational practices, is doomed to repeat and intensify the inherited patterns of social division and equality"

…unless it engages with power and difference within the social context. Family policy and practice is gendered, it exists within and perpetuates norms including those which shape and direct what it is to be male and female in society (Ahmed, 2017). If this is not acknowledged, if this is not considered, work with young people within their families will perpetuate inequality and the physical and structural violence against women, girls and those who dare to live non-normative gendered lives. Batsleer (2013) argues that feminist resources can propose different starting points for democratic education. This involves envisioning a different ontology of learning. Drawing on the work of Irigaray, she argues for a change in perspective which respects and is committed to the expression of difference and diversity.

> For social education and social pedagogy to cease to be complicit in the reproduction of social and cultural inequalities and the violence inherent them, a change of perspective is indeed required "(p.295)

In practice with young people within their families this means troubling our practice and questioning our starting points and our purpose and definitions of learning. It means being committed to the voice and empowerment of the young people work respecting the diversity of their experience and of their visons of family relationships.

14.3.9 Expert or generic practitioners

Working with the whole family in a non-therapeutic context, requires a breadth of understanding of services for adult and young people, and the capacity to build meaningful relationships with adults, young people and children. Multi-disciplinary teams should ideally include a balance of expertise and generic skills and knowledge. Practitioners may however find themselves working in relative isolation with families and finding themselves inexperienced in important aspects

of that practice. The support of colleagues with distributed expertise is invaluable in this work and knowing where professional boundaries lie.

14.3.10   Safe guarding

My research supports arguments that work with young people and their family's needs to shift away from risk averse practices (Bunting et al, 2017). However, for those practitioners working as key workers, the safe guarding agenda is dominating practice, procedures and training. The early days of key working in my study raised concerns about practitioner's lack of safe guarding awareness given the complexities of the families they were working with and the very close interface between the key work and social work roles. Therefore, key workers and other professionals working with families experiencing multiple disadvantage do need to have knowledge and expertise in safe guarding. However, the boundaries and responsibilities of their role need to be clearly defined.

14.3.11   Reflexivity

Developing critical practice requires practitioners to question, as openly as possible, their own reasons for and assumptions about their practice. Critical work with young people within their families asks the practitioner to uncover and name the norms and taken for granted that shape their ideas about families and why we work with them. Reflexive practice engages the practitioner in an ongoing examination of their relationships with the young people and families they work with, and their relationship to dominant ideas and discourse. Normative models of family based on white, middle class ideas of family, may for the white middle class practitioner involve blind spots including a failure to recognise alternative and diverse family practices.

Social pedagogy and youth work value reflective practice which supports the theorising of practice and practice development. Practice in any new context requires a commitment to individual and shared reflection. This study demonstrates the value of an organisational approach to reflection in developing coherent practice measured against its stated values and purpose. Ideally, shared reflection allows space for differences to be surfaced and examined. Listening to the perspective of practitioners who may bring different cultural and professional experiences to their practice is key in building a model of practice from the bottom up, informed by practitioners and the young people and families with whom we work.

14.4 Conclusion

My research suggests that work with young people within their families is a context for work with young people, not a discipline in its own right. The programmes considered in this research project – family residentials, outdoor residentials and key working – do not represent a single pedagogical

perspective. I began my research questioning whether a new pedagogical perspective might emerge from these organic programmes as together we articulated and examined emerging practice with young people and their families. This has not been the case. Instead, we have critically reflected on practice based evidence and the agendas that drive it and developed a model of critical practice. The case studies demonstrate the contribution that outdoor learning, experiential learning and informal learning can offer to the multidisciplinary practice of work with young people within their families. The school's residential programme is an example of informal, young-person centred practice in a formal education setting. It is an attempt to address broader social and political issues which impact on practice with young people and families through developing a different perspective on practice, learning. These approaches may combine with outdoor residential programmes to create a different space in which to explore family relationships. Youth workers and related professionals have an important role to play in developing work with families that foregrounds the experience, needs and perspectives of young people. The tradition of social education and new possibilities of social pedagogy provide further theoretical perspectives from which to critically reflect on practice and its social and political context.

15 FURTHER RESEARCH

This research project has identified a need for further research in a number of aspects of practice with young people within their families.

15.1 Young person-centred research exploring the experience of young people and family focused interventions.

Research by Wenham (2016) demonstrates the importance of listening to young people. If young people are to have a voice and participate in decisions that affect their lives beyond the immediate and personal, opportunities for young peoples' participation in research about work with families is vital. Developing young peoples' role as researchers themselves would contribute the process of critical questioning that underpins youth work practice.

Research with young people should also consider diversity recognising and valuing the perspectives of black and minority ethnic young people and young women, as well as the young men who are often targeted by policies concerned with criminal and anti-social behaviour.

Research into young people's experience of the targeted culture of youth work and young people's services in this period of austerity cuts could be a means of hearing the views of young people who are not heard in the ballot box, nor have an economic voice. As statutory involvement with young people is being diminished work with families is one of the few places that still offers opportunities to hear about young peoples' perspectives on poverty and social and educational policy.

15.2 Feminist perspectives

Work with families can be viewed through a number of lenses. Throughout my research project, feminist care ethics have repeatedly emerged as a perspective for further research. With an emphasis on the working relationship between practitioners and the young people and families they work with, further research could explore the meaning(s) of care within those relationships and how the context of the family impacts on practitioner's understanding and exercising of care.

Building on the history of feminist family studies, research from a feminist perspective could explore the experiences of black and minority ethnic young people and their families. Building on what is already known about cultural competency and anti-racist practice from the field of social work, further research can contribute to understanding of the experience of BME young people, including Muslim young people, and what working with them within their families means.

16 EVALUATION OF RESEARCH

My research has already made significant contributions to practice and to teaching. The research process created a rare opportunity for practitioners to critically reflect on their practice and take a lead in the development of their organisation's approach to work with young people within their families. This in turn supported the work of the case study organisations and facilitated the understanding and articulation of their ways of working with young people within their families. My data made a qualitative contribution to the external evaluation of schools Family Residential Programme.

The young people and families who took part in the research were supported in the storying of their experience. It was a privilege to be a small part of their stories and to experience the fun and enjoyment they had in narrating them. Additionally, the young people who took part in the research residentials learnt new skills in their role as co-researchers.

My research eventually took a broader perspective rather than focusing on one theoretical framework. This is both a strength and a disadvantage. It is indeed 'messy' research. I have attempted to retain the voices of young people in the narrative of this practice. It is only a small, partial voice and highlights the need for research which focusses specifically on the experience of young people. The practitioners' narratives of their practice opened up many possibilities for further research which I hope to explore in the future.

The research has identified a range of critical issues which can immediately inform the development of practice with young people within their families and the professional youth work training and education. I have learnt a lot from this process and know that it has made me a better teacher and has contributed to my work with students many of whom are now working with young people within their families.

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APPENDIX 1 ETHICAL CLEARANCE

10 June 2013

Our Ref: IC/SB

Kate Breeze
c/o Chris Loynes
Faculty of ABS
Outdoor Studies
Ambleside

University of Cumbria

Research Office
University of Cumbria
Lancaster Campus
Lancaster, LA1 3JD

Tel: 01524 384175
Fax: 01524 384385
Email: sonia.barnes@cumbria.ac.uk

Dear Kate

Request for Ethical Clearance – Ref 12/31
Project: Working with families through Outdoor and Experiential Learning -
Phase 3: data collection for substantive study

Thank you for your application which has been given consideration by the Panel. The Panel are delighted to give approval for your project. However, please can you respond to the following?

- Elaborate on how you will manage the participant/researcher role and the possible tensions this raises.

- You mention mindfulness in the application but the panel would like to see a little more detail on this.

Please give your response either in an email to sonia.barnes@cumbria.ac.uk or alternatively provide a revised application and send electronically to the same email address.

Yours sincerely

Dr Ian Convery
Chair
Ethics Advisory Panel

I went to one home and the son answered the door and said to me 'my mums not here', but I could see her sandals and her feet when the door was open. I didn't want to embarrass her. I just thought maybe she can't be bothered. Sometimes you don't want someone bothering you... you've just got to persevere. But I'll get in there, hopefully.

Sometimes M takes you out and introduces you...

Persevere: what does that look like.

It depends – some families are more welcoming, some really want your help and some are suspicious because they think you're a social worker or police, or you're going to spoil their life.. so it just depends. On what they're trying to hide as well – stuff they know they are doing wrong and they don't want you to find out.

Every time I've just said I'm here to support you, not be against you or upset you, so we'll just find out what we can do together.. It's not about me going in and taking over.. I help them identify what they feel they need.. sometimes they don't know.. you could say you need to do this and that but who am I to go in there and tell them what to do.. so I have to help them identify what they need to do, and they do. Just take time – the best way to do it is... slowly befriend, let them know that you're OK, not a threat, once they get to know you they are fine then... it takes a while.. these and a cup of tea..

I think you use your own people skills, some people and some people don't. Some people like people and some people don't, it's just something I'm naturally good at. I just think if you are friendly and you're not pushy... if you are friendly and say let's have a brew – you can't do that with everybody.

You just tell em who you are, what you want to do... here to find out about you – that's usually then they talk about their kids. Most of them don't know what they want – most are single mums, they don't know who they are, they've lost their identity... so its sort of unpicking stuff. You just find out what they're like.

I went to one family with D – he was saying what do you like and she didn't know. And then I looked at her house – you can tell a lot by people's houses... and thought she's made them herself…. I said do you kike making stuff... an she said I love making stuff and she went on about what she's made... and that's when we got her to make some stuff here... cus she was suffering from depression that helped her…. She came to have a look here and chose her own material. I think they sold some of them

Why did you do that?

Cus when you are working with families... sometimes I think people can get in a rut and can only see that. And can't see anything bigger. So it's getting to know em and finding out what they like. I think that's a good way of helping them find themselves more and to maybe get them into work, even doing courses... to support them and get them out of their real life... not that their life;'s wrong .. There's just so much potential in families. You can see all the potential, all the things that they like doing and they want to do and it's just helping them identify that. Like... I love my families... they're not my families but... my first family... there's been a lot... C is 15 and he got beat up a year and half ago by 5 boys who said they would find him at school so he was scared to go to school. So he started having panic attacks and were scare d to go out. He were put under CAMHS but basically he got left. No education for a year and a half.. The education system... he got lost in all of it. Nut when I started speaking with him... he wanted to do his exams... and I thought how can you do your exams you haven't been to school for a year, but then I thought well he is bright... he had a mentor that used to come to house.. Who am I to judge that... and I thought if this is what he wants to do, do it anyway. So I got him back to do his exams which he was really scared of. His mum said 'he's not going to go... then I spoke to his head teacher who said 'I bet you now he's not going to come... he won't come here... he messes about... he won't do his exams ... and if he does he'll come and then he'll go. It was so sad cus I looked at the emails – they had not faith in him.. I thought you've just given up on him. There's so much potential in him that you should give him a chance. So he's just done his exams... English... maths and it was really hard cus when I took him he could hardly breathe... I said I'm going to come with you and I'm going to support you and I'm going to wait round that corner and I'm not going to go. And I'll stay there. So I waited for hi and I remember looking round... like you check on your kids, to se if they're OK and I could see him... he were doing it and I were so proud of him. And his mum as well, I were texting. ... So I were interacting with her and she felt proud about that. He did all his exams and he's going to be a dad as well. I feel that I made a difference to him...

Colour codes:

Xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx how families respond – assessing need

Xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx practitioners perspective

Xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx what key workers do

Xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx key worker's approach

Xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx   explaining practice "I think/I feel"

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXX working with the young person