'YOUTH WORKERS - JUST "ADULT SOMEBODIES" IN THE LIVES OF YOUNG PEOPLE?'

AN INQUIRY INTO YOUTH WORKERS' PERSPECTIVES ON PROFESSIONAL YOUTH WORK

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Social Science

Maynooth University

April 2020

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I, Sasha Noonan, certify that the Thesis is my own work and I have not obtained a Degree in this University or elsewhere on the basis of this Doctoral Thesis.

ABSTRACT

Youth work in Ireland is evolving from a primarily voluntary activity, engaging young people in out-of-school leisure time activities, to one where there is increasing state involvement, along with a process of professionalisation which now sees some 1400 people employed as youth workers (NYCI 2012). These changes take place against a backdrop of an increased focus on pre-determined outcomes, and an emphasis on 'targeted youth work' (Kiely & Meade 2018). Youth workers are challenged in this context to articulate the values, the processes, and the outcomes of youth work as a particular sort of practice, based on particular sets of relationships.

To date, with a few notable exceptions (Devlin & Gunning 2009, Melaugh 2015), youth workers' voices have not been prioritised in youth work literature. This research seeks to rebalance that situation by engaging professional youth workers in a narrative inquiry process to elicit their perspectives on professional youth work.

Narrative inquiry, using the terms story and narrative interchangeably, is based on the idea that narratives/stories are both the phenomenon to be studied, and the method of study (Pinnegar & Daynes 2006). The narrative process employed engaged professional youth workers in multiple conversations about before, becoming and being youth workers, eliciting 'stories of experience' (Connelly & Clandinin 1990). These stories were then 'restoried' to identify four key findings, namely:

- The participants in this research can be termed 'accidental youth workers' because of the nature of their pathways into the professions.
- It is essential that youth workers have the opportunity to discuss their practice and identity, in order for them to be, and to be seen as, a collective group of professionals.
- Participants stress that youth work is distinctive as a profession in a number of ways, including the means of preparing for it, and the types of learning and knowledge required for its practice.
- Finally, a growing emphasis on outcomes, evidence and value for money has, according to the participants, 'disadvantaged' youth workers, and youth work as a profession.

Sociological perspectives on the professions, particularly the work of Evetts (2011) which focuses on professionalism as both an organisational and occupational discourse, added another dimension to the analysis. Evetts (2011) examines features of professionalism which both support and create tensions for professions working with people. I propose that a code of ethics/ethical practice, and a strong education and training infrastructure, is essential if youth work as a value-based practice is to survive and thrive in Ireland. Creating systems to support and promote youth workers' voices is central to the success of this endeavour.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This page is very important. Though I have said it in many conversations with the people I mention here, I now get the opportunity to put down in words my heartfelt appreciation for, and say thank you to, those who have supported and helped me throughout this journey. I am extremely thankful to:

My supervisory panel who have supported and guided me every single step of the way. To Hilary: for being a youth worker throughout this whole process. Your youth work approach with me throughout this whole journey of academia is what has made it possible for me to complete this thesis. Your patience as you always tried to find ways with me to address the challenges that arose, and facilitating me to get to the next step, has never gone unnoticed and I am extremely grateful. To Maurice: for always greeting me with a calmness and an openness for any ideas or suggestions I had along the way. For your consistently honest and well thought out words of wisdom, and your meticulous feedback, which I have learned so much from.

My fellow students on the Doctoral programme, Oonagh, Dave, Tommy, Michael and Sinead. The spaces I had with you were invaluable since the beginning. The many conversations and advice on where to go with my ideas, down to actually taking my thesis off me, and reading through parts, has been greatly appreciated. Also, to my work colleagues who have had nothing but kind words of support and encouragement since I started working with you five years ago.

To the individuals who, at different times right up to the last month of completing this thesis have accompanied me on this journey. You have all taught me a lot, but most of all you have kept me company and helped me believe I was able to finish it.

To my friends for never questioning or getting annoyed at my absence for weeks or sometimes months on end, and always providing a space for me to switch off for a while.

To my parents Eugene and Pamela. Dad and Mam you have always encouraged us to do our best and promoted the importance of education at home.

To my sisters Claire and Rebecca, brothers-in-law, nieces and nephews for listening, understanding and making me laugh.

My fiancé Joe. I am not able to put down in words how important you have been throughout this whole process, but I will hopefully show you in the coming years. The support you have given me by just listening and never giving out as I spent endless weekends at my computer, and having to put trips, days and evenings out on hold, is indescribable. I am very lucky to have you in my life.

Finally, thank you to the professional youth workers who took the time to share your stories with me. Your humour, honesty, approachability and insights legitimised my research endeavour and fuelled my determination to complete it every time I heard and read your words .The concern and belief you have in young people and what they can do is fervent and is exactly why youth workers voices need to be heard.

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GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS

BOBF	Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures
CDYSB	City of Dublin Youth Services Board
CE	Community Employment (Scheme)
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
DCYA	Department of Children and Youth Affairs
DES	Department of Education and Science
EC	European Community
EU	European Union
IYWA	Irish Youth Workers Association
LDTF	Local Drug Task Force
NPM	New Public Management
NQSF	National Quality Standards Framework
NSETS	North South Education and Training Standards
NYCI	National Youth Council of Ireland
NYWAC	National Youth Work Advisory Committee
NYWDP	National Youth Work Development Plan
OMC	Office of the Minister for Children
OMCYA	Office of the Minster for Children and Youth Affairs
SPY	Special Projects for Youth
TYFS	Targeted Youth Funding Scheme
VFMPR	Value for Money and Policy Review of Youth Programmes
YACVic	Youth Affairs Council Victoria, Australia
YAU	Youth Affairs Unit
YPFSF	Young Peoples' Facilities and Services Fund

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Informed by a particular theoretical base and a distinct set of values enacted in practice, youth work in Ireland evolved from a purely voluntary endeavour to a professional occupation (Devlin 2017) which now employs over 1400 full-time staff working alongside 40,000 volunteers (NYCI & Indecon 2012 p. 45). Associated with this evolution has been a change in how youth workers are seen and see themselves. From volunteers and voluntary organisations acting out of philanthropic, charitable and social control motives, youth workers are now also educated and qualified practitioners who are paid to practice youth work in Ireland. However, for those involved in youth work, professionalisation was not inevitable. Instead it occurred within wider social and political contexts resulting in a unique situation amongst the social professions where volunteers substantially outnumber paid staff.

Since the 1960s, youth work has been incrementally recognised by the Irish government and this is apparent with the publication of the Bruton (1977), O'Sullivan (1980) and Costello (1984) reports, and more recently the Youth Work Act 2001. Additionally, the National Youth Work Development Plan 2003-2007 (DES 2003) [NYWDP], Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures (DCYA 2014a) [BOBF] and the National Youth Strategy (DCYA 2015) have all contributed to bringing more state control. Conversely, Kiely (2009 p. 12) suggests global changes and forces, e.g. the banking crisis in 2008, have contributed to marginalising practices underpinned by specific values such as empowerment, equality and inclusiveness. What's more, programmatic approaches measuring pre-determined outcomes against criteria predominate, with a move to tendering for services becoming increasingly apparent, e.g. Value For Money Policy Review (DCYA 2014b) [VFMPR].

1.2 Research Context

In the context of a rapidly changing practice environment, youth workers are challenged to communicate youth work as a distinctive practice to diverse audiences including policy makers and funders (Spence 2007). Akin to other professions, especially those working with people, youth work is being shaped by the wider policy and professional discourses. This research is concerned with youth workers' perspectives and specifically their experiences in

this context. Firstly, the question asks who those professional youth workers are, considering there is an 'absence of centralised record keeping systems'. Secondly, how do they understand their role seeing as there is 'evidence that the paid workforce within youth work is well educated with approximately two-thirds of paid staff employed in a number of roles educated to third level degree standard or above' (NYCI & Youthnet 2013 p. 6), yet the focus of their degrees, whether youth work or otherwise, is unknown.

In the remainder of this chapter I provide a rationale for this study through (i) describing how my own position as a practitioner researcher contributed to identifying the inquiry of this study and, (ii) identifying the gap in literature. I conclude by describing the purpose of and approach to the research, and by outlining the structure of the thesis.

• Background to the Study

Following qualifying as a youth worker, I started working in 2007 shortly before the 'global financial crisis' of 2008. This 'crisis' led directly to the introduction of an Irish austerity programme in 2009 which disproportionately impacted the Irish youth work sector (Devlin 2012, Jenkinson 2013, Melaugh 2015, NYCI 2016). Certainly, austerity does not account for all the changes that took place and continue to affect youth work, but it is the backdrop to my research interest and the conversations I have with professional youth workers in this research. As a professional youth worker, I have encountered many challenges associated with my own practice and identity. Whilst I have always been confident to speak about my practice and call myself a professional youth worker amongst colleagues, I have faced difficulties in communicating and articulating my practice and identity to professionals outside of youth work.

Funders increasing focus on pre-determined outcomes foster a disparity between what they consider the value of youth work to be, and what youth workers do (Spence 2007). For example, a young person speaking out in a group after admitting to the youth worker – me in this scenario – that it was a challenge they needed to overcome for many months is constituted as an achievement and therefore, an outcome for me as the youth worker, but not the funder. As a result, this type of detail is generally omitted from final reports leading to external audiences' misinterpretations of youth workers' practice and identity.

Of course, my individual experiences are influenced by the broader political, economic and social environment and the ongoing changes occurring, therefore I am interested in other

professional youth workers' experiences in it. I want to explore our experiences as a professional group, how we individually understand similarities and differences, and how we manage this collectively. This is the impetus behind doing this research and why I take on the dual role of a practitioner and a researcher (Costley 2010). The role necessitates critical reflexivity (Finlay & Gough 2003) to facilitate research participation which 'promotes an engagement in the process that is educational and developmental for both researchers and practitioners' (Issitt & Spence 2005 p. 79). This aspect of the research is explored further in Chapter 4.

While consideration of recent political, economic and social changes in Ireland has occurred in other social professions, e.g. social work (Featherstone 2011), this has tended not to occur in youth work, hence the value of this study focusing on *Irish Youth Workers' Perspectives on Professional Youth Work.* That said, there is a considerable body of literature to assist this (DES 2003, Devlin 2010, 2012, Kiely 2009, Melaugh 2015, Treacy 2009). Various perspectives discuss what youth work is, the principles informing it, and its contribution to young people's lives. Moreover, interpretations in the sociology of the professions are useful for supporting insights into global forces and movements alongside Irish policy and legislative changes occurring. This helps make sense of what youth work is evolving into in terms of its practice base and professional status. However, despite a few notable exceptions (Devlin & Gunning 2009, Melaugh 2015), the tendency for Irish literature to focus on policy has resulted in youth workers' perspectives receiving little attention.

Similar to 'In Defence of Youth Work' – set up in response to the dismantling of youth work as a statutory service in England – and research by Spence et al. (2006), my study aims to prioritise youth workers' stories. This is done by asking practitioners about their experiences of professional youth work and illustrates why practice knowledge needs to be explained by youth workers themselves. In doing so it allows the stories of practice to stand alongside stories about practice (Spence et al. 2006). The study makes space for youth workers to contribute to, challenge, support and contextualise the stories that are told about them.

This study focuses on the South West of Ireland as previous research with youth workers occurred, for the most part, in Dublin (Farrelly et al. 2010, Melaugh 2015). Drawing from relevant literature, analysis and discussion concentrates on the following areas: youth work as a profession, features of youth work, education and training, youth work management,

professionalism and professionalisation, and finally, policy and austerity (Bessant 2004, Davies 2005, Devlin 2010, Hughes et al 2014, Melaugh 2015, Sercombe 2010, Young 1999). Therefore, considering the broader political, economic and social context, this study examines youth workers' perspectives on professional youth work by asking participants about their experiences of it. This research sets out to explore professional youth workers' experiences' through their stories.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research is to understand professional youth workers' perspectives on professional youth work through their own experiences in order to prioritise their voices and contribute to existing literature. Examining individuals experiences through their stories reveals how wider contextual changes play out in the daily practice of youth workers. In this context, professional youth work is usefully explored using the concept of professionalism as a discourse, particularly as an organisational and occupational discourse (Evetts 2011).

In Chapter 3, I outline perspectives in the sociology of the professions concentrating on professionalism, the focus for more contemporary theorising on the professions. I explore Evetts' (2006, 2011, 2012) analysis of professionalism as a discourse and what organisational and occupational discourses are. Using these, she considers the current context for professions, particularly those working with people, e.g. youth work, and the challenges, tensions and opportunities they encounter.

However, it can be difficult for practitioners to see the relevance of sociological analysis within their professional lives and practices. Youth workers understand and communicate their practice through stories of experiences, and it is through their stories the principles of practice are emphasised (Spence 2007). That said, they also describe difficulties with explaining their work beyond its practice context due to the nature of the work, e.g. having to make on the spot decisions without pre-planning. Usefully, discourses of professionalism refer to areas such as discretionary decision making in complex cases which support an analysis of concerns like these in the participants' stories. As a result, a more in-depth understanding of ongoing difficulties for youth workers trying to explain what they do and how beyond their practice environments, and importantly how they might challenge these, is possible. Hence, hearing youth workers' experiences through their own stories of practice is

of considerable value when trying to understand the dilemmas they currently contend with as individual professionals and as a group of professionals.

The challenge for youth work, as I see it, it to resist becoming merely a set of practices which addresses externally imposed outcomes, and to remain grounded in the values, principles, theories and practice-base of youth work. A developing shift away from value-based explanations of practice to more technical explanations is explored in Chapter 3.

1.4 The Research Design

As described in Chapter 4, the study adopts a qualitative approach to address the research question and is significantly influenced by narrative inquiry. This approach was chosen because of its compatibility with youth workers use of conversation in their daily practice and because it is through youth workers' own explanations that youth work practice is understood best (Spence 2007). Previously, English research about youth work has omitted youth workers' voices and, therefore, the potential they may have to shape policy (Issitt & Spence 2005). Also, as noted (see Section 1.2), research on youth work in Ireland has thus far focused on policy rather than youth workers' perspectives. As I am a practitioner researcher, my own position is subjective, therefore, by explaining my philosophical underpinnings and rationale for the methodological choices in Chapter 4, the suitability of a qualitative approach is apparent. Narrative inquiry necessitates that several long and in-depth interviews, engaging a small number of participants, are undertaken. Research participants come from three different organisations in Limerick City and County to present the individuality of settings professional youth workers' practice in. The research methodology creates a space for them to share their experiences, and through their stories their perspectives on professional youth work become apparent. Hence, knowledge is produced 'with' them as opposed to 'on' them.

Considering the background and context, the research methodology is guided by the following objectives:

- To facilitate six youth workers to tell their stories of practice, highlighting the individuality and unique complexities within them.
- To carry out the research in a manner that enables the participants to communicate the principles of their practice through conversation.

- To facilitate a space to be self-reflective, essential for all social professionals (Schon 2001).

1.5 Conclusion

This chapter has given an outline of the research while summarising the focus of the proceeding chapters. It states the research aim which enquires into youth workers' perspectives on professional youth work considering the local, national and global context. Who professional youth workers are, and how they understand their role, is of considerable interest in building this inquiry along with highlighting my own position as the impetus for this research.

The rationale for carrying out this study is grounded in the gap in literature, i.e. the absence of youth workers' perspectives on professional youth work in Ireland. Moreover, it is rooted in youth workers' experiences. These two areas are discussed further in Chapters 2 and 3.

Chapter 4 describes the research design – influenced by the purpose of this study – to explore youth workers' experiences, and so it focuses on creating space to elicit participants' stories and prioritise their voices.

Analysis highlighted an overall plotline, Before, Becoming and Being, and individual experiences in this plotline are represented through seven vignettes. These vignettes are included in the three findings Chapters, 5, 6 and 7, titled ***'Luck more so than a grand design'***, ***'Adult somebodies'***, and ***'Youth workers out and about'***.

Informed by relevant literature, Chapter 8 discusses the key themes from the plotline under the following headings: Various Routes to Professional Youth Work, Practice and Identity, Communicating Youth Work to Others, and finally, The Policy and Funding Context.

Chapter 9 concludes the inquiry as it revisits the approach and findings, outlines the contributions, limitations and implications of the research, and finally suggests recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2: IRISH YOUTH WORK: AN OVERVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Chapter 1 provides a background to and rationale for this inquiry into Youth workers' perspectives *on Professional Youth Work*, perspectives that are under-represented in the literature. These perspectives are discussed using relevant literature on policy, theory and practice. This literature is reviewed in Chapters 2 and 3, and explores the evolution of youth work in Ireland from a purely voluntary endeavour to an increasingly professionalised practice.

2.2 Historical Overview

• The Origins of Irish Youth Work

Irish Youth Work owes its origins to the late 19th century and I will identify some key moments in its development through the 20th and early part of the 21st century. Like in Britain, youth work in late 19th century Ireland was part of a wider philanthropic movement – made up of mostly volunteers – seeking to 'rescue' young people perceived to be in need (Banks 2004).

Despite commonalities in the birth of youth work, a closer look at Ireland's religious and political context reveals how and why Irish youth work evolved differently from that in Britain (Devlin 2010). Since Ireland was established as a Free State after the Rising of 1916, and became a Republic in 1949, young people in Ireland were seen as vital in building a state that was distinctly Irish and by extension Catholic. At the time, the principle of subsidiarity, a concept drawn from the teachings of German Catholic intellectuals, emphasised the care and welfare of society was not the responsibility of the state but individuals, families and religious associations. As a result, the Irish state was largely relegated to the role of bystander and later funder with voluntarism central to social and welfare support thus influencing the increased development of voluntary youth organisations.

Voluntarism informed youth work delivery in Ireland for most of the 20th century and supported the establishment of organisations such as the Boy Scouts and the lesser known Na Fianna Éireann (Hurley 1992). These organisations were more often underpinned by

religious values and political agendas (the main ones being "Catholic/nationalist and "Protestant/unionist") (Devlin 2010 p. 96). Certainly, the alignment of Catholicism with Irish identity ensured the Catholic Church retained the primary role in the co-ordination and sculpting of youth work for most of the 20th century while the states influence remained secondary. This was increasingly apparent as local youth clubs were set up and run by volunteer youth leaders throughout Ireland. However, from the 1940s on there was a gradual shift in both positions as government concerns with the economic and political climate grew.

Between the 1940s and the 1960s government turned to youth organisations not once but twice for help to address concerns with the youth population. An ally to the Catholic church at this point, government sought help from youth organisations for the first time in the 1940s to address the increasing levels of youth unemployment and rising emigration to Britain (Devlin 2010), and again in the late 1960s due to increased social expenditure, a growing population and the publication of The Albemarle Report (1960) which recognised the role of the Youth Services there considering 'the anticipated needs of the labour market' (The Albemarle Report 1960 p. 10). Moreover, the 1950s and 1960s saw youth organisations like The National Youth Foundation undergoing substantial development (Hurley 1992), strengthening their presence in Irish society and therefore their ability to support government. Undeniably, the events between the 1940s and 1960s prompted two fundamental changes for Irish youth work, namely, a shift in the role of church and state, and also, the beginnings of a youth policy process.

In April 1966, Irish youth work and government began engaging with each other as representatives of all voluntary youth organisations in Ireland met with the Department of Education. Following this, the National Youth Council of Ireland [NYCI] was established in January 1968 and became responsible for supporting policy development and co-ordination of key voluntary youth organisations in Ireland, a role it maintains to this day. As state recognition grew, so too did the publication of influential reports identifying the role and contribution of youth work in Ireland and, importantly, a need to include it at policy level. For example, under the Department of Education, 'The Development of Youth Services' prepared by the NYCI in 1975, and included in 'The Bruton Report' in 1977, resulted in small monetary and policy actions for youth work (Hurley 1992).

The Report of the O'Sullivan Committee in 1980 called 'The Development of Youth Work Services in Ireland' produced no less than 100 recommendations concerning the needs of youth work and young people, and highlighted 'questions of voluntarism, the nature and effectiveness of youth programmes, social disadvantage, youth employment and the role of statutory agencies and the Department' (Hurley 1992 p. 19). Particularly interesting for youth organisations was the attention this report gave to the employment of youth workers and their role. It also commissioned reports such as the 'Research Report on Youth Organisations' and 'A survey of 12 youth clubs' (Treacy 1989 as cited in Hurley 1992 p. 19) which was the first suggestion that government were interested in assessing youth work. This report, along with the more recent 'Mapping the Work Force in the Youth Work Sector in the Republic of Ireland' (NYCI & Youthnet 2013) – noted in Chapter 1 in relation to my research inquiry – acknowledges that youth workers in Ireland have always come from a diversity of backgrounds. The Report of the O'Sullivan Committee (1980) states:

> Some youth workers enter with a third-level qualification, normally in arts or social science. Others qualify through years of experience in voluntary youth work or similar areas and may also have secured relevant certificates or diplomas through the various courses available. O'Sullivan Committee (1980)

In 1983 the National Youth Policy Committee known as the Costello Committee (chaired by Justice Declan Costello) commenced its work, and by 1984 they had produced a significant set of recommendations. Certainly, the Costello Report (1984) is a milestone, putting in place important building blocks for modern youth work in Ireland. Ultimately though, Irish youth work policy has been somewhat piecemeal, as has been the level of responsibility.

• Building Blocks for Modern Youth Work

Undoubtedly, the Costello Report (1984) introduced several significant firsts for Irish youth work including defining the task of youth work, its process and the centrality of critical social education for the first time. Treacy (2009 p. 183) explains, 'It emphasised the empowerment of young people and encouraged youth workers to engage in processes that enabled young people to become critical participants in society: a view of youth work more in line with the Critical Social Education model'. It also recommends the structure of youth work be reformed, and for the first time in Irish youth work, a clear structure for a 'National Youth

Service, distinct and independent but with links to other services for youth' (Hurley1992 p. 23) was proposed and welcomed by youth work organisations.

Furthermore, while previous reports (Bruton 1977, O'Sullivan 1980) concentrate on the volunteer youth worker as central in youth work – placing paid workers in a supportive role – the Costello Committee identifies a need for 'the employment of youth workers' (National Youth Policy Committee 1984 p. 122). It advises the allocation of funding to youth work at the time made it unsustainable and recommends the establishment of training at university level for youth workers. This is discussed later in this section.

The Costello Report (1984) can – for the reasons I have just outlined – be conceived of as an instrumental and positive contribution providing building blocks for the development of Irish youth work over the next thirty years. That said, the course of Irish youth work has not run smoothly by any means. Harvey (1994) describes an environment where scarce resources prompted rivalry and competition amongst youth work organisations impacting how they explain and justify their work. Moreover, many valuable recommendations from the Costello Report (1984) were either unplanned and *ad hoc*, or were not realised for many years. For example, in 1988 a grant scheme financed by the National Lottery was introduced by the Department of Education and provided extraordinary amounts of funding for youth work to target young people in marginalised and disadvantaged communities. This provoked an 'influx' (Treacy 1992 p. 15) of mostly untrained, unqualified and other qualified youth workers by organisations that were unprepared for this shift. However, on a more positive note this coincided with the establishment of the first under-graduate programme for youth work in Maynooth University, though it was at a time when the Irish youth population was actually falling. Thus far, despite '*The purpose and outcomes of youth work. Report to the Interagency Group*' (Devlin & Gunning 2009), there has been little literature on the experiences and perspectives of these workers, hence the importance of my research.

In 1997, the first youth work act was introduced and enacted but was ultimately unsuccessful. Its reliance on the provision of an infrastructure envisaged but never realised in the Education Act 1997 made it unworkable. Nevertheless, two significant parts of the 1997 Youth Work Act were adhered to and contributed to the realisation of the Youth Work Act in 2001. These included the recognition of the NYCI as the national organisation representing the voluntary youth work sector. Also, the National Youth Work Advisory Committee (NYWAC) was set

up to advise the Minister on matters concerning youth work services and policies. Finally, in 2001 the Youth Work Act was passed, and for the first time in Irish youth work it places responsibility on government and the state to 'define the development, structure and funding of youth work in Ireland' (Jenkinson 2013 p. 7).

• Definition and Structure for Youth Work in Ireland

The Youth Work Act 2001 provides an overarching definition of and direction for youth work to internal stakeholders and external audiences, as:

> a planned programme of education designed for the purpose of aiding and enhancing the personal and social development of young persons through their voluntary participation, and which is –
>
> Complimentary to their formal, academic or vocational education and training; and
>
> Provided primarily by voluntary youth work organisations
>
> (Youth Work Act 2001)

While the Act acknowledges paid youth workers as employees of youth work organisations, they are not called professional youth workers. The Act legislates that all Voluntary Youth Councils give only one quarter of places to paid youth workers and the rest to volunteers. This, I argue, supports the belief that paid youth workers, i.e. professional youth workers, and particularly their views, are not of relative importance to volunteers. Considering this, it is not surprising youth workers' voices are largely absent in the literature.

• The National Youth Work Development Plan

In 2003, NYWAC produced a plan for the development of Irish youth work. Focusing on the enhancement and support of professionalism, the NYWDP (Department of Education and Science [DES] 2003) recommends a set of actions to ensure standards of quality, efficiency and safety are in place. The NYWDP (DES 2003) outlines a strategy which includes several markers that are significant for youth work as a profession, e.g.

- Endorsement Body (NSETS)
- Routes to Certification
- Registration
- Professional Association

Interestingly, the NYWDP (DES 2003) states not everyone can be a youth worker, just as not everyone can be a teacher or a doctor, and links youth work with the term profession. Yet this encompassed those who are paid as well as those who volunteer. 'Professional' in this sense does not refer to a salaried position or status but rather to the vocational and ethical underpinning of the role. Professional in the plan does not signify or distinguish a full-time, paid youth worker from one who volunteers and there is little reference to the distinctive, yet complementary roles played by professional and voluntary youth workers adding to my increased interest in the concept of profession in this research.

• Education and Training

While the NYWDP (DES 2003) uses the term professional youth worker to denote a quality of approach rather than a status, it does call youth workers professional educators. Looking at the continuing development of paid and voluntary youth workers through ongoing training, the plan also focuses on increasing youth work education and training. This was significant and overdue, not only because of the increasing numbers of paid youth workers – mostly unqualified and untrained – but also because policy had only attended to in-service rather than pre-service training up to that point accepting professional youth workers may or may not have education in youth work theory or practice.

Until 2003, the education and training for professional youth workers had been largely uncoordinated, inconsistent and fragmented nationally. Workers availed of extra-mural training related to leadership and issues relevant to young people at the time, while the establishment of third level programmes, though encouraging, were limited to only a few areas in Ireland, making them inaccessible to many. For example, Maynooth University began delivering a youth work diploma in 1985, while University College Cork [UCC] partnered with Youth Work Ireland (National Organisation supporting over 21 local youth clubs through an integrated service model) in 1993 to offer a degree in youth work and with Brunel University, in 1995, to provide a Masters in Youth Studies. However, despite this, an overarching framework ensuring consistent, theoretically informed youth work practice throughout Ireland was absent.

Indeed, Treacy (1992) highlights some inconsistency in the methods used amongst youth workers and their interpretations of youth work principles and approaches while Harvey (1994) identifies a workforce without a clear, consistent theoretical base and intellectual

infrastructure. As noted, the NYWDP (DES 2003) recognises this by recommending the establishment of a body to professionally endorse youth work programmes across Ireland. Action 4.1 states 'a youth work validation body should be established, with the purpose of developing a comprehensive framework for accreditation and certification in youth work' (2003 p. 27).

In 2006, the establishment of the North South Education and Training Standards Committee [NSETS] marked the realisation of Action 4.1. Assessing existing and newly developing youth work programmes, NSETS approves qualifications which are professionally recognised across England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales, with a vision for 'A world class workforce for youth work on the island of Ireland'. Seven youth work programmes in Irish higher education institutes have acquired NSETS endorsement to date. These include:

- Carlow Institute of Technology
- the Centre for Youth Ministry
- Dundalk Institute of Technology
- Maynooth University
- Open University
- University College Cork
- University of Ulster.

2.3 Irish Youth Work: 2008-Present

• Double Trouble – Austerity Funding and Staff Cuts

While some actions were realised, the NYWDP (DES 2003) was never fully funded or implemented, and after 2007 any further attempts to develop youth work were hampered by the downturn in the global economy. In 2008, the Irish banking and construction sectors collapsed and one in every seven jobs were lost (O'Farrell 2013). As a result, the Irish Government introduced a programme of austerity made up of two thirds spending cuts and one third revenue increases (O'Farrell 2013). Like many sectors receiving state funding at the time, Irish youth work was not exempt from the blows of austerity and sustained massive cuts to funding for youth work specific programmes.

'Youth Services took a disproportionate hit between 2008 and 2014 with cuts four and a half times general Government budget reductions' (NYCI 2016 p. 5). Indeed, this highlighted the

relatively low status attributed to youth work in the policy and funding arenas as a reduction of 31.7% in funding for youth work occurred between 2008 and 2015 (NYCI 2018 p. 4). While funding has gradually increased in the past four years, levels have still not returned to those of pre-austerity Ireland. For example, in 2016 funding was increased by €1.1 million in current and €2.25 million in capital expenditure (NYCI 2016) while in 2018, €58.9 million (NYCI 2018 p. 4) was granted to youth work, yet this is still 20% below the €73.1 million given in 2008.

It seems austerity brought a series of inescapable funding decisions, decisions with consequences still impacting the youth work sector today. However, the sector resisted this austerity, producing various publications, e.g. 'Assessment on the Economic Value of Youth Work' (NYCI & Indecon 2012), which argued the importance of youth work's contribution to Irish society and for the first time, the number of professional youth workers in Ireland was identified – 1,397(NYCI & Indecon 2012).

Shortly after this publication, 'Mapping the Work Force in the Youth Work Sector in the Republic of Ireland' (NYCI & Youthnet 2013 p. 6) exclaims that 'ongoing cuts to budgets have impacted severely on service delivery and organisations are mindful of their resources and how they are perceived'. At a time of unremitting cuts when valuable youth work resources, including youth workers' jobs, were being lost, this really was a call to halt these reductions. Additionally, 'a move away from association to individualised work' was developing, and the accumulation of cuts to youth work prompted professional youth workers to mobilise themselves as an association in 2013, *The Irish Youth Workers Association* [IYWA] (Melaugh 2015 p. 110).

Certainly, funding cuts were not the only changes emerging after 2008 as responsibility for youth work was transferred from one government department to another. After nearly twenty five years in the Department of Education (the Department of Education and Science [DES]), youth work became the responsibility of the Office of the Minister for Children [OMC] and later the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs [OMCYA] whose role was mostly concerned with health, but also education and youth justice. This move signalled the emergence of particular tensions and challenges for youth workers and youth work organisations, e.g. 'conflicting ethos or principle (as in the case of youth justice services and the question of 'voluntary participation') or the issue of what age group of 'young people'

youth work should concern itself with' (Devlin 2008 p. 52) which are not only unresolved to date, but I would argue that, even with a move to the Department of Children and Youth Affairs [DCYA] in 2011, have grown exponentially.

Established in 2011, the DCYA oversees policy and provision for children, young people and families. In the DCYA, the Youth Affairs Unit prioritises non-formal education, i.e. youth work, for young people to develop their personal and social skills with a particular emphasis on socially disadvantaged young people. While here, the funding cuts have forced youth work organisations to explore all available options for funding (Jenkinson 2013) resulting in increased expectations for youth workers to work with specific groups of young people.

Despite continuous reductions in funding for youth work specific programmes during austerity, funding from sources prioritising child protection and welfare in addition to diversion and rehabilitation actually increased. Since the publication of The Ryan Report (Ryan 2009) – highlighting countless acts of abuse against children and young people – a heightened awareness and impetus around the protection and welfare of children and young people is prevalent at policy level. Tusla – the government agency responsible for child protection and family support – and the Irish Youth Justice Service have increasingly provided significant amounts of funding for work with more targeted young people, i.e. those qualifying under the family support or youth justice remits. Since the introduction of austerity, youth work organisations have increasingly sought funding from more affluent sources to ensure the existence and sustainability of their services (Jenkinson 2013, Melaugh 2015).

Youth work managers described the downturn as a time of survival for youth work organisations (Jenkinson 2013). I suggest that the impact to youth work as a value-based practice needs to be considered, as youth work's relationship with the state was reconfigured and made way for the holy trinity of outcomes, evidence and value for money, a trio all too familiar to youth workers today. Treacy (2009) warned that 'funding does not come without strings attached and funding pressures threaten to submerge many of the distinctive and diverse traditions that youth workers have long championed'. Elsewhere, English youth workers were being urged to challenge current policy decisions as funding for work with targeted young people is prioritised (Davies 2015)

In addition to location changes and funding cuts, there is concern for the approaches to assessing youth work programmes. In 2010, the National Quality Standards Framework [NQSF] (OMCYA 2010) was introduced as an assessment framework for youth programmes. It outlines a staff-led – unfortunately, not professionally led – process, and assesses the outcomes. However, despite the emphasis on programmes, its ten steps reflect a youth work process making it somewhat familiar to youth workers. The same cannot be said for the Review – embodying the holy trinity of outcomes, evidence and value for money – which was introduced four years later.

In 2014, the DCYA identified areas where further savings could be made from their department for the wider Irish economy. A policy review of youth programmes, called the *Value for Money and Policy Review of Youth Programmes* [VFMPR] (DCYA 2014b), focusing specifically on youth programmes and using measurement structures was undertaken but failed to recognise the youth work process. Exacerbating youth works marginalised (Spence 2007) position further, the Public Spending Code provides guidance on which programmes to choose, advising 'Departments should focus particularly on the more discretionary areas of programme expenditure, where issues of both effectiveness and efficiency feature strongly' (DCYA 2014b p. 2). Worryingly, the Review embodied a technical reasoning throughout.

Globally, social professions are increasingly challenged to explain what they do and how due to a prevailing technical rationale dominating evaluation structures (de St Croix 2017). These structures fail to recognise, let alone understand or engage with, the centrality of process over product in the social professions and, as a result, professions like youth work are viewed as problematic for evidence gathering and evaluation (Issitt & Spence 2005, Schon 2001). More often, practitioners end up telling funders what they want to hear (Kiely 2009). The VFMPR (DCYA 2014b) assessed whether it was of economic worth to sustain projects under three specific youth programmes set up under the following funding streams:

- Special Projects for Youth
- Young People's Facilities and Services Fund 1 and 2
- Local Drugs Task Force projects

The final VFMPR report (DCYA 2014b) made twelve key recommendations related to the structure and management of youth funding schemes and these are apparent in the structure of Irish youth work funding today (referred to in Chapter 8).

• Survival: At What Cost?

All things considered, the trajectory of youth work after 2008 appears extremely uncertain based on my own experiences as a professional youth worker then. During this time, colleagues were made redundant and those remaining were expected to work with specific, targeted young people characterised by their deficits (Melaugh 2015). In relation to pay and conditions, Melaugh (2015) notes workers' own welfare and enthusiasm for the work has been affected as a fear of job loss and continued change is having an emotional impact on them.

While funders like Tusla or Irish Youth Justice may not fully appreciate the youth work process, they most definitely recognise that youth work supports workers to engage with young people, particularly those most disadvantaged and most distant from services. Therefore, targeted funding for youth work is increasing and employment opportunities in universal youth work are limited for youth workers. On this, Treacy (2009 p. 189) points to Young (1999) who 'believes it is important for youth workers to keep focused on the fact that they do not work with young people solely because they are 'in trouble' or the cause of trouble'. In fact, youth work managers are also apprehensive about the funding environment and 'the effect this has on the provision of universal youth work initiatives aimed at the general youth population' (Jenkinson 2013 p. 10).

• Reasons to Frame Professional Practice

Undeniably, professional youth work has been challenged in recent years, yet efforts to develop it at policy and grassroots level have not ceased. I outline five significant developments, already noted, to conclude this section.

Firstly, there was the implementation of the NQSF (OMCYA 2010) (looked at further in Chapter 3, section 3.4), a tool for youth work organisations to articulate practice, and review and assess their work and continuing development within the broader structures of informal and non-formal education. Importantly, it recognises the diversity of ways youth work happens in Ireland, i.e. with paid and voluntary youth workers. At first glance, the NQSF

(OMCYA 2010) could be critiqued for its administratively heavy load, yet its ten-step process reflects a youth work process, particularly the principles of youth work provision. Unfortunately, a lack of monitoring of its implementation and use in recent years means the evidence is not yet available to assess youth work under its own terms.

Secondly, youth work moved to the DCYA in 2011. Previously, it had moved from the DES to the OMC, and then the OMCYA, where responsibility for children and young people was shared between various ministers for Health, Education and Justice primarily. On the one hand, the DCYA is a more suitable location for youth work as it has its own section – The Youth Affairs Unit – in the Department, and is recognised alongside other professions working with young people. On the other hand, it focuses on youth work programmes and of course with any programmatic approaches come the trio, outcomes, evidence and value for money, already proven problematic for youth workers in relation to the VFMPR (DCYA 2014b). Unfortunately, a programmatic approach fails to recognise youth workers as central in the process and delivery of these programmes. This is apparent on their website (www.dcya.gov.ie) which has no reference to youth workers and in turn contributes to silencing youth workers' voices. Also, it is possible that the values underpinning youth work, e.g. voluntary participation, may get lost in the child health and welfare focus.

Thirdly, at long last, recognition, inclusion and an intention to further develop youth work in Irish policy and strategy is apparent in the publication of the national policy framework, BOBF (DCYA 2014a). It sets out goals and outcomes related to the health and well-being of all Irish young people and who needs to be involved including professionals and volunteers in youth work. In the same vein as the NYWDP (DES 2003), some of the goals in BOBF (DCYA 2014a) emphasise the importance of training and education for professionals working in formal and non-formal education as central to this. They include;

- Quality standards
- Interdisciplinary and inter-professional training programmes
- An interdisciplinary workforce.

Furthermore, the National Youth Strategy 2015-2020 (DCYA 2015) also originated from BOBF (DCYA 2014a) – the DCYA had consulted with professionals and volunteers working with young people and the feedback from this process informed the development of the strategy. While BOBF (DCYA 2014a) means a shared rather than a dedicated policy space

for youth work, closer examination reveals several details which are encouraging for the future of youth work. BOBF (DCYA 2014a) outlines six transformational goals reflecting youth works guiding principles and acknowledges young people's transitions and therefore provision of service in education, health, child welfare and youth justice to support this (DCYA 2014a p. 35)

Moreover, the government's view of youth work finally appears to have shifted. Despite recognising the primary role of youth work in critical social education since 1985, later reports note youth work was still largely associated with recreation rather than social and critical education, a dominant view prior to 1984 (Ronayne 1992). However, the National Youth Strategy 2015-2020 (DCYA 2015) places youth workers alongside already recognised professionals such as teachers and social workers, indicating a change in government's perception of youth work. These individuals are all acknowledged in the strategy as supportive in young peoples' transition (DCYA 2015 p. 13) and I suggest that this supports professional youth workers claims for professional recognition. Though BOBF (DCYA 2014a) positions youth work in a shared professional and policy space, rather than its own, it does acknowledge youth work and the existence of professional youth workers, beside already recognised other professionals, working with young people.

Fourth is the establishment of NSETS in 2006. As such, the number of professionally endorsed youth work programmes in Ireland has grown and therefore the potential for professional youth workers to hold professionally endorsed qualifications that are not only recognised in Ireland but also in England, Scotland and Wales. That said, these programmes are largely located in the East of Ireland (University College Cork is the exception) and so access is still more difficult for potential and current youth workers in the west and north west of Ireland. Ideally, NSETS endorsement needs to expand in the West of Ireland in the coming years.

The fifth, and final, development is the emergence of the IYWA in 2013. This was an unforeseen, yet hopeful, consequence of austerity as youth workers attempted to make their voices heard, particularly on matters like professional recognition and practice, locally and nationally. The initial purpose was for youth workers to resist the challenges named thus far (Melaugh 2015). However, since its initial inception in 2013 there has been minimal activity from the Association. Indeed, the impetus for the Association came from professional youth

workers in the east of Ireland but any further momentum has failed to gather since. Quite possibly, this is because more professional youth workers have accessed NSETS training in the east compared to the rest of Ireland. This could mean that it is mainly the youth workers in the east who realise the need and value of being recognised as professionals. It may also indicate that the IYWA criteria initially stipulated that members must have a professionally-accredited qualification, thus preventing the majority of professional youth workers in Ireland joining (NYCI & Youthnet 2013). Though the criteria was amended in 2018 – now there is a clause stating professional youth workers with ten years or more continual youth work employment can join (ref Appendix I) – energy and economics has curbed the momentum that was there at the beginning. On speaking to an existing member during this research, numbers involved have dropped significantly leaving only three youth workers on the committee to reconsider the strategic direction of the association.

Considering the policy and funding context outlined in this chapter, I suggest that youth workers need to question whether youth work is part of social change or social control in Irish society (Treacy 2009 p. 15). Indeed, Kiely (2009) warns 'youth work [is] increasingly attractive to the state as a means of managing and socialising young people who move outside the radar of other services'. What's more, Treacy (2009) foresees youth work becoming another service slowly losing the features and practices which make it unique. Similarly, in England, Davies (2005) argues youth work values and principles are often compromised because youth workers are required to meet funders' expectations. The reality for youth workers is that funders' goals are not always achievable, translatable or visible to funders in a youth work context (Spence 2007). If funding for Irish youth work continues in the same direction, as literature suggests (Jenkinson 2013, Kiely 2009, Kiely and Meade 2018), the future for youth work as a value-based practice is extremely uncertain.

Examining policy and strategy in Ireland highlights an emerging, though not unproblematic recognition of youth work and youth workers. Considering this, to what extent professional youth work and particularly the role of a professional youth worker is communicated and understood underscores my commitment to hearing and re-presenting youth workers' perspectives on professional youth work.

2.4 Conclusion

On the one hand, youth work has expanded from a philanthropic activity carried out by volunteers to one now also practiced by paid workers who are both professionally qualified or other qualified and in some cases – though not as common today – not qualified at all. On the other hand, funded youth work practices are moving from a set of activities grounded in aims, principles and a particular vision of all young people to one more commonly focused on addressing the needs of specific, targeted groups. Examining youth work policy from 1984 onwards reveals significant developments for professional youth work in Ireland, particularly from the 1990s on. However, after 2008 the global economy collapsed, and this had a serious impact on anticipated developments for youth work.

Funding cuts, ill-fitting evaluations and an increasing emphasis on targeted youth work has created ongoing challenges in professional youth work and proved youth work is not immune to value for money evaluations. Nevertheless, the design and partial implementation of the NYWDP (DES 2003), the existence of the NQSF (OMCYA 2010), BOBF (DCYA 2014a) along with the establishment of NSETS are all notable steps in the advancement of Irish youth work at a policy level. Yet, how supportive or challenging these changes are in the everyday practice of professional youth workers remains unknown. Therefore, guided by the literature discussed in the following chapter, my research explores youth workers' experiences of professional youth work in the contemporary and changing context.

CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Introduction

The preceding chapter refers to several key stages in the historical development of Irish youth work to date which provides a context for this study exploring *Youth workers' perspectives on Professional Youth Work.* While the question itself may appear relatively straight forward, the concepts at its core – youth work and profession – are quite complex and somewhat contested. This chapter locates this research in context by examining key ideas and relevant research related both to youth work and the wider professional discourses in order to inform the fieldwork stage and analyse practitioners' narratives at a later stage. The chapter is presented in three distinct sections. The first section examines core literature relating to perspectives on youth theory and youth work. The second focuses on the sociology of the professions drawing particularly on the recent work of Julia Evetts in relation to organisational and occupational discourses of professionalism. Finally, in the third section I concentrate on professional youth work locating it in the literature on the social professions.

3.2 Youth Work Theory

The way we conceptualise youth and young people impacts the way we think about youth works purpose, processes and practice. Youth work emerged at a time of social upheaval and transformation during which the modern conception of youth developed. Musgrove (1964 p. 33) put it succinctly, saying the 'adolescent was invented at the same time as the steam engine'. Furthermore, he remarks the 'invention of the adolescent posed two major questions for society i.e. 'how and where to accommodate him into societal structures and how to make him fit with the specifications' (gendered pronoun in the original). The origins of the now commonplace concepts, youth culture, youth studies, youth development and indeed, youth work, can be traced back to attempts to answer those questions. Several writers suggest youth workers' recognition of youth as a social construction which has been reinterpreted over time (rather than a naturally occurring group in society) is fundamental to youth work practice (Devlin 2009, Jeffs & Smith 1999, Sercombe 2010, Young 1999).

• Perspectives on Youth

Hall (1904) defines adolescence – a child transitioning to adulthood – as a development period of 'storm and stress'. Though authors refer to challenges to reshape this view overtime (Jeffs & Smith 1999, Wyn & White 1998), it continues to influence social work, psychology, education and youth work approaches to engaging young people. More often, this developmental approach is viewed as a 'common sense' understanding underpinning public discourses, yet it is only one of five theories of youth examined by Devlin (2009). Unpacking the five perspectives on 'theories of youth' namely, developmental, generational, structural conflict, constructionist and transitional, Devlin (2009) offers distinct possibilities of both thinking about and consequently framing different approaches to engaging with young people in youth work settings. Briefly, developmental perspectives are associated with psychology and focus on biological and physiological aspects of adolescence. Generational perspectives, associated with functionalist sociology, are considered complementary to developmental perspectives, however, they emphasise age and recognise youth as a specific age category, one which is distinct from childhood and adulthood, and is located in a unique 'youth culture' (Devlin 2009 p. 37). Structural conflict perspectives draw from Marxist sociology and are perhaps less concerned with age and more with understanding the structural inequalities associated with the category of 'youth', i.e. the ways in which young peoples' lives and experiences are systematically structured by the interaction of such factors as gender, class, sexuality etc. Musgrove's (1964) reference to the 'invention' of youth is the essence of the constructionist perspective pointing as it does to the category of youth as something socially constructed rather than an innate identity. In this view, youth as a life stage is the product of social and economic change and necessitates sustained attention by multiple professions including teachers, psychologists, social workers and youth workers.

Finally, and most significantly for this research, there are transitional perspectives. Initially, these focused on the transition from education to work but have expanded more recently to encompass other transitions including – for instance – leaving the parental home and moving into work. Transitional perspectives emerged from the 1970s onwards as increasing emphasis on policy concerning youth unemployment and youth training developed throughout the EEC (now known as the EU). For example, in Ireland in 1983 the Department of Labour assumed, albeit briefly (see Section 2.2), the place of the Department of Education as the new home for the Youth Affairs Section. Whilst transitional perspectives moved beyond a concern for

school to work with a burgeoning emphasis on transitions between public and private spheres (Cavalli & Galland 1995), Devlin (2009 p. 47) asserts today 'transitions are much less unidirectional and definitive and much more reversible and provisional'. Markedly, the NYWDP (DES 2003) points to an environment offering countless choices related to lifestyle and notes this, along with the occurrence of individual life events, can be a significant challenge for young people. Furthermore, life course rather than life cycle (Elder 1974) approaches in transitional perspectives have become increasingly apparent. Sercombe (2010) states:

> accreditation as adult now emerges vaguely and unevenly, one step forward and one step back, across a range of contexts in which the individual lives rather than the product of a predictable and reliable set of developmental tasks.
>
> (Sercombe 2010 p. 18)

Essentially, examining various perspectives in youth theory reveals societies continuous reconceptualising of youth and adolescence to the youth worker (Young 1999), yet the inclination to choose one perspective over another is to be avoided. Rather, youth workers need to be aware of firstly, the tenets and secondly, the implications of each perspective for practice.

• Understanding Youth Work

As outlined in Chapter 2, youth work practice has evolved from a large, voluntary, philanthropic activity into a paid occupation, a profession based on values with some distinctive features. To date, research with young people and youth workers identifies specific features of youth work practice, what supports workers, and what makes it unique (Broadbent & Corney 2008, Davies 2005, 2010, Devlin & Gunning 2009, Ord et al. 2018, Spence 2007, Spence et al. 2006, Young 1999). Yet youth workers' perspectives on professional youth work in Ireland have not generally been to the forefront of research. Therefore, I suggest that youth workers' insights and perspectives on their own practice and practice contexts are an under-examined dimension of youth work related research.

Youth work is understood as informal and non-formal education. The Youth Service Liaison Forum in Northern Ireland (2005 p. 13 cited in Devlin & Gunning 2009 p. 10) explains:

> Non-formal education refers to learning and development that takes place outside of the formal education field, but which is structured and based on learning objectives. This is differentiated from informal learning, which is not structured and takes place in daily life activities within peer family groups etc. Youth work interventions typically result in both non-formal and informal learning. (The Youth Service Liaison Forum in Northern Ireland 2005 p. 13 cited in Devlin & Gunning 2009 p. 10)

Furthermore, youth work is underpinned by the values of participation, empowerment and equality of opportunity (Devlin 2009, Jenkinson 2000, Kiely 2009, Smith 1982). However, in England, mindful of the dynamic policy and funding environment youth workers practice in, authors determine youth work remains insufficiently differentiated from other work with young people as not enough has been communicated about its nature and purpose (Young 1999, Davies 2005). In examining earlier UK literature on youth work, for example *In the Service of Youth (Circular 1486)* (Board of Education 1939) and *The Challenge of Youth (Circular 1516)* (Board of Education 1940), Young (1999) identifies little concern for its nature and purpose and recognises a focus on values and their growth while also concentrating on personal and social development of young people. Deeming this incomplete, she contends theory of youth (as outlined above), identity, and values and developing virtues must also be considered in framing youth work's purpose (Young 1999 p. 11).

Moreover, how society thinks about and understands youth inevitably shapes how youth workers think about youth work's purpose, process and practice. Indeed, in contexts where continued funding for youth work is unpredictable, Spence (2007), Metz (2017) and Trudi Cooper (2012, 2018) insist youth workers need to be able to communicate the importance of youth work, its relation to – yet also its distinction from – other work with young people, and articulate to policy makers how it fits with policy agendas. Essentially, for others to understand youth work, communication of it is crucial, and reflection is fundamental to this. Corney (2004) emphasises the need for youth workers to reflect on and explore their value-base to understand what influences their motivation and impetus behind their approaches as practitioners.

Furthermore, Cooper (2012 p. 115) suggests youth workers should critically reflect on practice while engaging with ideas underpinning various models of youth work. This could firstly support youth workers to make sense of and communicate their practice better. Secondly, assist in the evolution of new models of practice. Finally, it may have the potential to support youth work to 'survive, and even thrive, as a useful and distinct form of practice in the twenty-first century'. Urging workers to utilise the same tools and practices they facilitate young people to use, e.g. critical reflection, Cooper (2012) maintains workers will be able to develop better – personally and socially – as connected individuals to the world around them.

Considering this, it is imperative for youth workers to also understand the centrality of relationships in practice, recognising the importance of their initiation, development and maintenance (Davies 2005, 2010, Young 1999).

• Relationships are Central

Understanding youth work as a relational practice denotes the centrality of relationship. As such, this necessitates an examination of the nature of the relationship, more specifically the distinction between a youth worker and a 'friend'. Young (1999 p. 74) explains mutual respect exists in relationships, and youth workers are non-judgemental while attempting to understand, empathise and have fun with a young person who has decided to build a relationship with them in an informal setting. Youth workers acknowledge their own world but 'suspend (their) assumptions' while embracing a curious and questioning role about the world of the young person/people they are working with (Tilsen 2018 p. 90).

Fundamentally, youth workers concentrate on their 'relationship with young people and what emerges within the conversational moment' (Tilsen 2018 p. 90). At the same time, a youth worker is not directly involved in the young person's social life and vice versa. To this end, difficulties with boundary setting and being professional can arise when a youth worker is identified as a 'friend'. Conversely, Young (1999 p. 74) challenges this by turning to Aristotle's understanding of 'friend' as 'someone who likes and is liked by another person'. She observes the youth worker as a role model who goes on to 'practice what they preach' (Young 1999 p. 78) while also being clear about the underpinning values ensuring integrity in their relationships with young people.

The process of and necessity to build relationships becomes apparent when several principles of youth work – embedded in practice from its earliest days – are outlined (Devlin & Gunning 2009, Jeffs & Smith 2010, Young 1999). For example, Davies (2010 p. 1-6) details these as:

- Young people choosing to be involved
- Starting where young people are starting – then speaking to motivate and support them to go beyond these starting points into new experiences and learning
- Developing trusting relationships with young people
- Tipping balances of power and control in young people's favour
- Working with the diversity of young people and for equity of responses to them
- Promoting equality of opportunity and diversity
- Working with and through young people's friendship groups
- Youth work as process
- Reflective practice.

Also, themes such as enhanced friendships, increasing confidence, improving wellbeing, increasing resilience, reduction in risky behaviour, and finally, mutuality emerge from recent research with young people about the impact of youth work (Ord et al 2018).

Both the principles of youth work (Davies 2010) and themes of impact (Ord et al 2018) are recognisable in the Irish Youth Work Act 2001. Commenting on this, Devlin (2017) describes youth work as:

> an educational endeavour and should complement other types of educational provision. Participation is voluntary (relationship is different from the one they have with formal education; youth workers refer to the young people as participants).
>
> Youth work in Ireland is carried out by non-statutory/non-governmental, not-for-profit organisations. (Devlin 2017 pp. 81-82)

In view of Davies (2010) and Ord et al (2018), I concur with Devlin (2017) who determines that the principles are recognisable, not only to youth workers in Ireland, but also in other parts of Europe, as practitioners engage in an ongoing process of informal and non-formal education with young people, i.e. youth work. Framing youth work as an educational process influences how youth workers and policy makers view youth work relationships and ultimately support youth work.

• Youth Workers as Educators

In Ireland, the NYWDP (DES2003) describes the youth work process as:

> the ongoing educational cycle of experience, observation, reflection and action, and – essential for this to happen – is the active and critical participation of young people. The successful facilitation of this process clearly requires substantial experience and a high degree of skill on the part of those responsible, the "educators", whether paid or volunteer. (DES 2003 p. 13)

Describing youth workers as educators is not a new idea. Indeed, Rosseter (1987 p. 52 as cited in Jenkinson 2000 p. 110) declares 'first and foremost, youth workers are educators', while Smith (1982) points to youth workers' responsibility to rediscover not only social education but the necessity to ensure critical social education with young people is undertaken. What's more, he contends youth work practice which is uninformed by theory accepts young peoples' powerless position. It is imperative that youth workers understand that power in society is unevenly distributed and 'As soon as they try to enable a growth in young peoples' power to make and carry through decisions, they are challenging the distribution of power and therefore, acting politically' (Smith 1982 p. 35).

As educators, youth workers respond to young peoples' developmental needs. Then again, the impact of this is reduced if workers are not aware of and do not carry out several things. They should understand 'the values and assumptions that inform their work', and they also need to support young people to understand the surrounding politics which frames personal problems as not only 'private troubles' but also 'public issues' (Smith 1982 p. 38). Significantly for policy and practice, the NYWDP (DES 2003) defines youth work as an educational process and youth workers as educators. Accepting youth workers are critical social educators, questions as to how they do this and what it looks like emerge (Broadbent & Corney 2008, Smith 1982, Spence 2007, Spence & Issitt 2005, Spence et al. 2006), especially as youth work 'calls for constant reworking and reframing of meaning' (Spence 2007 p. 6) with relationship at its core.

Recognising youth workers as educators with relationships central to their practice – a practice that is fluid, changeable and is described as precarious even (Metz 2017 p. 1) because of this – makes it difficult though necessary for them to find ways to communicate this to external audiences.

• Communicating Practice is Challenging

Asserting similarities such as engaging in an educational process and building relationships exist between youth work and other vocational professions working with young people, Broadbent and Corney (2008) insist there is a knowledge-base and set of practice tools particular to youth work. The notion of tools is also apparent in a set of guidelines for youth workers in Dublin, Ireland called 'Essential Guidelines for Good Youth Work Practice' (CDYSB). In a youth worker's 'kitbag', these tools appear as 'diverse activities, such as music and the arts', which are – or should always be – underpinned by theory, practice and values (Broadbent & Corney 2008 p. 18). Regrettably, difficulties arise for youth workers when the tools of their trade – the activities – are taken at face value. Spence et al. (2006 p. 82) explain that:

> An understanding of youth work which is framed entirely within a model of recreation-control, does not perceive that there is any skill involved in the work beyond organising and participating in activities and controlling space.

Davies (2010 p. 6) likens youth work practice to 'great jazz' due to its encapsulation of 'contradictory qualities' e.g. a youth worker is a friend but not a friend, as noted, and explains youth work is 'well prepared and highly disciplined, yet improvised'. As a result, youth workers encounter challenges when attempting to communicate the rationale of facilitating various activities and how they use their 'kitbags' (Broadbent & Corney 2008), i.e. the various methods they utilise, based on lived experiences, in a way and by using language accurately reflecting the nature and purpose of youth work to those external to practice (Spence 2007, Coussee et al. 2009).

Essentially, a youth worker's job is as a 'conversationalist: someone who partners in the cocreation of meaningful stories and experiences through collaborative conversations with young people' (Tilsen 2018 p. 52) and as such, in their everyday practice the language they use is immediate. However, research discussions with youth workers on the meaning of youth work (Spence et al. 2006 p. 40) highlights how their 'language is more systematically reflective' and influenced by a 'set of mutually understood concepts' related to how they understand the purpose of youth work, expectations of them and experiences. Notwithstanding this, 'discussion is also shaped by a professional discourse', one which

associates particular concepts within ‘an everyday professional language whose meanings are shared and assumed amongst workers’(Spence et al. 2006 p. 40).

This performative forum reflects youth workers’ awareness of a purpose – more often funding or policy – and an audience – commonly researchers – which has potential implications for youth work funding, policy or both. Spence et al. (2006 p. 40) recognise this in their research data explaining ‘it was explicit when youth workers expressed anxiety about whether the researchers were ‘getting what they wanted’ from the project when one group of young people ‘acted up’ with a youth worker who seemed to be trying to perform for the researcher’. They describe another youth worker using the research space to vocalise her annoyance with the current situation declaring her job is about ‘Paperwork, paperwork, paperwork, computers, paperwork’ and stipulates that the research needs to deliver these concerns to ‘the big bosses’ (Spence et al. 2006 p. 40). Consequently, due to youth workers’ engagement in ‘performative language’, Spence (2007 p. 3) contends policy makers only partly consider ‘the realities of youth work practice conditions’. That said, she argues this can also be attributed to researchers methods and the evidence they are expected to produce. Moreover, theory and policy-based conversations with practitioners needs further development to ensure youth workers’ perspectives both challenge and inform policy and policy makers effectively (Spence 2007).

Schon (2001 p. 10) reasons ‘our knowing is in our action’ and it is ‘a kind of knowing inherent in intelligent action’. Yet this knowing is disregarded when outcomes and technical measures are prioritised and as a result, practitioners’ professional knowledge is lost in translation to those outside. Essentially, practitioners are left with a dilemma, one which forces them to choose between two possible ways of communicating their practice. On the one hand, they can detail practice in terms that are inclusive of values but ill-fitting with outcome focused collection methods. On the other hand, they can communicate their practice in terms of external measurements, ultimately succeeding in the exclusion of their occupations inherent values.

Schon (2001) argues the consequences of each choice do not work out well for practitioners. By choosing the first, they attempt to pull from experiences they are immersed in, potentially resulting in feelings of inferiority because these practices are judged by society as not producing the required outcomes or objectives. On choosing the second, professionals

account for their practice through the prescribed systems, often leaving them confused about how to do the job in a way which is consistent with their professional values and beliefs. Schon (2001) suggests practitioners use the reflective cycle as a way out of this impasse. Implicitly used it provides a framework to understand and explain the production of their practice knowledge internally, while explicitly used could reveal a way of highlighting practice knowledge to external audiences. Markedly, he also recommends educators need to play a role in supporting practitioners to do this. Despite challenges in communicating their practice knowledge and therefore, what they do to external audiences, the Irish Government recognises youth workers possess a particular skill set associated with their role, a role they describe as professional.

The NYWDP states 'Not everyone can or should be a youth worker, in the same way that not everyone should be a teacher, doctor, administrator or actor' (DES 2003 p. 14). Acknowledging that youth workers – just like other professionals – have a particular knowledge-base and skill set, the NYWDP recognises youth work as a profession. Considering this, it could be established that youth work is in fact a profession, and both volunteers and paid staff are professional. However, to what extent this is useful is debateable and is therefore addressed in the following two sections of this chapter. Lorenz (2009 p.3) determines 'measured by the standards of the traditional professions like medicine or law, professionalisation in the social field is at the very least incomplete' and there is 'a public crisis of confidence in professions in general' which is exacerbated by a pervasive neo-liberal politics throughout Europe. Interestingly, Metz (2017) refers to these challenges, also relating them specifically to youth work and youth workers in Northwest European welfare states. This magnifies the importance of understanding the broader influences helping to shape youth workers' practice contexts and for this reason it is useful to explore the sociology of the professions next. It offers perspectives into the origins and conceptualisation of profession, professionalisation and professionalism, and supports in-depth insights into youth work as a profession. I specifically draw on the recent work of Julia Evetts (1999, 2003, 2005, 2006, 2011, 2012) regarding discourses of professionalism.

3.3 Sociology of the professions

Examining perspectives in the sociology of the professions provides valuable insights into the current challenges, tensions and opportunities shaping the environment professional youth workers' practice in. Evetts (2005 p. 2) determines 'the conditions of trust, discretion and competence which historically have been deemed necessary for professional practice are continually being challenged, changed or regulated'.

A good starting point for this section is Devlin's (2012) historical development of the professions where he examines various approaches, and the contested nature of the concept profession is highlighted. Devlin (2012) describes both the noun profession – the identity – and the verb – the action to profess. Building on standard dictionary definitions, he outlines the historical meaning of the noun profession as 'a solemn declaration, promise or vow' (Devlin 2012 p. 178) and explains the application of profession to law, medicine and theology can be traced back over four hundred years. Understood traditionally as work with people, professional occupations were differentiated from trades through their application of knowledge within and to other peoples' lives. Devlin (2012 p. 179) summarises some recognisable features of a profession as 'an element of formalised learning, a concern with certain values or beliefs and a focus on some aspect of human welfare'. In view of these three features, I suggest that youth work is a profession.

As Chapter 2 details, the establishment of NSETS prompted substantial expansion of youth work education and training programmes in higher education over the past fifteen years in Ireland. Furthermore, youth work is a practice underpinned by values such as 'empowerment, equality and inclusiveness', and is concerned with young peoples' welfare (Kiely 2009 p. 12). Indeed, Sercombe (2010 p. 11) asserts youth work is a profession based on its ethical commitment, and a 'professional is someone who professes' and 'commits him or herself to serve some sort of constituency, typically people in some state of vulnerability, with a particular focus to their service', and therefore the idea of relationship is at its core. Hence, youth work is a profession. However, by continuing to examine sociological perspectives, it becomes apparent that a diversity of approaches to conceptualising professions exist and further possibilities to challenge, and equally support the notion of youth work as a profession emerge.

Though Devlin's (2012 p. 179) historical analysis explains 'dictionary definitions' identify traits differentiating the professions from other occupations, he also stresses 'it is difficult to find agreement on what the distinguishing traits might be' and points to a survey compiling a list of twenty-three traits highlighted by various writers. Nevertheless, the trait approach is only one of many approaches providing various perspectives examining professions thus far (MacDonald 1995, Evetts 2006).

Evetts (2012) explains sociological interpretations emerging from diverse political, economic and social contexts have so far attempted but never succeeded in conceptualising profession as a way of grouping the distinct work of an occupation. Some perspectives (Abbott 1988, Johnson 1972, Larson 1977, Larkin 1983) view profession as a way of supporting existing members of an occupation to protect and control entry into it, or alternatively create opportunities in the public service emphasising specific credentials for increasingly sought-after roles (Evetts 2003 p. 398). Examples of these perspectives are apparent in analysis from Friedson (1994), MacDonald (1995) and Wilensky (1964). Wilensky (1964 p. 142) identifies five qualifying markers associated with a process of professionalisation. They include:

- The occupation become a fulltime endeavour
- Training schools are established within or with links to universities
- Those looking for training to be set up create a professional association
- Legal protection is required
- A code of ethics is required

Whereas Friedson (1994) focuses on the public service describing it as a 'third logic' based on the occupational control of work and distinguishing it from bureaucratic or market-based forms of constructing work. He outlines features of professionalism as:

- A body of knowledge and skills officially recognised, based on concepts and theories and allowed discretion to practice
- An occupationally controlled division of labour
- An occupationally controlled labour market requiring training and credentials for entry and career mobility
- An occupationally controlled training programme associated with 'higher learning', providing an opportunity for the development of new knowledge
- An ideology serving some transcendent value

Despite the two theorists concentrating on different concepts – professionalisation and professionalism – they both observe an occupational value in their analysis, recognising professions 'as distinctive and special way of controlling and organising work and workers with real advantages for both practitioners and clients' (Evetts 2011 p. 406). Professions are differentiated from other occupations by referring to a shared identity – created through professional relations – and trust and recognition of a practice grounded in education and training with minimal guidelines applied from outside (Evetts 2011 p. 409). Conversely, MacDonald (1995) critiques the types of markers set out by theorists such as Wilensky (1964) and Friedson (1994), arguing a profession achieving these allows a monopoly of their service resulting in social closure. These perspectives are just three of many recognised and organised by Evetts (2003 p. 399) under two headings which are, normative value system and controlling ideology, thus informing her own analysis. Recognising sociological approaches are complex and diverse, Evetts (2003, 2006, 2011) maintains they provide ways of examining the current context for professions and determines the notion of professionalism is the most useful to do this. Neither 'good' nor 'bad', professionalism can be described as:

> a discourse (a set of ideas, images and practices) that can be employed for diverse purposes and to serve the interests of different groups, including being used as an instrument of discipline, power and control. (Devlin 2012 p. 181)

Understanding professionalism as a discourse, Evetts (2012) outlines two types, organisational and occupational, as evident, 'particularly within "knowledge-based, service sector work" (Devlin 2012 p. 181) like youth work.

• Discourses of Professionalism

According to Evetts (2003,2006,2011), ongoing examination of the concepts profession and professionalisation is needless because 'professionalism is changing and being changed as professionals increasingly work in large-scale organisational workplaces and sometimes in international firms' (Evetts 2011 p. 406). She explains profession is 'essentially the knowledge-based category of occupations which usually follow a period of tertiary education and vocational training and experience' (Evetts 2003 p. 397). She also asserts that the process of professionalisation is influenced by the role played by social, cultural and political context during the professionalisation of an occupation, and the process is fluid (Evetts 2006). Focusing on professionalism, Evetts (2012) stresses it is increasingly used in modern day

employment settings. Evidenced in marketing slogans, recruitment initiatives, literature pertaining to management and training, and for occupational regulation and control, professionalism as a discourse has implications for 'the development and maintenance of work identities, career decisions and senses of self' (Evetts 2012 p. 4) which are attractive to staff at all levels of the organisation. Understanding professionalism as a discourse provides ways of analysing occupational change and social control in a diversity of work settings. As noted, Evetts (2006) recognises two types of discourse, organisational and occupational, describing organisational professionalism as:

> a discourse of control used increasingly by managers in work organisations. It incorporates rational-legal forms of decision-making, hierarchical structures of authority, the standardisation of work practices, accountability, target setting and performance review and is based on occupational training and certification (Evetts 2006 p. 140-141)

While describing occupational professionalism as:

> the more traditional historical form. This involved a discourse constructed within professional groups themselves that involved discretionary decision making in complex cases, collegial authority, the occupational control of the work and is based on the trust in the practitioner by clients and employers. It is operationalised and controlled by practitioners themselves and is based on a shared education and training, a strong socialisation process, work culture and occupational identity, and codes of ethics that are monitored and operationalised by professional institutes and associations. (Evetts 2006 p. 141)

More recently, referring to McClelland (1990 p. 107), Evetts (2012 p. 5) describes organisational and occupational discourses of professionalism emerging 'from above', i.e. from employers and managers, as a carefully constructed discourse to promote change and control of the occupational group and says this is 'the case for most contemporary service occupations' (Evetts 2012 p. 5). An occupational discourse then is one constructed 'from within' (Evetts 2012 p. 5) by members of an occupation and is more commonly associated with professions in the past.

Evetts (2012 p. 14) also contemplates whether a 'new' form of professionalism is developing in the context of 'a governmental project to promote commercialised (Hanlon 1998) and organisational (Evetts 2006, 2009) forms of professionalism', as features associated with both discourses are recognisable.

Querying whether professionalism as an occupational value is in danger of extinction, she suggests that:

> Perhaps continuities, challenges and opportunities for professionalism as an occupational value is one of the most important tasks for professional institutions and for governments over the next few years. (Evetts 2012 p. 27)

This is pertinent for value-based professions like youth work where – considering the literature discussed so far – professionalism is more suitably understood through an occupational discourse. Co-constructed between workers, and workers and young people 'from within' (Evetts 2012 p. 5), I suggest that professional knowledge, practice and identity require further consideration in relation to professionalism. Their relevance to conversations on recently recognised professions (Green 2009), more often professions working with people, is discussed next.

• Professionalism and Professional Practice

Green (2009 p. 3), referring to Beck and Young (2005) who describe 'the emergence of a new kind of professionalism', proposes that new professions – both the occupations transitioning to become recognised as a profession, and whose knowledge is closely connected to the practice environment, and those teaching them – face challenges. Concurring with Van Manen (1999 as cited in Green 2009 p. 2), and concentrating on what Beck and Young (2005) describe as 'knowledge-based professionalism' – many of which, including youth work, are now taught within a third-level context – Green (2009) argues that little theorising on discourses of professionalism in areas like health or education has happened.

Alluding to an environment of New Public Management [NPM], and a politics influenced by neo-liberal reasoning, Schwandt (2005) suggests there is an increasing emphasis on evidence-based practice and policy, and proposes professional practice is developing in a way which causes concern for the preparedness of practitioners and, importantly, the authentication of their professionalism. Equally, Kinsella and Pitman (2012) contend the type of knowledge currently privileged is worrying for the social professions and argue the comprehension of practices rooted in values has been replaced by practices grounded in the outcomes they produce, inferring an instrumentalist rationality, discussed later in this section.

On practice, Kemmis (2009 p. 19) argues the idea of professional practice is not 'self-explanatory' and sees it as a subset of social practice. He emphasises the relational aspect at the core of knowledge creation, understanding 'practice is not just "raw activity" it is always shaped and oriented in its course by ideas, meaning and intentions' (Kemmis and Grootenboer 2008). Hence,

> practice is always embodied (and situated) – it is what particular people do, in a particular place and time and it contributes to the formation of their identities as people of a particular kind, and their agency and sense of agency.
> Kemmis (2009 p. 19)

More specifically, Evans (2008 p. 10) discusses teachers' practice and examines the construction of professionalism amongst them through interaction and practice between each other and simultaneously with outside structures, contending it 'should be perceived as a reality'. Evans (2008) dismisses externally designed constructions of professionalism and stresses the importance of understanding practice reality and how it shapes identity. Determining practitioners are united by common beliefs and values underpinning their practices, Evans (2008) contends a shared understanding of profession should be observed. This is significant for a value-based and principle-led practice such as youth work (see Section 3.2) where the 'realities of practice' are changeable (Spence 2007 p. 3).

Since the introduction of the Youth Work Act in 2001, an act promoting 'increased state intervention' (Kiely 2009 p. 17), there has been significant organisational and practice changes. As a result, I argue that the landscape for youth workers is being continuously reshaped 'from above' (Evetts 2012 p. 5). During austerity, the imposition of funding cuts and tendering for contracts seriously impacted the youth work sector (Kiely and Meade 2018) as many youth workers were forced to compromise values and principles of practice with organisations just trying to survive (Jenkinson 2013). This has made it more challenging, though not impossible (see Section 2.3) – and I suggest that probably more crucial – for Irish youth workers, as Metz (2017) also proposes for their counterparts in Northwest Europe, to explore how they create a sense of professionalism through their practice and therefore a shared sense of professional identity.

• Professional Identity

Professional identity can be understood as one's professional self-concept based on attributes, beliefs, values, motives and experiences, and is both individual and shared with others in that profession (Slay & Smith 2010). Examining whether a new form of professionalism is developing, Noordegraaf (2007) proposes it has become 'hybridised', amalgamating varying conceptions and forming through different associations of what it means to be professional and what professionalism is. Potentially, reconstructions of professional identity will occur and notions of professionalism within and for professions will emerge, especially if practice is constituted through interactions with the world and through narratives made within and from the experiences (Van Manen 1994). Indeed, it makes sense then to think of professional identity formation occurring through interactions between the practitioner and their social world as 'ultimately this is a matter of changing identities, of seeking shared senses of direction and belonging' (Noordegraaf 2007 p. 781). Ibarra (1999 p. 765) refers to Schein (1978) who states:

> a basic assumption is that professional identities form over time with varied experiences and meaningful feedback that allow people to gain insight about their central and enduring preferences, talents and values. Schein (1978)

For this reason, the importance of asking the research participants about their experiences of before, becoming and being professional youth workers and examining how these may have influenced them as professionals is important.

Crossley and Vivikananda-Schmidt (2009 p. 603) explain professional self-identity is a 'state of mind'. Ultimately, how individuals manage their understanding of it is subjective and created from one's participation in various activities related to the profession (Lave & Wenger 1991), and is necessary 'for accepting the responsibilities and obligations of the professional role' (Crossley & Vivikananda-Schmidt 2009 p. 603). Discourses of professionalism, particularly the idea of professionalism 'from above' and 'from within' (Evetts 2012 p. 5), support an examination of several areas in this research. Firstly, they support a focus on individual research participants involvement in the various activities related to youth work, perhaps as an adult volunteer in a youth club or a paid youth worker in a project. Secondly, the influence of these various activities on participants understanding of professional youth work and themselves as professional is considered. Finally, the third

and final area looked at in more depth is how participants engagement in these various activities may have contributed to their professional identity formation and understanding of professionalism.

This section highlights the usefulness of the sociology of the professions, particularly professionalism, for examining the current environment. Importantly, it also draws attention to the possibility of a 'new' kind of professionalism which inevitably raises questions, poses challenges and offer opportunities for professions working with and for people (Evetts 2011), i.e. the Social Professions.

3.4 Professional Youth Work

Examining literature on the social professions highlights two areas for Irish youth workers to address. Firstly, they need to be able to distinguish professional youth work from the other social professions. Secondly, they need to reflect on and discuss what kind of profession they want youth work to be. Banks (2004) groups community work, youth work and social work under the umbrella term the 'social professions'. Though useful, she acknowledges 'The term social professions is little used as yet in English, although its usage has developed as part of the European project to develop transferability of qualifications and greater understandings between those involved in work in the social welfare field' (Banks 2004 p. 26). That said, Banks (2004) does not intend on defining these occupations as professions, rather using approaches to the professions to distinguish between occupations working with and for people related to their welfare, e.g. youth work, from other occupations, e.g. farmers or accountants. To this end, Banks (2004 p. 35-37) identifies some key features shared by the social professions over the years, inclusive of social work, community work and youth work in Britain (which includes Ireland until 1922):

- A calling to care
- Co-option to welfare and control
- Commitment to change
- Ambivalence towards professionalisation
- Influence of deprofessionalising trends.

Then, using Friedson's (2001) features of professionalism (see Section 3.3) to identify and analyse current challenges for the social professions, Banks (2004) recognises a curtailment

in practitioner discretion – a key feature of occupational professionalism – which is exacerbated by the increasing setting of targets and management implementing standards informed by market values. Cognisant of Bank's (2004) analysis as well as the markers associated with both discourses of professionalism, I could argue that youth work has thus far been professionalised 'from within' but is being increasingly deprofessionalised 'from above' (Evetts 2012 p, 5). However, and most importantly, my research looks at Irish youth work and not all these features, e.g. an occupationally controlled labour market requiring training and credentials for entry and career mobility, exist here. Despite the growth of professionally endorsed youth work programmes in Ireland, candidates applying for paid youth work positions are still not obliged to hold qualifications from these. Devlin (2012 p. 185) explains 'In formal legal terms there is no requirement that persons practising youth work (or applying for posts) possess given qualifications or awards' and therefore, it is not a "protected title" (see end of chapter for varying recruitment criteria).

On the one hand, historical analysis (Devlin 2012, Banks 2004) identifies youth work as a profession. It is a value-based practice with a concern for people's welfare and requires a particular skill set. Moreover, development of youth work and in youth work continues with the introduction of a 'Framework for the inclusion of ethics into youth work education and training' (D'arcy 2016) and the emergence of a youth worker association. Therefore, continuing to debate whether youth work is a profession is pointless (Devlin 2012). On the other hand, examining analysis from Banks (2004) illustrates that youth work in Ireland is not wholly comparable with its allied professions. Considering this, I suggest that Irish youth workers need to firstly be able to distinguish youth work from other social professions, and secondly ask 'What kind of profession do we want it to be?' (Devlin 2012 p. 187). This, I argue, is being answered 'from within' (Evetts 2012 p. 5) a practice setting which is being shaped 'from above' (Evetts 2012 p. 5). Yet to understand this better, the current challenges and opportunities shaping youth work 'from above' need to be explored before examining what is happening 'from within' through analysis of youth workers' own perspectives.

• Youth Work as a Profession – Challenges and Opportunities

Accepting that youth work in Australia is a profession, Bessant (2004) uses the sociology of the professions to highlight the current advantages and disadvantages with this. Pointing to various sociological conceptions on professionalism and professionalisation, she discusses

the challenges and opportunities associated with codes of ethics, associations, accreditation relating to education and training, license and training, and development of a professional identity. Furthermore, in England professional youth work is facing ongoing challenges. Ord (2012 p. 1) identifies a changing environment of professionalism which is reshaping youth work management and explains 'the values which underpin this form of management in youth work it is argued, are fundamentally neoliberal, with an emphasis on the private over the public sector and the pre-eminence of the market' (Ord 2012 p. 1).

Spence and Wood (2003 p. 12) are sceptical about the future of English youth work saying it is 'less than certain as the conditions for the expression of commitment and enthusiasm in social organisations are increasingly squeezed between a narrowly defined professionalism on the one hand and the incursions of bureaucracy and authoritarian agencies of surveillance and social control into everyday life'. They recommend youth workers challenge this by explaining what they do and how they do it (Spence & Wood 2003), and like other social professions, they need to be able to articulate their practice (Schon 2001, Spence & Wood 2003). But youth work is 'face to face practice which' by its very nature is not concerned primarily with gathering evidence and creating meaning but rather with personal and social change' (Issitt & Spence 2005 p. 63).

As already noted (see Section 3.3), practice in professions working with people and for people, like youth work, cannot be explained by merely describing what practitioners do (Kemmis 2009, Kemmis & McTaggart 2000). Understanding the centrality of process within youth work practice is fundamental because, like other social professions, youth workers construct knowledge in their ongoing interactions with others. Their failure to do so makes it difficult to comprehend how and what presents as evidence of impact. Essentially, evidence in youth work is the knowledge developing between the youth worker and the young person, and can be found in the experiences, the moments they create together (Spence 2007). As Metz (2017 p. 5-6) explains 'most of the knowledge is experience-based: both from being a professional youth worker and a member of the target-group (Spierts, 2005)'.

Undeniably, youth workers need to be clear about how they practice and what informs them along with being able to identify individual and group approaches to explain it, because ultimately, they need 'to establish their professional credentials under different policy imperatives and with different emphases' (Spence 2007 p. 4). Concurring with Corney et al.

(2014) who – in addition to other issues – point to short-term funding leading to agency competition, I argue that youth workers need to collectivise. As a group attempts to challenge misconceptions of who they are and what they do is possible. This could facilitate sharing practice knowledge in common spaces and recording it in a manner which elucidates rather than conceals practice and supports the development of a collective identity and voice.

Additionally, English youth workers are concerned about external inspection bodies collecting evidence about youth work, i.e. outcomes, in order to show impact (de St Croix 2017), as their voices and how they speak about their practice has only appeared briefly, if at all, in the literature (McArdle 2012, Spence 2007, Spence et al. 2006). Unfortunately, an understanding of and reasons for the youth work process are omitted when just the youth work outcomes are collected. Generally, if the principles are grasped to some extent, it is only by accident (Spence 2007).

In order to respond to technical, outcome focused collection methods, both English and Australian literature propose the collective identity of youth workers needs to be strengthened (Corney et al. 2014, Davies 2005, Spence et al. 2006). In Australia, Bessant (2004 p. 26) likens youth work to the Loch Ness monster suggesting both have stories about them which pop up now and again and are equally central in cultural stories identifying a particular group, though 'it is never clear how believable they are' (Bessant 2004 p. 26). Though Treacy (2009) cautions recent events in English youth work could be a warning for Irish youth work, I suggest, that perhaps there is still time for youth workers here to heed lessons learned elsewhere, and successfully influence the development of professional youth work.

So far, the literature discussed in Chapter 3 supports useful insights into the broader challenges and opportunities for professional youth work. As my research focuses on Irish youth work, it is imperative I finish the chapter with a reminder of the most recent efforts to shape Irish youth work 'from above' (Evetts 2012 p. 5), efforts which specifically encouraged me to undertake this research.

• Professional Youth Work in Ireland

As Chapter 2 outlines, several occurrences in the past twenty years have helped shape professional youth work in Ireland to date. These include the Youth Work Act 2001, NYWDP (DES 2003), the establishment of NSETS (2006) and the NQSF (OMCYA 2010). Yet with closer analysis I argue that policy and provision largely fails to understand and

recognise the professional youth worker's role as fundamental in youth work. As noted (in Section 2.2), the NYWDP (DES 2003) sets out a range of goals to develop professional youth work in Ireland. However, the NQSF (OMCYA 2010) which was launched as a three-year process of review, assessment and continuous development for what they call 'staff-led youth work organisations' (OMCYA 2010 p. 2), interestingly overlooks the title professionally-led youth work organisations despite intending to develop professional youth work. Its rationale is:

- to provide a support and development tool to youth work organisations providing services to children and young people
- to establish standards in the practice and provision of youth work
- to provide an enhanced evidence base for youth work
- to ensure resources are used effectively in the youth work sector
- to provide a basis for 'whole organisational assessment' (OMCYA 2010 p. 2).

Notably, the five core principles at the centre of the NQSF (OMCYA 2010) are also crucial in youth work and reflect both occupational and organisational discourses. Briefly they include being:

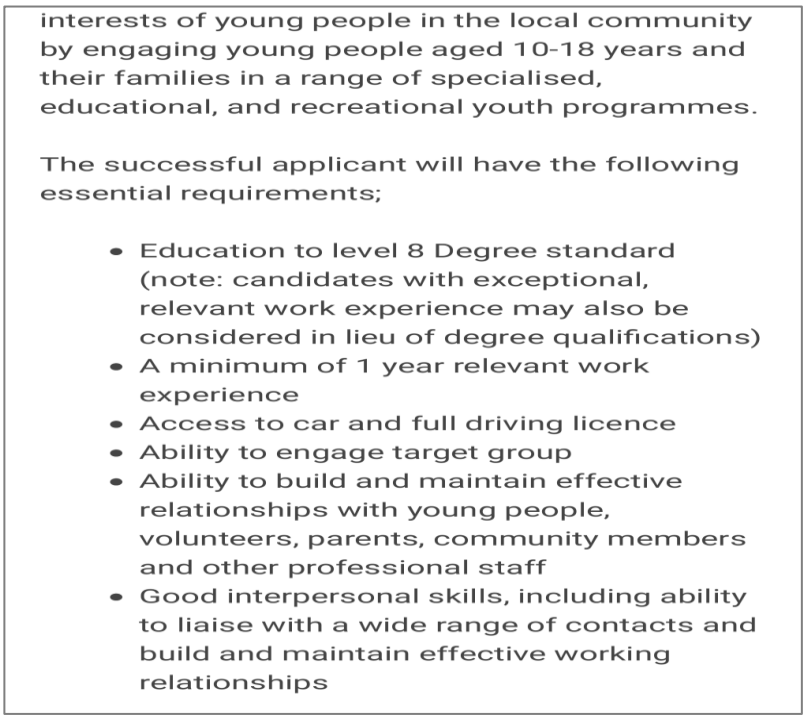
- Young person centred
- Ensuring and promoting safety (young people)
- Educational and developmental
- Ensuring and promoting equality and inclusiveness
- Dedicated to providing quality youth work and committed to continuous improvement (OMCYA 2010 p. 3).

Importantly for youth workers, the NQSF (OMCYA 2010) recognises the youth work process and creation of tacit knowledge in youth work relationships, and 'It also provides an opportunity to articulate their practices through the development of a common language and within a structured framework' (OMCYA 2010 p. 1).

All things considered, the NQSF (OMCYA 2010) takes great strides to address some of the challenges associated with assessing professional youth work. However, like 'The Purpose and Outcomes of Youth Work Report to the Interagency Group' (Devlin & Gunning 2009), acknowledging 'the term youth worker is used generically to describe volunteers, full and part-time staff' it does not differentiate between youth workers who are paid and those who

volunteer. As a result, the distinction between paid and volunteer workers is blurred and professional youth workers' voices are ignored. Also, two years after the NQSF (OMCYA 2010) appeared, the 'Report on the Economic Value of Youth Work' (NYCI & Indecon 2012) was published, and for the first time the number of youth workers employed in Ireland became apparent. While it shows 1,397 paid at the time, it also points to the number of volunteers as 40,145 (NYCI 2012 p. 14), which significantly outnumbers those employed thus highlighting the challenge, but equally the importance of hearing professionally paid youth workers' voices whose experiences are rooted in daily practice.

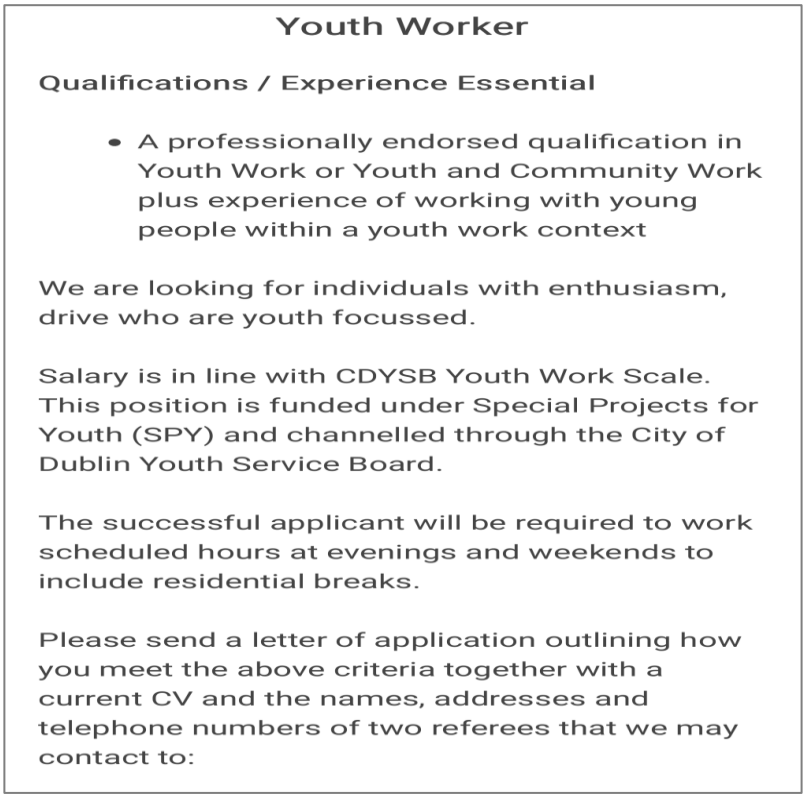
The youth worker recruitment advertisements provided in Figure 1 and Figure 2 (below and overleaf, Tierney 2017) show the contrast between candidates' requirements for those being hired to work in different youth work organisations.


interests of young people in the local community by engaging young people aged 10-18 years and their families in a range of specialised, educational, and recreational youth programmes.

The successful applicant will have the following essential requirements;

- Education to level 8 Degree standard (note: candidates with exceptional, relevant work experience may also be considered in lieu of degree qualifications)
- A minimum of 1 year relevant work experience
- Access to car and full driving licence
- Ability to engage target group
- Ability to build and maintain effective relationships with young people, volunteers, parents, community members and other professional staff
- Good interpersonal skills, including ability to liaise with a wide range of contacts and build and maintain effective working relationships

Figure 1: Sample youth worker recruitment advertisement indicating candidate requirements – a level 8 degree (Tierney 2017 p. 39)



Youth Worker

Qualifications / Experience Essential

- A professionally endorsed qualification in Youth Work or Youth and Community Work plus experience of working with young people within a youth work context

We are looking for individuals with enthusiasm, drive who are youth focussed.

Salary is in line with CDYSB Youth Work Scale. This position is funded under Special Projects for Youth (SPY) and channelled through the City of Dublin Youth Service Board.

The successful applicant will be required to work scheduled hours at evenings and weekends to include residential breaks.

Please send a letter of application outlining how you meet the above criteria together with a current CV and the names, addresses and telephone numbers of two referees that we may contact to:

Figure 2: Sample youth worker recruitment advertisement indicating candidate requirements – a professionally endorsed qualification (Tierney 2017 p. 39)

Unfortunately, the impetus to continue developing professional youth work in Ireland was unexpectedly halted after 2008 as severe funding cuts, and particularly ways to undertake these, were introduced. For example, the *Value for Money and Policy Review of Youth Programmes* (DCYA 2014b) [VFMPR] evaluated several youth programmes on achieving the following policy objectives effectively:

- Communication skills
- Confidence and agency
- Planning and problem solving
- Relationships
- Creativity and imagination
- Resilience and determination
- Emotional intelligence (DCYA 2014b).

However, considering English and Australian literature on technical outcome focused collection methods, evaluation of youth work programmes separate from youth work is

challenging for youth workers and youth work organisations. The VFMPR (DCYA 2014b) frames work with people, i.e. 'Human service' as problematic for evaluation, 'particularly in relation to performance measurement' (DCYA 2014b p. 2) and focuses on outputs. For example, Number 3 in its terms of reference is to 'Define the outputs associated with the youth programmes' (DCYA 2014b p. 3) explaining 'it was not possible to capture every nuance' within provision under the funding schemes, rather it aimed to cover the 'bulk of service delivery' (DCYA2014b p.3). Markedly, the VFMPR (DCYA 2014b) is a stark example of the concerns related to the reshaping of youth work 'from above' (Evetts 2012 p. 5) (Spence 2007, Spence et al 2005).

Notwithstanding efforts to develop professional youth work in recent years, the economic downturn and resulting policy decisions have magnified the peripheral positioning of professional youth workers in discussions on policy and provision. I contend that professional youth workers are – like the groups they are increasingly expected to work with – marginalised (Spence 2007, Coussee et al 2009). Paradoxically, professional youth work has developed, yet the role of the professional youth worker appears overlooked and an afterthought to the emerging changes. Ultimately, the economic and policy climate has reshaped the landscape for Irish youth work, particularly over the past twenty years, yet youth workers' experiences of this remain unknown. This research enquires into this.

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter was divided into three sections, with the first examining youth theory and youth work, the second exploring the sociology of the professions, and the third section discussing professional youth work.

Section 3.2 considered the various approaches associated with youth theory and youth work, and argues that youth workers' understanding of theory and increased dialogue amongst them supports deeper insights into youth work as a value-based practice. They are then better equipped to articulate their work to external audiences.

Section 3.3 presents several sociological perspectives on professions and therefore multiple ways for practitioners as well as academics to consider, debate, conceptualise and manage their profession. To understand the current context for professions like youth work, professionalism as a discourse was explored. Using organisational and occupational

discourses as lenses, professions such as youth work appear to be increasingly shaped ‘from above’ rather than ‘from within’ (Evetts 2012 p. 5).

Section 3.4 examined professional youth work using the social professions literature and revealed why firstly, Irish youth workers need to be able to distinguish it as a profession in itself. While secondly it highlighted why they need to contemplate what kind of profession they want it to be in order to manage it in the current environment.

Remarkably there is little within the literature about how youth workers themselves articulate their relationship with professionalism, or perhaps a ‘new’ form of professionalism influencing ongoing changes to youth work. It could be argued that the interpretations in the sociology of the professions remain obscure to practitioners on the ground. However, it is less likely that their experience of practising within a changing socio-political context, that judges and funds your work, is outside youth workers’ understanding.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

Earlier chapters describe the context and rationale for this research, and they outline my professional background and motivation for inquiring into youth workers' perspectives on professional youth work. Relevant literature on youth work history, theory and policy is also examined. In this chapter, I build on that scaffolding – in sections 4.2 to 4.4, I discuss the theory of narrative inquiry and the research design, with a particular focus on philosophical, methodological and ethical considerations. I conclude, in section 4.5, by providing an overview of the fieldwork undertaken and the subsequent data analysis of outcomes.

4.2 Narrative Inquiry

Henn et al. (2006 p. 8) suggest that social research 'is the pursuit of information gathering to answer questions about some aspect of social life' which then becomes more complex when social researchers begin contemplating how to do the research. Social research explores and seeks to understand meanings attributed 'to a social or human problem' (Creswell 2008) and begins with the researcher choosing the 'overall design' most suitable for exploring their topic (Creswell 2008 p. 3). Primarily, consideration 'involves philosophical assumptions as well as distinct methods or procedures' (Creswell 2008 p. 5). When contemplating the vast array of research methods available, researchers are advised to distinguish their philosophical worldviews in order to attend to their understandings of 'the nature of research, the nature of knowledge, the purpose of research, the nature of research design, and the nature of the research process' (McCormack 2000 p. 284). Only then will initial influences on the research design and methodological choices emerge.

Darlington and Scott (2002 p. 4) affirm that 'everyday those working in the human services field, be it with families, groups or whole communities, generate multiple questions from their practice'. In this research, the philosophical assumptions are largely informed by my role as a practitioner and its centrality to my conceptual framework. Through my engagement as a practitioner/researcher, two 'worlds' meet, bringing together a practitioner identity with a researcher role. Moreover, relationships of trust and shared meaning often exist and contribute to a co-constructed meaning (Coupal 2005 p. 5). Therefore, using narrative inquiry

as the key influence in this research design makes sense. This is apparent as narrative inquiry is described in more detail in the following sections of this document.

Two philosophical worldviews, social constructivist and advocacy/participatory, both of which are described by Creswell (2008) below, underline this inquiry into youth work. Knowledge is continuously constructed in youth work relationships' between young people and youth workers, within moments, and 'face-to-face situations' amongst individuals (Issitt & Spence 2005 p. 63). As such, this knowledge cannot be readily generalised, making a social constructivist worldview more appropriate for this research. Creswell (2008 p. 8) explains:

> Social constructivists hold assumptions that individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work. Individuals develop subjective meanings of their experiences – meanings directed toward certain objects or things.

This worldview helps, in part, to explain how the nature of knowledge is understood in this research. Additionally, underpinning assumptions related to the impetus behind and throughout this research point to:

> An advocacy/participatory worldview (which) holds that research inquiry needs to be intertwined with politics and a political agenda. Thus, the research contains an action agenda for reform that may change the lives of the participants, the institutions in which individuals work or live, and the researcher's life. (Creswell 2008 p. 9)

Youth-work practice is guided by the principles of social education – defining itself as different from formal education in that it emphasises the 'centrality of conversation' (Spence 2007 p. 8) rather than the instruction. Youth workers are conversationalists (Tilsen 2018 p. 52, see Chapter 3 above) and, through conversations youth workers and young people, learn about and from each other, and are able to deconstruct, reconstruct and construct stories of realities being, not being, or soon to be lived (Tilsen 2018). However, the emphasis on conversation creates difficulties for workers trying to communicate their work – the experiences and moments – in contexts outside of youth work practice.

Spence (2007 p. 14) explains, 'personal and relational language is a deeply problematic area of public communication'. Commonly, the gathering of professional knowledge results in the use of 'written or visual texts, for functional rather than analytical purposes', and the principles of youth work are often lost (Spence 2007 p. 4). Hence, this research explores

youth workers' perspectives by asking them about their experiences of professional youth work. The aim is to construct knowledge which illuminates and communicates youth work principles to internal audiences and external stakeholders. Therefore, a qualitative research methodology is the most suitable.

• The Qualitative Tradition

Focusing on youth workers' experiences locates this research 'in the general paradigm of qualitative research methodology' (Hollingsworth & Dybdahl 2007 p. 149). Qualitative research is defined by Denzin and Lincoln (2000 p. 3) as:

> a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive material practices that makes the world visible. These practices…turn the world into a series of representations including fieldnotes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that the qualitative researchers study things in their natural setting, attempting to make sense of, or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.

It views peoples' lives as continually evolving while interacting with the world in which they live (Bryman 2008), and encompasses a wide array of methods and approaches for in-depth exploration of peoples' worlds. Qualitative research supports a researcher to build confidence and trust between themselves and the participants (Darlington & Scott 2002). Sharing many of the practices embedded in work with people, e.g. relationship building, qualitative research reflects youth work practice and its underpinning values. This research design is developed to ensure research participants are fully supported to actively contribute in a way they understand and are familiar with. To this end, narrative inquiry is identified as the key influence in this qualitative design.

• Narrative Inquiry - Overview

The Narrative Turn emerged within the context of civil rights, women's sexual liberation and anti-colonial movements (Berger & Quinney 2004). Narrative inquiry studies experiences, and how we think about experiences, and views people as having unending experiences while continuously recreating stories during the experience (Connelly & Clandinin 2006). Narrative researchers gather stories, analyse them to identify significant features, e.g. time, plot etc, and then rewrite them to position them in a chronological sequence (Ollerenshaw &

Creswell 2002 as cited in Creswell 2012 p. 74). Essentially, narrative researchers endeavour to 'restory' participants' stories into a framework that makes sense' and 'Restorying is the process of reorganising the stories into some general type of framework' (Creswell 2012 p. 74).

Youth workers create and recreate knowledge with young people in changeable contexts where practice is fluid, and they communicate this through stories (Davies 2011a). Their stories describe experiences and events in and about their work, while those they work with also share stories with them (Spence 2007, Tilsen 2018). It can be viewed as a way of 'sense-making for both the storyteller and the listener' (Cooper 2018c p.235). Essentially, the youth work process reflects the imperative of narrative inquiry, hence its influence on the development of this qualitative research design (Creswell 2007). Narrative inquiry research promotes the "active integration of *knowing*, *doing* and *being*" (White 2007 p. 231, italics added), 'thus unhinging the problematic distinction between theory and practice' (Tilsen 2018 p. 50), thereby supporting youth workers to explain what they do and how they do it, in a way that is familiar to them.

Increasingly, social professionals are using narrative inquiry in their practice and research as it sits itself into 'the temporal unfolding of lives' (Clandinin & Huber 2010), For example, teachers describe their use of narrative inquiry to look at their personal and professional lives explaining it is an ongoing inquiry amongst them and their colleagues (Hollingsworth & Dybdahl 2007). A recent resurgence of practitioner research – particularly in the health and social professions – prompts some authors to suggest it is receiving increased recognition from academics and practitioners (Coupal 2005, Darlington & Scott, 2002). Conversely, others propose that practitioner researchers observe academic researchers denoting less importance to their work (Fox et al. 2007). Though practitioner research bears the same expectations of it as academic research (Costley 2010, Fox et al. 2007), the positioning of the researcher in the research process is fundamentally different (Coupal 2005). Indisputably, practitioner research involves the sharing and gathering of stories, hence the suitability of narrative inquiry in this research.

Clandinin (2006 p. 44) proposes a narrative paradigm accepts the belief that as humans 'we create meaning in our lives as well as ways we enlist other's help in building our lives and communities'. Creswell (2006 p. 54) defines narrative inquiry as a 'specific type of

qualitative design'; while Czarniawska (2004) asserts it can be a written or spoken text, offering a chronological account of an event, action or series of both. Also, Chase (2008) explains narrative inquiry can be defined as an approach and a method. For the purpose of this research I followed the guidelines outlined by (Creswell 2007) in terms of data collection and analysis.

Referring to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), Creswell (2007 p. 55) describes a set of guidelines for researchers to consider when selecting and using narrative inquiry. They are:

> Choosing narrative inquiry if the question necessitates the gathering of stories and experiences from a small number of individuals.
>
> A considerable amount of time should be spent with the individuals using a variety of collection methods, e.g. 'field texts' (Clandinin & Connelly 2000)
>
> The researcher collects information about the context of the individuals' stories being gathered.
>
> Stories gathered during the fieldwork are re-storied by tying them together under a general framework and presenting them back in this way.
>
> A collaborative and active participation process between the researcher and the participant, with the researcher negotiating relationships and meanings, and facilitating turning points and epiphanies for themselves and the participants in their interactions is promoted. Creswell (2007 p. 55)

Importantly, these procedures are a guide, 'an informal collection of topics' (Creswell 2007 p. 55) rather than a steadfast set of rules to be used by the researcher when appropriate in the research process. Examining philosophical underpinnings illustrates why this research is qualitative and draws from narrative inquiry. This becomes apparent when describing the plan for data collection and specifically the method, i.e. interviews.

• Qualitative and Narrative Interviewing

Qualitative interviews look to access more in-depth knowledge, e.g. peoples' experiences and thoughts (Rubin & Rubin 2005). Qualitative interviewing enters peoples' life worlds, interpreting meaning, obtaining nuanced descriptions, and acknowledging sensitivity and varied experiences acquired through interpersonal interaction (Kvale 2009). Using qualitative interviews with youth workers facilitates a process which is familiar to the researcher and participants as everyday topics are discussed and meaning in each participant's world is expressed in their own language and interpreted as such (Kvale 2009).

These interviews encourage the participant and the researcher to engage with and reflect on their work and experiences, shared or otherwise (Rubin & Rubin 2012 p. 7).

Kvale (1996 p. 25) describes a qualitative interview to be 'a specific form of human interaction in which knowledge evolves through a dialogue', and Merrill and West (2009 p. 215) suggest 'interview implies relationship'. During a qualitative interview, a relationship is built between the researcher and participant influencing its content and process thus reflecting a youth worker's practice of establishing relationships and trust with young people through talking with them (Young 1999). Kvale (1996 p. 124) suggests interviews are for 'obtaining qualitative descriptions of the life world of the subject with respect to interpretation of their meaning' and offer an opportunity to those whose voice is normally silent to be heard by a larger audience (Kvale 2006). After choosing qualitative interviews for data collection in this research, the next consideration looks at what type of qualitative interviews should be undertaken with youth workers and why.

• Biographical Narrative Interviewing

Narrative interviewing acknowledges the temporal, social and meaning structures of an interview in which stories may be spontaneous or elicited (Mishler 1986). Researchers use narrative inquiry to gather knowledge by asking people to tell their stories – as is the case in youth work – while also looking at the stories being created with the participants throughout the research. Narrative research practices are guided by the following traditions; biographical, autobiographical, life history and oral history (Creswell 2007, Chase 2005), and – depending on the purpose of the research – the type of interview approach is influenced by one or more of these. The biographical tradition influences the interviews in this research as I inquire into who professional youth workers are and how they understand their role. Therefore, I ask participants to share stories of their experiences before, becoming and being a professional youth worker. Gathering data using biographical narrative interviewing supports me as a practitioner researcher to hear, share, and gather stories with each of my fellow practitioners in a way reflecting youth work practice, i.e. asking and sharing experiences between us in conversation. At the same time, the process is undoubtedly unpredictable, and so the planning stages need to address this and prepare for the unexpected. Ethical considerations are central to this.

4.3 Narrative Ethics in Narrative Inquiry

• Narrative Interviewing: Co-constructing Knowledge

Rubin and Rubin (2005 p. 12) describe qualitative interviews as 'extensions of ordinary conversations' with the interviewees 'as partners in the research enterprise rather than just subjects to be tested'. Furthermore, Kvale (1996 p. 125) understands an interview as 'a conversation between two partners about a theme of mutual interest' and Rubin & Rubin (2005 p. 15) label the process 'responsive interviewing'. Essentially, in conversations with participants, questioning styles, relationships and purpose can all change and evolve in response to how the participant is or is not engaging in the process throughout the fieldwork. This is because 'qualitative research is not simply learning about a topic, but also learning what is important to those being studied' (Rubin & Rubin 2005 p. 15).

During data collection, it is useful for a researcher who is cognisant of this to think of themselves as a traveller who 'wanders through the landscape and enters into conversations with the people he or she encounters'. Fundamentally, the researcher and the participants are 'wandering together' (Kvale 2009 p. 48). The epistemological notion of researcher as 'traveller' (Kvale 2009 p. 47) is the essence of a narrative inquiry perspective which understands knowledge as co-constructed. Looking to travel with the research participants – my fellow practitioners in youth work, on journeys that are at times 'off road, taking unexpected paths' (Tilsen 2018 p. 61), visiting new places together, sharing and collecting stories, and creating new experiences – any intention to try and dig out information like a 'miner' believing, like some researchers, it is buried within participants, is disregarded (Kvale 2009). Several features guiding the research conversations and supporting the data collection process in this research include:

- Deliberate naiveté
- Looking for specificities as opposed to generalisations
- Purpose
- Ambiguity reflecting real life situations
- Being open to change regarding new insights and descriptions
- Sensitivity
- Information is obtained through interpersonal interaction
- It is a positive experience for the interviewee (Kvale 2009 p. 28)

These features resonate deeply with me because they reflect the essentials of a youth worker's attitude and disposition when working with young people (see Chapter 3, Tilsen 2018 p. 90).

The practitioner researcher positionality also needs to be managed. Kvale (2009 p. 33) introduces the term 'power asymmetry' to recognise the interviewer as ruling the interview through a one-way, instrumentalised dialogue which can be manipulative. To avoid this, an interviewee is advised to have their own questions for the interviewer, coupled with the interviewer sharing their observations and thoughts to 'equalise' the interaction and process (Kvale 2009). Likewise, Rubin and Rubin (2005 p. 79) suggest the use of responsive interviewing leads to a 'conversational partnership', encouraging the development of a relationship between the researcher and the interviewee, which 'influences the interviewing process'. Hence, the three interviews with each participant in this research are referred to as three conversations.

That said, conversations with participants are not ordinary conversations. Instead they are for research, with a purpose and focus (Kvale 2009), and involve 'a delicate balance between cognitive knowledge seeking and the ethical aspects of emotional human interaction' (Kvale 1996 p. 125). Described as 'more detailed, more in-depth, more focused, and also more imbalanced' (Rubin & Rubin 2005 p. 108), interviews should not be regarded as 'completely open and free dialogue between egalitarian partners' (Kvale 2009 p. 33) and it is essential to ensure a plan with a strong 'ethic of care' is developed and approved for use throughout the process.

• Narrative Research and Ethical Approval

Qualitative researchers or 'insiders' argue the importance of recognising that narrative research is different from quantitative research, explaining that 'we pursue a question through a meandering route, finding appropriate data sources as we go along' (Zeni 1998 p. 10). A qualitative research design – particularly one influenced by narrative inquiry and the practitioner researcher role – requires detailed planning to ensure a strong 'ethic of care' (Kearns 2012 p. 29).

University ethics' panels often review research proposals through a traditional scientific inquiry lens which commonly looks at harm to participants, lack of informed consent, invasion of privacy, and deception (Diener & Crandell 1978 as cited in Bryman 2008 p. 118).

However, Lincoln and Tierney (2004 as cited in Bryman 2008 p. 17) suggest:

> In recent years, research ethics committees …have become quite controversial. Some writers see them as too influenced by a natural science model of the research process and as therefore inimical to social research and qualitative research in particular.

This was a concern for me before I began to look for ethical approval as – noted earlier – narrative interviewing attends to how stories are being told, but equally how those stories are being made (Clandinin & Huber 2010 p. 10), and is a 'recursive process' embedded in a narrative approach for the collection of in-depth data (Clandinin & Huber 2010 p. 10).

Knowledge is created, shared and revisited to influence future interviews between the narrative researcher and the participant. This has prompted the decision to have three conversations rather than just one with each participant in this research activity. As a result, the narrative researcher must continuously attend to issues of ethics, including ongoing consent when doing narrative interviews. Essentially, ethics is not just a one-off piece of work to be taken care of during the fieldwork process, but rather it is ongoing – stories are collected in the middle of stories being made.

The collection of data constructs rather than merely relates, peoples' stories (Clandinin & Huber 2010), and so open-ended conversations present the possibility of renegotiated consent with participants throughout the research. To this end, 'narrative ethics thus involves a simultaneous welcoming and valuing of endless questioning' and supports the researcher to acknowledge narrative privilege (Adams 2008 p. 188).

I received ethical approval from Maynooth University through a process that was designed to facilitate practitioner research. I was granted ethical approval following completion of a written protocol, and making a presentation to a panel which addressed any queries and concerns the University might have had about ethics in relation to my work. Following ethical approval, I addressed the area of quality in research before beginning the fieldwork.

4.4 Quality in Narrative Inquiry

In social research, quality is most commonly discussed in relation to reliability, replicability and validity (Bryman 2008). Briefly, reliability is concerned with whether the results of the completed study can be repeated, i.e. can it be relied on to produce the same results if the

study is carried out again. Replicability looks at whether it is possible to create the same study again in order to produce those same results. Validity addresses the integrity of the study and focuses on measurement and internal validity, i.e. measures and causality (Bryman 2008).

On completion or near completion of any research project, questions related to its 'quality, validity, reliability and generalisability' are certain (Loh 2013 p. 1). Contemplating this, Creswell (2012 p. 52) declares:

> At some point I ask, "Did we (I) get the story right?" (Stake 1995) knowing that there are no "right" stories, only multiple stories. Perhaps qualitative studies have no endings, only questions.

As noted, currently, specific criteria, attendance to a process of regular evaluation, and an emphasis on evidence-based practice, dominate discussions concerning research quality. However, qualitative researchers suggest that there are alternative ways to judge the quality of qualitative research (Hammersley2007, Bryman 2008,Loh 2013). Hammersley (2007 p. 287) recommends defining the term 'criterion', its position in qualitative research, and whether it's reasonable to have just one set of criteria. This is particularly pertinent when considering the various, often contrasting, paradigms and underpinning philosophical assumptions across qualitative research.

Additionally, Loh (2013) queries whether writers on qualitative research are sufficiently and confidently addressing the issue of quality, particularly quality in narrative inquiry research. As such, he explores how the areas of trustworthiness and truth – noting verisimilitude and utility – can be managed in narrative inquiry, and recommends the use of member checking with peers, and audience validation, when thinking about trustworthiness in narrative inquiry research.

Truth is discussed considering the believability of the research and its findings when read by another, i.e. verisimilitude. When discussing the writing of research for the reader, Creswell (2012 p. 54) explains how verisimilitude manifests:

> A literary term captures my thinking (Richardson 1994 p. 521). The writing is clear, engaging and full of unexpected ideas. The story and findings become believable and realistic, accurately reflecting all the complexities that exist in real life. The best qualitative studies engage the reader.

Finally, the term utility – looking at the usefulness and contribution a piece of research makes or can make when it is completed – is considered. Loh (2013 p. 10) suggests following Eisner's (1998) three criteria: comprehension, anticipation and guide maps. Using these three, the researcher considers if their final research helps the reader to understand something otherwise unknown while using interpretations and descriptions to move them beyond the information given, and provide them with directions to observe and understand areas and experiences presented in more depth. To conclude this discussion on quality and the overall design, an examination of the practitioner/researcher role is essential before describing the fieldwork.

• Reflecting on My Own Story(ies) as a Practitioner Research

Certainly, practitioner research, and the role of the practitioner/researcher, continues to fuel debates for various reasons already noted in this chapter. One final area which has not yet been discussed in relation to this research concerns validity and its relevance to the role of the practitioner researcher. Positivist critiques argue the position of the insider practitioner researcher is problematic in terms of a lack of objectivity, questionable impartiality, and a view to a particular outcome being attained (Costley 2010). Ultimately, their role is seen to compromise the collection of 'valid' or 'true' knowledge as constituted in an objectivist context (Kvale 1995).

However, from a social constructivist view, positivist research can fail to recognise the multiple experiences of practitioners operating in different contexts, and for the social constructivist researcher 'validity is not defined by objective criteria laid down by researchers and academics' (Fox et al. 2007 p. 80). Comparing positivist researchers to insider researchers, Costley (2010) suggests the latter has a better understanding of the participants' professional role and mutual understanding exists between the researcher and participant, encouraging discussion in the interviews. The practitioner researcher 'can draw upon the shared understanding and trust of their immediate colleagues with whom normal interactions of working communities have been developed' (Costley 2010 p. 1). That said, I previously worked under the same funding remit as three of the participants and had expected that our experiences and perspectives on youth work would be similar.

Many differences arose as I listened to the recordings of their conversations, and analysed the transcripts, gaining a more in-depth understanding from participants' experiences (Rooney 2005). Therefore, social constructivist researchers need to be aware of, and make visible, contextual influences on their research to authenticate it. These include whether it is commissioned, who the other stakeholders are, and the biases they bring to the research. Rather than striving for objectivity – regarded as impossible – researchers endeavour to make their subjectivities visible.

• A Story of Quality in Social Research - Responsibility

Mindful of the debates on quality, particularly validity, in qualitative and narrative inquiry research, I include a suitable framework to ensure their transparency in this research. McClintock et al. (2003) identify six criteria for evaluating responsible research explaining what they can contribute and in what form they may take. Table 1 (overleaf) illustrates the guidelines and in its column four, I outline my response to each area during the research process.

Furthermore, rather than striving for objectivity – regarded as impossible – researchers endeavour to make their subjectivities visible. Considering this, I use the criteria for responsible research (McClintock et al. 2003) [as indicated in Table 1] again, as it offers a suitable framework to make my biases visible and judge validity. Indeed, assuming research about youth work practice can be designed and implemented without being reflective of its practice and value-base is challenged by this research design (Issitt & Spence 2005). This is further evident in the implementation of the fieldwork and analysis process.

Table 1: Criteria for Evaluating Responsible Research (McClintock et al 2003)

Criteria for responsibility (Evidence of)	How it can contribute to responsibility	Desirable Attributes	How I responded
Self-reflection	Being aware of ideas assumptions and alternatives	Research Journal Document changes in ideas	My reflection journal: This documents thoughts and changes in ideas throughout the interview process including 'My Story' in Appendix H.
Engagement in a research community	By a 'dialogue' with other researchers By contributing to a research community	Collaboration Peer Review Conferences	Collaboration: in class Peer review with thesis supervisors Conferences: attended Narrative Inquiry Annual Conference and Youth Work Conference in Maynooth University.
Adequate use of available resources	Being 'accountable'	Coherence and plausibility of argument. Use of time.	Coherence and plausibility of argument & use of time Evident throughout the thesis and particularly in Chapter 4, the Research Design
Immersion in context	By a prolonged time with people in context. Through relationship building.	A rich picture of that context Research is relevant to that context	A rich picture of that context. Research is relevant to that context Evident in: Chapters 5,6 & 7, the Findings and Analysis.
Rigour	By substantiating arguments.	Quoting relevant literature and sources of material	Quoting relevant literature and sources of material: Evident throughout thesis, particularly in: Chapter 2 – Irish Youth Work, An Overview Chapter 3 – Literature Review Chapter 4 – Research Design Chapter 8 – Discussion
Sincerity	Valuing other people Consistency to aims of working with people	Writing in the first person Learning described Developing appropriate skills	Writing in the first person Learning described Developing appropriate skills Evident in: Chapter 4, Research Design Chapters 5,6 & 7- Findings and Analysis Chapter 8, Discussion

4.5 The Fieldwork

• Preparation

The remainder of this chapter attends to participant selection and recruitment of study participants, and provides an overview of the fieldwork and ethical considerations. Six youth workers were recruited, and I had three conversations – eighteen in total – with each of them. I then analysed the conversations, and these are represented through seven vignettes provided in Chapters 5, 6 and 7.

• Criteria

As I was trying to get an in-depth insight into my area of research, *Youth workers' perspectives on Professional Youth Work,* I used purposive sampling – 'the researcher samples on the basis of wanting to interview people who are relevant to the research questions' (Bryman 2008 p. 458) – in order to talk to key informants, i.e. other professional youth workers who, like myself, were practising before and during the implementation of an austerity programme in Ireland (see Section 1.2). Therefore, I developed criteria which would encourage key informants, those offering 'the researcher…perceptive information about the social setting, important events, and individuals' (Bryman 2008 p. 695), to participate. This was guided by the imperatives of narrative inquiry and discussions with my supervisor, and was premised on my position as a practitioner researcher. The five criteria were:

1. The participants were not required to have a youth work qualification as this reflects the qualification backgrounds amongst the professional youth workers I work with and more broadly in Ireland. Currently there is no legal requirement stating the employment of professional youth workers is partially or otherwise dependent on them having recognised qualifications in youth work. As discussed in the previous chapters, this has resulted in Ireland having a population of professional youth workers with a diversity of qualifications and experience – many with either one or the other only.
2. Participants needed to be practising outside Dublin (and preferably Limerick), as the research aims to highlight the voices of youth workers and the landscape of youth work practice in an area other than Dublin. As noted (see Section 2.3), the Irish Youth Workers Association was established in 2013 with membership criteria stipulating those who wanted to join needed an accredited youth work qualification. However, since 2013, a

growth in membership has been largely unsuccessful. This is perhaps due to their establishment in the East of Ireland where professionally accredited education and training, facilitating the formation of a professional identity process for youth workers exists, while professional youth workers elsewhere in the country, e.g. Limerick, have not had the same opportunities to access accredited education and training and therefore participate in this type of process and recognition of their professional identity. Hence, I suggest, the lack of growth in the IYWA and therefore a space for professional youth workers outside of Dublin to have their voices heard. Furthermore, with the exception of the report 'The Purpose and Outcomes of Youth Work' (Devlin & Gunning 2009), past research and reports with professional youth workers in relation to Irish youth work has been largely carried out in Dublin (Farrelly et al. 2010, Melaugh 2015). Also, since my youth work career experience is Limerick-based, I wanted to gain a more in-depth understanding of the youth work happening there. Practically, I was working as a full-time youth worker during the data collection period, and needed to consider the time implications and resource constraints for me when undertaking and completing the fieldwork. I needed to balance the ideal with the feasibility of undertaking the research. As Bryman (2008) asserts:

> All research is constrained by time and resources. There is no point working on research questions and plans that cannot be seen through because of time-pressure or the costs involved. Bryman (2008 p. 68)

Speaking to participants based in Limerick was more practicable for me to complete.

3. Participants must have at least ten years' experience as a professional youth worker. If they had more, even better, as I had anticipated a larger pool of insights to draw from.
4. Though gender was not an initial focus, the criteria sought an even number of male and female participants with a view to considering its possible emergence in the findings.
5. The participants could be youth work supervisors, while actively practising as professional youth workers. This was included as I knew a potential research participant had a supervisory, as well as a practitioner role, in their organisation and I expected insights from the dual role to bring a wider diversity of experiences.

With the criteria established, the next step for the researcher was to recruit participants.

• Participant Recruitment

Narrative inquiry methodologies focus on in-depth engagement with a small number of participants, therefore, I decided to talk to six youth workers, three times, accumulating a total of eighteen conversations. As noted earlier, there were several potential participants that I suspected might satisfy the five identified criteria. They were also aware of my research preparations over the previous two years. I contacted four of these youth workers to find out if they actually met the criteria – they did, and they agreed to become participants in the research. However, I needed to identify two more youth workers who met the criteria, and were willing to participate.

On the advice of my thesis supervisor, I sought a key informant, and contacted an ETB Youth Officer in Limerick who gave me a contact list of all of the professional youth workers in Limerick City and County. From this list I phoned two youth workers I was familiar with, explained what I was doing, identified that they met the criteria for the study, and they agreed to participate. To support my research, each research participant took part in three conversations with me over a period of six months (see Table 2, below).

Table 2: Profile of Research Participants

Participant Pseudonym	Gender	Age Range	Decade left school	Qualifications	No of years' practicing as a professional youth worker	Involved in youth work as a young person
Eamonn	Male	55-60	1970s	Not-professionally endorsed Diploma in Youth work and Community work	12	No
Jewel	Female	40-45	1980s	NSETS Degree in Youth and Community Work	12	Yes
Maria	Female	40-45	1990s	BA in Humanities	15+	No
Martin	Male	30-35	1990s	BA in Liberal Arts	10	No
Susan	Female	40-45	1980s	Not-professionally endorsed Diploma in Youth Work and Community Work	10	Yes
Thomas	Male	30-35	1990s	NSETS Masters in Youth Work	12	No

• The Introduction Meeting

After their recruitment, I organised an introduction meeting with each of the participants to give them an overview of the research, discuss my role and their role, answer any questions arising, and of course read through the participant information and consent forms. This practice ensured participants became aware of, and agreed to, having conversations for research, and were informed of its background and context along with the expectations associated with their participation and mine as the researcher. In the interests of data protection, the completed consent forms were scanned onto my computer and all hardcopies destroyed. The scanned copies have been kept as proof that all agreed to participate and therefore, accountability is maintained. The transcripts are retained for ten years in accordance with Maynooth University data protection guidelines.

Finally, cognisant of circumstances and thoughts developing and changing since we previously met, the participants and I revisited their Consent Form each time we began a conversation.

The introduction meeting lasted about forty-five minutes to one hour. Firstly, I highlighted my dual role as a practitioner researcher, explaining that I would remain working as a full-time youth worker during the fieldwork. I then described the focus of the three conversations as: experiences before, becoming, and being a professional youth worker. Of course, when I met each participant, our conversation often addressed aspects of all three areas of before, becoming and being in one sitting, and not just the one we were focusing on that day.

The introduction meeting gave me, and the participants, an opportunity to discuss the research, ask each other questions, make suggestions, and go through each part of the consent and information forms before signing them (Appendices B and C). We discussed managing time and venue constraints, and I assured every participant I would share the length of each recorded conversation at the end, playing back any part of it before I left if they wished.

Anonymity was negotiated, primarily to ensure participants and the research sites were not named. Everyone is given a code in all written material produced e.g. transcripts and analysis, whilst pseudonyms are used in the findings and analysis, and discussion chapters. However, the participants work in local youth projects around Limerick and despite these remaining nameless, I could not guarantee complete anonymity. At the end of the introduction meeting, we set a date for our first conversation.

• Constructing Our Conversations

Three open-ended conversations with each of the six youth workers generated eighteen recorded conversations over a six-month period. Seventeen of the eighteen conversations were conducted at the project base where the participant or I worked from, and my third conversation with Jewel was at her home. Though these research conversations were sometimes cancelled in advance – remembering the participants and I also had professional and personal commitments to attend to – we always negotiated new dates, times or both to meet. Each conversation was framed in the context of each person's youth work biography. Hence,

- the first conversation invited participants to reflect on their life before becoming a professional youth worker.
- the second conversation asked participants to discuss becoming and being a professional youth worker.
- the third conversation invited participants to look at being a professional youth worker currently, and in the future.

We had 'exploratory, open-ended conversations, prioritising holistic understanding situated in a lived experience' (Trahar 2009 p. 2). There was a period of two months between each conversation in order for me to transcribe and analyse each participant's interview and send it back to them to look over before our next meeting. On completion of the fieldwork, the data collected consisted of the eighteen recorded conversations, accompanied by eighteen transcripts and my reflection notes in six red A4 hardback copy books.

At the start of each conversation I revisited the purpose of the research, reminding the participant of the research, my role, and what would happen during and after the fieldwork process regarding the data and writing up. I updated them on any changes they may need to be aware of from my side, and gave them a synopsis of what we had spoken about in the previous conversation. I asked if they were still happy with what they agreed to do and recorded their verbal consent. I also checked-in with participants to see how they were, and if there was anything that struck them or resonated with them from the last conversation we had. During each interview I took handwritten notes, when possible, as I did not want to interrupt the flow of our conversation by having to stop and write.

Eight guidelines helped me to think about creating space to facilitate learning (Hollingsworth & Dybdahl 2007). These are as follows:

- Develop trust. Listen non-judgementally
- Put together conversations that set norms
- Talk about topics that might be controversial
- Allow conversation to develop naturally
- Value different ways of communicating
- Try to understand and articulate the learning that happens in a conversation
- Reflect on assumptions
- Be attentive to issues of power in the research relationships.

The third guideline for example – 'Talk about topics that are controversial and difficult' (Hollingsworth & Dybdahl 2007 p. 166) – encouraged me to inquire into youth workers' experiences of funding cuts in their practice and more broadly in their organisation. After each interview I checked in with the participants again to ask how they were feeling, how they were, and if they would like to go back over anything we discussed. I explained that the transcript of our conversation would be sent to them and I would then talk with them on the phone to schedule our next meeting.

After the interview, I wrote up my own reflection notes about my position as a researcher, the conversation we had, and the setting. These notes proved invaluable as I revisited them, and the recorded audio of each conversation, numerous times when preparing for the next conversation. Using the collected data, I generated guiding prompts for our next conversation together. Rubin and Rubin (2005 p. 13) explain:

> to achieve richness and depth of understanding, those engaged in qualitative interviews listen for and then explore key words, ideas and themes using follow-up questions to encourage the interviewee to expand on what she had said that the researcher feels is important to the research'.

I intended to explore and learn more about each participant's individual experiences (Rubin & Rubin 2005) before they were a professional youth worker, in becoming a professional youth worker, and on being a professional youth worker using the following prompts:

Conversation One:

- Life before, and leading to, youth work/ Experiences.
- Training and qualifications.
- Why professional youth work?

Conversation Two:

- Experiences in particular shaping your youth worker identity and practice.
- Describing what professional youth workers try to do.
- Describing other professionals' perceptions of youth work in the past.

Conversation Three:

- Understanding of the word professional.
- Understanding of professional youth work practice and a professional youth worker now.
- Changing/ renegotiated youth worker identity since becoming professional.
- The future for professional youth workers.

During, and on completion of, the eighteen conversations, I constructed and implemented a plan for their data analysis. The analysis of this data is presented in the remaining sections and outlined step by step in Table 4.

4.6 Analysis – *Which Stories to Re-story?*

In narrative inquiry, material is analysed to find a 'story worthy' in the context of the research purpose and rationale outlined (Georgakopoulou 2006 p. 122). However, the process of analysis in research can cause confusion and can, at least partly, be attributed to the diversity of approaches and the type of material produced by narrative approaches, particularly biographical interviews (Merrill & West 2009). The amount of data gathered throughout the interview process can be overwhelming for a researcher and make it difficult for them to decide on an analysis strategy (Maple & Edwards 2010). It is important for a researcher to remember 'it takes patience and perseverance to give yourself permission to remain

bewildered during this transitional period between data review and synthesis' (Maple & Edwards 2010 p. 39).

Analysing narratives requires the researcher to focus on what the participants choose to tell rather than on 'historical truth' (Reissman 1993 in McCormack 2004 p. 220). As Hunter (2010 p. 44) explains, a social constructionist perspective sees the stories people tell as 'dependent on the context of the teller and the listener; and are not intended to represent truth', believing there are many truths, with those widely accepted 'attached to power' (Byrne-Armstrong 2001 p. 113 cited in Hunter 2010 p. 47).

Chase (2005 pp. 656-8) presents five analytic lenses used in contemporary narrative inquiry that illustrate how the researcher and their accompanied discipline – underpinned by philosophical notions – influences the analysis and subsequent findings. Briefly, these lenses include:

- narrative as a distinct form of discourse
- verbal action – focusing on voice
- narratives are enabled, and constrained, by a range of social resources and circumstances
- narratives are socially situated interactive performances, and
- narrative researchers are narrators themselves.

As I focus on narratives constructing the self – specifically in relation to professional youth work in larger, organisational and cultural contexts – this research draws from the second and third lenses, shaping what I examined, and therefore the stories developed during analysis.

I wanted to ensure my analysis yielded findings which pointed to a 'good' narrative inquiry, focusing 'on a small number of participants, (telling) stories about a significant issue and have a chronology that connects different aspects of a story' (Creswell 2007 pp. 214-215). Also, that the story I crafted re-storied the experiences shared by the participants in a way which was convincing, reflexively highlighted how I included myself as the author, and was engaging to readers (Creswell 2007). Furthermore, retaining and managing participants' voices is a key consideration throughout the research design, and so this needed to continue by respecting and representing the individual voices within the broader narrative (Maple and Edwards 2010). To this end, I queried what way to approach the analysis, and found

Clandinin and Huber's (in McGaw et al. 2010 p. 13) note on an 'overly dominant researcher signature' when contemplating analysis and re-storying resonated with me.

McCormack (2000 p. 283) also grapples with this dilemma admitting 'I was concerned that the traditional method of coding for themes in transcripts and studying those themes separated people's words from their spoken and heard context'. McCormack (2004 p. 220) describes her analysis as a process in which she moves from viewing the interview transcript to the story development, and points to two types of analysis in a narrative inquiry framework, 'analysis of narrative' and 'narrative analysis' (Polkinghorne 1995). The latter, narrative analysis, aims to create a process of emplotment from the actions and events gathered with participants in order to construct stories. Meanwhile, analysis of narrative looks for themes that 'hold across stories' (McCormack 2004 p. 220). Like McCormack (2004), use of both types guided my research analysis.

Mindful of the challenges accompanying procedures and features in narrative inquiry research – detailed throughout the chapter thus far – there are several areas a researcher can attend to in preparation for and during analysis (Creswell 2007 p. 57). These include:

- Collecting extensive information about the participants and have a clear understanding of their life.
- A keen eye to identify in the source material the particular stories that capture the individual's experiences.
- Active collaboration and discussion about the stories with the participant.
- Reflection on the part of the researcher about their own personal and political background ('which shaped how they "restory" the account').

Pinnegar and Daynes (2006) contemplate emerging stories and deliberate over who should own, tell or change the stories, whose account is most believable, what to do with competing narratives, and what stories do to people as a community. Both Creswell (2007) and Pinnegar and Daynes (2006) highlight areas which are central to a good analysis process, and these are evident throughout the rest of the chapter.

• Having a Keen Eye

To begin analysis, McCormack (2000 p. 284) advises the narrative researcher to move from transcript to interpretive story in two stages. The first stage involves the researcher 'viewing the transcript through multiple lenses', and the second stage recommends the use of

understandings which arose in the first stage to develop interpretive stories (McCormack 2000 p. 285). The multiple lenses are as follows:

- Immersing oneself in the transcript through a process of *active listening*
- Identifying the *narrative processes* used by the storyteller
- Paying attention to the *language* of the text
- Acknowledging the *context* in which the text was produced
- Identifying *moments* in the text where something unexpected is happening.

She suggests these lenses 'are dimensions' people use to construct and reconstruct their identities and to give meaning to their lives' (McCormack 2000 p. 287).

To begin the first stage, I transcribed each of the eighteen conversations - twenty hours and fifty-seven minutes of recordings, in total. Essentially I was immersing myself in the data and actively listening, whilst also beginning to recognise narrative processes used by the participant. This task was completed within nine months of meeting the first participant. After each conversation, I took notes and actively listened back to the audio several times to develop a familiarity with the characters in the stories being told, what was happening, my position as practitioner researcher, and how I was responding emotionally and intellectually to each participant (McCormack 2000 p. 288).

This first stage also allowed me to refine the large amount of data and identify all the quotes related to my research inquiry. However, there was a large amount of data to sort through and I brought this concern to my supervisors. During our discussion, the analysis chart template, represented in Table 3 (below), was suggested for use. After careful consideration I decided that it would be a useful tool to help me begin organising the data collected during the conversations.

Table 3: Analysis Chart (Tierney 2010a)

Transcript Analysis Chart			
Purpose:		**Identify data using research question**	
Overarching research inquiry and question:		**_____**	
To do:		**_____**	
Focus of Analysis:		**e.g. perspectives on being professional**	
Participant ID	**Transcripts / Excerpts SAY / TELL ME**	**Theme**	**Link to Literature Who's thinking, talking, writing about this?**

With an analysis chart full of refined data, I continued to use the 'multiple lenses' to identify key concepts commonly discussed by the participants. For example, Maria, Thomas and Martin spoke about their reasons for going to third level, explaining they wanted a profession or a career. Therefore, a key concept was profession. Also, during this time, I shared my thoughts and ideas with my supervisors and classmates to engage in a process of 'learning from conversation' (Hollingsworth & Dybdahl 2007). The next lens shifted my attention to language, looking at 'what is said and what remains unsaid' (McCormack 2000 p. 291), particularly in relation to the research inquiry, which looks at *'Youth workers' perspectives on Professional Youth Work'.*

Finally, using the lenses of context and moments, I reflected on what I could learn from the interactions and responses in the conversations, and what I recognised as significant moments through key words, descriptions and other forms of discourse. I highlighted quotes using different colours until several concepts emerged. I put aside the data not highlighted, and on completing this part of the analysis I was left with quotes identifying four key concepts, namely: profession, practice, identity, and the future of youth work.

• Keeping the Inquiry Central

Before exploring the quotes related to the (four) key concepts, I decided to refine the data further. I had not anticipated the way participants would speak about youth work, i.e. their

extensive use of metaphoric language, and I was ultimately drawn to using conceptual metaphor analysis to complete the refinement. Conceptual metaphor analysis views metaphor as giving a structure to the thoughts of humans, and how they understand experience (Lakoff & Johnson 1980). Lakoff and Johnson (1980 p. 4) state most of people's 'ordinary conceptual framework system is metaphorical in nature'.

As there is a long tradition of metaphor in writing and speaking about youth work (Smith 1982, Spence 2003, 2007, Tierney 2011, Young 1999), conceptual metaphor analysis is a suitable technique to use for further data refinement. I condensed the data into a more manageable form by using the transcript analysis chart (Table 3) to identify metaphor. With the data refined, I moved on to examine the remaining quotes.

Continuing to utilise the analysis chart (Table 3) to organise and analyse, I explored the remaining quotes using the conversation prompts and the four key concepts: profession, practice, identity, and the future (Appendix D). Doing 'narrative analysis', it was quite obvious considering the framework for the conversations already used – the overarching 'plotline' (Creswell 2007 p. 54), i.e. taking the key 'descriptions of events or happenings' (Creswell 2007 p. 54) and then tying them together to inform the content and sequence of the story – was Before, Becoming and Being. This plotline was one which told of the participants' diverse experiences of Before, Becoming and Being professional youth workers.

4.7 Representation in the Plotline – *Voice in Narrative Inquiry*

As Clandinin (2006 p. 45) stated:

> Connelly and Clandinin (1990, 2006) observed that arguments for the development and use of narrative inquiry are inspired by a view of human experience in which humans, individually and socially, lead storied lives.

Furthermore, as noted earlier in section 4.2, narrative inquiry gives an opportunity for voices normally silent to be heard by a larger audience (Kvale 2006). Therefore, informed by 'analysis of narrative', next I highlighted individual experiences in the overall plotline – based on the four key concepts – and concentrated on the views and recollections of each participant in relation to these (ref Table 4, below).

Table 4: The Analysis Process

STEP ONE: Organising the data & using the transcription chart	Gathered all the data associated with the research inquiry using the analysis chart.
STEP TWO: Refinement of data	Used the multiple lenses when looking at the reduced data and identified four common concepts by using colour coding. Four concepts: Professional, Practice, Identity, The future of youth work.
STEP THREE: Refinement of data	Influenced by Concept Metaphor Analysis, I reduced the data further.
STEP FOUR: Identifying the plotline	Narrative Analysis: Looked for broad themes in the reduced data using the prompts which guided the eighteen research conversations. This resulted in the formation of a plotline. The Overarching Plotline: • Before they were a professional youth work • Becoming a professional youth worker by accident • Being a professional youth worker (illustrating the internal and external contexts)
STEP FIVE: Individual stories within the plotline	Analysis of Narrative: Guided by the plotline, I chose a quote from each participant which represents their individual experiences within this.
STEP SIX: Vignette titles	I used the chosen quotes as vignette titles, and they guided the development of each participant's vignette.
STEP SEVEN: Vignette presentation	Vignette development: Carried out using the six steps that I had developed (ref p. 74, below).

The process of analysis (as outlined in Table 4, above) as used in narrative inquiry delves into and explores how individuals understand their experiences while also looking at the broader social and cultural context influencing these (McCormack 2004). Individuals continuously reconstruct their experiences through recounting them and generating new understandings through this act (McCormack 2004). Consequently, 'Stories re-present the outcomes of a series of reconstructions' (Reissman 1993 in McCormack 2004 p. 220), therefore, attending to voice – mentioned earlier in this chapter (sections 4.3 and 4.6) – is essential when addressing the contemplations of Pinnegar and Daynes (2006) (see section 4.6) regarding emerging stories.

Unlike other approaches, narrative inquiry emphasises the centrality of participants' voices throughout the research process and what is finally re-presented. Chase (2008 p. 70) stresses that research participants are 'conceptualised and attended to as narrators with stories to tell, and voices of their own rather than simply having answers to researchers' questions'. To achieve this centrality, I needed to make my own 'voice, stance, assumptions and analytic lenses clear' to the reader, whilst also maintaining the narrator's reconstructions (Clandinin 2007 p. 453). Failing to do so could lead to the loss, concealment or confusion of their voice and mine (Reissman 2002).

Chase (2008 p. 75-79) discusses three voice strategies which position the research differently in the script: authoritative, supportive and interactive. The authoritative voice locates the researcher as the interpreter, while the interactive voice presents several voices. Using the supportive voice – as I do in the presentation of findings – helps the research remain consistent with its goals, i.e. prioritising the voice of youth workers and therefore ensuring participants' voices continue to be at the forefront of the research.

• Collaboration towards Change and Re-presentation

I created seven interpretive vignettes to re-present the participants' reconstructions of their experiences, and emphasise the diversity of these amongst them in the plotline I had developed and the broader social context. Bradbury-Jones et al. (2014 p. 428) describe vignettes as 'a short, descriptive literary sketch (Richman & Mercer 2002) or scenario told' (Renold 2002). Vignettes provide a way of presenting:

> a holistic cultural portrait of the social group that incorporates both views of the actors in the group (emic) and the researchers' interpretation of views about social life in a social science perspective (etic). (Creswell 1998 p. 60)

Returning to the data, and following the plotline, I highlighted 'one phrase to represent each participant' (Hunter 2010 p. 50). Each phrase was used as a vignette title and supported the crafting of vignettes illustrating experiences and perspectives related to the broader plotline and four key concepts (Appendix E).

Influenced by McCormack's 'storying stories' (2000, 2004), I created my own six step strategy for developing the seven vignettes. These included:

- Step One: Collect all the quotes connected to the participant's vignette title.
- Step Two: Reduce the number of quotes to illuminate the experience/s related to the title.
- Step Three: Compile all the quotes (I'm (participant researcher) still included).
- Step Four: I omit myself from the material left.
- Step Five: Gather all the quotes into a vignette form and send it to the participant for feedback (McCormack 2000).
- Step Six: Make the changes suggested by the participant resulting in the completed vignette.

Essentially, using these six steps, I returned to the full transcript of each participant's three conversations and identified a vignette title. I focused on all the quotes related to the title, including my own, and then reduced the size of the conversation where the participant's vignette title had been sourced, as detailed in steps two to four (above). I was left with a collection of quotes beginning to re-present the individual participant's experiences in the broader plotline, and I compiled these into a draft vignette. Continuing the collaborative process, I then sent the draft vignette to each participant to get their feedback on it and to make any further changes which came from this stage. Accompanying each vignette were the following questions for the participants:

- Was this the story you thought you were telling me?
- Does what I have written made sense to you?
- How does this account compare with your experience?
- Have any aspects of your experience been omitted? Please include these wherever you feel is appropriate?
- Do you wish to remove any aspect (s) of your experience from this text?
- Please feel free to make any other comments. (McCormack 2000 p. 299)

These six steps illustrate my presence in the conversations, how the participants' experiences were reconstructed during the analysis process, and, finally, how together we influenced the development of each vignette to re-present their experiences.

4.8 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the research design with a particular focus on philosophical, methodological and ethical considerations. By detailing the use of a qualitative framework, and more specifically a narrative inquiry influence, reasons for the choices made, and therefore the suitability of the methodological design, is apparent. The methodology was designed to reflect the nature of a youth worker's practice and so I sought to understand youth workers' experiences through forming research relationships and constructing several conversations with each participant.

Using this design – supporting me to attend and respond to the evolving nature of the conversational partnerships during and after the fieldwork – meant ethical considerations were paramount owing to the nature of narrative inquiry and my role as a practitioner researcher collaborating with fellow practitioners. Ethical considerations were fundamental to the development of the whole research design and implementation process. Moreover, producing any research intending on contributing to how others understand an aspect of the world we live in necessitates an examination of quality. For qualitative researchers, particularly those undertaking narrative inquiry research, existing criteria for assessing quality can often pose more difficulties than supports, because of the various approaches and positions held within qualitative and narrative research. The potential for initial criteria to change, and the reality of ongoing ethical considerations was recognised, explored and accounted for in this research due to the nature of the methodology designed.

I developed a set of criteria to support me to do this, as the advice was to make the process of research, especially researchers' biases, visible to the reader, allowing them to make up their own mind and create their own assessment and interpretation of the research. My analysis identified a plotline, but also raised several questions related to re-presentation and voice. Further to this, I identified individual stories from participants and collaborated with them to develop seven vignettes based on their reconstructions of experiences, in order to keep their voices central in the research.

I complete this chapter by providing an overview of the three findings and analysis chapters which follow.

• Constructing Chapters 5, 6 and 7

As this chapter explains, I had three conversations with each participant about experiences of before, becoming and being a professional youth worker in order to explore their perspectives on professional youth work. From an analysis of the eighteen conversations, seven vignette titles were selected and developed, and are presented throughout Chapters 5, 6 and 7.

Each chapter title is chosen based on the overarching plotline, Before, Becoming and Being, and by selecting a word or phrase from the participants' vignettes.

In Chapter 5, titled ***'Luck more so than a grand design'***, the participants describe life before they were professional youth workers and how they became professional youth workers. Chapter 6, ***'Adult somebodies'***, looks at becoming and being professional youth workers and presents participants' perspectives on education and training, and practice and identity. Chapter 7, ***'Youth workers out and about'***, focuses on the participants being professional youth workers, looking at external perceptions of youth workers, expectations of youth work and youth workers, and the future of youth work.

CHAPTER 5 FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS 1 – *'Luck more so than a Grand Design'*

5.1 Introduction

Chapter 4 attends to the philosophical, methodological and ethical considerations of the research design. An overview of the fieldwork and subsequent data analysis is provided along with describing the development and use of seven vignettes to support the analysis of findings. It concludes by outlining the focus of each of the three findings and analysis chapters. The emphasis of each chapter relates to the overall research inquiry which explores *Youth Workers Perspectives on Professional Youth Work.*

This chapter, ***'Luck more so than a grand design'***, includes two vignettes concentrating on the participants' experiences before they were professional youth workers and becoming professional youth workers. The opening vignette: As a Young Person – ***'I loved the positive re-enforcement'***, belongs to Jewel, and is followed by an analysis of the participants' various experiences as young people – some of whom were involved in youth work during their childhood – before they were, or even considered, becoming a professional youth worker.

The analysis following the second vignette, Martin's vignette: The Accidental Youth Worker – ***'I suppose I probably got into youth work then by luck more so than a grand design'***, details the participants' paths to professional youth work and becoming professional youth workers. This chapter highlights the participants' experiences as young people and young adults and how, from various backgrounds and routes travelled, they became professional youth workers. The analysis– outlined at the end of this chapter – identifies areas which are discussed in Chapter 8.

As Chapter 4 already explains, the seven vignettes prioritise each participant's voice while the researcher's voice is one of support, introducing and guiding the reader through the vignette. The use of different font and indentation in the seven vignettes distinguishes the participant's voice from that of the researcher. Further to this, participants' quotes are used throughout each chapter – following presentation of each of the seven vignettes – to support the analysis (for identification purposes, they have similar fonts to the participant vignettes). A reminder of each participant's profile, detailed already in Chapter 4, Table 1, is included before each vignette.

5.2 As a Young Person –'*I loved the positive re-enforcement'*

Jewel's Profile: Jewel is in her 40s and has been a full-time professional youth worker for 12 years. Jewel has an NSETS accredited Degree in Youth and Community Work.

Jewel's Story:

Having to complete eighteen conversations, the one I am about to have with Jewel is not only our first together, but my first as a practitioner researcher to date. Nervous and quite anxious to start, I sit in the upstairs office of the youth project where I am based. Waiting for Jewel to arrive, I try to keep busy by reading notes about interview techniques but, to be honest, nothing is really going in at this point. The doorbell rings at 10 am on the dot. This is it. She's here. I run down the steep, creaky stairs of the old building and answer the door to a smiling, friendly face and welcome Jewel in. Hot cups of coffee in hand, I invite Jewel to tell me about her first experiences of youth work either as a child or as an adult. With this invitation she begins sharing childhood stories with me by describing her first few years in primary school and participating in a Saturday youth club which she loved. She then tells me about starting secondary school and how she was supposed to leave the Saturday youth club. However, she was unexpectedly granted a welcome opportunity to stay involved as she explains next.

> One day my friend was talking to one of the nuns and I was there with her and the conversation came up about the [Saturday youth club], and ah, we were both asked by the nuns would we be interested in coming back the following year in September and helping out facilitate groups. And I thought brilliant, I'm still involved.
>
> It was a lot of responsibility at thirteen years of age and I think it grounded me. It stabilised me. That responsibility at that point, and also, I liked the nuns liking me. You know it was this … It wasn't liking me as a person, it was giving me this responsibility, knowing Jewel is a good girl, she's doing this. It was positive re-enforcement. I loved the positive re-enforcement. I was not getting that in the school. But at the time I didn't know, as a child growing up, I did not know I was dyslexic. And I had the massive challenge of am, around my learning abilities. Why wasn't my capabilities there? I worked hard. All the teachers would say I was a hard worker. What was wrong? In fact, my mother who didn't understand, would have been very much like 'Jewel, sit down there at the table and do your homework' and also had extra homework for me, and even my summer holidays I got extra homework. Homework came with me in my holidays. Mam didn't

realise though. They hadn't sent me for an assessment at the time for dyslexia, at the time in primary school. This is where it's, I use the onion a lot as it's great to say layers, it was utterly like a layer being torn off each time and bringing my abilities into question.

And am that's why I say the club stabilised me, grounded me, because I would have been that disruptive child. I was out in the lower grade of the school. I was in with that group of kids that would have been from the troublesome kids. I did that for about two years [volunteer as a leader with the Saturday club]. I then went into transition year. Transition year at that point was totally different to TY now. In those days, it was only given to those young people that were at risk of being early school leavers. It was for those students whose capabilities are not there for doing the Leaving Cert and they [the teachers] directed me into this year. I opted for it but didn't understand at the time that I was not going back into fifth year. I did transition and finished up. So, I was an early school leaver.

• Youth Workers when they were Young People

Jewel recounts her participation in youth clubs and emphasises her enjoyment as a junior club leader. She describes her formal education experiences as challenging for several reasons, some of which she did not realise until she was an adult. Jewel's vignette suggests her involvement in informal and non-formal education was positive and provided her with personal and social support during her formative years.

Like Jewel, Susan also vividly recalls youth work being part of her childhood:

> I've always been involved in youth clubs as a participant growing up. Am so we used to love that on a Friday night. (Susan)

As a child, Susan was also a youth club member and then, as a teenager, she became a junior leader. She describes how the role made her feel important:

> So, we had the power. We had the control. We thought we were brilliant. Now they were very innocent days, so there was nothing, you know it was just the craic. All we done was play ball or soccer or basketball or you know. But I loved it. I loved the youth clubs. We were like junior leaders. But there was no titles. There was no courses. There was never anything like that. (Susan)

Like the youth club Jewel described, the one Susan attended was also set up and co-ordinated by a nun:

> It was a nun that started it and she, I have to say now, I'm not religious, but she was a lovely nun.

However, unlike Jewel and the rest of the participants, Susan suggests one adult at the youth club was a professional youth worker:

> So, Sr [name] kind of ran it with the help of the volunteers and I think there was one youth worker. I'm not sure. But the rest were volunteers. (Susan)

During our first conversation, Thomas also tells me he participated in a youth club as a teenager and emphasises his personal and social development there. He describes being shy and having little confidence as a young person:

> And people like myself wouldn't have been very confident growing up. Would have been quite shy. (Thomas)

As a youth club member, Thomas took part in exchanges and a youth conference.

> And I do remember, I remember going on exchanges and stuff. And I remember going to a conference in Britain. Myself and my brother went over, and I can't remember what it was. I do remember we met a lot of youth volunteers from around the country and we would have been the youngest there. Am, but I realised that we had a lot to say and we had an awful lot of am, opportunities to say it, and people did listen. And I kind of felt like am, we were kind of passionate about something and people were kind of reacting to that, and they were quite willing to give us the space to talk about it. And I suppose that kind of struck a chord. (Thomas)

In contrast to Jewel, Susan and Thomas, the other three participants, Eamonn, Martin and Maria were, for various reasons, not involved in youth work when they were younger. Eamonn loved sport and was very involved in it at school and this motivated him to stay in second-level education until he completed his Leaving Certificate. He explains:

> And like being honest, I didn't like school, but I really loved that kind of side of it, [sports] and that kind of kept me in school for a while, and there then I did my Leaving Cert [final exams]. (Eamonn)

When Martin and I chat about his childhood and teenage years, he says he always enjoyed talking to people and being around people when he was in school. Though he was not in a

youth club or youth work environment as a young person, he describes his rural upbringing as influential in shaping him into a youth worker.

> No, I just think I was that person. I just probably like people and enjoyed talking to people, am and I suppose even as an upbringing I had a small village upbringing if you like. (Martin)

During our conversation about her childhood, Maria reveals she grew up in a big family, and outside of school they did activities together as a family group. She didn't really look to join youth clubs or extra-curricular activities when she was growing up, explaining:

> And so, like we would never have been the families that like would have gone to or had birthday parties or play dates or this kinda caper. It was a case of, we went to town together, to the park and that was it you know. D'you know they [her parents] wouldn't have had the money for us to go to youth clubs or go to activities or anything like that. So that was kinda, I wouldn't have felt I missed out. (Maria)

Three of the participants illustrate their own experiences of a youth club setting. Their recollections highlight the influence and support the youth work process can have on a young person's personal and social development, and the potential to realise this several years later. Although Eamonn, Martin and Maria did not participate in youth work as young people, they do give us an insight into family, school and growing up. Indeed, while some participants were part of youth work and others were not, for the most part, the majority were unaware youth work was something they could do professionally. The following vignette describes Martin's path to becoming a youth worker.

5.3 The Accidental Youth Worker – *'I suppose I probably got into youth work then by luck more so than a grand design'*

Martin's Profile: Martin is in his 30s and has been a full-time professional youth worker for 10 years. He graduated from university with a Degree in Liberal Arts.

Martin's Story:

Sitting in the bright, homely kitchen of the youth project where he works, Martin tells me about the third year of his Bachelor of Arts degree programme in Liberal Arts. It consisted of an off-campus work placement which he did in a youth work, and education and training service. Describing his feelings and experiences on placement, he says he was prompted to consider becoming a social worker before eventually becoming a professional youth worker.

> Really struggled with it. Really, really saw another side to life from the people that I worked with. Like I remember some of the young people I worked with back then, the level of need, the level of intervention, of expertise, of skills. So, ah, I suppose ah, I had this idea after third year in placement that maybe a social worker or something like that is what I'd like to do.
>
> So, at the time, it's probably for anyone when your leaving college, you're at that age where you don't really know. You have a degree. What does that mean? So, you start applying for jobs and people are saying no, you don't have experience. And you know, well, how am I going to get experience? Martin stops for a moment to think about his next step. I was always working at home [during university], so like I obviously went back ah, with a block layer, am, I was happy out. Making a few pound, applying for a few jobs. Am I applied for am, a dry out house. I was called for the interview. The first time I was ever called for and like that, probably lack of confidence in an interview, but I remember, nearly one of the interviewers was nearly annoyed with me d'you know, because I didn't have the background. But I didn't get the job anyway, and I suppose like that, didn't want to stay working as a fabricator or a block layer. So, I said feck it. My friend was going to Australia. I said jese, that was somewhere I'd like to go, and I said listen, I'll go for three months or whatever, am, and like that I got a job over there laying pipes within fecking two days of landing there.
>
> But like I said with the construction, I loved doing it and I loved the money, but I never could see myself doing it for years. So I said jese, you know what, I'll come back [to Ireland to get a professional qualification so he could settle in Australia] and I'll apply for a Masters in Social Work, cause at the time Australia was crying out for social workers and you know the way they have priority professions and social work was one of them. So, I was coming home for my sister's wedding, ah, like this was probably after two and a half years [in Australia]. I started

working with my brother in law, am as an electrician, or as a, as a labourer for an electrician. I started filling out my application form to go back and do social work.

To apply for social work, Martin also needed references and experience, and so contacted his third year off-campus placement supervisor. I would have rang [off-campus placement supervisor] to ask him for, for a reference for the college application. This was probably November, and he said he would, no bother, but "you might call down to me someday" he said to me. I think this was shortly after Christmas anyway, when I kind of followed it up again and at the time I was still working as the electrician. [The youth work manager] decided to call out to meet me [at Martin's place of work as an electrician's labourer], and I just had a chat with him, and he said could I come in and meet himself and [the other manager] about a potential job in the organisation. So, one day, maybe a week later, I finished work early and I drove to meet them. What they were saying was, we have a 6 month contract here to do youth work. [The youth work manager] said I'd like you to consider it. Ah, am, it would have been significantly less then what I was earning like, but in my head it was like well, I have a bit of savings here. I want to go back to do social work. It would look great on the reference if I got called for the interview or not. Ah, agreed to start the job like two weeks later.

But that's kind of where it's come from d'you know. That start. I probably got into youth work then by luck more so than a grand design because I wasn't even aware that youth work was a job when I got into it.

• After Secondary School

Martin never considered youth work as a career path and was, in fact, unaware it was even an area of employment. He never intended on becoming a professional youth worker, though during his off-campus placement, he did get some inclination he would like to work with young people. Despite his intention to become a social worker, various encounters over several years signposted him to youth work. Each of the participants, except for Susan, stated an uncertainty about their future employment after second and third level education, but with markedly contrasting experiences. Jewel and Eamonn decided not to go to third-level education when they left secondary school. Jewel describes her experiences of secondary school as the driving force behind entering the workplace early. In her vignette, she says she didn't like school, leaving early as she felt her time would be better spent earning money. She explains:

> So, it was a thing of mmm, I want to be earning. So, I didn't care less whether I went back. (Jewel)

In his vignette – included in Chapter 6 – Eamonn explains he only remained in secondary school to continue playing sports and had no intention of attending third-level education. After sitting his final second-level state examination, the Leaving Certificate, he signed up to the Irish Army. He reasons:

> I was probably mad fit and just loved the thought of kind of continuing in that and at that time there was a lot of young lads going in. (Eamonn)

Eamonn goes on to explain, entry into the army then was easy, saying:

> You didn't need anything to get in there. You didn't need your leaving cert. The height maybe was a bit. A medical you had to do of course. Things like that. But I, being honest, I was always mad to get in, but I, the first day I went up there, I was kind of as much as, right, sign-up and I came home. I was heading to Clonmel for 6 months. (Eamonn)

Eamonn was seventeen years old when he joined the army, and though he enjoyed meeting new people and being active every day, he decided to leave after several years. Despite being confident in his decision, he was less assured about his future job prospects. He says:

> I hadn't any real plans to do anything you know around jobwise. (Eamonn)

Jewel and Eamonn decided not to attend third-level education, however, like Martin, Thomas and Maria did go to third-level and undertook a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Liberal Arts and Humanities. Unsure as to the most suitable career choice, both hoped it would become clearer during their time in third-level education. For example, Maria said she considered secondary school teaching at first, but as she moved through university she decided against it. Looking back, Thomas admits his decision to go to third-level and his chosen course were not linked to any specific career. Maria and Martin's experiences also highlighted this. After sitting the Leaving Certificate, Thomas explains:

> I then went to college and just studied economics and social studies which is unrelated really. (Thomas)

It was years later – as a professional youth worker – that Thomas completed a Masters in Youth Work. Despite most of the participants leaving second and third-level education without realising youth work was an education and employment option, Susan was the exception. Owing to her involvement in youth clubs when she was growing up, she decided

to study youth work after sitting her Leaving Certificate. She had a good relationship with the youth worker in her youth club explaining:

> And I remember a youth worker, her name was [name] and she was the nicest person I ever met. I thought she was brilliant. But I started volunteering in youth clubs and stuff. But I was only doing it because I liked it. I don't know why I started doing it. I think I just liked am, being like [name] the youth worker. (Susan)

She was motivated to attend third level education to study for a Diploma in Youth and Community Work. She reasons:

> Because I wanted to be, remember I wanted to be the youth worker. So, I went to do youth and community work. But I only got as far as a Diploma in Youth and Community Work cause I couldn't afford to keep going for my masters. That's the only reason. Or even my BA. (Susan)

As Susan talks about her third-level experiences, she gives me a bit more of an insight into her background as an adolescent and young adult explaining:

> I come from [area she is from] which would be considered disadvantaged, but I didn't know. I went to college when I found out I was disadvantaged, ha,ha. Apparently, I was a rare breed, ha, ha. (Susan)

However, after achieving the Diploma, Susan decided not to pursue a career in youth work due to personal reasons. Yet, later in life Susan began reflecting on the ability of youth work to provide positive experiences for young people and support them to make healthier choices, mentally and physically, for their future. After several challenging experiences working with adults who had a complexity of needs, Susan decided to return to youth work.

• Pathways to Youth Work

For Eamonn, his encounters with youth work first began when he was a parent. Bringing up his family in an estate labelled 'disadvantaged', he and other parents decided to organise and supervise soccer games for their children. Their supervision meant the young people had a safe place to play. His intention was to keep his children, and the other young people living there, away from the potential trouble they could get into.

Eamonn explains:

> Because I knew the need for it. I saw the needs of young people. I saw the way that, if they were kept in sport and any kind of sport… Like the lads that drifted away from it were getting into trouble like in a different state, and I've seen over the years, like unfortunately a lot of the fellas that drifted away from it were either in prison or passed away. (Eamonn)

A developing awareness for much needed youth provision in his housing estate influenced Eamonn to become a youth work support worker as part of a Community Employment (CE) Scheme in his area:

> So, I got on a scheme in [name of area]. Am it was a kind of youth club scheme where I was involved in youth clubs. So, I suppose that was my first encounter with youth work and probably didn't realise it. Probably got into youth work like in a roundabout way, didn't realise it. (Eamonn)

Like Eamonn and Martin, Maria also encountered work with young people and youth work when she was a young adult. Maria attended university because, she explains:

> I always kind of said I wanted to go to college. I wanted to get a job. I wanted to, you know, do a decent job. (Maria)

After graduating with a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Humanities, and a Master of Arts, Maria aimed to work with women's groups, long term, but in the meantime was volunteering in a local community project. While there, she was offered a job as a youth worker elsewhere. She accepted because she:

> Needed to get a leg in somewhere…it would be the best way to get a leg in, a way for me to progress and as time went on I could progress. I felt I just needed a start really. (Maria)

For Maria, youth work was initially a step towards another career she was pursuing. As young adults, Jewel and Thomas left the youth work they had participated in. Later in life, it was a chance meeting, coupled with advice from others, that helped them realise youth work was a potential career. Thomas only became aware of youth work as an employment option when he accidently met a youth worker from his old youth club. Encouraging him to apply for a youth worker position in her service, it was only then Thomas realised that some of the adults in his former youth club had been professional youth workers.

It's clear that youth work was not a lifelong ambition for him as he states:

> There's very little, this is my dream, this is my destiny. (Thomas)

Likewise, Jewel had several jobs before she became a professional youth worker. A relative encouraged her to participate in a Youth and Community Work Diploma being delivered locally. She had been volunteering a lot in her community but – considering her past experiences of secondary school – she was extremely apprehensive to return to formal education and initially decided not to.

Nevertheless, she did decide to participate in the Diploma, reasoning:

> I kept seeing these advertisements in the local newspaper about a Youth and Community Diploma. I kept seeing it and thought no, I won't be able for it. I applied, did the course for two years and realised this is what I want to do. (Jewel)

Jewel received her Diploma, became employed as a professional youth worker, and continued her education until she achieved a Youth and Community Work honours degree (a BSocSc).

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter presented each participant's stories, related to their experiences before and becoming a professional youth worker. All the participants – albeit Susan quicker than the rest – recognised the importance of professional youth work and became professional youth workers because of encounters with various people and places. As young people, Jewel, Susan and Thomas were involved in youth work, and it was this association that later influenced their decision to become professional youth workers. Conversely, Martin, Eamonn and Maria worked with young people and participated in youth work later on as adults. Indeed, it must also be noted that, at the time when the participants were transitioning from secondary school to the next stage of their lives, there was, in contrast to now, limited availability of youth work education and training programmes.

As Chapter 2 outlines, a process of professionally endorsing youth work education and training programmes did not begin in Ireland until 2006. The findings and analysis in this chapter described the participants' experiences as young people (three of whom were

involved in youth work from an early age), their backgrounds, and their various paths to professional youth work.

After constructing Chapter 5, I recognised key findings for the discussion by using a grid chart (Appendix F) given to me by my thesis supervisor. I also created short poems as I read over the two vignettes (Appendix G), which 'encapsulate the essence' (Ely et al. 1997 p. 135) of the topics being discussed and helped me think about the findings and structure for the discussion in Chapter 8.

The view of accidental youth workers emerged based on the following findings, namely, the various routes to youth work amongst participants and trying to understand these, and the idea of volunteering and vocation in youth work. These are also discussed in Chapter 8: Section 8.1, 'Various Routes to Professional Youth Work', in relation to literature on theory of youth, identity, youth work practice and the vocational aspect associated with youth work.

Youth work happened in the background or played an active role in the lives of all participants at different stages. Despite this, most of the participants admit that they did not recognise youth work as a profession and potential career until, from diverse avenues, they stumbled upon it unexpectedly. Chapter 6, which follows, continues to focus on <u>becoming</u> a professional youth worker, and moves on to look at <u>being</u> a professional youth worker. The chapter presents the participants' views on entry into professional youth work, youth work practice, and associated challenges.

CHAPTER 6: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS 2 –*'Adult Somebodies'*

6.1 Introduction

Chapter 5 presented participants' experiences as young people and their various routes to becoming professional youth workers. This chapter, ***'Adult somebodies'***, includes three vignettes, and continues to focus on becoming a professional youth worker in the first vignette, with the second and third describing participants' experiences of becoming and being a professional youth worker. It begins with Eamonn's vignette: What makes a Qualified Youth Worker? – ***'We had the experience, but we didn't have the paper'*** as he describes his attempts to become employed as a youth worker after being a volunteer and a support worker on a Community Employment (CE) Scheme.

The second vignette: Practising Youth Work –***'I'm there as an adult somebody'*** is from Martin, whose first vignette was presented in Chapter 5. He explains how it was only through becoming a professional youth worker that he came to understand youth work practice and identity, and therefore, what being a professional youth worker encompasses. The final vignette in this chapter: Expect the Unexpected –***'My lesson plan is gone out the window'*** is from Susan. She discusses being a professional youth worker and reveals some of the difficulties she encounters in practice.

Education and training, practice and challenges amongst the participants are identified through my analysis and highlight several areas – outlined at the end of this chapter – to be discussed further in Chapter 8. Again, different font and indentation are used in the three vignettes to distinguish the participant's voice from that of the researcher, and the participants' quotes used throughout each chapter have similar fonts to the participant vignettes. Finally, participants' profiles, excluding Martin's due to its insertion in Chapter 5, are included before each vignette.

6.2 What Makes a Qualified Youth Worker? – *'We had the experience, but we didn't have the paper'*

Eamonn's Profile: Eamonn is in his 50s and has been a full-time professional youth worker for 12 years. He has a non-accredited Diploma in Youth and Community Work.

Eamonn's Story

Sitting in the activities' room of the youth project where Eamonn is based, I wonder why youth work had not been mentioned in his story yet. So far during these interviews, the other two participants I have met spoke about youth work several times at this point. Eamonn had told me about being at school and his love for sport, but he had not mentioned youth work. Then, about twenty minutes into the conversation, youth work appears. He is describing his experiences of being a young parent at a time when employment in Ireland was rising rapidly.

> Now things started to pick up then, and I got on a scheme in [area where he lived]. Am, it was a kind of a youth club scheme where I was involved in youth clubs. It was in the community centre, so I was working as a youth worker. But myself and [his friend and neighbour] were on that, and we used to do all the summer camps and that. It was a CE and I suppose that really developed us in the youth work side of it. We did a few courses and stuff like that.
>
> Then our three years were up, and we were kind of going out the gate one day and [lady supervising the CE Scheme], I can't think of her second name now, she kind of called us back and said d'you know "what are ye going to do?" And we said we dunno. And she said like, she kind of could see that we had potential. Like we were kind of talking about setting up our own kind of business.
>
> Eamonn and [his friend and neighbour] had been talking about working with young people from disadvantaged areas using sports after they finished the CE Scheme. Well she pushed us towards a start your own business course. We did a year of that and got our certs and whatever. In the middle of that we met another lovely lady up there [Eamonn and his friend were doing their business course in a local adult education college] who saw kind of potential in us and kind of said "ye should do the youth and community diploma". So, we went on and done the youth and community diploma.

Eamonn and [his friend and neighbour] began working with young people through sport, but they found it difficult to earn a full-time wage from it, and so needed to look for alternative

employment. Eamonn explains they were '*Still doing all our stuff*' – working with young people through sport – while they looked for employment in the youth and community sector.

> Yeah, I suppose early 2000s things started to pick up again. A bit more money around, and there was jobs coming on. We were applying for the jobs. And in 2003 or 4, both of us, myself and [his friend and neighbour] actually went, [organisation working with young people] came along, and we both went for the job. Now we had both been going for the jobs, but they were saying we hadn't really the paper like. We had the youth and community. I think we just finished it [the diploma in the adult education college]. We did a few other things. But there was a lot of people coming out of college. They'd a lot more, but they were very young, and they were getting these jobs and they weren't able to handle it. We had the experience, but we didn't have the paper. I think people started to realise then I think. I'll never forget it. We put our stuff [CVs] into the [current place of employment] I remember. But in between anyway, we went for the [organisation working with young people] job, and there was I think two or three jobs. [His friend and neighbour] got it, and I didn't get it. Now at the time I, I was very nervous. I suppose [his friend and neighbour] would have been that bit more confident than me you know like. He's a different way and I think he just came out a bit better in the thing. But I was very upset at the time that I was gona get nothing. But literally, I'd say a few months afterwards, jobs came up in the [current place of employment] and I went for them. I was getting more interviews and stuff, and I kind of got a bit more confident.

Eamonn subsequently got one of the jobs.

• Education and Training

Eamonn points out that organisations were looking for a third-level qualification – though it did not have to be in youth or community work – when he was applying for full-time youth work positions. He had a Diploma and several years of experience working with young people, but a lot of the other applicants – those often being considered or chosen for a job he applied for – had degrees in various disciplines, though often no experience. The participants offer various perspectives on the supports and challenges concerning education and training, and experience in youth work. Martin reflects on being a youth worker without having a youth work qualification saying:

> I definitely think the qualification enriches what you are doing. So, I definitely think if I started off as a youth worker without a qualification, which I did, I had a degree. But, but if I start off without a qualification, I need to provide that space to actually reflect on what I'm doing. How I'm doing it. (Martin)

Acknowledging his degree is not in youth work, Martin contends youth workers need a space to explore and reflect on their practice. This suggests there should be ongoing training in the workplace, not just one-off education opportunities to gain youth work qualifications at third level. He compares youth workers to the young people they work with saying ongoing training for youth workers should be underpinned and guided by the same values and principles associated with youth work practice. That is, to ensure youth workers, like young people, are acknowledged as individuals in a group, while also recognising they share similarities, and to facilitate them to reflect on, and question, self and society separately, and together, in order to influence change at many levels. Martin stresses the importance of training, and advocates for its potential as a space of reflection for youth workers, proposing:

> Say we're all unique, like every young person we work with. But together we do make a difference. Make them think it's part of a bigger picture, and that's why I think the training becomes invaluable. (Martin)

Susan elaborates on Martin's point when she discusses training. She maintains that achieving a qualification – youth work or otherwise – is not sufficient enough for a youth worker emphasising:

> It always is a case of like, just because you qualified in something, that's not you done. You always need to upgrade or refresh. (Susan)

Eamonn also points out that:

> You have to be kind of updating yourself on all that kind of stuff. (Eamonn)

Martin, Susan and Eamonn suggest there should be ongoing training for youth workers for several reasons such as, youth workers who have not got a youth work qualification, for reflection, and to support youth workers to be able to see and acknowledge the wider context they practice in.

• New Youth Workers

Jewel and Susan's perspectives also focus on newly recruited youth workers with third-level qualifications. For example, Jewel sees new employees joining the organisation she works in, and the problem she identifies is they are qualified to work with people but don't have a youth work qualification. However, I suggest that this is not a new occurrence. Chapter 5

illustrates it was not uncommon for people to become youth workers without a youth work qualification or in fact any third-level qualifications, as presented by some of the participants themselves.

Jewel proposes that:

> You now have people who are coming in with am, social care, and of those other areas that are tokenistic because they are covering so many wide areas. (Jewel)

Describing newly qualified youth workers, Susan suggests:

> They come into the role dreamy eyed and knowing theoretically what's to be done. I think that they are disillusioned over time. (Susan)

The participants recognise youth work qualifications are important, but also stress ongoing training and practice experience in the workplace is essential. This is due to continuously changing situations and needs which require practitioners to adequately and competently respond. On the one hand, the participants see challenges related to the recruitment of new youth workers who are not satisfactorily qualified or prepared for youth work and its environment. On the other hand, while there appears to be agreement on training, the findings suggest that participants have several conceptions of its purpose.

Furthermore, I suggest that the challenges related to qualifications and the preparedness of new youth workers are not recent and were apparent when the participants started as novice youth workers themselves. Coming from various backgrounds, they were once new to youth work and had varying qualifications, yet with practice experience they are now willing to offer their perspectives on the characteristics and skills of a good youth worker and good youth work. Considering this, it is interesting to hear next what they identify as features of good youth work practice. In Martin's following vignette (reference section 6.3 below), he explains how he transitioned from identifying as a novice youth worker to a capable practitioner by describing his learning and continuous learning in and about youth work.

6.3 Practising Youth Work – *'I'm there as an adult somebody'*

Martin's Story (No 2)

Throughout our conversation, Martin reflects on what he used to think about youth work. He describes his process of learning in youth work and how it informs his views on practice and what a youth worker should be like.

> Maybe when I started out as a youth worker, I was just asked to work with young people, and then it was why? What was it meant to do? And then it was obviously through a process, so probably six months to two years that you understand why. But I suppose I came to that understanding in time. If I'm being honest probably, probably young people have given me my understanding of youth work if that makes sense.
>
> D'you know, I understand why we get funding. Why we do it. But it's actually from young people that I understand what youth work is.
>
> I guess like, what like I definitely think the core principles of youth work are, providing a safe secure place for young people, and that's, if you can even do that, and create that environment for young people where they are safe and secure even, if it's just a building and they can do that, and those young people respect each other, that's very good. But I think what we work in is a grey area that's always changing. I think I said it before, but I'm friendly, but I'm not the young person's friend. I'm there as an adult somebody. But that area is always moving because you can't be over friendly, but you want to have an approach that young people feel comfortable talking. But you're the adult. So, I think your role is always changing. Like you know you're always ebbing and flowing. You can't dictate over 10 weeks what a young female or male member of a group will or won't say. But to give that space to say something that's pretty amazing. And then I s'pose giving that space to reflect on where they're at and what they're doing, and even introducing topics that they never had before. To give them the space to kind of think, well actually, yeah, this is what I actually think on this, and this is actually what I believe in.
>
> Like we done a little mock referendum here one day about the gay rights, and it was brilliant like. That was just like 'Jesus, will we do this today. It's in the paper' [Newspaper. It was in current affairs at the time]. They were asked their opinions on the referendum this year. Within the group they talked about it amongst each other. Then they're asked to have a ballot on it, and we had ten young people that day. Nine voted yes, that they should be [allowed to marry], and one young male didn't. But I think he done it just to be the antagonist d'you know. But it was still good that if he did believe that he was right in saying no, he was still challenged by his peers d'you know. And to get them to that place and time where they were articulate, or they had a great approach, was because, well I've worked with their brothers. I've worked with their sisters. I know their

parents. I know the community. Those young people come up knowing we are on their side. There's not many places where young people are encouraged to be young people, and a youth project is one of those places. And that's the unique thing about youth workers. That as a youth worker I can do my job. I can do it in a way that I create the space, and I show up and I do it. And I still done my job. But if I create the space, show up, and I want to engage with these young people. I want to tune in. I want to actually act upon their ideas.

Am see, I think a youth worker, by their very nature, have to become friendly, approachable, ah d'you know. And that's kinda who they have to be to some degree. That's nearly not a job description, but like it makes it easier for young people to engage with that I suppose and having certain characteristics like that. As I said, it's that grey area isn't it like, and that grey area can be a lot of things.

• Describing Youth Work Practice and Identity

In his vignette, Martin refers to the skills, and consequently the characteristics of a youth worker alongside features of practice. He does this by sharing a story about one of his own practice experiences. This suggests youth workers' experiences, and therefore descriptions of their practice, are inextricably linked to how they articulate their identity. He describes becoming a youth worker as something happening within practice – as a process over time – and acknowledges the youth worker is not friends with the young person, but an adult whose role it is to work with them, 'an adult somebody'. I suggest that he does this because the characteristics of a youth worker are similar to those of a friend. However, recognising the underpinning values of youth work helps differentiate the two.

Martin consciously decides not to use the term 'friend', alluding to his awareness of a youth work purpose and a professional perspective ethically or otherwise in the role. He identifies the skills and characteristics of a youth worker, and features of youth work practice, which is what the rest of the participants elaborate upon in our conversations. They outline the need for flexibility in the role, patience, an ability to connect, empathy, an underlying set of values, being open and approachable, and seeing the bigger picture. In terms of flexibility, Jewel compares youth workers to other social professionals saying:

> There's a bit more flexibility in you. Other people aren't as flexible as us. You have a social worker who cannot go into a house. The youth worker in that community can go into that house. (Jewel)

Jewel also stresses that patience is essential:

> No, I think you have to be a certain person to be a youth worker. If you lose the rag very easily, you can't be a youth worker. (Jewel)

The participants propose a youth worker connects with groups of young people in order for the work to happen. Thomas states:

> You can call yourself a youth worker, but am there's a, like can you sit in a room with young people and actually make a genuine connection, build a rapport with them, understand your role, their role, that they're not just consuming a product. (Thomas)

To connect in the way Thomas is describing, Martin explains empathy is essential:

> I think empathy, like relating to the people I was working with, or I understood, tried to tune in. And I suppose by tuning in, you're taking on board some of what they are telling you. (Martin)

Eamonn agrees and maintains if:

> You haven't the empathy, if you haven't the, you know, the mindset to link in with people. To read people, I suppose that is a big one. (Eamonn)

Thomas describes the mindset of a youth worker as a 'Peter Pan' type mindset. That a youth worker is someone who always knew, even when they were a young person, what it means to be an adult, but then as an adult remembers what it is like to be a young person and can empathise with young people because of this. On this he says:

> They're kinda old before their time but they're young forever type thing if that makes sense. (Thomas)

Interestingly, while Thomas uses the label 'Peter Pan' to help him explain characteristics of a youth worker, the same label is used by Susan later in Chapter 7 (ref section 7.2) to describe negative perceptions of youth workers. This suggests youth workers describe their identity based on their individual understanding and practice experiences. Therefore, the label 'Peter Pan' appears to have a dual meaning amongst the participants, yet I am unsure as to whether they are aware of this. Both Thomas and Susan's statements – Susan's are provided later in this chapter – raise questions for youth workers in relation to the language they use, their articulation of practice, and also identity. Based on the findings, it seems youth work can only be understood through individual practice experiences. As a result, it is questionable

whether a shared conception of professionalism in youth work could be constructed by youth workers, and equally, whether people outside of youth work can be informed about what youth workers do. This is referred to again in this chapter, and further discussed in Chapter 8.

• Values and Youth Work

Maria believes a youth workers' personal values influences the characteristics and skills described thus far. Significantly, this suggests personal values and youth work values are intertwined. Yet during our conversation, neither Maria nor I offer an outline of specific youth work values – though they are recognisable in participants' descriptions of practice – suggesting there is a diversity of conceptions of values amongst youth workers and a lack of experience in discussing them. Potentially, this could inhibit consistency in youth work practice and adequate communication by youth workers to those outside. Words such as values are used but not explicitly elaborated upon. Maria also considers youth work as a position of employment but also as a role which goes beyond receiving a wage:

> I suppose it's a bit about the type of person you are as well. It's all about the values. You know what I mean, we can all work in a job where you know, we just look to move A to B and where it's a bit kind of mind numbing stuff. And not saying there's anything wrong with that. (Maria)

Susan also agrees with Maria. Emphasising the role of a youth worker extends beyond the receipt of an income, she describes a youth worker as somebody who is approachable and open:

> It's d'you know. The characteristics of a good youth worker is someone who is open to a free flow of fresh water, not stagnant. (Susan)

Conversely, when Martin discusses values, he is concerned with youth work values specifically – though again, does not explicitly name them – but stresses the importance of being able to make the link between youth work values and principles of practice. He emphasises the need for:

> An understanding of the core values, of the principles of why our work is the way it is, and why our approaches can be so individual and unique. (Martin)

• Describing their Day to Day Practice

Informed by practice experiences, the participants identify and describe youth workers' skills and characteristics during our conversations. Continuing to speak about practice, these skills and characteristics are illuminated further and in fact, the underpinning values of youth work begin to emerge. When the participants describe practice, they use words such as constructing but also breaking down, that they are discovering and collecting while also evolving and connecting. Throughout, they emphasise the need for purpose and reason for their actions. Maria describes her practice as creating space. She explains:

> Making a space or a little bit of timeout for somebody, or giving them a little bit of time. (Maria)

Susan says in practice she looks to:

> Breakdown barriers. Build confidence. Build networks with other organisations. (Susan)

Martin also discusses his practice in terms of breaking down and creating, and develops the idea further. He provides a sense of the challenges in youth work practice when he speaks about breaking down, giving the impression a youth worker is on a mission and trying to fight an adversary. He also alludes to the variety of areas and therefore influences on the young people youth workers meet. He explains youth workers facilitate young people:

> To let the guard down. And I understand why you need it in certain areas and it's sad like. But that's what I'm trying to break down. Then, d'you know what, you've created a group that can actually be meaningful to each other. Youth work operates in that grey area that shapes young people, that shapes young people, that develops young people. (Martin)

The participants' descriptions of their practice illustrate a sense of discovery and collecting, Maria states:

> That's part and parcel of what it is to be trained as a youth worker, or to be a professional youth worker, is that you're always looking out for you know, potential in someone. (Maria)

Eamonn also discusses this potential when he says:

> You're picking up little things. You're trying to put some picture together. Direct them the right way. (Eamonn)

Susan says discovery is something that excites her about youth work practice. The youth worker themselves can be the discoverer as Maria and Eamonn emphasise, but so too the young person. Susan says her role is to facilitate the young person to be the discoverer and this is about:

> Helping them find their strengths. I love seeing people finding out things about themselves. (Susan)

The idea of discovery takes on another meaning again when Eamonn speaks about his experience of becoming employed as a professional youth worker for the first time, saying:

> I think like a lot of us that time, we were kind of just left to go in and do our thing. It was as much as said to you, you know like. And you find your own way you know. (Eamonn)

• A shared Language

While the words discovery and collecting are apparent in participants' descriptions of practice, they do not use them consistently to describe the same practices or situations. This suggests experiences of/in practice provide different opportunities for learning amongst youth workers, and this learning is relational. The participants offer alternative insights along with different conceptions of the words and terms commonly used by youth workers. It seems a shared language is not always mutually understood amongst the practitioners and could result in youth workers communicating a disjointed picture of practice and identity to those outside of practice. Equally, the findings suggest this may occur if youth workers are not practising from the same understanding and awareness of youth works underpinning values. Later in this chapter, Maria and Susan talk about their practice in terms of connecting, although, yet again, contrasting conceptions of commonly used words is apparent. That said, Martin and Thomas appear to share a similar understanding in relation to the notion of evolving. Martin declares:

> I think your role is always changing. Like you know you're always ebbing and flowing to meet the needs of the group or the need of a meeting, or the need of a community member. Cause I think if anything, there's so many different approaches like with the community member who wants to volunteer their time and it becomes more about supporting that volunteer member, making them aware why they are doing it. (Martin)

Though Thomas doesn't point to a specific practice situation like Martin, he makes the same point:

> Like you're always trying to evolve the work you're doing. (Thomas)

In terms of connecting in youth work practice, the participants highlight the importance of networking and talking with individuals and groups of young people and adults. Maria describes her experiences of this as a new youth worker. She recalls:

> It was very much joint work that I would have been linking in with, am, various people to do you know, joint programmes in any way that I could, just to gather a pool of people together so you could get a piece of work done. (Maria)

Maria also emphasises the importance of networking in terms of trying to equip herself with enough resources to do quality youth work. Here the idea of gathering arises again, however, in this context it concerns resources as opposed to the direct work with young people. Eamonn also points to the necessity of networking in youth work practice, saying:

> Networking was a big thing, and it took a while to get that networking. I was the link person, so you know. (Eamonn)

Staying with the idea of connecting, Maria and Susan focus on the practice of talking with others as a necessary skill for youth workers to have. While they discuss the same skill, Maria argues youth workers need to be able to converse with adults, exclaiming:

> There are some people who just cannot talk to adults. (Maria)

However, Susan focuses on talking with young people announcing:

> I just thought it was normal to talk to young people. (Susan)

Maria explains she has worked with colleagues who could not talk to other adults, only young people, while Susan has experienced the opposite. Both views emphasise the same skill, yet what is interesting is the contrasting category of people they have chosen. I suggest that this is because their perspectives were created within individual practice.

• A Shared Purpose

In their descriptions of practice, participants consistently emphasise having a purpose and reason behind their role and practice. Additionally, they note the sustained use and generation

of ‘tools’ and underline the importance of recognising youth work practice as something that must be planned and carried out with reason which generally reveals itself on hearing about and interacting with a group of young people.

Maria asserts:

> I mean youth work is there to support young people and come to us and say, this has happened for me, or this is coming up for me, and then we can signpost them to various different things. We are a very necessary thread. (Maria)

Jewel’s point concurs with this as she explains:

> When it’s [a programme] given to a certain group of young people, it’s given to them for a reason. It’s not tokenistic. There has to be a purpose. There has to be a reason for working with a certain group of young people. (Jewel)

Susan details each step of what she does when planning and facilitating youth work delivery. She stipulates:

> I spend an hour with them [young people] and then I write out a programme for them. Specifically, for them, with them in my head. Because there’s no point in sitting down and talking about life skills if they want to talk about cannabis. D’you know what I mean? There’s a point to whatever it is you are doing. That you’re not flying by the seat of your pants. Building confidence. (Susan)

Though Susan stresses the need to create a plan for groups she works with – detailed further in section 6.4 – she explains youth workers are now required to write down ‘lesson plans’. In her vignette she illustrates some of the difficulties for youth workers when trying to follow through with their plan. The difficulty is not the planning itself – Susan recognises its importance in her vignette – rather it’s the challenge of trying to explain why the plan may have been cut short or failed to happen at all. The participants refer to the presence of practice ‘tools’ in two ways. Again, just like when they spoke about discovery and collection, they use the same word but with a different focus. For example, Susan talks about giving tools to the young people she works with as she reveals:

> I suppose in one sense, part of the reason I would do youth work is because I really, really would love to give someone tools to improve themselves, d’you know what I mean? Because sometimes you can be so far down you just think that there’s no point. (Susan)

In contrast, Thomas and Eamonn discuss the idea of having tools as a support in their work with young people. Thomas maintains:

> Am, but I suppose it's having all these things that you can utilise in different situations. I said that before, about having a kind of toolbox. (Thomas)

Eamonn recalls how practice experiences have equipped him with tools during his time as a youth worker, declaring:

> You can use tools down the line, and you're trying to put some picture together. Just getting a puzzle together. (Eamonn)

By drawing on practice experiences, participants' perspectives on youth worker's skills and characteristics, and features of their practice are highlighted. Given the opportunity, participants articulate their practice and identity further, and implicitly recognise youth work values in how they describe practice. As a result, they reveal two important consequences of practice, the link between practice experiences and identity formation and expression, and how learning to practice as a youth worker is a relational endeavour.

Importantly for this research, when the participants talk about youth work - specifically values or skills – I do not prompt them to elaborate as I have had very few conversations with fellow practitioners using the word values and I assume that they are the same (Coupal 2005). Therefore, I decide that I am asking them to talk about something as a researcher and not a practitioner and see this as shifting the power in the conversation, therefore compromising my role as a practitioner talking with fellow practitioners (Kvale 2009, Rubin & Rubin 2005). Moreover, they do not offer more detail, nor do they specify whether they are discussing personal or youth work values at any one time. This suggests participants may not distinguish personal values from youth work values.

Also, guided by narrative inquiry, I decided not to query this further with them as I was trying to strike a reasonable balance between listening and speaking as a practitioner researcher. Alternatively, like my experience as a youth worker, this may be an area which they have not discussed in conversations previously. While the participants use similar terms and metaphors such as 'gathering' and 'tools', indicating a shared language, they attach different meanings and contexts to them. For example, Maria and Susan discuss communication in relation to connecting in their work, yet they emphasise its importance from very different standpoints.

I propose that participants' learning and perspectives on youth work are shaped within individual contexts and experiences. They also stress the presence and guidance of a purpose

in their work, and emphasise a need to recognise and respond to the continuous evolution of the work in individual settings. This fluidity in practice points to potential difficulties for youth workers when attempting to explain their daily practice to co-workers and external audiences, a challenge Susan illustrates in the following vignette.

6.4 Expect the Unexpected – *'My lesson plan is gone out the window'*

Susan's Profile: Susan is in her 40s and has been a full-time professional youth worker for 10 years. She has a non-accredited Diploma in Youth and Community Work

Susan's Story

Susan describes the skills a youth worker needs, and insists their competency levels should not be measured by their ability to use current communication procedures and processes with management.

> I don't get it. What's the paperwork for? There should be administrators there to do the paperwork, and youth workers there to do the youth work, and I don't understand why the youth worker has to do everything all encompassing. That's just silly. People have specific skills and they should be utilised. And it's, it's not fair. Just because you might not be able to present yourself in a meeting, doesn't mean you're not good with the young people or doing a great job. And I do think that I would love to see that going forward. It's actually recognised that some people are just gifted with young people or young adults, whatever. And other people are gifted on the paperwork side. Some people are able to multi-task and can manage the two, but they shouldn't have to.

Susan then begins to tell me a story from practice to illustrate the challenges she has presenting her work back to management. She describes a dangerous encounter she had in a group she was working with.

> We have to have these lesson plans done now. And I'm like sure, I dunno what I'm gona do until I meet 'em. I went to a group last Monday, of girls, four girls, new group. I'm giggling now because I got such a fright. And there was four girls and I thought, oh my goodness this is going to be so simple. I'm going to get loads of work done with the four girls. One girl had a knife pulled within five minutes of me being there, onto another girl, and went for her. And another one picked up a glass and tried to smash her with it. Sure, needless to say my lesson

plan is gone out the window. Right. I'm gone from doing drugs work to doing survival. So, next thing anyway, I won't intervene if there's weapons. I won't. I'm not going to put myself in that danger. The ones that weren't involved, I plucked them out and I said girls, ye want to kill each other, I would prefer if you go outside there so I don't have to clean up any blood. I made it very clear to 'em now and they're screaming. You want to do something, you do it. We're *[Susan and the rest of the group]* not getting involved. Out. It quenched it straight away. Sure, they only wanted someone to hold them back. So, then they sat down. Got all weapons, I mean to say weapons, they couldn't have a glass of Miwadi cause they weren't picking up the glass beside the other one. So, we sat around the table, I explained to them boundaries, behaviour. I understand when people get angry and you get angry, but you have to work on that anger. D'you know?

So, the point is I ended up doing anger management with them that day off the top of my head cause, I don't mean to normalise it either now, or say that it's ok. It's not ok and it's not normal, but I was kinda like, how do I justify not getting my thing [session plan] done? So, I just left it. I'll make something up next week, ha, ha. I'm not gona write down that I done A,B,C,D because what I'll be told is, you can't work with that group anymore because they're dangerous. They're not dangerous. They just don't know how to express their emotions productively. But my point is, where does the paperwork come in there? So, it's not just drug education on its own. But to our funders we have to have it black and white. I want to go to Dublin. Don't ask me why Dublin, cause that's where all the government is, and I just want to slap them with a wet fish over the forehead and go, would you wake up and put down the pencil. Come to one group with me and then ask me to fill out your boxes. Just one group.

• Administration, Management and Support

Susan describes a very dangerous situation which arose for herself and the group members. She explains how she de-escalated the scenario, but in fact concentrates more on the internal debate she had with herself about telling management. Though she acknowledges getting a fright, she accepts that an event like this might happen, and interestingly details her challenge with management rather than the incident itself in more depth. I suggest that this raises questions for youth worker responsibility to reflect on and acknowledge the extent of a situation like this and its consequences. It is reasonable to question whether a youth worker like Susan – deciding that informal processes as an employee are not suitable for her and her work – should accept there is potential danger in her role, and take on individual responsibility to manage this as a single worker. In this vignette, Susan identifies several difficulties within her ongoing practice as a youth worker such as the expectations placed on

youth workers – citing administration and communication of practice as two important areas in need of review – and the role of management in this, viewing them as another challenge rather than a form of support. In brief, outlining the expectations on youth workers, coupled with a perceived lack of support from management, provides a picture of frustration and disempowerment for Susan as a youth worker. This is also evident amongst the other participants. Jewel admits:

> I'm giving 21 [hours]. I'm not putting down I'm actually doing those. (Jewel)

She goes on to explain this statement admitting:

> Now if that was put to you, create that [extra hours] into money. That's every single week. Because I'm telling you, even [colleague's name] will tell you. I always worried was this me. Was it me making a big deal you know? Was I actually not doing my job good enough? (Jewel)

Jewel questions her practice ability when she is required to communicate the number of hours she has worked to management. Earlier, the participants describe youth work practice, however, when asked to account for their work through existing procedures, Jewel and Susan's admissions suggest they lack confidence in and doubt their ability. Participants view management as disinterested and offering a lack of support. Maria declares:

> I don't know are they very much up to speed with what exactly, what's going on within the youth work you know. (Maria)

She declares:

> But we never seem to get feedback from management on what's happening. What's going on? Where in the direction of the organisation that's going. They tokenistically say "yes we have given ye some information about this, that and the other". (Maria)

Martin returned to youth work in 2011 after taking study leave for two years. On his return he noticed relationships and dynamics had changed between youth workers and the management team. He saw what he describes as:

> a distance between middle management or line managers and youth workers. I suppose, before that there would have been a very close unity. And sometimes the direction that the line managers were looking for you to push weren't always in line with what you thought was best for young people in the community. (Martin)

• Withdrawal and Loss of Voice

The views of the participants suggest they expect management to support, encourage and protect them in their practice, and equally youth work when it is questioned, and decisions are made about it by those external to practice. However, participants' expectations of this are declining and threaten a withdrawal and loss of voice amongst them. Susan acknowledges:

> It took me a long time, but I had to learn to accept they're not going to take an interest in us. They're not going to fight for us. You've been shit on so much that it's a case of I'm not getting up. For what? Another punch. The reality hits when you're told you're lucky to have a job. You stick your head out of that shite and it's shot. (Susan)

Indicating a disconnect, Eamonn recommends:

> A lot of management need to go back on the ground. I think management need to realise that and get a bit more involved. (Eamonn)

Susan agrees with this. If managers know what's going on, they may be more forthcoming in defending youth workers. She explains:

> I suppose it depends on why the person's in the role, cause they'll fight harder if they know what's needed. (Susan)

Martin stresses management are:

> Keeping their head down. Don't rock the boat. Don't say anything. If something comes up, if someone challenges us, we'll throw a load of work their way. We'll do whatever it is to secure funding. (Martin)

The participants' perspectives indicate paperwork and stipulations on practice are challenging, and as a result they question management's role. Although the participants are disillusioned with management, Susan attempts to understand the broader context for youth workers and their management. She suggests management, like youth workers, are actually quite limited in their ability to effect change. She reasons:

> And I do think, to be fair to managers and people running organisations, they're, they don't get to choose the dance they have to dance. They mightn't like the dance, but they do it. Now don't get me wrong, they do it. I think we have a government and I'm not blaming everything on them, the government, but they are faceless and nameless, and their choices are who's going to rob us less, not who's going to not rob us. (Susan)

The final point Susan makes in her vignette concerns the decisions government are making about youth work. She points to a considerable distance – physically and metaphorically – between the decision makers for youth work, and the circle of youth workers and youth work management she is practising in. This is explored in more depth in the next chapter ***'Youth Workers out and about'*** as perspectives on the broader policy and funding environment emerge. The participants discuss how youth work and being professional youth workers is perceived, understood and influenced by people and structures outside of youth work.

6.5 Conclusion

By presenting stories of becoming and being a professional youth worker, this chapter has outlined the participants' perspectives on education and training, practice, and the challenges they associate with practice as professional youth workers. In Chapter 5, the participants present diverse education and training backgrounds amongst them, while in this chapter they discussed their thoughts on what education and training for youth workers should look like, and what its purpose should be. Primarily, through their own explanations, they suggest youth work practice is relational in nature and is closely linked with the formation and articulation of a youth worker identity. Yet there appears to be inconsistencies amongst them in relation to how and why they use particular words, phrases or metaphors to explain practice.

The participants have also highlighted difficulties with procedures in place to communicate their practice to management and therefore, present a loss of agency and voice. Moreover, they also suggest management are not fulfilling the role youth workers expect of them, but this could be owing to managers preoccupation with responding to the outside demands of youth work, e.g. from funders. Considering this, using the grid chart (Appendix F) and by creating short poems (Appendix G) again, a view of youth workers as a collective is identified and discussed in Chapter 8: Section 8.2, Practice and Identity, based on the following findings emerging from analysis, features of youth work practice and professional identity, and a collective understanding of youth works' purpose and a shared language.

Analysis also highlighted youth work as different, and this is discussed in relation to the following findings; communication and, education and training, in Section 8.3, Communicating Youth Work to Others. The findings are examined using literature on features of youth work practice and professionalisation, and the sociology of the professions

– specifically professional identity, management, and practice knowledge. Chapter 7 includes; the participants' perspectives on outside perceptions of youth work and youth workers, being a profession, professionalism and professionalisation, and the policy and funding context within which youth work is located.

CHAPTER 7: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS 3 –*'Youth workers out and about'*

7.1 Introduction

Participants' views on education and training, practice, and the challenges associated with these whilst becoming and being a professional youth worker are analysed in Chapter 6. In Chapter 7, ***'Youth workers out and about',*** participants' perspectives on being professional youth workers in the current environment are presented. The final two vignettes are from Thomas and Maria. Thomas' vignette: External Perceptions of Youth Work and Youth Workers – ***'A Christmas dinner'*** discusses outside perceptions of youth work and youth workers. Maria's vignette: The 'Value' of Youth Work - ***'Trying to be everything to everybody and you know, messing it up along the way'*** considers the requirements and expectations of professional youth workers by those outside of practice. After each vignette, the participants' perspectives on outside perceptions of their practice and their role as professionals are analysed.

The requirements and expectations of youth workers, their practice and how it is managed by youth workers individually, and as a group, in the current environment is contemplated along with some final thoughts on the future of youth work. Analysis of the findings illuminates several areas which are summarised at the end of this chapter and discussed in Chapter 8. This chapter begins with Thomas' vignette as he shares his perspectives on outside perceptions of youth workers and their practice, and why this is so. Following on from this vignette, the participants' perspectives elaborate on Thomas' points.

Consistent with Chapters 5 and 6, a different font and indentation is used in the two vignettes to distinguish the participant's voice from that of the researcher, and the participants' quotes are similarly formatted to distinguish them. Again, the participant's profile is included before their vignette.

7.2 External Perceptions of Youth Work and Youth Workers – *'A Christmas dinner'*

Thomas' Profile: Thomas is in his 30s and has been a full-time professional youth worker for 12 years. He has a Degree in Humanities and an NSETS accredited Masters in Youth Work.

Thomas' Story

It's a beautiful sunny morning and I can hear parents doing a last-minute check with their children to ensure all the listed items for their summer trip are packed. The bus outside heaves and hisses, waiting for its excited cargo to board. I sit in Thomas' tiny office, no more than four feet by four feet I imagine, and he is describing some of the challenges he sees for youth work and youth workers.

> Oh I've, I've worked with ah, and I've come across people that think it's just about putting people in a room and I still do. And that's, and the unfortunate thing is, sometimes groups, sometimes young people, that's what they want. They don't want you to be engaging them in higher levels of thinking. They just want a ball and kick it off a wall. And there's a place for that as well.

I ask Thomas to tell me a bit more about engaging young people at a higher level. What does he mean when he talks about engaging young people at a higher level?

> Yeah. I think you should always be trying to engage people at a higher level, and if you can't do that yourself then you're probably in the wrong area. You're just a well-paid babysitter rather than a youth worker.

He stops to think for a moment.

> Am, I suppose that's the other thing d'you know, anyone can be a youth worker. That's not a protected…Just get the title, walk in off the street…Oh, I'm a youth worker. I work with young people.

I then ask Thomas about how youth work and youth workers are perceived if, like he says, it is a job that anyone can walk into.

> I suppose our perceptions are always going to be based on the contact you have with people. So, if they're in contact with people who are extremely competent, they'll have a good reflection of, a good feeling of the industry. Kind of well-disposed towards it. But if they're in contact with bad youth workers or with bad practice… The young people might be really happy and really well engaged, but if you're just not at the races, then d'you know they [people outside youth work] can be a bit like, what the hell did they do like? But you get that everywhere. Like I remember being somewhere and a youth worker's wife at a Christmas dinner once said, like really guys, what would happen if ye didn't go to work? The kids wouldn't get to play games? Am, she was, that was his [the other youth worker] wife said that. She worked in a crèche. Yeah, she thought that we were a crèche for older [young people]. Genuinely, she was convinced of it.
>
> But I suppose…why do people have perceptions? Because that's when they interact with people. So, you only come across youth workers out and about when they're out in King Johns Castle with a group. Or they're down in Lahinch surfing. You don't have a reason to watch what they do in group settings, or whatever. So, they're always getting a bus when you see them. So, you know what I mean.

• Being a Profession

Thomas begins describing what he understands as youth works purpose – referred to in Chapter 6 – one facilitating young people to think about their lives and the environments they live in. He admits to meeting youth workers who don't do this, and at the same time remarks anyone can become a youth worker. This was prevalent amongst the participants when they talked about entering youth work in Chapter 5, and according to Thomas still is. Considering the diversity of backgrounds amongst the participants, I suggest that it could be challenging to try and differentiate between youth workers who are equipped to do youth work – guided by its purpose – and those who are not. Especially if, like Martin said in Chapter 6, it is a process which takes time. Eamonn concurs with Thomas saying:

> Anyone can be classed as a youth worker (Eamonn)

Thomas also says:

> Someone could just walk in off the street and say I am a youth worker. There is no organisation that protects that identity. (Thomas)

In view of this – protecting youth workers' identity – it is pertinent to look at participants' perspectives on professions, and youth work as a profession, to understand and analyse what they suggest this could or should look like. Martin describes a professional as:

> They're a member of a national body with a very strict code of ethics and beliefs, ammm … they've to find evidence-based ways for their approaches working. ammm …you can't practice or use the title without that registration of that body. ammm … they're selective in the sense that they can exclude because you don't have the qualification. Like you need to pass certain exams. (Martin)

In relation to a profession, Thomas asserts:

> A profession. Ahh, I suppose in my own ideas is a, is an area which ah, there's a kind of a particular knowledge base. And am, ah like I suppose traditionally it would be quite protected entry to that. It's protected in that, to gain entry, you can't just, ah, put a plaque outside your door and call yourself, ah, doctor whatever. (Thomas)

Thomas and Martin associate particular requirements with recognised professions. Based on this understanding, Thomas is not sure if youth work should become recognised as a profession if the noted requirements were compulsory. Thomas ponders this saying:

> But I don't know if the, it should be like a protected… you can't be a youth worker unless…There's a huge value to what a volunteer brings. I don't agree that we should totally jump on the lines of having like people registered and having a minimum academic standards and all this. You're excluding them. You're kind of cutting them out in favour of a 19 year old who has a degree that says they're a youth worker. Yeah it comes with warts and all. (Thomas)

Furthermore, while Thomas questions whether youth work should look to attain professional status in respect of how he understands it, he also offers his view on why he thinks youth work has not acquired this type of professional status to date. He maintains:

> It suits not to have a youth worker as a protected profession. If it's being delivered by people that are registered youth workers, then it ups the ante and it ups the cost, and there's a different layer of bureaucracy. (Thomas)

Thomas deliberates advantages and disadvantages of having youth work fully recognised as a profession, but is ultimately uncertain about how to settle this dilemma. Nevertheless, the participants do identify as professional youth workers despite the irresolute nature of this status. Maria describes a professional youth worker as someone who has a specific set of practice skills. She stresses:

> You know, you need the professional youth worker there to pull it altogether, and all the little bits are taking place, and then to be that little thread between the other additional signposting d'you know. That they're a trained professional. And it does take a particular amount of skills. (Maria)

Maria associates training, already mentioned by Thomas and Martin, with a profession and being professional. Four out of the six participants have participated in youth work education and training, though only two of these – Jewel and Thomas – have engaged in accredited third-level education.

Susan focuses on professionalism saying:

> Professionalism is…Do you have your own stuff going on? Course you do. Will it always be going on? Yes. But you balance it. You balance it. So, you play a role. Cause your plate shouldn't be full. There should be two plates. Professional plate and the personal plate. And it doesn't matter which one is weighing heavier. The point is, you choose what goes on each plate. So, your personal one you deal with in your own time. (Susan)

Considering youth works' origins are in volunteerism, it is interesting to hear Thomas highlighting the role of the volunteer and their value. He discusses the role of a professional youth worker in relation to how they can complement a volunteer's role or *vice versa*. Martin reasons:

> I do think you can have the youth worker who is professional to support the volunteer. To create the environment for the volunteer to come up with their ideas and those decisions. (Thomas)

That said, Jewel also notes why a volunteer youth worker is different from a professional youth worker, emphasising the concern associated with each role. She says:

> As a volunteer you go in, you know you're going in for two hours on the night. You know you're committing. You're doing it for the worth of your community. In your job, you're doing it for the wider community and life. (Jewel)

Maria elaborates on the use of the wider community and life term, explaining:

> And we can see the bigger picture…we can take the signposting and we can make the connections. That if we were all to just volunteer and you know, there'd be no professionalism around it, then we could be leaving ourselves wide open. (Maria)

Thomas points to bad youth workers and bad practice in his vignette, though doesn't elaborate. Actually, on reflection I could have inquired about this further but my inclination at that point in our conversation was that it may have interrupted Thomas who was in the middle of making a particular point and the flow of our conversation. Again, as noted in Chapter 4, I was trying to facilitate 'a delicate balance between cognitive knowledge seeking and the ethical aspects of emotional human interaction' (Kvale 1996 p. 125). However, Jewel offers an example of what she recognises as bad practice with young people in a youth club. She illustrates the difference between someone who is trained and educated in youth work - a professional as she sees it - and someone who is not. She explains:

> They [someone who is not educated or trained] are not conscious of what they are doing. An example is the last disco in [local area]. This is an example of bad practice where volunteers were concerned. A young lad assaulted another young lad. Am, heightened tensions, whatever happened. The young lad that was assaulted was taken over to a very public area, so that there was young people all hanging around. He should've been brought into the office, out of public view. There was rumours and talking. Gossip and snapchats. All that was going on. (Jewel)

Jewel's example presents the potential for mismanaging practice in a voluntary youth work setting, but a professional youth worker can bring the necessary procedural awareness.

• Being Recognised as Professionals

The participants identify as professional, and offer suggestions as to what this looks like, but are not convinced they are recognised or understood as professional by those outside of youth work.

Maria recalls what it was like being employed as a professional youth worker when she started:

> Well I always think that youth workers were always very short changed. We were always the dredges at the bottom of the barrel you know what I mean like? Whereas everyone else had a proper job and we were just youth workers because there was no credit given to youth workers. Because it was like youth workers ran clubs and you know, did a few hours with kids. There was no bigger picture for us like. We didn't do paperwork. We weren't seen as professionals. (Maria)

Susan's admission echoes what Maria is saying. Already noted in Chapter 5, she reckons outside perceptions view youth workers as:

> Adult children. Peter Pan. Bottom of the chain of priorities because it's a case of, she don't need an education for that. What she gona do, play with the kids, you know? And it's disrespected. The youth workers are adult children. They have a great life sure. Look at them. They're off horse riding. I don't think there is a professional respect for youth workers. Once you see a youth worker wrote down, it's like dumbass. They don't credit youth workers with intelligence. They only see the outward. They don't see the underneath. You're like a swan peddling like mad underneath, but calm on the outside. (Susan)

In his vignette, Thomas talks about engaging young people at a higher-level, and says this is not evident or understood by those outside of youth work. Generally, when youth workers are seen with young people, it is during planned activities which are only in place to facilitate ongoing engagement and relationship building. Participants' views suggest professional youth workers do not accept their practice or identity is understood or respected by those outside of youth work, also they are not recognised as professionals. Nevertheless, Maria and Susan argue youth workers enact recognised requirements of a profession, and there is an adherence to professionalism in their practice, qualifying them to be accepted as a profession. Like Martin and Jewel, they stress the need for a professional youth worker, though Thomas queries the value of professional status for youth workers. Considering the participants looked outside of a youth work setting in this section, Section 7.3 highlights the participants' perspectives on how youth work is being shaped outside of practice, particularly by those occupying positions influencing and shaping youth workers' practice and identity. Maria's vignette includes her perspectives on the wider funding environment, its influence on youth work, youth workers, and youth work management, and how they are dealing with it.

7.3 The Value of Youth Work – *'Trying to be everything to everybody and you know, messing it up along the way'*

Maria's Profile: Maria is in her 40s and has been a full-time professional youth worker for over 15 years. She has a Degree in Humanities and a Master of Arts.

Maria's Story:

Maria describes her views and experiences of funders' current expectations of youth work and youth workers.

> So, it's like funders are very much dictating. I believe the funders are very much dictating, well you have to have this and this. And you know it's not improving, it's worse it's getting. I just don't know. I think it's just the way everyone wants a bang for their buck, and it's all about numbers and it's all about figures and outputs, and you know you'd go mad if you thought too much about it you know? And there's probably so much competition there as well between community based organisations and Youth Work Ireland. And you know, DCYA or Dublin City whatever, youth service board, and am, you know? And everything down to everyone is pitching for the same pot of funding. Even [private organisation working with young people] branching now into for example, the area of Garda Diversion was never you know, was never an area of work that they…And I know they said that Garda project, IYJS came knocking on their door.
>
> And so unfortunately when you go down that route, it just dilutes the work, and I think that we are better off sticking to what we do and what we do well. And knowing what we do and being very clear about what we do. And that we do it well and we do it to the best of our ability, and we protect what we do rather than trying to be everything to everybody and you know, messing it up along the way to a certain extent. So am, so you know there has been examples of that, where we've tried to grasp money from here, there and everywhere, just because it's available you know.
>
> So, there is a little bit of me that thinks, you know, as time has gone on, youth workers are being dragged into a multitude of things that we're not trained for. And everything has a knock-on effect, and it has a multiplier effect in that, yeah, we get this piece of money, but somebody needs to do the job, and it's going to am, absorb a certain amount of a person's time, so they are going to be able to give less time. And a person can only do so much in a thirty-five hour week you know? If there's something else that you've been asked to do, then something else has to give. And unfortunately, people, including myself in that, will try and stretch themselves to absorb it. Well I think people are getting a little bit cleverer around that as well, saying, I'm sorry now, thirty-five hours is what it is and that's what I'm doing, and I'm not going to stretch myself, and I have to put a half-hour down for my lunch break, and I have to do this, and I have to do that.

> So, you know, unfortunately where there was a great will before, I think the same great will is not there. And that's why I go back to when I started in the organisation, you know? I mentioned that while you know, while the support and supervision may have not been to the level that you wanted it to have been, there was still dialogue. There was still conversation. There was still space to discuss things and…and within that then there's a little bit of acknowledgement that there's five of us sitting around, and we're discussing, well, Maria what did you do last week. And that went great, and blady, blady, blah. That was great. This was crap. It's some bit of recognition of the work. But to get nothing. No feedback at all. It has a really, really negative impact on people.

At the end of the vignette, Maria compares her current experiences to when she first started in youth work. Despite little understanding, and it seems respect for youth workers, she insists there was once dialogue, support and feedback from management, and goodwill amongst youth workers to do extra hours. This, she reckons, has disappeared. In the previous chapter, Jewel also discusses doing more hours than her contract allows. However, far from identifying this as goodwill, she appears apprehensive about disclosing these hours to management. Doing extra hours appears to fuel a sense of uncertainty regarding her practice, and so the usefulness of the communication structures between management and youth workers – for practitioners to satisfactorily explain what they are doing – is questionable. In view of this, participants' contemplations related to the current environment for youth work are attended to next.

• Changes in Youth Work

Maria stresses the imposition of quantifiable measures and frameworks on youth work now, while Eamonn maintains the way youth work is managed, and what youth workers are expected to prioritise, has been changing. He determines:

> Unfortunately, over the years it has grown like a business, and unfortunately that's the way it went. Responsible to young people, but is that who we are really accounting to now. (Eamonn)

Eamonn indicates that youth work is organised and managed through a business model which then compromises a youth worker's practice.

Thomas elaborates, and contends youth work is:

> About young people on a ledger in the Department of Finance now. We're not a priority so far as the government are concerned. Money is going direct towards filling the gaps in the wall in areas that are marginalised rather than kind of trying to spread it over the whole wall. (Eamonn)

Susan's following statement reinforces what Eamonn and Thomas are saying. She explains that her organisation has applied for funding on several occasions and maintains the:

> Young people were being used. They were an afterthought. The triangle, it's upside down. D'you know what I mean? It's very top heavy. It's very much, how do we get the funding regardless of what we are applying for. And it's not young people led. It's funding led. (Susan)

Indeed, Martin also describes how funding requirements necessitate youth workers to ensure the young people they are working with fit into established criteria. He reasons:

> These young people, the minute we start naming them, we are boxing them in. As we said, they have all their own stories. They're not the same, so why should we make them all the same. (Martin)

Furthermore, Thomas concedes young people are not acknowledged as fully-fledged members of society who are:

> Not regarded as kinda individuals like. We're trying to create perfect citizens. We're trying to knock the edges off imperfect things. (Thomas)

With youth work organisations receiving increased funding for work with targeted young people, Jewel questions the governments perspectives on young people, and more specifically, on the role of youth work, and says:

> A few more jobs have come on line in the last year in certain areas. In the restorative side of things. That's where all the money is. So, are the state telling us that young people are troublemakers then? That the only people that need support are the troublemakers? (Jewel)

• Stand Up and Be Clear Together

Maria argues youth workers are being dictated to and are not in control of their work. She says they need to get on with their job and implies no good will come from thinking about it in detail.

Martin appears to agree with Maria – that youth workers have little control – yet he offers an alternative response to addressing the issue.

> I know myself that we get frustrated in that space. All I hear is we are going to have cuts and we need to do this. We need to do that. I don't hear anybody standing up you know, protecting the value and the core principles of youth work. And bit by bit we're chipping away with, you know, the universal. We are not thinking about the bigger picture. (Maria)

Nevertheless, Maria does stress the importance of youth workers and their organisations being clear about what they do. That they shouldn't compromise this in what appears to be a competition for the acquisition of funding. Like Maria's point, Martin explains it is essential for youth workers to unite and challenge the external decisions imposed on youth work. He states:

> We're disadvantaged as professions go. We're kinda taken advantage of and government [say], we kinda put those in a box there because you know, they don't have a strong voice to say, go f**k yourself. If nobody can stand up and say, well, hold on a second, this is good but it's not youth work, and make that distinction. (Martin)

Ultimately, I propose that this may be difficult if youth workers themselves are constrained from working together as a group – for the good of the young people – due to funding requirements, e.g. geographical area, issue based etc. This is alluded to by Susan who describes two youth work organisations – based in different areas of the city – one organised and made available activity programmes to young people from all areas, not just the geographical remit of the organisation:

> Someone tried to start a fitness through football and there was murder over it cause it's like, that's ours. This is our group thing, and these are our boys. They're not our boys. (Susan)

Discussing the ongoing changes, and having a collective voice around these – not only amongst youth workers, but professionals in a range of voluntary and charitable organisations – Martin admits that:

> I don't think a lot of youth workers, definitely from what I'm aware of in the mid-west, don't believe they're part of something bigger because there's not really a collective voice. Or one overarching, unifying space I suppose. (Martin)

He states that he sees:

> No joined up thinking. Like we do talk to other organisations, but we don't talk about how we work and who we work with. There's none of that bigger, joined up thinking. What we have is a number of organisations working in one locality with different perspectives and different agendas. They're not all in unison. (Martin)

And that youth workers have:

> Embraced that environment where, like, that's just our piece, and that's what we'll do. But we haven't said like, like how can we bring these pieces together. (Martin)

Like Jewel, Susan is also concerned about the increasing amount of targeted youth work. She contends that:

> I think nowadays it should be universal. Schools are completely mixed. Kids from all areas. We need to stop the stigma and stop the labelling because they're [youth workers] firefighting the whole time. (Susan)

Susan worries that targeted youth work is actually sustaining rather than challenging existing stereotypes and determines:

> The hands of death are around the throat of youth work. (Susan)

Yet, despite her rather disheartened view of youth work Susan's next admission provides some hope that youth workers are not fully accepting the current changes. They are in fact subtly challenging these changes. Susan admits:

> We have never said that we are going to the other places [areas not targeted]. We kind of sneak it in. (Susan)

Though Susan's admission is encouraging, if things continue as they are, Martin argues:

> If our delivery becomes about the more targeted intervention, the more structured based approach, like the Meitheal, or I know the Garda diversion stuff coming in. If that becomes part of the youth worker's role. So, if people don't start making a distinction between youth work and certain practices, they will be considered the same. (Martin)

Martin's final statement summarises the apprehensions and potential challenges described by the participants in this section.

Uncertain about the future of youth work he says:

> I don't know where youth work is going to be in ten years. But I do know that if we don't stand up, like if we're still trying to be everything to everybody and are, what we do is blurred. We won't have an identity, or will definitely have a new identity that will be a bit more blurred in a sense that it won't necessarily be around the core principles of youth work. It may have a few from social work and a few from restorative justice, and it might have a few from youth justice. They definitely will have an added value-base which I don't think will enrich youth work. (Martin)

7.4 Conclusion

The participants' perspectives in this chapter concentrate on the external environment for youth work and being a professional youth worker. They expressed their views on outside perceptions of their practice and role as professionals, and indicate a lack of understanding and respect by those not involved in youth work practice. Various conceptions and standpoints – many apparent in the sociology of the professions, e.g. a focus on professional protection - were offered by the participants. Additionally, they spoke about the requirements on youth workers and their practice currently, what they see as challenging – particularly in the current policy and funding climate – and how they manage it as individual youth workers and as a group.

The participants end with an uncertainty as to what the future of youth work and the state of youth work as a profession may potentially look like. Consequently, after using the grid chart (Appendix F) for the final time, a view of youth work as different emerged as the analysis highlighted – outside perceptions of youth work and youth workers, and profession, professionalism and professionalisation. These are discussed in Chapter 8: Section 8.3, Communicating Youth Work.

Additionally, analysis also highlighted youth workers as disadvantaged due to the following areas emerging; communication with management, the policy and funding context in Ireland over the past ten years, targeted youth work and finally, youth workers as a disadvantaged group and the future of professional youth work. These are discussed in Section 8.4, The Policy and Funding Context. Literature on the sociology of the professions, Irish policy and funding – particularly since 2009 – and opportunities and challenges in Irish, British and

international youth work and more broadly, the social professions in the past ten years, informs the discussion.

The next chapter discusses the key findings that were highlighted using the grid chart (Appendix F) and by creating short poems (Appendix G) –already noted in the conclusion of each findings and analysis chapter – under the following headings; Various Routes to Professional Youth Work, Practice and Identity, Communicating Youth Work to Others, and The Policy and Funding Context.

CHAPTER 8: DISCUSSION

The fieldwork process elicited stories of experience which were analysed and re-storied using both narrative analysis and analysis of narrative. Seven vignettes were then crafted and anchor the findings and analysis in Chapters 5, 6 and 7. As noted in the conclusion of each findings and analysis chapter, the key findings and therefore section titles for this discussion were identified using a grid chart (Appendix F) and by creating short poems from the seven vignettes (Appendix G).

In this chapter, I use the literature reviewed in Chapters 2 and 3 along with additional sources and quotes from the seven vignettes to discuss these findings. The chapter is divided into four sections.

Section 8.1, Various Routes to Professional Youth Work, discusses participants as accidental youth workers coming from diverse pathways to professional youth work, and volunteering at some stage along the way. This is significant when looking at who youth workers are, their professional identity, and their understandings of professional youth work in Ireland today.

Section 8.2, Practice and Identity, examines youth workers as a collective group of professionals and how, individually and collectively, they understand their practice and identity, and the implications of this. This is discussed referring to the findings such as features of youth work practice and, as a result, professional identity, a collective understanding of youth works purpose, and a shared language.

Section 8.3, Communicating Youth Work, discusses professional youth work as different from other professions and why it can be difficult for youth workers to explain youth work to those outside of practice. The findings - profession, professionalism and professionalisation, outside perceptions of youth work and youth workers, communication and, education and training are discussed.

Finally, Section 8.4, The Policy and Funding Context, looks at youth workers as a disadvantaged group in the policy and funding environment. This is examined in relation to the findings - communication with management, the policy and funding context in Ireland in the past ten years, targeted youth work, youth workers as a disadvantaged group and, the future of professional youth work.

8.1 Various Routes to Professional Youth Work

In Chapter 5, the participants share their experiences of before and becoming professional youth workers by accident, i.e. accidental youth workers. Revealing various educational and career pathways, the participants' stories also describe their voluntary participation in youth work as adult supervisors or young participants. Recent perspectives in the sociology of the professions discuss a changing environment and therefore a shift in the professions (Evetts 2006, 2012, Wilensky 1964). As such, I suggest that it could be useful for youth workers to reflect on what youth work is as a profession, and their roles and responsibilities in it as a professional group.

Examining participants' early experiences of before and becoming provides insights into who professional youth workers are in Ireland, and how this helps shape their perspectives on professional youth work today. Using theory on the professions, and theory of youth, reveals initial influences on their individual professional identity and what informed this, and an understanding of youth work as a profession through an occupational discourse perspective (Evetts 2011).

• Early Influences

Despite some of the participants being involved in youth work when they were younger, most of the participants – like some of the detached youth workers that de St Croix (2013) speaks to – became professional youth workers by accident as Chapter 5 details. Therefore, how and why they have come to understand their professional identity in a certain way, and what informs their practice, cannot be assumed.

Interestingly, Crossley and Vivikananda-Schmidt (2009 p. 603) propose students engage in 'legitimate peripheral participation' in their chosen profession as they move from identifying as a student to identifying as a member of it, and this is how one begins to self-identify as professional. They argue, 'Delayed professional self-identity is a barrier to successful transition from student to professional'. Clearly, the authors recognise education and training as fundamental for individuals beginning to engage with the practice of their chosen profession, gain access to it, identify themselves as professional, and have the right to use the title. However, apart from Susan, the participants in this research did not undertake specific

youth work education and training initially despite youth work education and training programmes – though limited – existing in Ireland since 1985.

Creating their own paths to youth work, the participants' involvement in professional youth work was not 'peripheral', but occurred when they were already employed as professionals. Significantly, none of the participants share the same transition process to becoming professional. In fact, the participants were volunteers and had education and training in other areas, but do not appear to have been part of any formal transition process into professional youth work. The participants experiences reflect recent research 'Mapping the Work Force in the Youth Work Sector in the Republic of Ireland' (NYCI & Youthnet 2013). This study indicates most professional youth workers in Ireland – two thirds precisely – currently have a third level degree, though it does not specify whether it is in youth work. It also explains 'CE workers are also employed as 'youth workers' in some instances (NYCI & Youthnet 2013 p. 7).

Sociological perspectives suggest education and training is one way of ensuring all members of a profession are part of the same process of transition to becoming professionals thus acquiring a shared professional identity (Friedson 2001, Wilensky 1964). Considering the participants' various routes to professional youth work – most did not engage in youth work education and training – I suggest that it is more difficult to understand initial influences on how and why they identify as professional youth workers. For this reason, hearing the participants' stories of before and becoming youth workers is essential in trying to understand initial influences on individual professional identity and contemplate whether a shared professional identity, or even potential for one, exists amongst professional youth workers in Ireland. Theory of youth supports an examination of this.

• A Common Starting Point

In youth work, theory of youth is useful for two reasons. On the one hand, it supports youth workers to understand their practice with young people better (Devlin 2008, Sercombe 2010), while on the other hand I propose that its use in an analysis of youth workers' lives, before they were professional, reveals turning points towards youth work as well as influences on their professional identity and value-base. Theory of youth examines what is distinctive about youth as a stage in the life cycle, the concept of adolescence, young peoples' lived

experiences, their position within different groups in society in relation to class, culture, gender and sexuality and, influences on them now and in the future (Devlin 2009).

Historically, theorists concentrated on the 'lifecycle' and connecting experiences, e.g. leaving school and moving into work or training, to a specific age. It proposes the following sequence of markers be met by an adolescent at specific stages during their transition to adulthood:

- Finishing full-time education
- Entry into the labour market
- Leaving home
- The establishment of an independent household
- Entry into marriage or cohabitation
- Parenthood (Kiernan 1991as cited in Morrow & Richards 1996)

and also,

- Acquisition of full citizenship (Jones & Wallace 1992 as cited in Morrow & Richards 1996).

However, the 'life-cycle' approach was later recognised as 'normative' and 'decontextualised' (Furlong 2013 p. 6) and using a 'life course' approach was more widely adopted (Elder 1974). Based on five principles, a 'life course' approach to youth seeks to understand individual's transitions through a contextualisation of their experiences in spaces viewed as active, relational and connected to others (Heinz 2009 p. 4). Furthermore, at different points in time research on transitions from youth to adulthood emphasises either structural elements, e.g. gender and class or 'factors underpinning individual agency', e.g. motivation and resilience, with the focus continuously shifting (Furlong 2013 p. 7). For example, Furlong (2013) explains, in the 1970s structures of opportunity in a context of rising unemployment levels were attended to, while social class and cultural capital was emphasised throughout the 1980s.

Individual agency and transitional outcomes e.g. resilience and judgement was the focus of transitional perspectives in the 1990s. More recently, authors suggest young peoples' transitions are becoming less defined (Devlin 2009 p. 47), with the beginning and end of adulthood becoming less stationary (Blatterer 2007 pp. 788-789). Devlin (2009 p. 47) proposes 'transitions previously associated with 'youth' are no longer so limited in scope'.

Indicators once associated with becoming recognised as an adult are no longer restricted to specific periods during a person's life (Sercombe 2010).

Indeed, Young (1999 p. 24) points to Coleman et al. (1997) and stresses the necessity for youth workers to understand theory of youth, 'Not simply because youth work focuses its attention on a particular age range, but also because 'adolescence' is typically portrayed as involving various transitions, for example in relation to clarity about rights, roles and responsibilities'. Sercombe (2010 p. 18) suggests youth is generally understood by youth workers 'in social terms', i.e. through experiences and interactions with others, and most commonly through transitions.

Considering the participants' stories, I propose that youth workers' paths can be understood using transitional and structural lenses in order to reveal influences on why and how they decided to become professional youth workers. Furthermore, the constructionist lens is also useful in terms of the backdrop to this research. Youth workers are asked to share their experiences, and in doing so they construct stories and describe how they constructed their own paths to youth work within various contexts and with diverse influences. Therefore, asking youth workers to share their experiences and essentially construct stories is a useful starting point to begin to understand their routes to professional youth work. The following section looks at their routes in more depth and the relevance of transitional and structural perspectives.

• Diverse Paths

As the findings illustrate, in primary and secondary school, three of the participants, Jewel, Thomas and Susan, attended youth clubs and were also junior leaders, while the other three participants, Martin, Eamonn and Maria had left secondary school when they became involved in youth work through volunteering and experiences they had while attending university. For various reasons, five of the participants were uncertain about their future careers after secondary school and subsequently engaged in several professional and personal endeavours before becoming professional youth workers. Notably, the sequential markers associated with transitioning to adulthood (Morrow & Richards 1996) are evident in the participants' accounts of leaving secondary school, but the markers in later experiences are not presented in such a linear or expectant fashion.

White and Wyn (1998 p. 314) state:

> In our view, young people negotiate their own lives, futures and meanings, but they do so in the context of specific social, political and economic circumstances and processes.

Arguably, the participants' journeys to professional youth work moved back and forth in between markers associated with specific life stages. Indeed, recognising the political, economic and social contexts of the participants may also provide insights into choices they made as young people.

The participants left school between the 1970s and the late 1990s, explaining they were at a crossroads when finishing secondary school and undecided about future employment and education and training options available to them. For example, Eamonn spoke about joining the army in the 1970s and he says it was a good option for him initially as 'you didn't need anything' (see section 5.3), i.e. qualifications. Alternatively, when Susan became a third level student in the 1980s, she discovered she was 'a rare breed' (see section 5.3). Growing up, Susan was unaware of living in an area labelled 'disadvantaged'. However, as a young adult this awareness changed when she met people who were surprised to see her attending third-level education because of where she came from.

As a teenager in the 1990s, Maria wanted to achieve a third-level qualification as she equated it with getting and doing 'a decent job' (see section 5.3) and progressing in her life. Describing their experiences, the participants move back and forth between having families and trying out different careers, and education and training, all of which are at various times in their lives before professional youth work, and highlight the importance of considering class, gender, culture etc. Therefore, informed by theory of youth and more specifically transitional and structural perspectives, it is possible to gain insights into the participants experiences and importantly, influences – describing people, places, thoughts and moments in their stories – on the formation of their individual professional identity.

During our research conversations, the participants emphasise the importance of facilitating young people to find their own way as unique individuals who are influenced by a variety of factors (see section 6.3). It is interesting that when they discuss their experiences as young people – referring to family, friends, youth work and, education and training – it is clear they also endeavoured to find their own way. The participants explain their approaches in youth

work are continuously constructed in response to young people finding their own way (see section 6.3). Young (1999 p. 31) explains young people:

- Live in different circumstances – e.g. in relation to housing, personal relationships, educational experience, rural isolation or employment.
- Face different issues – e.g. in terms of health and crime.
- Have different interests – e.g. sport, music, the environment.
- Aspire to different achievements – e.g. in terms of their academic achievement career choices or life goals.

To this end, I propose that youth workers have engaged with all these elements en route to professional youth work and quite possibly this supports them to do the job better considering the principles of practice (Davies 2010, Devlin & Gunning 2009, Jeffs & Smith 2010, Young 1999). The findings indicate youth workers' unplanned journeys to professional youth work may be reflective of young peoples' paths today, and this gives more of an insight into why youth workers have, as Thomas says, a 'Peter Pan' type mindset (ref section 6.3). Yet, it is also important to point out that young people today are expected to be flexible and build their own paths from the beginning. More often, this view fails to recognise the structural and individual factors which serve to constrain their choices.

The youth workers in this research initially engaged in a 'normal biography' (Furlong 2013 p. 9), one which generally had pre-determined conceptions of life stages. Modern transitions are more commonly associated with 'choice biographies' (Furlong 2013:9). Young people are presented with many choices which may seem like they have more freedom, but really there is often more pressure as they don't feel ready or equipped to choose, or circumstances inhibit their choices. Essentially, 'it is the tension between option/freedom and legitimation/coercion which marks 'choice biographies' (du Bois-Reymond 1998 p. 65 in Furlong 2013 p. 10).

Young (1999) states theory of youth helps youth workers to understand the reasons behind their practice. Additionally, I suggest that theory of youth supports youth workers to examine their own pathways to youth work. By doing so, initial influences on their professional identity and value-base emerge, and I propose that transitional and structural perspectives of youth in particular, can help youth workers to recognise and understand how they have engaged in various planned and unplanned transitions similar to the young people they work

with. Significantly, these experiences and influencing factors were only revealed when youth workers were asked about their experiences of life before and becoming professional youth workers, hence the value of the constructionist perspective also. Whilst individual experiences of becoming professional varied, volunteering and the notion of vocation was evident in participants' stories. Essentially, I suggest that this has influenced how youth workers understand youth work as a profession and equally, their perspectives on professional youth work.

• A Way of Life

Chapter 3 examines the religious, charitable and voluntary roots of the social professions, and their association with the word vocation (Banks 2004, Devlin 2012). Markedly, volunteering is apparent in the participants' stories of before and becoming professional youth workers, and to this end the concept of vocation, more specifically identified by Banks (2004 p. 35-37) as a key feature of the social professions, becomes relevant. Youth work attracted individuals who regarded the work as a 'way of life'. Notably, Susan and Jewel both identify nuns as central to the setting up and management of their youth clubs.

Koehn (1994 as cited in Sercombe 2010) proposes those engaged in a profession are committed to serving a specific, often more vulnerable group in society. To this end, youth work can be understood as a profession based on 'an ethical commitment to serve' (Koehn 1994 as cited in Sercombe 2010 p. 10), and youth work can be conceived of as a profession using what Evetts (2011) calls an occupational discourse. Participants' initial encounters with youth work were voluntary, as a young participant or a supervisory adult, and they became professional youth workers without engaging in any formal transition process. Most of them aimed to move on to another job, however, as their understanding of practice and an awareness of youth works influence on peoples' lives, communities and societies grew, they decided to remain (ref section 5.3).

To summarise, Section 1 examined the participants' various routes before and becoming a professional youth worker, essentially as accidental youth workers who had all volunteered. The participants tell stories of before and becoming professional youth workers by accident, and this reflects recent research (NYCI & Youthnet 2013). Using youth theory supports an analysis of these various routes and initial influences on their individual professional identity. A picture of who professional youth workers in Ireland are, and their perspectives on

professional youth work, begin to emerge. It becomes apparent that youth workers' professional identity formed through individual experiences in various, often contrasting settings. Furthermore, volunteering was central in all of their stories, and as such, they potentially have a collective understanding of youth work as a profession from the point of view of what Evetts (2011) calls an occupational discourse. That said, without engaging in a shared professional identity formation process, youth workers having a collective understanding of their professional identity, and youth work as a value-based practice is questionable. These two areas, collective identity and a value-based practice are discussed in more detail next.

8.2 Practice and Identity

Section 8.1, above, discusses the participants' various routes to professional youth work, and a view of them as accidental youth workers. It emphasises the importance of examining youth workers' experiences of before and becoming professional youth workers. Section 2 explores the participants' practice and identity, and how this provides insights into professional youth workers as a collective group. As noted, in recent years youth work is in the process of being recognised as a profession and therefore, those employed in it as professionals, with some traits apparent in various actions outlined in the NYWDP (DES 2003 p. 27), e.g. Action 4.1 which proposes establishing a validation body 'with the purpose of developing a comprehensive framework for accreditation and certification in youth work'. Hence, the establishment of an endorsement body, NSETS. Examining participants' experiences highlights a shared value-base and the potential for a collective understanding of their professional practice and identity.

However, looking more closely at how they discuss the purpose of youth work and the language they use reveals challenges to this. How these might help or hinder youth workers from being or being seen as a collective group of professionals is considered. I suggest that the youth workers' own descriptions of practice draws attention to some of the challenges and though limited, some of the possibilities existing for youth workers in being and being seen as a collective group of professional practitioners. Furthermore, using an occupational discourse of professionalism lens (Evetts 2006) to examine the language in descriptions of practice is useful. The implications of this are discussed in more detail in Sections 3 and 4 in

relation to why youth work is different from other professions, and youth workers as a disadvantaged group of professionals.

• What Youth Workers Do

In Chapter 6, practice is analysed, and characteristics and abilities of a youth worker emerge. Akin to other professions where the welfare of people is their primary concern, youth work is understood and made sense of through its practice (Van Manen 1994, Schon 2001), and 'neither the practitioner nor the client are empty vessels', meaning both are entering the relationship with knowledge and lived experiences already (Corney 2004 p. 12). Referring to Fook et al. (2000), Corney (2004 p. 11) suggests that a youth worker's practice is informed by and adheres to 'value-based "meaning systems" and 'professional practice is not enacted in a meaning vacuum'. Due to the relational nature of youth work (Issitt & Spence 2005), it is through descriptions of practice that youth workers describe their understanding of practice and why. Therefore, youth workers' stories reveal conceptions of youth work as a value-based practice, and whether a shared understanding exists. This cannot be assumed considering their accidental arrival into professional youth work.

Throughout Chapter 6, the participants assert there is always a purpose in their practice and the work is always changing within individual settings. Looking at the participants various experiences of practice, they all refer to similar characteristics and abilities which make a good youth worker. What's more, a shared understanding of youth work as a value-based practice is apparent. Through descriptions of practice, the participants explain a good youth worker is flexible, patient, can connect, is empathetic, has an underlying set of values, is open and approachable, and is able to see the bigger picture, all of which are noticeable in a youth work relationship (Young 1999), and significant in recognising an occupation e.g. youth work as a profession (Koehn 1994 as cited in Sercombe 2010 pp. 8-10).

The participants explain, young peoples' participation in youth work is voluntary, and they stress the importance of having reasons which inform how and why they decide to practice in the way they do. For example, Thomas feels young people are 'not regarded as kinda individuals' (ref section 7.3) (Davies 2005, Sercombe 2010, Young 1999), while Maria talks about 'giving them a little bit of time' and 'always looking out for, you know, potential in someone' (ref section 6.3). Susan explains, one of the reasons she is a youth worker is because she wants to be able to support someone to improve themselves and their situation.

There appears to be 'concern about the development of young people's values and the "sort of people" they are to become' (Young 1999 p. 10) amongst the participants, which has always been central to thinking and practice in youth work (Young 1999).

• How Youth Workers do Youth Work

The participants describe practice as always *moving*, more specifically they need to keep moving to keep up with it. For example, Martin explains 'Like you know you're always ebbing and flowing' (reference section 6.3) and Thomas explains 'Like you're always trying to evolve the work you're doing'. This is in keeping with Davies' (2010 p. 17) idea that youth work practice is constantly 'ebbing and flowing', and 'the notion of process is central' (Davies 2010 p. 17), occurring in spaces that are fluid and have a continuously changing dynamic requiring an endless redefinition and re-amalgamation of responses (Spence 2007).

In participants' descriptions of their practice, the importance of a youth worker having a plan is stressed, but so too the importance of being able to improvise with new session plans when the needs of the group are not being addressed when meeting them. For example, Jewel says when a programme is 'given to a certain group of young people, it's given to them for a reason' (ref section 6.3), indicating a plan is put in place by the professional youth worker.

However, as a youth worker, Martin also recognises that young peoples' needs change and 'you can't dictate over ten weeks what a young female or male member of a group will or won't say' (ref section 6.3). This is represented in Susan's vignette as she explains 'I ended up doing anger management with them that day off the top of my head' instead of the session she had planned. She was responding to what was happening in the group that day, not with the plan she came with, but by constructing a new plan when the group was underway – this points to Susan using 'disciplined improvisation' (Davies 2010 p. 6) in her practice. She was able to rethink her plan for the group so it would respond to their needs instead of stopping the session altogether.

In addition to patience and an ability to talk to young people as well as adults, empathy and having a set of personal values are also identified as important. Significantly, they insist youth workers need to be comfortable in what Martin calls the 'grey area' (ref section 6.3), i.e. those 'indeterminate zones' (Schon 2001 p. 4, also cited in Issitt & Spence 2005 p. 75). Interestingly, this alludes to the types of liminal spaces youth workers must practice in, 'the interstices and in the margins of other, more dominant institutions such as family, school and

police' (Spence et al. 2006 p. 135). Martin also points out – as have other youth workers (Young 1999) – that as a youth worker he is not a friend, and unfortunately this can be a difficult distinction to make as many of the features in a youth work relationship can also be seen in a friendship (ref section 6.3). Young (1999) addresses this dilemma by drawing on Aristotelian ideas and proposing alternative ways to understand the concept of a friend which may sit more comfortably with a youth worker in their relationship with a young person (Young 1999 p. 74).

• A Relational Practice

Considering the discussion so far, I propose that the participant's individual knowledge-base continuously develops as their learning occurs through ongoing participation and interaction in practice (Illich 1981). As Martin indicates, for each individual youth worker, knowledge is created over time, through their various experiences in a diversity of contexts (reference section 6.3). Certainly, it is through practice that Martin understands youth work better, and what characteristics and abilities are associated with being a good youth worker. As Chapter 3 notes, through practice, and identifying features of practice (Young 1999, Davies 2010), youth work is understood better, and can be conceived of as a relational practice. Issitt and Spence (2005 p. 64) explain there is a 'complex and subtle understanding of practice that is derived from the interpretation of experience over time' by both the youth worker and the young person.

In Chapter 5, Jewel, Susan and Thomas reflect on their experiences and learning of practice when they were young participants, remarking they were listened to and given responsibility. Susan refers to the youth worker she knew as a role model, and she wanted to become one too saying, 'I just liked being like [youth worker's name], the youth worker' (ref section 5.3). Recognising relationship as central to youth work practice (Young 1999 p. 62), and the notion of the youth worker as a 'role model' (Young 1999 p. 78), also needs to be acknowledged.

The youth worker practices with a concern for both relationships and process. Both emerge in the findings and were discussed earlier in this section. Relationships comprise of:

- Accepting and valuing young people
- Honesty, trust and reciprocity

while the process supports young people in:

- Learning the skills of critical thinking and rational judgement

- Participating in deliberations about what is 'good – not only in particular respects but in terms of what is conducive to the good life generally (Aristotle 1987, cited in Young 1999)
- Taking charge of their lives as empowered individuals as opposed to powerless victims (Young 1999).

The participants highlight the characteristics and abilities of a youth worker through sharing their stories of practice. By describing their experiences, they articulate their purpose and how they do youth work, and they indicate that a knowledge-base and also an awareness of a value-base develops through practice over time. Consequently, features of an individual professional identity also emerge. In this research, individual descriptions point to commonalities amongst the participants in how they undertake practice and therefore, how they identify. That said, contrasting descriptions of practice are also apparent amongst the participants, and more specifically, their individual understandings of it. This is discussed next in relation to language and could, I propose, hinder youth workers being, and being seen, as a collective group of professional practitioners.

•A Shared Language

Notably, the participants share stories to articulate practice and therefore allude to a shared sense of professional identity and language at the centre of this. Describing common features of practice through a shared language can support occupations to distinguish themselves as a profession (Kemmis 2009). The participants use metaphors – many of which are the same – when describing the characteristics, abilities and practices of good youth workers. In Chapter 6, they discuss their practice explaining they 'break down barriers', 'build a rapport', 'signpost', 'put some picture together', while often using a 'set of tools' (6.3). These conceptual metaphors are similar or the same as those noted in literature on youth workers' practice (Tierney 2010b). For example, Broadbent & Corney (2008) suggest youth workers use a 'kitbag' to support their practice, while CDYSB (2010) have also published a document for youth workers with 'toolkit' in the title. Recounting practice, the participants point to their positions as creators and builders, a metaphor with a long tradition in youth work (Smith 1982, Spence 2007).

That said, Spence et al. (2006 p. 40) explain, 'The field of practice for youth workers comprises a series of cross-cutting and different levels of communication and meaning-making'. Remarkably, despite a shared use of various metaphors, there are equally times

when participants attach different meanings to each. For instance, Susan discusses 'tools' in relation to what she wants to give a young person, while Thomas uses 'tools' to describe his continuous attainment of skills and abilities as a youth worker (ref section 6.3). Certainly, the metaphor can be used for both, however, it is not apparent whether participants are aware alternative meanings are attached to the same metaphor. A common language is presented, yet shared meaning is not always obvious.

Furthermore, when the participants mention values in youth work, they do not elaborate. This, I suggest, could be for several reasons – which I have reflected on in more detail in Chapter 9: Section 9.6 – related to my role as a practitioner researcher, and the possibility that this was the first time they had discussed youth work values with someone else. As a result, I argue that it is difficult to ascertain their individual or collective awareness of a value-base in youth work. To a large extent, inconsistency in how the participants use their common language provides an unreliable picture of what youth workers do at times and why. Therefore, one of the challenges for professional youth workers, as I see it, is to ensure they have a shared understanding of youth work as a value-based practice, and this is presented consistently through the language they use.

While recent policy, practice and research publications in Ireland outline principles of practice (DCYA 2015, DES 2003, Devlin & Gunning 2009, NYCI 2006, OMCYA 2010), I propose that a code of ethics, or ethical practice as they have in Victoria, Australia – an overall outline of youth work principles which can develop with youth workers as practice evolves – could support a shared understanding and language amongst youth workers in Ireland. In Australia, the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria use the 'Code of Ethical Practice – A First Step for the Victorian Youth Sector' (YACVic2007).

They explain:

> The Code offers an opportunity for the sector to articulate the elements of youth work that define why the work we do is so valuable and unique. It describes the principles that drive our work in improving the lives of young people in Victoria. It also describes the practice responsibilities of youth workers that ensure the highest level of professionalism continues to be upheld. (YACVic2007)

Developing a code of ethics/ethical practice for youth work in Ireland could provide professional youth workers with a common reference point to guide their professional practice. What's more, it may also support consistent descriptions of what they do and why

for those who are not involved in youth work practice. While 'A framework for the inclusion of ethics in youth work education and training' (D'arcy 2016) provides a good starting point for educators to begin thinking about including a framework of ethics into their teaching, I argue that professional youth workers need to develop a code of ethics/ethical practice with and for the Irish Youth Work Sector.

Section 2 discusses practice and identity, and provides insights into youth workers as a collective group of professionals and the challenges associated with being and being seen as such. What youth workers do and how they do it, in addition to characteristics and abilities of youth workers is also examined. Youth work as a relational practice, and the importance of relationships and the ongoing learning within these is explored. Stories of individual practice experiences illustrate common youth worker characteristics and abilities amongst the participants, and a shared value-base begins to emerge.

I suggest that youth workers share a collective understanding of youth work as a value-based practice (Davies 2010, Devlin 2017, Devlin & Gunning 2009, Young 1999). However, because the language they use is inconsistent at times, it is unclear whether they are all aware of the specific values underpinning youth work and sometimes offer unreliable descriptions of what they are doing and why. I suggest that this is because of their diverse pathways to youth work and more importantly, as a result of only beginning to learn about professional youth work when they became professional practitioners. I propose developing a code of ethics/ethical practice in the sector to promote good practice thus supporting youth workers with this challenge. In view of this, Section 3 continues to look at youth workers' practice and identity, but in relation to youth work as different from other professions. How participants understand youth work as a profession, identify as professionals, and view outside perceptions of youth work and youth workers, is examined.

8.3 Communicating Youth Work to Others

Sections 8.1 and 8.2 discuss participants' various routes to becoming professional, practice and identity. As such, individual professional identities emerge, and their perceptions and understandings of youth work as a value-based practice become apparent. However, a closer look at the language they use to describe practice, a practice shaped within individual

settings, indicates some challenges for youth workers in communicating practice and, therefore, being and being seen as a collective group of professionals.

The development of a code of ethics/ethical practice may begin to address this challenge. Continuing to discuss practice and identity in Section 3, it appears language is not the only challenge youth workers have to contend with when communicating practice to external audiences. The findings suggest youth workers more often do not make space or are not provided with space to describe practice to each other and to those outside practice. Additionally, participants share their views on education and training for youth workers, and highlight what they see as minimal changes to pathways to professional youth work for potential youth workers. Despite acknowledging the role of third-level education, the majority stress the importance of ongoing training.

This section focuses on the view that youth work is different from other professions, but this is not and, most importantly, cannot be recognised in the current context. Accordingly, dominant conceptions of professional occupations impact professional youth work, and it is essential to understand the challenges and opportunities these present to professional youth workers. This is examined using an analysis of professionalism as a discourse, one that can take at least two contrasting forms, such as those which Evetts (2011) labels the occupational and the organisational.

Participants' understandings of youth work as a profession, and identifying as professionals – particularly in relation to outside perceptions of professional youth work and youth workers, and how education and training plays, and can play a role in this – is examined and discussed with reference to literature on the sociology of the professions, practice knowledge, education and training, and youth work throughout this section.

• Professionalism

Certainly, literature in Chapter 2 points to a developing recognition of professional youth work in an Irish policy context. Despite this, the participants' perspectives on professional youth work in Ireland reveal unresolved issues and uncertainties in this environment. For example, Thomas declares 'anyone can be classed as a youth worker' (ref section 7.2). Certainly, unlike formal education, youth work occurs in various settings, and there are many who have little to no experience of it. Having 'no similar institutional or contextual coherence, and no universally shared familiarity with youth work practice' makes it difficult

for outsiders to understand what youth work is and why (Cooper, T. 2018 p. 4). In view of this, the protection of a professional youth worker's role, and how this is or might be adequately managed, becomes pertinent. Davies (2005) 'Manifesto' raises this issue also, advising youth workers to engage in 'critical debate' regarding the 'defining characteristics' of youth work which he elaborates on more succinctly in later publications (Davies 2010). This is exactly what the individual participants begin doing in our research conversations, conversations which demonstrate the value of talking with youth workers about their practice.

Additionally, in Chapter 7 the participants offer their perspectives on what a profession generally looks like, recognising an association or as Martin says, 'a national body with a very strict code of ethics and beliefs' (ref section 7.2) and a knowledge-base, Thomas says 'there's a kind of a particular knowledge-base' (ref section 7.2), as features. They also refer to these as a way of protecting the profession as Martin says, 'you can't practice or use the title without that registration of that body' (ref section 7.2). In relation to having to have a knowledge-base, Thomas says 'you can't just, ah, put a plaque outside your door and call yourself, ah, doctor whatever' (ref section 7.2). Their perspectives actually identify traits which are associated with occupational and organisational discourses of professionalism (Evetts 2006), As Chapter 3 notes, recent literature on the professions suggests a focus on professionalism, and specifically discourses of professionalism is the most useful for current debates. Evetts (2006) proposes:

> A different interpretation of the concept of professionalism is also developing and this involves an examination of professionalism as a discourse of occupational change and control. This interpretation would seem to have much more contemporary relevance in the analysis of occupational groups where the discourse is increasingly applied and utilised. Evetts (2006 p. 138)

However, the participants are not convinced that the ongoing development of professional youth work should look to subscribe to the familiar and most notable traits of a profession as they understand it, and they question what these traits might mean if attained by youth work. For instance, Thomas deliberates the consequences of protecting a youth worker's title. On the one hand, he muses, 'But I don't know if the, it should be like a protected profession, you can't be a youth worker unless' (ref section 7.2), which indicates its potential for closure and exclusion of others, i.e. a 'professional project' (Larson 1977, Macdonald 1995).

Goodwin (2014 p. 35) explains there was significant debate amongst youth workers in Victoria, Australia between the 1960s and the 1980s about the meaning of professional and what this meant for youth work. Like the participants in this research, the Australian youth workers were unsure as to how youth work should be established practically, what form it should take, or even 'what the boundaries should be' (Goodwin 2014 p. 35). Others associated professional status with a salary, while there were those who understood a professional youth worker as one whose practice was informed by their view of young people.

The participants use metaphors to describe professionalism in a youth work practice setting. For example, Susan discusses the 'professional plate and the personal plate' (ref section 7.2), and Maria stresses the importance of 'connections' (ref section 7.2) in order to describe their understandings of professionalism, understandings which are reflective of an occupational discourse of professionalism (Evetts 2006, 2011).

On the one hand, individual attitudes and behaviours towards 'professionalisms' (Evans 2006) are apparent in descriptions of practice, and there appears to be a shared understanding of professionalism in terms of an occupational discourse (Evetts 2011). For example, 'decisions making in complex cases' (Evetts 2006 p. 141) is apparent in Susan's vignette (ref section 6.4).

On the other hand, participants' descriptions of the broader environment for youth work, discussed next, reflects features associated with an organisational discourse such as 'hierarchical structures of authority…accountability, target setting and performance review' (Evetts 2006 p. 140-141).

Maria says 'So, it's like funders are very much dictating. I believe the funders are very much dictating, well you have to have this and this' (ref section 7.3). Using these lenses reveals insights into why youth workers' understandings of professionalism in youth work are different from the more dominant conceptions of professionalism and why they are dealing with various challenges currently. However, using discourses of professionalism in this analysis also offers suggestions as to how youth workers can manage and develop their professional selves and professional youth work in the current context.

• Beneath the Surface

The participants insist those who do not practice – 'policy makers, fellow professionals or the public at large' (Spence 2007 p. 3) – misinterpret youth work and the youth worker's role. In Chapter 7, the participants explain youth workers are not considered to have a specific skill set or education, and previously other professionals saw them as 'the dredges at the bottom of the barrel' (ref section 7.2). As a matter of fact, Susan likens a youth worker's practice to a swan swimming and seemingly gliding peacefully across the water, yet underneath the water, and invisible to the naked eye, the swan is working hard to stay afloat. She explains, those outside do not see what is happening in youth work practice and they only observe the activities used to support practice.

Research from Spence et al. (2006 p. 87) points to youth workers conceding 'their work is most commonly understood by outsiders, and to some degree young people, as recreation – control and that few really understand what their work is about'. Such was the case for Irish youth workers even after the Costello Report (1984) outlined the role of youth work as central in young peoples' critical social education (Ronayne 1992, Treacy1992). Likewise, the policy perspective of youth work in Australia during the 1980s was one of 'youth work as recreational club work' (Goodwin 2014 p. 117).

• Making Plans

Receiving feedback from those outside of practice, the participants ascertain there is an insufficient understanding of youth work practice, and therefore its purpose, leading to little respect for who youth workers are and what they do. Essentially, youth workers develop programmes or activities with young people to meet them where they are at (Davies 2010, Spence 2007, Young 1999), but this expression gives the impression that the job a youth worker is tasked with is simple (Davies 2005). Yet as the findings illustrate, this is far from the reality, and meeting young people where they are at requires youth workers to go on unplanned journeys with them and this in fact is where practitioner knowledge – discussed further on in this section – is constructed. As Spence (2007) explains,

> The oft-repeated youth work mantra of "starting where young people are at" is a phrase which clumsily covers a complex, sensitive and highly skilled process of intervention' (Spence 2007 p. 13)

which the participants imply, those outside of practice neglect to recognise.

For example, in section 6.3, Susan describes how she plans and organises a programme with a group. She explains the correct way for her to practice is to meet the group, get to know what they want or might like to do, and then develop a plan based on this. However, she admits, despite meeting and planning with the young people before beginning a programme, the reality of being able to see it through, or even starting it, can be very different, such is the unpredictability of youth work. Beyond this, she is frustrated with management and funders expectations for the pre-planned activity she creates. In her vignette, she explains that youth workers must now write a plan for a group before meeting them, and are then expected to follow through with the plan regardless of its suitability for the group. She says, 'We have to have these lesson plans done now, and I'm like sure, I dunno what I'm gona do until I meet 'em' (ref section 6.4). It is unsurprising that this may also be part of her frustration with having to do time consuming 'paperwork' (ref section 6.4). She argues, as a professional youth worker she must acknowledge that needs and situations regularly change in practice, and she needs to respond to this.

However, it is difficult explaining this to those outside who are expecting the delivery of specific plans. Outside expectations of professionals is that they have a plan before starting a piece of work and complete it, therefore a youth worker is expected to have a plan set out before meeting a group and to follow this. Yet, for youth workers it makes more sense to create plans with a group when they are meeting, and be open to the plan changing along the way. Professionalism appears to be shaped 'from above', while at the same time it is developing 'from within' (Evetts 2012 p. 5).

Certainly, Susan's vignette illustrates knowledge of 'how to' as created in the moment using 'improvisational immediacy' (Van Manen 1994 p. 139). She describes her youth work practice in three stages – planning, responding to what happens in a group, e.g. when the fight broke out, and the consequences. After the planning stages, the latter two emerge in the immediacy of the practice setting where she made decisions which cannot be accounted for when referring to the initial plan. Davies (2005 p. 19) suggests this is common in youth work, maintaining a youth worker's practice 'is not random. It is guided and shaped by usually unarticulated questions, in effect posed to themselves at critical moments'. It is interesting that in Susan's vignette she avoids telling management of the incident fearing they will insist she stop working with the group.

Sercombe (2010) emphasises relationship is at the core of professional youth work, and it is critical for youth workers to understand their role is to make spaces for young people to move in while trying to walk alongside them and meet them where they are at, regardless of what they have done, 'in order to create possibilities of transformation' (Sercombe 2010 p. 11). However, had Susan told management, she supposes they would not have accepted her understanding of professionalism was to continue working with the group, despite what happened. De St Croix (2013) discusses this same challenge in England in terms of professional and organisational norms where a youth worker prioritises:

> work with a challenging group of young people, while their employer might want to encourage them to move on to new groups to meet targets and maximise funding. (de St Croix 2013 p. 42)

While there is a dilemma considering the safety of the young people in the group and of course Susan's own personal safety, there appears to be a stark disconnect in what Susan as a youth worker perceives professionalism to be and managements understanding of professionalism, an understanding promoting the use of pre-determined plans/programmes which in some respects are useful, at least in terms of clarity and safety for young people and youth workers. However, it does not seem to consider the intricacies of a youth worker's practice. Susan's conception of professionalism appears to be developed 'from within', while it looks like management are trying to shape professionalism 'from above' (Evetts 2012). As a result, the two differing conceptions seem to be causing confusion and contention between the youth worker and their management.

The participants maintain youth work practice is misunderstood by those external to practice (ref section 7.2), and partially attribute this to the lack of opportunities and spaces they have to describe practice and practice knowledge generated throughout the course of their work. Considering this, using an analysis of professionalism as a discourse, I suggest that it would be useful for professional youth workers to create a collective discourse and, then, engage in an ongoing dialogue with managers about their conceptions of professional youth work practice and a professional youth worker's role in order for them to create and maintain a shared understanding of professionalism. A common discourse of professionalism amongst professional youth workers – one supported by ongoing dialogue between professional youth workers and managers – is fundamental for those outside to understand practice. Further to

this, a closer examination of participants' experiences of how youth work practice and practice knowledge is understood and communicated currently provides additional insights.

• Practice Knowledge

The traditional professions are associated with having knowledge particular to them (Devlin 2012). As discussed, the participants refer to a knowledge-base, one constructed through practice, a practice they perceive to be misinterpreted and misjudged. Further explanations of this allude to over-riding interpretations of what society considers acceptable professional knowledge to be. For instance, the situation seems to be getting worse as Maria exclaims 'it's all about numbers, and it's all about figures and outputs' (ref section 7.3). Her statement suggests an awareness of a dominant 'technical rationality' which accepts 'an application of research-based knowledge to the solution of problems of instrumental choice' (Schon 2001 p. 5). This is also known as Evidence Based Practice [EBP], which it is proposed is 'the product of a particular time and place' (Robb 2007 p. 58). De St Croix (2017 p. 1) also refers to this environment for youth workers in England 'where government and third sector organisations are promoting 'a youth impact agenda' encouraging organisations to predefine and measure their outcomes'.

Conversely, the knowledge created in professions working with people, like youth work, is 'messy' and 'on the spot' (Schon 2001 p. 7), and can be seen in a youth worker's practice every day (Issitt & Spence 2005). It is difficult to measure and translate this into current technical frameworks. Jewel also worries about the number of hours she does, and how management understands them when they are submitted each week (ref section 6.4). Allocated a specific number of hours in her contract, Jewel regularly exceeds this, and so continuously questions her ability to do the job. Having said that, it is conceivable that the unpredictability of work with people may require more or even less hours than originally allocated. In fact, Martin goes as far as defending his right to practice in and embrace the uncertainty coming from working with and for young people (ref section 6.3). In his vignette he changed his plan for the group he was working with and organised an activity which encouraged conversation on a current topic (the Marriage Equality Referendum in Ireland).

Indeed, Martin emphasises, 'I still done my job' (ref section 6.3). Due to funding criteria, management seem focused on readily available data in the form of hours worked and pre-determined plans, not only distracting from, but also making it difficult for youth workers to

undertake and articulate a value-based practice and guiding principles. Managed as a resource, 'time is political', and more often, out of the practitioner's control (Cooper 2018c p. 234). What's more, current frameworks for tracking and quantifying development and progress make it difficult to explain the fundamental knowledge gathered in youth work, as less resources now provide practitioners with little to no time for reflection, and evaluation is often seen as a 'one-off' piece of work (Cooper 2018c p. 234). Participants' perspectives point to youth workers struggling to explain what they do – particularly the value of it – in the way they are being required to, and as a result their voices and therefore knowledge is silenced (Issitt & Spence 2005).

Schwandt (2005 p. 313 as cited in Green 2009 p. 3) suggests articulating practice knowledge is a challenge for the 'semi-professions' (Green 2009 p. 2) or 'minor' professions (Glazer 1974) as they have been dubbed, e.g. teaching and social work. He refers to a 'New Public Management' movement globally, and an increasing emphasis on Evidence Based Practice and policy (Schwandt 2005 p. 313 as cited in Green 2009 p. 3). As such, a preference for instantly visible evidence is apparent (Issitt & Spence 2005, Schon 2001), with a dismissal of practice knowledge in the social professions or at the very most, making it secondary (Schon 2001). Then again, it is argued that the concept of professional practice has not yet been explored or defined sufficiently either (Green 2009), and 'practice' itself is not 'self-explanatory' (Kemmis 2009 p. 19).

Further to this, Schon (2001) asserts that social professionals' knowledge is primarily created through practice, in practice and on reflection of practice, implying a tacit learning and understanding. As a result, its immediate translation to others is generally impracticable, hence, it is not surprising that Susan, Jewel and Martin identify difficulties in Chapter 6. Schon (2001 p. 7) explains, 'Practitioners make judgements of quality for which they cannot state adequate criteria, display skills for which they cannot describe procedures or rules'. However, this is not to say quality and outcomes should not or cannot be judged in youth work (de St Croix 2013), rather youth workers themselves need to find suitable ways of doing this. Recent research looks at ways of doing this with the Participatory Evaluation Method. Using this, young people and youth workers were facilitated to identify outcomes from youth work practice which they saw as important (Ord et al 2018)

Issitt and Spence (2005) insist youth workers' practice has always been about working in relationships and conversations that are continuously evolving and reforming, and because of this, gathering evidence was never a focus. It is through reflection on action and reflexivity within action that youth workers explain and come to make sense of their work (Issitt & Spence 2005). The essential 'moments' (Schon 1984 as cited in Issitt & Spence 2005) are the vital building blocks in practice and made sense of through reflection. This leads to learning from experience which can, if applicable, be utilised in current or future practice (Schon 2001).

Several sociological perspectives offer suggestions for addressing these challenges for social professionals. Kemmis and McTaggart (2000 as cited in Green 2009) present a framework for exploring social practice and in that, their model moves from the individual to the social, and the objective to the subjective, and how, for example, a practitioner understands their own behaviour, to how they understand its appearance outside of themselves. They discuss key features of practice and 'mediating preconditions' (Kemmis & McTaggart 2000 as cited in Green 2009 p. 20) along with concepts such as 'connections', 'arrangements'. 'compound structures', 'exoskeletons' and 'practice architectures' to provide a way of examining the complexities in tacit practice in more depth. Furthermore, Issitt and Spence (2005 p. 75) respond to this challenge by advising youth workers to contend with the 'structural disadvantage' caused by the pre-eminence of a technical rationale. They recommend that youth workers be:

> Self-conscious about key personal and professional values.

And have:

> Sensitivity to a wide range of working relationships including those with co-workers, managers and user groups.
>
> An explicit analytical understanding of organisational possibilities and indeterminate zones.
>
> An ability to negotiate within structures and relations of power, and knowledge about the wider socio-political factors which impact upon practice and within which practice is inscribed. Issitt and Spence (2005 p. 75)

Certainly, managing a fluid practice makes it difficult for youth workers to consistently reflect in and on action. Considering this, I suggest that youth workers need a structure, one which could be provided through education and training spaces, to facilitate ongoing support and guidance to support them to think about their practice knowledge and ways to adequately

describe it. With this, youth workers could more freely identify 'reflection-in-action' as readily as 'reflection-inaction' on an ongoing basis (Schon 2001 p. 17). Notably, Martin acknowledges this process and 'the role of tacit or practice knowledge' (Robb 2007 p. 59) suggesting there should be spaces provided to support practitioner reflection processes and importantly recognise that youth workers' 'approaches can be so individual and unique' (ref section 6.3) and this is a good thing.

The findings indicate it is difficult for those outside of practice to ascertain an adequate understanding or indeed judgement of quality youth work, and therefore dominant conceptions of how an occupation labelled professional should be judged are readily applied. In light of the discussion on practice knowledge thus far, it is unsurprising that a youth worker's role is more often met with confusion and disinterest. Considering this, I suggest that it is difficult for youth workers as individuals and as a group to have confidence or certainty in their practice and likewise, their professional identity. While the findings support the suggestion that youth workers articulate an understanding of their role through stories of practice (Spence 2007), the participants propose much of their practice knowledge is lost as they don't get the opportunity to tell their stories. Or, if presented with the opportunity, they find it difficult to highlight or translate the significance of the practice knowledge beyond the practice settings in their stories.

Youth workers need to explore how to explain their practice and practice knowledge in a way which translates amongst each other and equally to those outside of practice. What is interesting is recent research has used the Participatory Evaluation Method (Ord et al 2018) which may provide a way for youth workers to explain practice to those outside, particularly those whose job it is to judge its quality and account for its outcomes. Providing opportunities to reflect – opportunities which Cooper (2018c p. 232) maintains 'have all but disappeared in many contexts' (Cooper 2014, Otteson 2007, Taylor 2014) – those involved in using the method emphasise the benefit of the 'process of collective reflection' (Cooper 2018c p. 232). With education and training featuring significantly in the findings, the discussion now turns to what this currently involves and should involve. Moreover, looking at how it could support professional youth workers to understand and further develop their suggestions on practice knowledge is central.

• Education and Training

Both Thomas and Martin view a professional as someone who has, Thomas says, a 'kind of a particular knowledge-base' (ref section 7.2) attained from formal training – commonly at third level – whereby exams need to be passed to secure employment. However, most of the participants in this research did not engage in formal education prior to becoming a professional youth worker, but have since participated in various pieces of training as a professional youth worker. It is not surprising then that informal and non-formal education spaces for reflection, and opportunities for continuing development while practising rather than formal education are discussed by the participants. There are several perspectives on what youth work education and training should look like, and what its purpose should or could be. For a youth worker, their knowledge-base is continuously developing and reforming in practice, and to this end, having only initial formal training is not sufficient.

The participants themselves identify a need for spaces to reflect upon and make sense of what they are learning through their ongoing practice. In fact, Davies (2005) asserts youth workers need to be self-critical and reflective in spaces provided for them to reflect on practice while undertaking practice. In effect, this facilitates practitioner learning and reflection on 'knowledge about', i.e. knowledge learned in the classroom, and 'knowledge how to', i.e. knowledge that forms skills during practice (Robb 2007 p. 57). Accordingly, I propose that education and training for youth workers needs to combine the two to ensure new and practising youth workers are given space to examine youth work values and acknowledge the approaches and methods incumbent in youth work practice. Additionally, they need to be equipped with the tools to be able to learn about practice whilst in practice. Essentially, 'training programmes need to demonstrate suitable mechanisms for ensuring the development of reflective practice' (2nd Declaration of Youth Work 2015 p. 5 in Kiilakoski 2018 p. 6).

Sociological perspectives recognise education and training as a key feature of professions with areas such as a knowledge-base, experience, proficiency, credentialing, accreditation and continuing development prevalent (Evetts 2014, Wilensky 1964). The notion of using education and training as a means of 'quality control' is proposed by Sercombe (2010 p. 162) who recommends the title of youth worker should in fact be protected, saying permission for its use should only be granted when someone has completed initial youth work education and

training. Jewel also alludes to ‘quality control’ (Sercombe 2010 p. 162) when discussing the employment of staff who have not engaged in any initial youth work education and training (ref section 6.2). Sercombe (2012) asserts professional youth work is responsible for ensuring individuals with the title youth worker have engaged in youth work education and training before they work with young people. This proposal reflects an understanding of the occupational value of professionalism, one which promotes a code of ethics within professions and positions education and training as a requirement for the profession (Sercombe 2010).

On the one hand, most of the participants discuss continuing training and development of their skills, while Jewel on the other hand is an exception as she focuses on initial formal training at third level rather than continuing development. Eamonn maintains, as a youth worker you should always be ‘updating yourself’ (ref section 6.2) because this helps guide professional practice and facilitate an awareness of the context they are working in. Due to the type of work they do, Susan stipulates a youth worker should never be finished learning. These expressions allude to Continuing Professional Development (CPD), a term increasingly associated with discourses of professionalism (Evetts 2012). One such view of CPD is that it is helpful for professions trying to create a space to shape their own professional landscape and most notably assert occupational control, while also providing opportunities for promotion and progression to managerial roles (Evetts 2014).

Alternatively, CPD is also viewed as a way for organisations to control groups of workers (Evetts 2014). The term CPD is becoming increasingly prevalent with professions, and youth work is no exception. Currently in Ireland, research discussed the growth of CPD in youth work organisations and recommends a ‘suitable structure’ be implemented for training which is mindful of resources and not overburdening the ‘workload’ of the youth worker (NYCI & Youthnet 2013 p. 84). For CPD to work in youth work I suggest that there needs to be opportunities for youth workers to contribute to and develop the ‘structure for coordinating this process’ (NYCI & Youthnet 2013 p. 84).

In North America, Fusco and Baizerman (2013) cast a critical eye over what the development of education and training may mean for youth work and list competencies, curricula and credentialing as features of a professionalisation process. However, they warn of a situation developing ‘from above’ (Evetts 2012) – particularly considering the current environment –

where youth work may incur large costs, new programmes that are too generalised, and a loss of diversity which exists amongst an occupations workforce.

Sercombe (2010) suggests a CPD model consisting of training in technical skills such as health and safety whilst also encouraging and developing youth workers to think, be creative and critique their practice in youth work is needed. Furthermore, he asserts professional youth workers should be encouraged to take responsibility for the identification, construction and roll out of training, and notes education and training is more sustainable with the development of professional organisations and unions, distinct from government, who can advocate for youth workers at a government level (Sercombe 2010). Corney et al. (2014) insist that:

> if the professional and industrial interests of the community services sector are combined, the collective voice of youth workers will be strengthened, and the quality of service provision will be enhanced. (Corney et al. 2014 p. 142)

Along with the title of youth worker, the notion and values of associations is discussed further in Section 4.

Bessant (2004 p. 30-31) contemplates advantages and disadvantages of professionally accredited youth work education by observing different perspectives within the sociology of the professions. Referring to features associated with perspectives on the professions, Bessant (2004 p. 30-31) outlines some of the advantages as practitioner competency, regulation, resourcing and increased popularity of youth work courses for the sector.

Conversely, accreditation may also perpetuate the areas of control, inequity, rigidity and conformity for youth work programmes. In effect, for example, through accreditation, control of the sector by those with particular interests is possible and better resourced institutions may be better positioned to achieve accreditation, In addition, the potential for accredited programmes to respond to shifts and particular needs of a community/student may be reduced, as would the scope for educators to be creative in their teaching.

Indeed, Broadbent and Corney (2008 p. 19) determine, ‘to progress the vocational role of professional youth workers, their education and training must be of a high standard and accountable, and the outcomes must meet agreed criteria’, criteria which should be assessed by academics as well as youth work colleagues, young people and the wider community. Encouragingly, Ireland has NSETS (see Chapter 2), and as a result, the number of professionally accredited youth work education and training programmes have increased in

recent years. I propose that the preceding debates should be kept in mind as evaluation and expansion of youth work programmes in Ireland continues.

Initial formal education supports an individual to become a professional youth worker, and more specifically, equip them with the necessary skills to ensure they provide adequate opportunities and resources, as they see fit, for the young people they work with. Accordingly, I propose that it is essential to consider what education and training could look like. I suggest that youth work education and training should incorporate initial and continuing training as complementary to each other and avoid an emphasis on one over the other, despite the participants focusing more on a CPD model rather than initial formal education and training. This is interesting seeing as the participants' training backgrounds consist of various qualifications in youth work and other disciplines (Table 1). Jewel and Thomas are the only participants who have an NSETS accredited qualification in youth and community work – this may have something to do with the centralisation of professionally endorsed youth work programmes in the East – and notably, Jewel is the only participant who discusses the importance of initial training.

The emphasis on CPD rather than third-level qualifications by most of the participants seems to reflect their general experiences of youth work education and training to date. Not having engaged in a process of accredited youth work training may have resulted in participants applying less importance to it. Nonetheless, while youth workers may have good intentions in relation to a sense of caring for young people, direction can be lost and become distorted or blurred, hence the usefulness of incorporating education and training as a way of questioning what is accepted as common sense and of course 'quality control' (Sercombe 2010 p. 162).

The discussion in Section 3 focused on a view of youth work as different from other professions, and as such, there are implications – both challenging and supportive – for professional youth workers. The participants' perspectives on outside perceptions of professional youth work and how well, if at all, it is understood by those outside of practice, including management, funders and society in general, is discussed. Participants' perspectives on outside perceptions were examined in relation to practice knowledge and, education and training. The participants are frustrated with having no space to explain what they do and how - largely due to the privileging of a particular type of knowledge - and

therefore why youth work is different from other professions. It's interesting that the participants are not sure if youth work should even be a profession. Alluding to perspectives on professions, there is an uncertainty about the type of profession they want youth work to be. I suggest that this ambivalence is reflective of youth works history, one which is 'characterised by inherent tensions and ambiguities' as youth workers have had to continuously balance definitions of what a profession is and what youth work is (Lorenz 2009 p. 3). Be that as it may, Lorenz (2009) proposes youth works past strengthens youth workers' positions in discussions about being a profession and therefore, I suggest that they are more comfortable – and in fact, need to be more comfortable and think about youth work as a profession despite their uncertainty – in a process of active reconceptualising as the professional landscape continues to change.

Significantly, the participants say it is a struggle for people to comprehend what they do, believing the activities with young people, e.g. swimming and football in youth work are recognised, but not the preparation, learning and knowledge that accompanies them, hence the perception of youth work 'as supplementary to other educational and welfare services and its priorities are located in the margins of related provision' (Spence 2007 p. 5). I suggest that the diversity of backgrounds, entry points into youth work, and education and training, has partially contributed to this, along with dominant conceptions of what a profession looks like and what is accepted as professional knowledge.

Sociology of the professions, and more specifically, perspectives on practice knowledge in the social professions, provides insights into the ways youth workers can be supported to reveal their practice knowledge more clearly amongst themselves and use their experiences to present their practice and identity in a way those outside of youth work can understand. Participants discuss ongoing training more than formal education as necessary, and this I suggest is due to their own experiences of becoming and being a professional youth worker. I propose that the provision of initial formal and on-going education and training, informed by practising youth workers, is essential for all youth workers, new as well as experienced. Similarly, broader research on European youth work recommends formal as well as informal education 'so that learning paths for youth workers supports life-long learning on an individual level and creating reflective practices on a communal level' (Kiilakoski 2018 p. 36). Literature advises the primary focus of initial education and training should concentrate on youth work values and theories along with perspectives and concepts concerning practice

knowledge (Corney 2004, Sercombe 2010). I also suggest that youth workers need to make spaces and be supported to do this in order to reflect and critique their practice as well as acquire more technical skills continually.

As such, translating practice knowledge, and therefore distinguishing youth work from other professions becomes even more pertinent when addressing the wider context for professions currently. Positioned in an environment of uncertainty for all professions, particularly the 'semi professions' (Green 2009 p. 2), it is not surprising that the broader policy and funding context has, and continues to challenge and essentially disadvantage – a word the participants use to describe their situation (ref section 7.3) – youth workers, individually and collectively. Examining the policy and funding landscape in Section 4 provides suggestions as to why this is occurring.

8.4 The Policy and Funding Context

Considering the challenges and to a much lesser extent possibilities for professional youth workers discussed thus far, this final section examines the policy and funding context and how this positions professional youth workers as a disadvantaged group. Illustrating diminishing relationships with youth work managers, in addition to evaluation and competition for funding and promotion of targeted work, youth workers are presented as a disadvantaged group. Participants appear mostly resigned to the changes occurring, and as a result, are uncertain and apprehensive about their future and the future of youth work. Literature on the sociology of the professions, Irish, British and global policy and funding since 2009, and youth work is referred to.

• Communicating with Management

Currently, communications appear fraught in the youth work organisations the participants are employed in. Indeed, Eamonn insists, 'a lot of management need to go back on the ground' (ref section 6.4). The participants discuss a disconnect between both the youth workers and management, and also the management and the national structures overseeing youth work. Martin recalls a time, before 2009, when relationships between managers and youth workers were good and youth workers felt supported , though after 2011, 'a distance between middle management and youth workers' (ref section 6.4) developed. Notably, literature on professions working with people points to the global economic downturn of

2008 and growing managerialism prompting reconsideration and a reshaping of managers' positions and purpose in recent years (Evetts 2011, Noordegraaf 2007, Schwandt 2005).

A sense of neglect is manifesting amongst the participants as they maintain management are not listening to them, and as a result, their practice goes unnoticed with little to no feedback offered. McArdle (2012) discusses this situation in relation to a group of Scottish youth workers who willingly share information with management, but management themselves are not as forthcoming with information, avoiding the creation of a 'feedback loop'. Annoyed, Maria explains, 'we never seem to get feedback from management on what's happening' (ref section 6.4). Essentially, the participants have expectations of management and so too, management have expectations of youth workers of which neither, it seems, are being met.

• Expectations of Management

Ultimately, participants maintain managers are responsible for the protection of youth work and youth workers against challenges, particularly outside challenges. Ironically though, the participants insist their agency is significantly compromised by managers, along with the national structures overseeing them. However, the findings indicate the lack of protection from management is a more recent development. That previously management had the freedom to support and protect youth workers, but circumstances beyond their control forced them to abandon this.

In England, literature explains there was an inherent trust for managers, one owed to its religious and vocational origins (Davies 2012). Managers original role is described as first and foremost 'advisory and administrative' with the presence of 'formalised accountability procedures thus irrelevant' (Davies 2012 p. 8). Managers were not responsible for enforcing external measures e.g. from funders, essentially impeding youth workers' practice. Rather, their position facilitated and supported youth workers to do the best they could with and for young people and communities. However, de St Croix (2012 p. 15) asserts, now English youth workers 'are positioned as defendants and senior management as enforcers and, in this process, older forms of collective working are transformed' because of the shift in the policy and funding environment.

Advising youth workers to stay quiet, Martin and Susan suggest management are 'keeping their head down' (ref section 6.4) and trying to defend themselves against youth workers rather than support them. If youth workers do not remain silent, Martin warns, management

will ‘throw a load of work their way’ (ref section 6.4). Then again, the participants also indicate management themselves are in a state of reaction and confusion with their voices and agency restricted. Susan proposes her board of management do not get ‘to choose the dance, they have to dance’ (ref section 6.4).

Indeed, American literature suggests, after US welfare reforms, managers working in the caring professions ‘were found to be less co-operative and supportive, and ruder’ (Hughes et al. 2014 p. 2). Additionally, care workers felt ‘a sense that government no longer supported, nor were interested in, the work they were doing’ (Hughes et al. 2014 p. 2). Participants’ relationships with management, and their perspectives on the national structures overseeing youth work, illustrates a picture of discontent and uncertainty. Their perspectives indicate the significant changes in youth work, e.g. in managers roles, which began emerging from 2009 onwards. Examining recent developments in the policy and funding environment next helps understand these perspectives better.

•Policy and Funding

Focusing on policy and funding changes in Ireland provides a context to and better understanding of the areas and associated challenges discussed in the previous sections of this chapter. As Chapter 2 describes, recognition of professional youth work in Ireland has developed since the 1980s, albeit quicker at certain points than others. Briefly, the Costello Report (1984), and some years later, the establishment of NYWAC, as well as the enshrinement of a youth work definition into legislation, the NYWDP (DES 2003) along with the setting up of the NSETS are all notable steps towards developing recognition for professional youth work in Ireland. Despite this, broader developments in Irish policy and funding have also hindered the recognition and progression of professional youth work. Concentrating on the policy and funding environment reveals more about the challenges described by the participants thus far.

It is interesting that as the youth work sector developed there was a growing emphasis on increasing professionalism, and this has transpired in several ways in recent times. Goal 4 of the NYWDP (DES 2003) committed ‘To put in place mechanisms for enhancing professionalism and ensuring quality standards in youth work’ (DES 2003 p. 26).

It points to the responsibilities of youth work organisations as employers, stating:

> The responsibility of acting as an employer, whether relating to existing organisations or new organisations to be established, will require significant expertise particularly with reference to financial management, personnel matters and organisational governance – all areas that would benefit from specialist expertise being targeted through resources, advice and training.
>
> (DES 2003 p. 27)

The NYWDP (DES 2003) recommends youth work organisations become more systematised and, as noted earlier, recognises youth workers as educators. As such, it is viewed as encouraging development in the recognition of professional youth work in Ireland (Devlin 2009, Jenkinson 2013). The plan, as I see it, had potential to create a framework for professionalism, one which reflected practice, particularly with the development of the NQSF (OMCYA 2010), and establish youth work as a profession in its own right. However, notwithstanding the contribution the NYWDP (DES 2003) intended to make, it recognised both paid and voluntary youth workers under the same umbrella. As such, I suggest that this has inevitably had consequences for how professional youth work has been perceived and therefore developed, especially in relation to criteria – or lack of it as it were – set out for the employment of youth workers.

Despite the NYWDP providing a blueprint for the development of professional youth work in Ireland, the economic environment from 2009 onwards (Melaugh 2015) had a huge impact on the extent to which it was carried out. Opportunities to continue developing professional youth work drastically decreased – with the exception of the implementation of the NQSF (OMCYA 2010) – as budgets were cut, and an environment endorsing a technical rationale caused professions, principally social professions, to question and be questioned on everything from how they were constituted, to the value of their input and output in society. A growing emphasis on outcomes manifested throughout, and youth work managers were forced into survival mode (Jenkinson 2013).

In fact, Susan refers to this environment in Chapter 6, and to an extent is empathising with the role of a manager as they are tasked with making the cuts and delivering savings. The real cause for concern, as she sees it, is government are ‘faceless and nameless’ (ref section 6.4), and there is a distance, physically and metaphorically, between managers and youth workers, and managers don’t understand youth work as Issitt and Spence (2005 p. 72)

evidence in a group discussion with youth workers. I suggest that the breakdown of relationships between youth workers and managers, and managers and funders could be added to Harvey's (1994 p. 40) list of features 'which serve to undermine the ability of youth services to make a good case for themselves with the State, funders and the public, consequently weakening any challenge to State policies in relation to issues that affect young people'.

After 2009, and given the introduction of an austerity programme in 2010, professional youth work was again back on the government radar, but for all the wrong reasons it could be said. Their primary goal was to use the VFMPR (DCYA 2014b) as the basis on which savings could be made from three targeted youth programmes. However, the issue with this was not the review itself, rather how they decided to undertake the review and the decisions which followed.

• Savings and Evaluations

Essentially, the VFMPR (DCYA 2014b) set out to ascertain whether the LDTF, YPFSF and SPY funded youth projects – established before the introduction of austerity in 2010 – were good value for money. Projects unable to meet the criteria associated with this review faced closure. Research into current data trends, as well as a projected growth in young people, gave credence to the review process (DCYA 2014b p. 7), a process where the objective of measuring efficiency and effectiveness, while also examining inputs, outputs and impact was predominant. De St Croix (2017 p. 2) states 'as government departments, funding agencies and private philanthropies throughout the world become more outcome-focused, this is having a significant influence on youth work practice'. The VFMPR (DCYA 2014b) report recognises challenges in undertaking the assessment process in the area of youth work as it states:

> Human services as a generic category is regarded as an area of activity that presents inherent evaluation problems, particularly in relation to performance measurement. The youth programmes in question presented additional challenges including complicated governance structures, considerable (and relatively uncodified) local discretion by practitioners and significant asymmetry between services providers and DCYA officials.
>
> (DCYA 2014b p. 15)

This exemplifies the prevailing technical rationality discussed in the literature on professional knowledge. Moreover, it neglects to recognise the type of practice knowledge produced in youth work and conceptualises it as problematic for evidence gathering (Issitt & Spence 2005, Schon 2001). This, I suggest, contributes to a growing 'performativity culture' which requires youth workers to tell funders what they want to hear (Kiely 2009).The VFMPR (DCYA 2014b) recommended better coordination between the DCYA and the Education and Training Boards (ETBs), better systems for data capture of the outcomes for young people involved in the schemes, and also that the three funding streams (SPY, YPFSF and LDTF) be combined into one fund labelled the Targeted Youth Funding Scheme (TYFS) (DCYA 2018). Additionally, the VFMPR recommends frontline staff (interesting the title professional youth worker is not used) concentrate on seven specific outcomes (see Section 3.4). Essentially, governments focus on youth work now promotes an emphasis on specific programmes for targeted young people with the aim of achieving pre-determined outcomes to be measured and measured more easily because of this. Kiely and Meade (2018) warn:

> In keeping with UK developments (McGimpsey 2017), government's preference for 'programmes for young people' rather than a more expansively understood youth work practice, is becoming ever more discernible in Ireland.
>
> (Kiely and Meade 2018 p. 25)

Ultimately, considering the developments in English youth work in recent years, I propose that this recent policy and funding shift in Ireland – one reshaping the landscape of professional youth work – will have a significant impact on youth workers and their practice. Worryingly, it seems policy and funding are setting the criteria for an easy to measure form of youth work, and this looks set to 'shape and restrict the field of practice' (Lyotard 1984 as cited in de St Croix 2017 p. 3).

The VFMPR (DCYA 2014b) perceived youth work as difficult to measure and is now in the process of making it more easily digestible for funders. Ironically, just as youth work and youth work practice is labelled as problematic by the VFMPR (DCYA 2014b), the reshaping of criteria and measurement is, more than ever before, labelling groups of young people as difficult, and requiring youth workers to shift their focus to work with these young people only. This occurrence is noted by Jewel in Chapter 7.

• Youth Work is for the Troublemakers

Targeted youth work has received a fair share of criticism in youth work literature (Davies 2013, Hughes et al 2014, Jeffs & Smith 1999, Jenkinson 2013, Kiely 2009). Targeting, Jenkinson (2013) claims, risks the pathologising of particular groups of young people. With increased funding from Youth Justice and Tusla in recent years (see Chapter 2), it is not surprising the participants allude to a funding led approach rather than a young people led approach. Susan maintains young people are not at the forefront of shaping youth work in Ireland, declaring it is 'not young people led' (ref section 7.3). This suggests youth work as a value-based practice is not meeting young people where they are at (Davies 2010). Dominant funding streams do not require youth workers to meet all young people where they are at, nor do they enable youth workers to facilitate specific young people to have a voice. Pre-determined funding criteria asks youth workers to meet specific young people to achieve specified outcomes and this risks the exclusion of others.

Treacy (2009) considers the English context when critiquing Irish youth work and remarks, the setting of targets:

> resulted in youth work providers selecting those young people who are most likely to achieve the prescribed outcomes and have therefore undermined provisions for those whom such objectives are neither feasible nor desirable.
>
> (Treacy 2009 p. 190)

Indeed, Mason (2015) argues funding requirements in England are sabotaging value-based youth work practice. As such, universality in practice is compromised. In fact, Susan explains that she goes to areas that are not designated by her funding. She declares 'we have never said that we are going to the other places. We kind of sneak it in' (ref section 7.3). For the participants, sustaining youth work as a value-based practice, while responding to current trends in funding, appears difficult to say the least. Despite this, I argue that Susan's actions could be deemed as a subtle but significant form of resistance. While youth workers' voices may be silenced due to policy and funding shifts, the research indicates it is possible that youth workers are engaging in their own forms of resistance (de St Croix 2017).

The participants maintain most of the funding granted to youth work organisations requires their practice to focus on targeted populations of young people. Maria suggests 'youth workers are being dragged into a multitude of things' (ref section 7.3). While the policy and

legislation in England is different, Irish youth work can still learn from the difficulties English youth workers face, especially concerning targeted youth work. Increased funding for targeted youth work requires English youth workers to question and often compromise their value-based practice. In fact, even before austerity, research in England shows youth workers and young people were unhappy with the setting of targets and outcomes for youth work (de St Croix 2017 p. 11). Annoyed and frustrated, they were required to undertake specialised intervention (Hughes et al. 2014) with specific groups of young people. The participants allude to this occurring in Ireland asserting youth workers are now expected to prioritise programmes with young people from marginalised areas because of increased funding from youth justice, child protection and family support. In other words, it seems now, more than ever, they are having to engage in youth work which:

> is promoted by policy makers because of its short-lived, project based, individualised forms of engagement and its privileging of demonstrable outcomes, quick 'successes' and capacity for replication and rebranding.
>
> (Kiely & Meade 2018 p. 3)

Jewel argues, a lot of funding is granted for restorative practice and points out 'That's where all the money is. So, they are telling us that young people are troublemakers then' (ref section 7.3). This is not a surprise considering the VFMPR (DCYA 2014b) highlights a projected growth in young people and states this 'will presumably include a proportionate increase in the number of young people requiring targeted support' (DCYA 2014b). Therefore, rather than examining the broader issues which necessitate increased targeted provision, it is accepted and viewed as an issue for youth workers to tackle (Davies 2005, Kiely 2009).

Thomas proposes youth workers are increasingly sought after to try and 'knock the edges off imperfect things' (ref section 7.3). Moreover, Martin argues labelling young people brings further challenges to youth work and it encourages diminished recognition of young people as individuals. He says, 'the minute we start naming them, we are boxing them in' (ref section 7.3).

I propose that Irish policy is not only bolstering 'deficit narratives' (de St Croix 2017 p. 2) of young people – viewing them as disadvantaged – but also reshaping youth workers' practice and essentially positioning youth workers themselves as a disadvantaged group of professionals. Ironically, the difficulties for youth workers is not primarily the young people

per se, rather 'the systems of exclusion that make it difficult for them (the young people) to participate in social and political processes' (Sercombe 2018 p. 475).

• The Business of Youth Work

Since the VFMPR (DCYA 2014b) was undertaken, it seems funding is increasingly allocated to organisations who not only meet the criteria, but can do it at a good price. This also opens up the possibility of non-youth work organisations throwing their name in the funding hat. Kiely and Meade (2018) explain:

> The VFMPR's concern with specific programmes also permits consideration as to whether alternative market or societal factors, i.e. other than voluntary youth organisations, can deliver what Davies (2015 p. 96) dubs 'cherry picked' or 'derooted' practice. (Kiely & Meade 2018 p. 26)

Considering this, Eamonn exclaiming 'youth work has grown like a business' (ref section 7.3) makes sense. Notably, Mason (2015 p. 56) points to 'the marketisation and privatisation that characterises the neo-liberal project' globally. Worryingly, in the wake of austerity, youth work has become increasingly privy to business like measures, e.g. the model of evaluation used in the VFMPR (DCYA 2014b). Austerity imbued the youth work sector with quantitative accountability structures for the purpose of cutting costs (Melaugh 2015).

In Chapter 7, Maria explains youth work funders want to ensure they get 'a bang for their buck' (ref section 7.3). Furthermore, Martin supposes management's view is 'we'll do whatever it is to secure funding' (ref section 6.4), thereby positioning youth and community projects in competition to provide funders with the best value for their money in order to hold on to the resources they have. Therefore, youth work and youth work practice is packaged in such a way to ensure that it catches the attention of the funders and shows that they can produce youth work which is managed and measurable. Funders are looking for a particular product, and organisations must be able to present and sell themselves as the best providers in producing that product (de St Croix 2017, Kiely & Meade 2018). As a result, competition ensues between providers as 'everyone must be an impact enthusiast' (de St Croix 2017 p. 6) and youth work, as we know it, may only remain by accident (Kiely 2009).

In England, commissioning and targeting has increased significantly, so much so that In Defence of Youth Work have satirically issued a health warning to youth workers, 'Tendering, targets and youth work: A health warning' (Taylor 2011). Case studies such as

'Short-term funding to meet external targets: one youth work projects experience' (Davies 2011b), highlight the growth of commissioning and its resulting problems. Bell et al. (2013) also suggest commissioning is having a devastating effect on locally-based youth services with their strengths in a community dismissed. Treacy (2009) may have been correct in his apprehensions for Irish youth work. Certainly, it is advisable to try and learn from issues challenging youth work in England, most significantly a commissioning process where competition amongst organisations has ensued. As a result, the smaller, locally based voluntary and community services suffer redundancies of 'significant numbers of workers' (Bell et al. 2013 p. 88). And the voices of youth workers and local people in these areas are silenced.

Martin alludes to a process of commissioning in Irish youth work and what he sees as some of the issues arising from this. Above all, he argues there's 'none of that bigger, joined up thinking' (ref section 7.3) amongst youth and community organisations because everyone is minding their patch, and under those circumstances a lack of unity amongst youth workers, and equally youth and community workers, exists. This, I suggest is a serious issue if youth workers attempt to resist developments in the current policy and funding environment. I argue the question as to how youth workers themselves can build their own capacity to address the changes becomes fundamental to what the future for professional youth work will look like.

• Active Agents

So far, the discussion in this section has considered the policy and funding environment while trying to make sense of the participants' perspectives on the changes occurring and decisions being made about youth work without youth workers. There appears to be a significant impact on the voice and agency of professional youth workers. It seems the manager's role has been reshaped and subsequently moved them further away from practice and support, and possibly harvesting a fractured comprehension of a youth worker's practice and their environment. This in turn has, it seems, silenced youth workers' voices and their potential to be active agents in shaping youth work, potential Martin conceives was possible before 2009. Further to this, he also contends government views youth workers' voices as weak, so they won't tell them to 'go f**k yourself' (ref section 7.3) when requests are made of them by funders. He maintains youth workers need to stand up to government as a group to challenge

what could be deemed as their status of disadvantage (Spence 2007). All things considered, it seems unrealistic for youth workers to empower and advocate in their everyday practice if their own position in what seems to be a 'restrictive social policy neoliberal regime' (Hughes et al. 2014 p. 4) is inhibited.

As noted earlier, the work of the In Defence of Youth Work organisation attempts to address the ongoing difficulties for youth work in England, while in Ireland a small number of youth workers have responded by establishing the IYWA in 2013 (Melaugh 2015). Markedly, associations are amongst the areas considered in the goals outlined by the NYWDP (DES 2003). Specifically, Goal 4 asks for consideration of whether 'the long-term interests of youth work, might be furthered by the establishment of a professional association of youth workers and a youth work employers' body' (DES 2003 p. 27). It could be assumed that there is 'communication' amongst 'communities of practice' who are engaging 'in peer learning, in developing shared experiences' (Kiilakoski 2018 p. 26). Unfortunately, there is minimal activity in the IYWA currently, however, its existence shows an aspiration for one and potential to develop it or create new versions of it. The process of doing this could, in itself, have several uses for professional youth workers such as being a space for youth workers to have their voices heard, being a place to support the formation of a collective identity, facilitating youth workers' agency and, finally, as a place to reflect on what they want professional youth work to look like in relation to professionalism and professionalisation.

Several youth worker associations have been developed for periods of time in Australia (Corney & Hoiles 2007, Goodwin 2014) and despite each one disbanding, they have provided a better understanding of youth work practice, promoted improved training and a more cohesive partnership within the sector, and supported a more legitimate sense of professionalism and developments in a code of ethical practice (Broadbent & Corney 2008). Suffice to say, fundamental in making these changes happen was actually the process of re-establishing youth worker associations in Victoria, Australia and supporting professional youth work to develop from grassroots, not just the existence and maintenance of an association.

Using discourses of professionalism as an analysis framework, advantages and likewise disadvantages for the establishment of a professional association can be debated (Bessant 2004). For example, on the one hand Bessant (2004) asserts an association provides advocacy

for youth workers in relation to pay and conditions while, on the other, she argues that in some instances an association is not needed because trade unions are already there. At the same time, she also points out professional associations for youth work do not need to take on the characteristics of the traditional associations. Rather, 'the regulation of youth work can involve intervening heavily or lightly according to certain agreed upon principles' (Bessant 2004 p. 28). Corney et al (2014 p. 142) urge youth workers in Victoria, Australia, to collectively organise in order to respond to the challenges they face with government. Furthermore, they advise youth workers to combine 'professional aspirations with industrial organisation' to strengthen 'the collective voice of youth workers' and improve 'the quality of service provision'. They explain youth workers need to work together to develop professional youth work but must equally gain recognition in an industrial arena to ensure youth work and particularly youth work values are recognised, maintained and protected.

Unfortunately, as previously noted, there appears to have been little development in the IYWA since its inception in 2013. There could be several reasons for this, all of which have been discussed in this chapter (also see section 2.3). Also, there is no code of ethics/ethical practice to guide youth workers to practice based on youth work values and moreover create a collective vision for youth work.

Finally, and most importantly, it must be recognised that this is occurring in a broader professional environment where varying discourses of professionalism exist. I argue that education and training, one which is formal, informal and non-formal in its construction, and a clear code of ethics/ethical practice, are fundamental to building the capacity of a youth worker association. Given these deliberations, a discussion on the participants' perspectives concerning the future of professional youth work is timely.

• The Future

As they describe a less than encouraging landscape for professional youth workers, the participants are uncertain about its future. Susan refers to new youth workers becoming 'disillusioned over time' (ref section 6.2), and there are concerns for professional youth work as they know it if current policy and finding developments are anything to go by. The participants say there is potential for youth work to become extinct, and equally, question whether a youth worker's role – if it is uninformed by the values which shaped it – will exist. To this end, Susan contends 'the hands of death are around the throat of youth work' (ref

section 7.3), and concedes the core values, particularly universality, are disappearing from professional youth work.

What's more, it may become mongrelised into something that is guided by principles from other social professions and focused on aims more commonly associated with funding agencies. For example, in Australia in the early 1970s, youth workers found themselves working for agencies who did not understand what they should be doing and in some cases youth workers' own view of what it meant to be professional became distorted and therefore they realised they needed to collectively resist (Goodwin 2014). Martin explains, practice in the future may resemble features 'from social work and a few from restorative justice' (7.3). Kiely (2009) also foresees this unfolding in Ireland, as does Davies (2005) in England who urges youth workers to engage in critical debate to distinguish the features of youth work practice. Troublingly, professional youth work may metamorphose into something else called 'social youth work' (Kiely 2009 p. 22) and youth workers into 'youth social workers' (In Defence of Youth Work 2011 p. 6), or some other derivative that has transpired. Youth work is attempting to be recognised as professional in Ireland, but how it is understood and by who, appears susceptible to ongoing changes beyond youth workers' control. There are efforts to avoid this in Victoria, Australia. The Youth Affairs Council Victoria [YACVic] – an independent body advocating at policy level for young people and the youth sector working with them – published the paper '*Youth work matters to Victoria. Strengthening young people's access to youth workers across Victoria*' (Mitchell 2018). In this, Mitchell (2018 p. 4) identifies youth work and, more importantly, youth workers as fundamental to 'Giving young people a great start'. The document advocates for the importance and value of youth work alongside the importance and value of youth workers in this. I suggest that a document like this would be invaluable in Irish youth work particularly as it identifies and outlines the youth worker's role as central to 'Giving young people a great start' (Mitchell 2018 p. 4).

Section 4 discussed the notion of professional youth workers as a disadvantaged group. Attention was given to the policy and funding landscape they are positioned in and the impact of this on participants' relationships with managers, along with their position in an environment promoting outcomes, evidence and value for money was examined. Despite the NYWDP (DES 2003) developing efforts to increase recognition of youth work in Ireland, the policy and funding context since 2009 has been challenging. The economic climate

heralded in a programme of austerity and with it an uncertain future for professional youth work, and more specifically professional youth workers. The VFMPR (DCYA 2014b) evaluated youth work programmes based on a technical rationality and subsequently, there has been an increased focus on targeting specific groups of young people and a call for youth workers to work with them under a renamed funding scheme, the Targeted Youth Funding Scheme (TYFS).

Undoubtedly, Irish policy and funding in the past ten years has seen a growing emphasis on outcomes, evidence and value for money which has, I suggest, positioned youth workers, like the young people they work with, as disadvantaged. Uncertainty regarding the sustainability of youth work as a value-based practice, and the role of a professional youth worker is apparent. Competition for resources perpetuates the individualisation of projects and workers, and a lack of collective action. Despite attempts to establish a professional association, it is questionable whether there is the capacity amongst professional youth workers to develop an association that can make any changes yet. I propose that areas such as a code of ethics/ethical practice and, education and training, need to be developed parallel to the development of an association which can influence the course of youth work. Elsewhere, associations and youth workers being part of processes to establish these have been quite successful. I suggest that having an association, even temporarily, may be an opportunity for youth workers to discuss features of practice and identity, and create their own discourse of professionalism, culminating in a shared understanding and vision of what they want professional youth work to be. This could help change the undetermined and extremely uncertain future the participants have predicted for professional youth work in Ireland.

8.5 Conclusion

The preceding discussion was split into four sections, as follows:

Section 8.1 examined the participants, i.e. accidental youth workers, various routes to professional youth work, and the significance of this in trying to understand youth workers' perspectives on professional youth work. While theory of youth helps youth workers to understand their practice better, I suggest that theory of youth is also useful when trying to recognise and understand influences on their individual professional identity. From the

participants' stories of before and becoming, volunteering was a common factor amongst them all, and the concept of vocation – a feature associated with the historical conception of the word profession – became apparent, indicating understanding of youth work as a profession from the point of view of what Evetts (2011) calls an occupational discourse.

Section 8.2 discussed youth workers' practice and identity, and the implications of this on being, and being seen, as a collective group of professionals. Through participants' descriptions of practice, a shared value-base became apparent, and the potential for a collective understanding of youth work. However, closer examination of the language they use in their descriptions, and specifically the metaphors, presents an inconsistent picture of practice, and therefore challenges to being, and particularly being seen as, a professional group. I suggest that the development of a code of ethics/ethical practice in Irish youth work could support youth workers in addressing this challenge.

Section 8.3 examines communicating youth work and the reasons why youth work as a profession is different from others and needs to be acknowledged and understood as such. Those outside of its practice don't appear to understand what youth workers do, and how, and this, I propose, is largely due to the lack of opportunities youth workers have to explain it. This proposal is examined, looking at practice knowledge, and education and training, and by looking at professionalism as a discourse that can take two forms, the occupational and the organisational. Challenges are apparent, especially related to the type of professional knowledge currently privileged. Despite this, opportunities for youth workers as a professional group also become visible, with education and training as central to these.

Finally, section 8.4 looked at the policy and funding context and how it positions youth workers as a disadvantaged group. Discussing the participants' perspectives on the current policy and funding context in relation to relevant literature presents a picture of weakening relationships with managers and increasing demands on everyone working in youth work organisations. A growing emphasis on meeting the needs of young people labelled disadvantaged appears to have positioned youth workers as disadvantaged. Uncertain about the sustainability of youth work as they know it, I suggest that it is essential for professional youth workers to consider developing specific areas further such as a code of ethics/ethical practice, and education and training. This may then support them to work together as a collective group of professionals, potentially in the form of an association.

Indeed, youth work continues to evolve, and the professional landscape is ever-changing, but youth worker meeting youth worker where they are at is the first step in making sure young people are met where they are at.

Chapter 9: OVERALL CONCLUSION

9.1 Introduction

This research was undertaken as it recognises youth work in Ireland – a profession with a theoretical base and a distinct set of practices – has evolved from a voluntary, philanthropic venture to one which is now in the process of becoming recognised as professional. Examining the broader socio-political context for this evolution gives rise to many questions, but in particular, highlights the absence of professional youth workers' voices. As such, participants were asked to describe their stories of experiences before, becoming and being professional youth workers. Analysis of the participants' stories highlighted a plotline of Before, Becoming and Being professional youth workers ensuring youth workers' voices and their perspectives remain central to this thesis.

Narrating their experiences, the participants discuss their lives before, becoming and being professional youth workers. After analysis, the key findings were discussed under the following headings:

- Various Routes to Professional Youth Work, i.e. accidental youth workers
- Practice and Identity, looking at youth workers as a collective group
- Communicating Youth Work to Others, examining youth work as different from other professions, and finally
- The Policy and Funding Context, considering youth workers as a disadvantaged group.

The findings were examined using literature on theory of youth, youth work and the social professions. Indeed, this literature is useful for understanding professional practice and identity, and moreover, youth work as a profession – distinct from others – and the reasons why. Also, literature on the sociology of the professions includes various perspectives highlighting the complexities, including advantages and disadvantages, involved in discussions on youth work as a profession. More specifically, the notion of professionalism and particularly discourses of professionalism – organisational and occupational – help identify and make sense of the participants' views and the professional landscape today.

Informed by this research, I suggest recognising youth workers' various routes to professional youth work in order to understand who professional youth workers are in Ireland and the implications of this on practice and identity. Ultimately, developing a code of

ethics/ethical practice for Irish youth work could support youth workers in addressing and managing the challenges described in this research. Often viewed as focusing on individuals and as a set of rules, ethical guidelines can actually help youth workers to negotiate the personal and the public, along with the practical and the political. The guidelines can also provide guidance to practitioners, provide protection for service-users, enhance professional status, help create and maintain professional identity and, support professional regulation (Banks 2013). All these areas are discussed by the research participants.

For Irish youth work, a code of ethics/ethical practice could guide practice and promote a collective understanding thus supporting youth workers in describing what they do and how, and provide the impetus to critique and resist changes as they see fit. Furthermore, youth work knowledge is different from other types and so youth workers need to find ways to communicate practice, e.g. storytelling, and be able to articulate outcomes and assess quality in a way which emphasises process over product, e.g. the Participatory Evaluation Method (Ord et al 2018). Education and training – formal, informal and non-formal – is fundamental to this. Finally, in an environment reimagining professionalism, inciting more questions than answers for social professions like youth work, and to a large extent disadvantaging youth workers, it has never been timelier for practitioners to collectively organise.

Associations have been useful in supporting youth workers to do this elsewhere, however, I suggest that certain areas – as outlined here already – need further development to support youth workers in building their capacity as a collective group of professionals, potentially as an association/s influencing and shaping the future of youth work in Ireland. To complete the thesis, this final chapter revisits the research approach, addresses the key findings, and makes recommendations for future research.

9.2 Revisiting the Research: Approach and Findings

Essentially, I wanted to contribute to my field of practice, youth work, and so I became a practitioner researcher. Adopting a qualitative approach, I reflected on how and why I became a professional youth worker but was not clear about the researcher role and moreover, how to manage the two to ensure the meeting of ethical obligations and a transparent process. Throughout the research, the dual role of practitioner researcher supported and equally challenged me. It was crucial to adopt a reflexive approach before, during and after the

research to continue engaging with any existing and potential bias arising while exploring *'Youth workers' perspectives on Professional Youth Work'*.

Using a qualitative approach encouraged flexibility in the research design and narrative inquiry was a significant influence. Furthermore, I was better equipped to respond and gather data in 'real world conditions' (Bryman 2008) anticipating conversations with participants practising for over ten years would most likely construct rich data addressing the research inquiry. Hearing stories from each participant about and in the context of their individual lives reflects what we do as professional youth workers (Spence 2007, Tilsen 2018). On completion of the fieldwork, the analysis process highlighted findings which are supported by a representative vignette from each participant, and these are analysed further in Chapters 5, 6 and 7. Using a grid chart (Appendix F) and by constructing poems based on the seven vignettes (Appendix G), key areas were identified and discussed in Chapter 8, and their relevance to the research inquiry was addressed.

9.3 Key Findings

An examination of Irish youth work from the nineteenth century onwards recognises important developments in its professional evolution (see Chapter 2). Moreover, youth workers have been at the centre of these changes. Therefore, this research looked at youth workers' perspectives on professional youth work and as a result four key findings were identified. Each finding and its potential implications on youth workers and youth work is described in this section.

• Accidental Youth Workers

Three of the participants were involved in youth work at an early age, while the other three became aware of it through volunteering or while they were in third-level education. Those involved as children and teenagers discussed how influential a youth work setting was on their decision to become professional youth workers. Except for Susan, who studied youth work part-time, the rest of the participants were unsure what they wanted to do. Two decided not to continue in education after secondary school, while three went on to third-level. Each participant's experiences of becoming a professional youth worker are different, but they still have one thing in common, volunteering.

Volunteering as children or young adults, the idea of vocation becomes apparent, one of the key features in an occupational discourse perspective (Evetts 2011). Based on the analysis and discussion of findings, I suggest that youth workers' stories of before and becoming need to be heard to find out who they are, how this has influenced their professional practice and identity and therefore perspectives on professional youth work today.

• A Collective: Being and Being Seen as a Professional Group

Participants were not familiar with what a paid, professional youth worker should look like when they became one. Yet, by describing their own experiences of practice, they illuminate characteristics and abilities a youth worker needs to have, and by outlining features of practice they explain how they understand youth work and give a sense of their own individual professional identity. They illustrate youth work as a relational practice in which knowledge is constructed by the youth worker in it while doing it. Considering our conversations, I suggest that youth workers understand youth work as a value-based practice. However, while a shared language and understanding of youth works purpose becomes apparent through their descriptions of practice, the same meanings are not always attached to the metaphors they use. This I suggest, has consequences for articulating a consistent picture of practice as a collective and therefore the purpose of youth work and a professional identity to external audiences. Likewise, Metz (2017 p. 1) also highlights this difficulty outside of Ireland, explaining that, 'due to an unclear professional identity, the existence of professional youth work within Northwest European welfare states is subject to debate'. I propose that a code of ethics/ethical practice could be developed by professional youth workers with the youth work sector to ensure all professional youth workers, accidental and otherwise, are informed and guided by the same principles of practice.

• Youth Work is Different

The participants contend youth work is misunderstood by those - including managers and funders – who do not practice. They maintain preparation, learning and knowledge is different from that which is commonly recognised in other professions. Yet despite this, and considering the current context, they are not sure if they want youth work to be fully recognised as a profession. Metz (2017 p. 3) also recognises this internal debate amongst youth workers in Northwest Europe referring to youth work's 'difficulties with the professions elite character' along with a common tendency to implement protocols. I suggest

that the variation in practitioners' diverse pathways to youth work contributes to this view along with an environment promoting instrumental/technical knowledge rather than the practice knowledge which is constructed in and during youth work practice. Literature on the social professions provides insights into this and ways youth workers can begin to remedy it. I suggest that youth workers need to develop ways which can support them to articulate their practice – identifying their values and what they all do as distinct from other professions – to explain it amongst themselves and others and potentially create a common understanding of professionalism in youth work. Metz (2017) suggests that articulating youth work values, and, particularly, describing how these values are often challenged by the current policy and funding climate, provides potential for a sense of professionalism to emerge, one which is equally recognised by youth workers and those external to practice. Furthermore, if they are undecided on whether youth work should be a profession or not, for how long they can continue calling themselves professionals is questionable. In turn, I suggest that this uncertainty is actually contributing to their self-professed status as disadvantaged.

The participants also stress ongoing education and training for youth workers is important, yet the majority do not insist on initial formal education and training. They emphasise continuing training which includes reflection coupled with attainment of technical skills. Participants begin constructing a picture of education and training for youth workers. After analysis and discussion, I propose that education and training for youth workers should be a combination of formal, informal and non-formal. It needs to involve initial formal education and training to ensure they have a shared knowledge and theory-base, along with ongoing informal and non-formal training in practice placements to gain experience in a youth work context thus supporting their transition to becoming and earning the title of a professional youth worker. Subsequently, opportunities for continuing professional development should be offered. Alternatively, or additionally, a model of education and training could also be developed which sees new entrants to youth work become trainees, i.e. apprentices, for a period, engaging in theoretical and practice domains simultaneously. On satisfactory completion of this they become qualified youth workers, but are still required to engage in continuing professional development.

• Youth Workers are Disadvantaged

Participants are disillusioned with the environment for youth work. They discuss weakening relationships with managers and a growing emphasis on outcomes, evidence and value for money consequently disadvantaging their capacity to undertake professional youth work as a value-based practice. Despite their frustration with managers, they acknowledge the difficult position managers themselves are in. The participants' experiences suggest the role of a youth work manager has changed in recent years, largely due to the shifting policy and funding environment since 2009.

Significantly, the VFMPR (DCYA 2014b) has reshaped funding, and there are expectations for youth work organisations to approach and deliver their work in particular ways, within a specific timeframe, and with, more often, targeted young people. The participants allude to a discourse concerning efficiency and effectiveness whilst also describing the funding climate as competitive. They say organisations have to adhere to tighter criteria and deliver services at what is deemed to be a fair price. Though this reveals that ill-fitting policy is potentially disadvantaging youth workers, the participants also allude to contributing to this disadvantage. While they discuss challenging these difficulties, it is only in and amongst themselves. They explain that they work with targeted groups but are not always transparent about the work or programme they are actually facilitating. Additionally, participants continue to work with young people who don't meet the criteria set out by funders. I suggest that these actions contribute to the continuation of the difficulties long term, as they are covertly rather than overtly running programmes not accounted for, and working with young people who don't come under their funding remit.

Those external to youth work, e.g. the policy makers and funders, are then unaware and oblivious to a great deal of youth work practice and knowledge being developed by youth workers. Regrettably, this scenario contributes to the silencing of young people's voices but equally the silencing of youth workers' voices. Youth workers end up disadvantaged by the current policy landscape but also by their own actions in dealing with it. Ironically, like the young people they work with, they are also marginalised from and disadvantaged in important debates concerning young people. Similarly, Coussee et al. (2009 p. 429) discuss the growth and accompanied difficulties, e.g. 'return-on-investment' of targeted youth work for professional youth workers in Genk, Flanders. They suggest youth workers 'get silenced

in the broad social debate on youth, education and society (and indeed contribute to their own marginalisation)' leaving them with few 'possibilities to offer empowering leverages to those young people that need them the most' (Coussee et al 2009 p. 433). As a result of my research I too propose that youth workers' voices, like the voices of the young people they work with, are silenced. I suggest that youth workers could collectively organise, possibly as an association – bearing in mind certain areas, e.g. codes of ethics and, education and training, need development along the way – and this could contribute to youth workers challenging the changes occurring, and influencing and shaping youth work in the coming years.

9.4 Contributions

This research makes several contributions. It addresses the absence of youth workers' voices by exploring their perspectives on professional youth work in Ireland with them. Examining the evolution of youth work, along with the broader socio-political environment for professions, highlights the need for professional youth workers to discuss professional youth work and what it should or could look like. Such discussions should consider early influences on youth workers' professional practice and identity, youth workers as a collective of professionals, understanding why youth work is different from other professions and why and, how professional youth workers are disadvantaged.

The research presented in this thesis prioritises youth workers' stories of practice and illustrates the importance of this in relation to what can be learned with and from them. I propose that their various routes into professional youth work influences their ambivalence regarding professional status though it has, I suggest, supported them to construct their own individual professional identity and supported them to be creative, flexible and resilient, areas which are often constrained in the more established professions. Moreover, the research highlights the importance of hearing and understanding professional youth workers, both individually and as a group, in order for them to influence the structures around them and, in particular, the decisions being made about and for them. Encouragingly, the Irish Youth Workers' Association's updated membership criteria (2018) recognise that many long-standing professional youth workers do not hold professional qualifications for a variety of legitimate reasons. Under the revised criteria, youth workers who have been continually employed as such for ten years or more and who do not hold an NSETS recognised

professional qualification are now eligible to join the IYWA as full members (see Appendix I). I suggest that this development has the potential to create a more open and inclusive space, accessible to all professional youth workers, enabling them to come together, organise collectively and have their voice heard.

9.5 Limitations of the Research

Limitations in this research concerned the sample and my position as a practitioner researcher.

The sample of participants was small and from one county, so caution is required in terms of generalising from these findings.

I knew four out of the six participants in the sample. I was aware of their backgrounds and experience in youth work, and I already had a professional relationship with them. I had yet to form a relationship with the two participants from the list given to me by the youth officer. Existing relationships with the four participants I knew may have facilitated a more immediate willingness to share their stories (Costley 2010), and we had potential to produce richer data during the interviews compared to the two participants I did not know as well. Also, because I am a practitioner – like the six participants –several areas potentially bringing further limitations were identified and are addressed in the following paragraphs. These included a predetermined acceptance of understanding, time and work responsibilities, research sites and, researcher expectations.

From the outset of the project, I sought to identify and to a large extent hoped the participants and I shared an understanding of youth work and particularly what shapes the broader context of youth work. However, challenges to this activity included acknowledging my own bias and ensuring ethical considerations were adhered to as described in Chapter 4. That said, I was hesitant to inquire further into youth work values with the participants and as a result shared meaning is not always obvious and an inconsistent picture of youth work is presented at times. I suggest that this could be for several reasons (Chapter 8, Section 8.2), such as the possibility that I did not explore this further in our conversations or that the participants may have not have been asked this question previously, and were therefore unfamiliar with how to translate their comprehension of youth work values to others.

On reflection, I am concerned about my own reticence to interrogate the area of values further. On further contemplation, I think that I became conscious of my role as a researcher and thought it might compromise my role as a fellow practitioner (Coupal 2005) having conversations with the participants (Rubin & Rubin 2005). Maybe it might have seemed more like an interview shifting the power balance in my favour (Kvale 2009) and by inquiring about values further, the participants may have viewed me as intrusive. In particular, I considered the possibility that some of the participants, specifically two who had not completed a professional education and training programme, may not have participated in many conversations about values up to that point (Coupal 2005) and they may not have been comfortable with me exploring the topic further. While I remained aware of and maintained my role as a practitioner, it has to be said that I did not put the same emphasis on my role and responsibility as a researcher and perhaps even give a professional respect to my colleagues. Quite possibly, because I have a professional qualification in youth work – unlike the majority of the participants – I did not want to come across as pontificating or maybe knowing it all.

I was apprehensive about moving away from the participants sharing experiences to discussing values in case I made them uncomfortable. Also, guided by narrative inquiry I was trying to maintain a balance between listening and speaking. Looking back, while I did not want to compromise my position as a practitioner I did not acknowledge my responsibility as a researcher and perhaps missed a valuable opportunity to discuss and reflect on youth work values with professional youth workers. This is potentially a missed opportunity and highlights a conversation on a topic – maybe one of those difficult conversations still to happen with youth workers – which could be addressed in future research. Considering this, it is unclear whether they are referring specifically to youth work values. As a result, I argue that it is difficult to ascertain their individual or collective awareness of a value-base in youth work.

Time and work responsibilities were apparent for the participants and I as we all worked fulltime. Therefore, limitations concerning the amount of time we could give existed. Due to the nature of youth work, it was not always possible to meet at the time we had previously organised (Bond and Mifsud 2006), or equally, that we were able to fully engage with the conversation we had. There were several instances where the participants or I had come from a practice setting and we had to deal with an issue unexpectedly. Also, there were times when

one or both of us had to leave our conversation early to attend a meeting, and this sometimes took our attention away from the interview near the end (Kearns 2013). Additionally, had the participants had more time to give on certain occasions, they may have been able to provide more experiences which could have enhanced the findings. Time constraints in our fulltime work, and the timeframe I had to complete the research, influenced this.

Another factor to consider – again partly due to the time constraints – was where we would meet each other. We chose to have our conversations in the youth project where either the participant or I was based. I ensured that the participant always selected where we had our conversations as they were giving up their time for the research. I had eighteen conversations altogether, seventeen in a project base and one in a participant's home. Having the conversations in these locations made the interactions between us relaxed and familiar. However, it also brought interruptions from others using the building, and our focus was redirected elsewhere at times.

Due to my reasons for starting the research, and particularly being a practitioner research (as described in Chapters 1, 2 and 4), I brought some expectations to the fieldwork process. Additionally, I had recognised a need for this research through my own experiences and began – at least initially – trying to locate similarities between our experiences. I hoped, however, that participants didn't feel they should share or even agree with my views (which I addressed to the best of my ability through my research design).

9.6 Recommendations for Future Research

The findings from this research suggest there are several areas which could be investigated further. The sample of participants was chosen based on a specific set of criteria. A reconsideration of the criteria in relation to geographical areas, qualifications, years of experience and responsibilities as a professional youth worker may produce findings to support, challenge and/or elaborate on those found here. Different criteria could produce findings which emphasise the presence of gender, while a sample from another geographical area could also present alternatives or additions to the findings.

The development of a professional youth worker's identity, their use of language, and how they understand the purpose of youth work as a group are areas that could be explored further

using action research. This could contribute to a shared vision for professional youth work and a code of ethics/ethical practice to guide youth workers' practice.

Further research with youth workers is recommended in order to look at how they might contribute to and shape the development of formal, informal and non-formal education and training for the sector. Also, research discussions with youth workers about their understandings of youth work values would be valuable considering the opportunity was not taken in this research.

The plotline, Before, Becoming and Being professional youth workers could be used by youth workers and managers to do an action research piece of work in an organisation. It could frame discussions on youth workers' comprehensions of each other's role and outside perceptions in order to consider how these influence and impact their daily practice and indeed, professional youth work as a whole. Using action research could facilitate youth workers and managers to have a voice amongst each other and begin to look at challenges and issues situated in an organisational space. Collecting data in this way could support attempts to resolve issues raised by participants in this research.

A future research inquiry could focus on youth work managers perspectives. There is potential, and it appears a need – based on the findings – to examine youth work managers' perspectives on professional youth work. Likewise, collecting stories with youth work managers under the three conversation themes from this research could develop youth workers and policy makers understandings of the various perspectives at all levels.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: A Youth Work Moment (A Story from the Practitioner Researcher)

'On the bus'

We travelled on an old bus which was slowly groaning its way along the dual carriage way. The boys sat and chatted in ones and twos. If this had been the group of girls I was working with that summer there would probably have been a hairbrush thrown out the window with a symphony of loud, excited screams while fizzy drinks sprayed open and bottles of perfume were being passed around, tested by all who came in contact with them. That was just where they were at sure and that was the exact scenario the week before as I headed away with them for a camping trip. As I sat here with this group of young men now, it was a completely different scene. I chatted with one of the young men who had placed himself in the seat in front of me on the big old bus whose engine sounded more like a train chugging away, struggling to get past each mile. As he spoke, I became more curious and eager to learn. What could I learn from a 16-year-old boy. Many of my adult friends would definitely ask this question. I was 29 and had many years of life lived before he came into this world. Well if I was to think like this as a youth worker I would always miss the whole point of why and how I did the job in the first place. As his story unfolded, I began feeling privileged that he trusted me enough to share this with me. I felt sad as he unravelled the details of his past, but at the same time completely comfortable as a youth worker who had a relationship with him, to hear his story. He was telling me about a part of his life that was extremely private and had happened a long time ago. Yet, he wanted to share it with me, Sasha, the youth worker.

'When I was younger I used to come over to Ireland every summer to an Irish family. I was living in an orphanage in Russia and my mother couldn't look after me. I remember I used to visit my grandmother in her apartment which was small and in the middle of the city. The city was horrible and grey I remember. My mother and father weren't around, and I can remember the orphanage was like an army camp. We had to get up at 6am, even on a winters morning, and go outside in the wind and snow to exercise and do army drills before we were given anything to eat. I remember being so hungry. It was really hard, and we were only ages 4, 5 and 6. I loved coming to Ireland in the summer to my family and was delighted when I got to come here for good. I was age 8 when I came to live in Ireland with them full time. I

can’t remember how to speak any Russian now and have not been back to Russia since I was 8’.

Though I knew about his background, I had never heard this story from his mouth. Of course, the story was not told like this in reality. Most stories were never told in the manner I have written it here, especially when in conversation with a young person. He did not just reel it out in a few breaths. It was told through a conversation where he told me a little bit of information, just enough, and I would respond with another question which encouraged another leaf of information to blow away from the branch. I knew he had been adopted by his parents and was originally from Russia, but he had never sat with me and talked to me about how it happened and his background in Russia. I knew him four years at this stage, since he was 12. He was now 16.

Sitting on that bus I was quite proud of what was happening. We were heading away on an overnight trip. We were going to be camping and windsurfing and best of all the 6 young men were going to be away together. They were going to be away from their local town and family and routines and try new activities and meet new people. We had been part of making this happen. Myself and my co-worker had made this happen with the boys. Not just this week or this summer, but over the past four years. That’s right. It had taken four years to get on this bus, with these boys and most importantly create a space where they wanted to share stories and life experiences with us.

We first met the group of young me when they were finishing primary school and they used to take part in summer camps which were run by my co-youth worker and me. They became part of an afterschool’s group in their first year in secondary school and the more we got to know them the more they learned about each other as a group and the more we as youth workers were able to build trusting relationships with these young men. Most of the information for my summer report that year consisted of the number of boys that participated, the when, where and what activities. The story told to me by that young person, and the experiences created in the four years and on that trip with those young men with us, their youth workers, were never written down, and were never asked for, and so the account that went to management of what happened that summer and the previous four years leading up to it was not heard. It was passed over by certain pieces of information being asked for and not others. This meant the story shared that day and how it came to happen became locked

into those moments. With each chug of the bus, with each story shared and created, I understood my job as a youth worker even better. But just as easy as the fumes from the bus evaporated into the air behind us, so too did these youth work experiences. I know, and the young people know they existed, but unless that bus broke down, nobody else would care to ask about or understand them. It is through experiences like these that youth work happens. Through youth workers and young people sharing stories, trust and relationships are built and allow for all those programmes and paintings and numbers to become visual to the human eye.

APPENDIX B: Participant Consent Form

Doctor of Applied Social Science Research Project

Participant Consent Form

Informed Consent Form for professional youth workers who have been professional youth workers for over 10 years and are working in Limerick City and County for the past 5 years. Youth workers are being invited to take part in doctoral research inquiring into **'Youth Workers Perspective on Professional Youth Work'.**

Name of Principle Investigator – Sasha Noonan
Contact – [redacted]
Name of University – Maynooth University
Name of Supervisor – Dr Hilary Tierney
Name of University Course– Doctor of Applied Social Science

Thank you for considering participation in this study which will take place throughout the Spring and Summer of this current year. This form outlines the purposes of the study and provides a description of the basis of your involvement and my obligations in the research study. At the end of the form you will be asked to formally agree to participate in the study.

Purpose of the Research

- complete a thesis in order to fulfil a major course requirement for the Doctor of Applied Social Studies programme in Maynooth University.
- create a space with youth workers to explore their experiences as professional youth workers also taking into account the backdrop of austerity. The research aims to understand the experiences of professional youth workers and gain insights into who they are. The knowledge produced from the interviews will be anticipated to contribute to the social professions and policy making in the youth work sector.

A separate sheet giving more information about the study is attached to the end of the form. Please read it and discuss it with me if you have any questions before signing this form.

2. Recording Conversations

In the first instance, if you grant permission for recording, no sound files/recordings will be used for any purpose other than to do this study and will not be played for any reason other than to do this study. At the end of the study, all sound files will be destroyed unless you give express permission for them to be archived as part of an oral record. Such permission will be sought after the completion of the project. Also copies of interviews can be administered to you on CD format if you wish for these to support you in your feedback within the process of the 3 interviews.

Do you give your permission for our conversations to be recorded?

Yes _____ No _____

Do you understand that sound files will be destroyed unless you give separate and explicit permission for them to be kept as part of an oral record?

Yes _____ No _____

3. Anonymity

Youth Work in Limerick City and County contains a small pool of individuals, heavily dependent on networking and face to face relationships among practitioners. All the research participants are professional youth workers who have worked in Limerick City or County for at least 5 years and have over 10 years of experience as a professional youth worker. Therefore, there is a chance that you will know other participants and potentially be recognised from the research thesis and any subsequent publications.

Do you understand that it will not be possible to guarantee total anonymity in a practice research project of this scale?

Yes _____ No _____

4. Confidentiality

Given the limitations outlined above, your confidentiality will be safeguarded in the following ways. Your real name will not be used at any point of information collection, or in the written thesis; instead, you and any other person involved will be given pseudonyms that will be used in all verbal and written records and reports.

Do you give permission to be quoted directly in the final thesis?

Yes _____ No _____

Are you willing to have un-attributed quotations from our conversations appear in the completed doctoral thesis as a part of the Doctor of Applied Social Studies Programme, Dept. of Applied Social Studies, Maynooth University?

Yes _____ No _____

Are you willing to have un-attributed quotations from our conversations used by me in publications and other media?

Yes _____ No _____

All information from our conversations will be kept in a locked cabinet in my office. Recordings/transcripts/notes are available to you during the research and can be accessed at any time, by arrangement.

Are you satisfied that information from our conversations will be kept safely and that you can access it at any time?

Yes _____ No _____

5. Withdrawing from the research study

Your participation in this research is voluntary; you have the right to withdraw at any point of the study, for any reason, and without any prejudice.

Do you understand that you may withdraw from this study at any time, for any reason and without prejudice up to the point of final analysis?

Yes _____ No _____

6. Agreement to Participate

Are you willing at this point to participate in a face to face conversation with me?

Yes (Face to Face) _____ No (Face to Face) _____

Having read the information sheet, considered the questions on this consent form and asked for and received any clarification, do you agree to participate as a co-inquirer in this study on the basis outlined above?

Yes _____ *No* _____ Name (Block) _____

Signature _____Date _____

I agree to conduct the research on the basis outlined above:

Researcher _____ Date _____

Please contact me by phone or email during the normal working week to ask any questions or discuss any aspect of the project

APPENDIX C: Participant Information

INQUIRY: WHAT ARE YOUTH WORKERS EXPERIENCES OF PROFESSIONAL YOUTH WORK?

Type of Research Intervention:

This research will involved your participation in three 60 to 80 minute long interviews with me, the researcher. There will be 5 other participants taking part using the same format/ I would like to discuss with you, your experiences before youth were a professional youth worker and further to this, experiences of becoming and being a professional youth worker

Who? - Participant Selection

You are being invited to take part in this research because I feel that your experience and knowledge as a youth worker can contribute to the youth work sectors understanding of youth work and youth workers practices and training. Who better to explain what youth work is about other than youth workers themselves? The knowledge you can contribute could influence decisions made at policy level which effect youth workers and the young people they work with.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. It is your choice whether to participate or not.

How? - Procedures

Introduction to the formal of the research study

3 interviews lasting 60 – 80 minutes each.

The 3 interviews will occur over a period of 6 months.

You will see the transcripts or a summary of the transcript of each interview and give feedback on it.

The interview will frame the next interview until 3 interviews are completed with each participant.

Questions aim to explore the following with youth workers:

Experiences as professional youth workers.

This research takes place over 6 months in total. During this time, we will meet 3 times with our discussion based on the previous interview, feedback on the transcription summary and the theme set out in the research design for the conversation. Outside of the interview, I will have to transcribe the content of the interview and then there will be some time taken by you in regard to looking at the transcription summary and giving feedback to

me by email or conversation over the phone. I will meet you at 6 week intervals at an agreed upon and suitable time and place to have each conversation.

Risks

You do not have to discuss any topic in regard to the areas already mentioned if you do not wish.

You do not have to give any reason for not wanting to continue on a certain topic and please be assured that this information that you share with me will never be given to or discussed with anyone including colleagues or the youth work organisations that you or I work for.

There is a risk that you may share some personal or confidential information by chance, or that you may feel uncomfortable talking about some of the topics. However, I do not wish for this to happen. I will ask / check in with you at each interview to make sure you are ok to continue with your participation and agreeable with the data that is being produced. I will ask you to look over the consent form each time to make sure you are still happy with what you signed at the beginning and where the research process is at, at that point.

You do not have to answer any question or take part in the interview if you feel the question(s) are too personal or if talking about them makes you uncomfortable.

As stated in the consent form pseudonyms will be used on the thesis but omitting real names cannot ensure you will not be recognized by the stories that you tell. This is due to Limerick having a small population of youth workers.

Why? – Benefits

There will be no effect to you, but your participation is likely to help me find out more about professional youth workers experiences and the structures around them to do the work.This knowledge, coming directly from practising youth workers, will hopefully be used to influence those who make the decisions about youth work and structure the management of the organisations so they can make more informed decisions about the work, and highlight the need for youth workers knowledge, like yours, to be central to this. More informed decisions being made about youth work and therefore youth workers, can enable and empower youth workers to practice with young people to the best of their ability and training which will further empower and give voice to the young people they work with.

APPENDIX D: Analysis for Plotline

Purpose of chart – Use prompts from conversation one (experiences of Before and Becoming a youth worker) to guide the analysis of final data after concept metaphor analysis

Prompts were used as guides during the conversation with the participants during our first interview (as written in my fieldnotes journal in preparation). Prompt 3 from conversation one - Why youth work?

Prompt 3	**Why professional youth work?**		
Participant ID	**Excerpts**	**What excerpt says to me**	**Themes from prompt 3**
1E	And also, for me moving in my role in my advancement in my career .pg28	Saw youth work as a career to progress in	1)Realised possibility of youth work as a paid job
2B	and I got on a scheme in Moyross am it was a kind of a youth club scheme where I was involved in youth clubs.pg11 So, I suppose like that was my first encounter with youth work and probably didn't realize it .pg11 I hadn't any real plans to do anything kind of you know around job wise you know that kind of…pg43 probably got in to youth work like in a roundabout way didn't realise pg. 85 suppose it was only later on that I realised what I was doing, and I could make some kind of a career out of it.pg85	Did youth work as a job on a CE scheme then realised he could do it as a job	1) Realised possibility of youth work as a paid job
3G	this might be a good career move. Pg21 There's very little 'Oh this is my dream, this is my destiny.' Pg27	Never consciously moved toward youth work as a career goal	1) Realised possibility of youth work as a paid job

4L	, I need some direction.' And I dunno, maybe it was part and parcel of going to college, pg3 and you haven't a clue what you're doing and stuffpg4 in but needed to get a leg in somewhere apg4 it would be the best way to get a leg in, a way in for me. And as time went on I could progress.pg 7 . I must have been really confused about what direction I was going to go in, but I did kind of have an idea that I did want to work with women's groups. I never ended up doing that obviously but am, the leg in was through youth work and I stayed there then. Pg31	Youth work seen as a way of progressing into the preferred career goal	2)Saw youth work as a move towards another career goal
5J	I'll apply for a Masters in Social Work cause at the time Australia was crying out for Social workers and you know the way they have priority professions. Pg26 It would look great on the reference if I got called for the interview or notpg29 well like it is in a nutshell. But that's kind of where it's came from d'you know.pg29 Where I suppose I probably got into youth work then by luck more so then a grand design because I wasn't even aware that youth work was a job when I got into it.Pg55	Youth work seen as a way of progressing into the preferred career goal	2)Saw youth work as a move towards another career goal
6S	6S: UCC was first. University College Cork was first. I, because I wanted to be, remember I wanted to be the youth worker. Me: Yeah. 6S: So, I went there to do youth and community work .pg23	Moved directly from school to study youth work but had to stop due to lack of finance	Saw youth work as a possible career straight away
Overall Theme from prompt 3:		**BEFORE** and Deciding to **BECOME** a paid youth worker	

APPENDIX E: Vignette Development

DEVELOPMENT PROCESS FOR VIGNETTE 5 (highlighting in green what to keep)

STAGE 1- All the material connected to the main title

3G: Oh I've, I've worked with ah and I've come across people that think it's just about putting people in a room and I still do.

Me: Yeah, exactly and I still do. D'you know what I mean.

3G: And they're still there.

Me: Very much so yeah.

3G: And that's …and the unfortunate thing is sometimes groups, sometimes young people that's what they want. They don't want you to be…

Me: I know yeah.

3G: …engaging them in higher levels of thinking.

Me: Yeah. Ha, ha, I know yeah.

3G: They just want a ball and kick it off a wall.

Me: Yeah, ha, ha. Of course, yeah.

3G: And there's a place for that aswell.

Me: Yeah.

3G: But not in, I suppose, d'you know if your, if this is your…

Me: Yeah depends if this is part of a bigger…

3G: Yeah.

Me: …picture like doesn't it.

3G: Yeah. I think you should always be trying to engage people at a higher level and if you can't do that yourself then you're probably in the wrong area.

Me: Yeah, that's a good point.

3G: You're just a well-paid babysitter rather than …

Me: Yeah exactly.

3G:…a youth worker.

Me: Yeah, yeah.

3G: Am I suppose that's the other thing d'you know anyone can be a youth worker.

Me: Mmmm, yeah.

3G: That's not a protected…

Me: You see that's …

3G: Just get the title, walk in off the street…

Me: See that's the thing.

3G: Oh, I'm a youth worker. I work with young people.

Me: Well that's what I was going to ask you. How do you think that am, how do you think other professions, you know in particular people you'd sit around a table with like. So, if you're at some family welfare meeting. Or you're, you know and there might be a social worker, social care worker, teacher, EWO, blah, blah, blah. How do you think they perceive youth work and youth workers? Like what, what do you think their perceptions of what we do and who we do it with.

3G: I suppose our perceptions are always going to be based on the contact you have with people. So, if they're in contact with people who are extremely competent they'll have a good reflection of, a good feeling of the industry. Kind of well disposed towards it.

Me: Mmmm.

3G: But if they're in contact with bad youth workers or with bad practice…

Me: Or people who can't articulate what they're doing.

3G: Yeah. Not necessarily that like. You might be able to articulate it. You might be quite good. The young people might be really happy and really well engaged but if you're just not, you're just not at the races…

Me: Yeah.

3G:…then d'you know they can be a bit like 'What the hell did they do like?'

Me: Yeah.

3G: But you get that everywhere.

Me: Yeah.

3G: Like I remember being somewhere and a youth workers wife at a Christmas dinner once said 'Like really guys what would happen if ye didn't go to work, the kids wouldn't get to play games'. Am …

Me: Thomas that was exactly what I was …in my head I was like, I was waiting for that sort of comment cause I was, that's exactly what I have gotten so many times.

3G: Yeah. She was, that was his wife said that.

Me: Yeah totally.

3G: She worked in a crèche.

Me: Ha, ha.

3G: Yeah.

Me: So, she sort of aligned it with …

3G: Yeah, she thought that we were a crèche for older…

Me: For older young people.

3G: Yeah, genuinely she was convinced of it.

Me: Yeah.

3G: Yeah and…

Me: You've great craic as a youth worker.

3G: Yeah, yeah.

Me: Go out and plan an auld game. Bring them to the cinema. Jese.

3G: There is yeah. But I suppose…

Me: There is that element to it though isn't there. There is that perception by some.

3G: There is. And why do people have perceptions, because that's when they interact with people. So, you only come across youth workers out and about when they're out in King Johns Castle with a group. Or they're down in Lahinch surfing.

Me: Yeah, true, true.

3G: You don't have a reason to watch what they do in a group work settings. Or whatever.

Me: Really finding out.

3G: So, they're always getting a bus when you see them.

Me: Yeah, yeah.

3G: So, you know what I mean. So, people's perceptions are….

Me: What's visual like to them.

3G: Yeah.

STAGE 2 – All material making the story clearer

3G: Oh I've, I've worked with ah and I've come across people that think it's just about putting people in a room and I still do.

Me: Yeah, exactly and I still do. D'you know what I mean.

3G: And they're still there.

Me: Very much so yeah.

3G: And that's …and the unfortunate thing is sometimes groups, sometimes young people that's what they want. They don't want you to be…

Me: I know yeah.

3G: …engaging them in higher levels of thinking.

Me: Yeah. Ha, ha, I know yeah.

3G: They just want a ball and kick it off a wall.

Me: Yeah, ha , ha. Of course, yeah.

3G: And there's a place for that aswell.

3G: Yeah. I think you should always be trying to engage people at a higher level and if you can't do that yourself then you're probably in the wrong area.

Me: Yeah, that's a good point.

3G: You're just a well-paid babysitter rather than …

Me: Yeah exactly.

3G:…a youth worker.

Me: Yeah, yeah.

3G: Am I suppose that's the other thing d'you know anyone can be a youth worker.

Me: Mmmm, yeah.

3G: That's not a protected…

Me: You see that's …

3G: Just get the title, walk in off the street…

Me: See that's the thing.

3G: Oh, I'm a youth worker. I work with young people.

Me: Well that's what I was going to ask you. How do you think that am, how do you think other professions, you know in particular people you'd sit around a table with like. So, if you're at some family welfare meeting. Or you're, you know and there might be a social worker, social care worker, teacher, EWO, blah, blah, blah. How do you think they perceive youth work and youth workers? Like what, what do you think their perceptions of what we do and who we do it with.

3G: I suppose our perceptions are always going to be based on the contact you have with people. So, if they're in contact with people who are extremely competent they'll have a good reflection of, a good feeling of the industry. Kind of well disposed towards it.

Me: Mmmm.

3G: But if they're in contact with bad youth workers or with bad practice…

The young people might be really happy and really well engaged but if you're just not, you're just not at the races…

Me: Yeah.

3G:…then d'you know they can be a bit like 'What the hell did they do like?'

Me: Yeah.

3G: But you get that everywhere.

Me: Yeah.

3G: Like I remember being somewhere and a youth workers wife at a Christmas dinner once said 'Like really guys what would happen if ye didn't go to work, the kids wouldn't get to play games'. Am …

Me: Thomas, that was exactly what I was …in my head I was like, I was waiting for that sort of comment cause I was, that's exactly what I have gotten so many times.

3G: Yeah. She was, that was his wife said that.

Me: Yeah totally.

3G: She worked in a crèche.

Me: Ha, ha.

3G: Yeah.

Me: So, she sort of aligned it with …

3G: Yeah, she thought that we were a crèche for older…

Me: For older young people.

3G: Yeah, genuinely she was convinced of it.

Me: Yeah.

3G: Yeah and…

Me: You've great craic as a youth worker.

3G: Yeah, yeah.

Me: Go out and plan an auld game. Bring them to the cinema. Jese.

3G: There is yeah. But I suppose…

Me: There is that element to it though isn't there. There is that perception by some.

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3G: You don't have a reason to watch what they do in a group work settings. Or whatever.

Me: Really finding out.

3G: So, they're always getting a bus when you see them.

Me: Yeah, yeah.

3G: So, you know what I mean. So, people's perceptions are….

Me: What's visual like to them.

3G: Yeah.

STAGE 3 – Highlighting all parts (I'm still included) that will be in the completed vignette

3G: Oh I've, I've worked with ah and I've come across people that think it's just about putting people in a room and I still do.

3G: And that's …and the unfortunate thing is sometimes groups, sometimes young people that's what they want. They don't want you to be…

Me: I know yeah.

3G: …engaging them in higher levels of thinking.

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3G: They just want a ball and kick it off a wall.

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3G: Yeah. I think you should always be trying to engage people at a higher level and if you can't do that yourself then you're probably in the wrong area.

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Me: Yeah exactly.

3G:…a youth worker.

Me: Yeah, yeah.

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3G: But you get that everywhere.

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Me: For older young people.

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Me: Really finding out.

3G: So, they're always getting a bus when you see them.

Me: Yeah, yeah.

3G: So, you know what I mean. So, people's perceptions are….

VIGNETTE 5 MATERIAL BEFORE EDITING – 'A Christmas Dinner'

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They just want a ball and kick it off a wall.

And there's a place for that aswell.

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Yeah. She was, that was his wife said that.

She worked in a crèche.

Yeah, she thought that we were a crèche for older…

(young people)

Yeah, genuinely she was convinced of it.

But I suppose…

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You don't have a reason to watch what they do in a group work settings. Or whatever.

So, they're always getting a bus when you see them.

So, you know what I mean. So, people's perceptions are….

APPENDIX F: Analysis Grid Chart for Discussion Chapter

(Tierney, 2010, unpublished)

Research Inquiry – Youth workers' perspectives on Professional Youth Work. Chapter 5 Title: *'Luck more so than a grand design'* - Stories of Before and Becoming professional youth workers. Highlight – key phrases in chapter 5 related to Before and Becoming professional youth workers.			
Key Findings in C5 Short summary phrase	Why is it significant? Make bullet points – short & concise	What literature does it relate to? Who is saying, what?	How does the literature support the 'validity of your finding in column 1?
Various routes Accidental youth workers	Paths are like young peoples' paths Did not participate in a shared professional identity formation process like other profs Implications for shared understanding of professional practice and identity	O'Sullivan Report (1980) Young 1999 explains YPs find their own way Lifecycle app decontexualised (Furlong 2013 p. 6) and using a 'life course' approach was more widely adopted (Elder 1974). Based on five principles (Heinz 2009 p. 4) Young (1999)- Important to understand youth theory Sercombe (2010) – Transitions Devlin 2009, Sercombe 2010, Smith 1982, Young 1999 – Need to know about theory of youth work to understand practice and young people	-Speaks about youth workers coming from different backgrounds - YPs path were understood as quite linear moving from one stage to the next. Later perspectives challenge this and help us understand prof youth workers routes to youth work YWs need to understand theory in order to recognise and understand their practice, who they work with and why. Without being able to do this they will not know if they are working based on

		Growing professionalism (Evetts 2011, Friedson 1994, 2001, Noordegraaf 2007) therefore need to explore identity	youth work values and guided by its principles. Environment for professions is asking particular things from occupations who identify as professional. The youth work sector has been following a path towards professionalisation and youth workers are called professionals. Considering the different routes they all clearly took, they do not have a shared path for practice and identity formation. Therefore, asking how they understand practice and how they identify has implications in trying to comprehend who they are as a professional group.
Voluntary participation	Understand YW as a vocation Occupational rather than organisational discourse Common reference point as a group	Banks (2004),Devlin (2012) – Vocation, voluntary routes Koehn (1994 as cited in Sercombe 2010) – a way of life	Youth work has traits associated with the original professions, professions which hold an occupational value.

	Could be used to start looking at identity		Therefore, beginning to look at youth work through an occupational value lens is a good starting point for discussions.
Key Findings	Participants became professional youth workers by accident. Also volunteeringplayed a role in all of their stories of becoming accidental youth workers		
TITLE OF SECTION 8.1	Various Routes to Professional Youth Work		

APPENDIX G: Developing Short Poems

Areas Highlighted:

BLUE - ‘phrases/ words that make you linger’ ‘encapsulate powerful images’ (Etherington, University of Bristol slides: February)

YELLOW – ‘self-defining memories’ ‘Highly significant personal memory that expresses central themes or conflicts of one’s sense of identity’ (Etherington, University of Bristol slides: February 2008)

Poem 1 – Jewel – A Common Starting Point

The first interview I meet Jewel’s friendly face

One who tells me her experiences of time and place

In her local youth club, she was participant and volunteer

Feeling grounded in a space she held so dear

Outside of the youth club, school was not for her

Abilities challenged she became an early school leaver

5.2 As a young person- ‘I loved the positive re-enforcement’

Jewel’s Profile: Jewel is in her 40s and has been a full-time youth worker for 12 years. Jewel has an NSETS accredited Degree in Youth and Community Work

Jewels’ Story

With eighteen conversations to conduct during the fieldwork stage, this conversation with Jewel is not only our first together, but the first one I will have done as a practitioner researcher to date. I am a bit nervous and quite anxious to get started. As I sit in the upstairs office of the youth project where I am based, waiting for Jewel to arrive, I try to busy myself by reading notes about interview techniques, but to be honest nothing is really going in at this point. The doorbell rings at 10 am on the dot. This is it. She is here. I run down the steep, creaky stairs of the old building and answer the door to a smiling, friendly faceand welcome Jewel in. Hot cups of coffee in hand I explain to Jewel that she can begin her story by telling me her first experiences of youth work as a child or as an adult. With this invitation she begins sharing stories of her childhood with me by describing her first few years primary

school, and how she was-part of a Saturday youth club which she loved. She tells me about starting secondary school and the likelihood of having to leave the Saturday youth club because of this until, unexpectedly she was granted, a welcome opportunityto stay involved.

One day my friend was talking to one of the nuns and I was there with her and the conversation came up about the[Saturday youth club],and ah, we were both asked by the nuns, would we be interested in coming back the following year in September and helping out facilitate the groups. And I thought brilliant, I'm still involved.

It was a lot of responsibility at thirteen years of age and I think it grounded me. It stabilized me. That responsibility at that point, and also, I liked the nuns liking me. You know it was this, it wasn't liking me as a person, it was giving me this responsibility, knowing Jewel is a good girl, she's doing this. It was positive re-enforcement. I loved the positive re-enforcement. I was not getting that in the school. But at the time I didn't know as a child growing up, I did not know I was dyslexic. And I had the massive challenge of am, around my learning abilities. Why wasn't my capabilities there? I worked hard. All the teachers would say I was a hard worker. What was wrong? In fact, my mother who didn't understand, would have been very much like "Jewel, sit down there at the table and do your homework" and also, had extra homework for me, and even my summer holidays I got extra homework. Homework came with me in my holidays. Mam didn't realise though. They hadn't sent me for an assessment at the time for dyslexia, at the time in primary school. This is where it's, I use the onion a lot as it's great to say layers. It was utterly like a layer being torn off each time and bringing my abilities into question.

And am that's why I say the club stabilised me, grounded me, because I would have been that disruptive child. I was out in the lower grade of the school. I was in with that group of kids that would have been from the troublesome kids. I did that for about two years [volunteer as a leader with the Saturday youth club]. I then went into transition year. Transition year at that point was totally different to TY now. In those days, it was only given to those young people that were at risk of being early school leavers. It wasfor those students whose capabilities are not there for doing the Leaving Cert and they[the teachers]directed me into this year. I opted for it but didn't understand at the time that I was not going back into fifth year. I did transition and finished up. So, I was an early school leaver.

APPENDIX H: My Story (Practitioner Researcher)

Growing up I didn't know people could become professional youth workers. I attended a youth club for and the Order of Malta cadets because my friends went, we went on trips away and we met other young people. From what I remember the leaders were all volunteers. As a teenager, adults asked me what job I wanted to do when I finished secondary school and to be honest I never really knew. I used to think it was a bit ridiculous deciding on a job for the rest of my life. Being 13 or 14, life was a very long journey ahead and committing to one job and one type of life was scary. Of course, now I see that deciding on one path does not mean having to stay on it, but then nobody told me otherwise. My parents always spoke about the importance of education as they had not had an opportunity to do their leaving certificate and go to university. Times were different when they were growing up they used to say.

After secondary school, I studied Sociology and History, graduated with an Arts Degree and then did a Masters in Sociology. I wanted to work with people, but not as a teacher, despite others assuming teaching was the next step. I used to say I might become a social worker but could not actually see myself doing it. After doing my Masters in Sociology I decided to work in my part-time job at home and did some voluntary work in Ghana. I looked at the job advertisements in the newspaper to identify what type of jobs were out there. It was 2005 and there were a lot of youth and community worker positions advertised. I thought this sounded like something I could do. I then found out there was third level education and training for community and youth work and the more I read about it the more I wanted to do it but properly. Properly to me meant doing the Higher Diploma in Youth and Community Work in Maynooth University. Having said that, when I started practising many of my colleagues came from various backgrounds of both education and training, and experience, or more commonly just one. I got my first job as a youth worker in 2007.

Several memories resonate with me from my first few years as a professional youth worker. At first there was an abundance of money for whatever I wanted to do in the youth project I worked in. I remember myself and the other youth worker could go any trip we organised with young people and buy any sports and entertainment equipment. However, from 2009 that all changed. I dreaded requesting any money for buses, trips or some piece of new equipment. The answer was generally no, as I was told there was not enough money and that I needed to start fundraising a lot more. I also remember meetings with other professionals

were a challenge for me in the first few years. Because of doing the Higher Diploma in Youth and Community work I have always thought of myself as a professional youth worker. Yet, attending external meetings or training events with other professionals when I started the job I used to feel a bit anxious when trying to explain what I did. Teachers and social workers for example often misunderstand my job was and my role. Also, funding was not renewed, colleagues lost their jobs and there was no sign of any salary increases. In fact, at staff meetings we were told how lucky we were to have a job. There was always a sense of uncertainty when it came to our future with the organisation.

With funding cuts and various changes occurring within my organisation, my colleagues and I grew more frustrated but there was a sense that we were powerless to stop it. That old rhetoric of being lucky to have a job along with an increasing focus on specific qualifications for any profession these days meant many of my colleagues seemed unsure as to what other options may be open to them if they were to leave the organisation that had taken them under its wing. Inside and outside the organisation decisions were made about us and for us but rarely with us. I wanted to question the changes but realised that not all of my colleagues felt deserving, confident, willing or able to do this which I found difficult to understand. This has led me to undertake research and ask other professional youth workers to share their individual experiences of professional youth work with me.

APPENDIX I: Irish Youth Worker Association – Membership Criteria

Source: IWYA Facebook page (http://m.facebook.com/pg/IYWAssociation/photos/)