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Beyond Youth Work Practice

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The Authors

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1

Introduction:

"We can truly 'start from strengths' only by ensuring that due respect and attention is paid to values which underpin the work and by ensuring that the same values pervade the training of youth and community workers. What otherwise is the intention of informal education, if it is not to enable individuals to make their own educated judgements about 'good performance', in whatever sphere, and then inspire them to go on and beyond?" (Norton et al, 1994, p31)

During the latter half of 2006, stretching into 2007, two researchers from North East Wales Institute of Higher Education (NEWI) undertook a small-scale, qualitative study of youth workers-in-training, talking to those studying in and delivering professional youth worker courses in Wales. The title for this research project, *Beyond Youth Work Practice*, was inspired in part by the above quote from a critical text on competency-based learning though was also chosen to capture, but leave open, the question as to how best to provide education and training for youth workers. Behind this title, a tension exists that suggests, on the one hand, those competent in the practice of youth work are best placed to provide professional training whilst, on the other, academics within higher education institutions (HEIs) produce the necessary blend to create professional understandings, knowledge and skills. It is clear that this tension has persisted for many years and that, as the above quote suggests, it can only be navigated by recourse to values held within the youth work profession.

Previously there had been professional apprenticeships for youth work in Wales (Youth Leaders for the Valleys, 1993) though, more recently, a range of different apprenticeship style schemes has emerged. Some describe those benefiting as 'workers-in-training', others cater for 'unqualified workers', some are viewed as 'trainees' but certainly employers have been investing in 'home grown' workers, taken from within their pool of volunteers or part-time staff and offered the opportunity to engage in professional training. Many apprenticeship schemes adapt existing or create new progression routes so that some professional education takes place within a HEI but there is a new breed of professional training

beginning to emerge that makes use of national vocational qualifications (NVQs) (see Youthlink Scotland's Youth Work Apprenticeship Scheme). Generally, each of these professional pathways has involved a blend of practice learning and classroom-based learning, even with NVQs there remains a need to include underpinning knowledge and understanding usually off-site, in a classroom setting. It is this tension between on-the-job and off-the-job learning and the emphasis placed on one or the other for professional learning that is the focus of this research.

The timing of the research is important in that such apprenticeship-style training, having increased with New Burdens money in Wales five years ago, had recently produced a number of qualified youth workers in 2005 with more qualifying in 2006 and 2007. It is also, perhaps, a useful time to look at this investment and its impact, alongside the changing climate for employers, practitioners and HEIs, so that the implications for all concerned who operate within the increasingly fragile All Wales Coherent Route for the Training of Youth & Community Workers (Murphy, 2005) can begin to strengthen their understanding and, hopefully, help shore up the Route itself.

This study grew from discussions between academics within NEWI and their franchise partners, practitioners and managers in the youth and community work field. This debate centred on the advantages and disadvantages of employer-led and Institution-led professional education. This discussion itself was stimulated by the arrival in Wales of competency-based qualifications – National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) and National Open College Network (NOCN) – to train, in particular, those employed as part-time youth workers. Whilst, at the time of the study, no youth and community employer had yet chosen to adopt such qualifications to 'grow' their own professionals, the possibility was being considered. A possibility that was previously resisted by the field in the 1990s though now offering a possible enhancement to the All Wales Coherent Route though, perhaps, a threat to those Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) that have found themselves exclusively engaged in professional education over many years.

Therefore, those involved in this study entered a potentially compromising arena of investigation. On the one hand it is eminently justifiable for higher education researchers to want to examine professional education since this is a clear component of their practice whilst, on the other, they lay themselves open to

allegations of 'protectionism' should they criticise the alternative, work-based form of learning that could be seen to compete. As it happens, both researchers are themselves practising youth workers so having a foot in each camp and, to further reduce the potential for academic self-interest as well as to inform the study, a review of current literature was undertaken.

Review of the Literature

Hodkinson (2005) proved particularly useful in framing an understanding of the differences and similarities between college-based and work-based learning. At the outset, he attributes any perceived differences to his theoretical stance which, he says, then frames any understanding of 'discontinuities' and 'links'. He draws attention to structural relationships between the two and how these relations act to determine learning. In discussing perceived differences, he identifies two theoretical constructs. Those considered 'situated learning theorists' some of whom believe formal education creates a mirror image in producing formal learners who mimic the features of their site of learning e.g. responding to a pre-determined curriculum and learning to pass (or fail) abstract assessment tasks. Another set of ideas on situated learning are captured around 'synergy' where "context, concept and activity" are kept in balance to produce more 'authentic' forms of learning. Added to this are perceived differences between formal and informal learning, differences that have echoes in the value base and methods familiar within youth work, conceived as trying to overcome the view that learning equates with education and assert, alternatively, that the real world and real lives are valid sources of learning. The second construct portrayed by Hodkinson surrounds those considered to support 'integrated learning'. A range of views is perceived, with some suggesting learning emanates from close relations within collective situations that exhibit mutuality, common purpose and accepted practices. Others take a broader view so 'communities of practice', to them, enable social learning - colleagues and neighbours acting together to generate learning. The learner here moves between situation and situation and in doing so can shift roles between learner and teacher, Hodkinson refers to these as learning fields and identifies each learner's 'uniqueness of navigation' and a 'necessary sense of belonging' as key components of such integrated learning.

Drawing on Bourdieu's ideas and the two sets of theories outlined above, Hodkinson develops an analytical tool that the researchers here have used to help shape this study:

"We have argued that the combination of positions, dispositions (habitas) and capital (economic, cultural and social), combined with his [Bourdieu's] views that a field is contested, that its practices and rules of engagement are constructed through the unequal interactions of those within it, and that all fields are related to ... the field of power, help flesh out some key facets of participatory practice, in work or in college..." (Hodkinson, 2005, p524.)

Social learning, therefore, is epitomised by a blend of fields, the existing determinants within each and the capability of the learner to make use of each situation. In providing this analytical tool, Hodkinson warns that, whilst they do exist, differences between college-based and work-based learning are usually exaggerated. Schulz however contradicts this by arguing that workplace learning exhibits particular features.

Whilst Hodkinson's is more of a critique of formal education, Schulz (2005) does this for workplace learning. He invites us (p498) to take account of four concepts underpinning workplace learning. Firstly, that such learning is unpredictable and so difficult to plan. Secondly, learning is (perhaps only) valued by its applicability to practice, its relevance to practitioners and to organisations. Thirdly, a level of acceptability, of legitimisation is needed for learners to gain access to workplaces. And lastly, that the work situation contains a tension within which learners negotiate between their search for understanding and the creation of knowledge. If we were to project these attributes onto the other site of learning under discussion here – higher education - we can create four mirroring concepts. Firstly, classroom-based learning is predictable and easier to plan. Secondly, it values learning that supports 'theoretical' understanding, research and publication. Thirdly, access to learning communities (HEIs) is restricted to those demonstrating a capacity for higher order learning. And lastly, the classroom is imbued with a tension between the meaning of knowledge and its relevance for practice.

The key to learning in workplaces, Schulz says, is reflection, and he provides models for this, three of which are useful here. Taking ideas from Schon, Schulz talks about reflection-in-action where learners engage in on-the-job analysis to improve in-the-job performance. He sees some reflection as being after-the-job, or retrospective, where past experience of the workplace was drawn on as a source of understanding. He also talks about using the workplace as a source of instruction, examples from practice used to

embed understanding. For this study, each of these models, taken in turn, could be understood to describe employer-led workplace learning such as NVQs; placement activities undertaken by students during a higher education course, or forms of classroom-based learning delivered as part of either. Schulz asks a fundamental question that our own study is concerned with, namely:

“One of the central questions in the debate surrounding adequate learning concepts is how to transfer theory knowledge into practice. Or, how can this knowledge be applied? The reverse question asks, if learning takes place in a specific context, how can this knowledge be generalised and made usable for different situations?” (p493)

And what this study tries to do is engage with this debate. It is not about providing a definitive view to determine a preferred form of professional learning for youth workers. Instead it raises issues that emerged from educators and trainers, students and workers-in-training, placing these within a conceptual framework that generates more questions than answers but, hopefully, brings a greater clarity to the debate.

2

Summary of the Findings

“Education and training are not polar opposites but different types of learning that merge into each other. The essence of an educational foundation for life is that it combines intellectual and practical study.” David Miliband, the Minister for Schools, writing in 1990 as cited in Rodda et al, 2007.

Taking Miliband’s simplistic view for the moment, this study has compared and contrasted two different types of learning by targeting two main ‘communities of practice’ - the broad youth work field and those involved in youth work training. Recognising that many in Wales are involved in both fields, we couldn’t help but delve into both but this study’s main focus was on the second ‘community of practice’, the trainers and trainees, with around a fifth of those talked to being tutors but with a low number of tutors in Wales overall (17), a representative sample was impractical. Instead a range of views was surveyed to explore the less simplistic tensions raised by Schulz who, as covered in the last chapter, portrays workplace learning as unpredictable, filtered for its usefulness to practice with workplaces restricted to those passing an ‘employability’ muster and then leaving learners to bounce between understanding and knowing. If Schulz’s model was projected onto classroom-based learning, it could be depicted as predictable, valued for generating theories, with students passing an ‘intellectual’ muster though expected to relate knowledge to practice.

Classroom & Workplace Learning

For professions, a tension permeates practice, where autonomy to act on behalf of those seeking help has to be balanced with accountabilities to both a profession and an employer. For youth work trainers, this tension expects them to deliver students who are self-directed learners whilst simultaneously meeting pre-determined occupational standards, academic learning outcomes and subject learning aims.

Both tutors and students agreed that a youth worker is more likely to be influenced and inspired, in the first place, by practitioners and practice than by academics and theory. The early source of

inspiration, skills, knowledge and understanding comes from employers' interpretations of what it is to be a youth worker but gradually individuals determine the kind of youth worker they want to be for themselves.

Work-based learning is seen to be more effective for learning practical skills and workplace-specific knowledge with classroom-based learning more effective at imparting knowledge and understanding. All considered reflective practice to be a vital element in professional training and though firmly embedded in both styles of learning, it suffers in competing with other demands within practice.

Students were critical of the ability of a franchise to deliver 'knowledge' and also saw training as too concerned with employer' needs. This questions the nature of professional development with the workplace dismissed by some as a secondary site for professional development, practice as a mechanism to cement classroom-gained knowledge. Youth work skills either emerge exclusively from the face-to-face work with young people or their capture, stimulated in the classroom, is accelerated by practice.

Whilst tutors in the classroom should possess knowledge of practice as well as theory, practitioners seem to abandon any theoretical considerations in their workplaces. Some common understandings did emerge in that the classroom gave youth work knowledge and understandings and was seen to enable a reflective return to the workplace whilst work-based learning provided youth work skills.

Using Hodgkinson's analysis, the learning depicted above involved blending two different fields – the workplace and the classroom. Each provided opportunities to construct in full or in part particular kinds of youth worker though this was mediated by the ability of learners to make use of each situation. In these youth work contexts, we can refine the anticipation Hodgkinson gave of unequal interactions by suggesting ideological tensions played out are not simply between those who value a profession based on practice skills and those preferring one based on theory but instead between those who see the workplace as the site of the integration of youth work skills, knowledge and understandings and those who see the classroom as the location of such praxis. This tension is at the heart of the kind of education that best equips professionals with Cheetham and Chivers (2000, p383) seeing such professional

development as a blend of professional knowledge, workplace competence, rational with reflective thinking and innovative practice.

Learners & Their Situations

Learners were sometimes unable to exert a choice of education provider because of limited availability of courses or existing links between employers or franchises and an HEI. Where choice was exercised, practical and financial motivations dominated with quality of provision less important. Students identified just as many educational factors as they did work ones and no matter which route, hoped to increase knowledge and understanding. There was frustration in having to endure course content that was academic without experiencing learning that was new.

The consensus was that classroom-based learning adds credibility to youth work qualifications, particularly from other professionals, though such qualifications are no proof of an ability to work with young people. Work-based learning brings practical experience of the youth work role though not necessarily new skills. There was an acknowledgement of the necessity for both types of learning although those who had gone down a primarily work-based route placed more emphasis on this type of learning and vice versa.

Focus groups called for a new kind of profession combined with a new kind of occupation – a professional practitioner. They saw the need for this to be matched by a new form of professional education that enables those with practice competences to translate their tacit knowledge of youth work gained through experience into an explicit set of understandings that maintain a required level of professional knowledge. Similarly, those with academic capabilities but lacking in professional skills need to take explicit knowledge gained and integrate this with learning from face-to-face experiences. This more integrative form of professional education that these students have called for but not so far experienced, is more in tune with an apprenticeship model, and such integration was not limited to those engaged in youth work but also with other professionals such as teachers. They called for greater consistency between providers so that quality was maintained between teaching and practice. A strong regulatory body consisting of practitioners, managers and trainers and separate from government was seen as welcome in improving the status of the profession.

3

Subjects of the Study

"We will build on existing workforce plans to include all care staff, with a strong emphasis on work-based training to enable individuals to gain qualifications on the basis of their practical skills and to develop those skills further." One Wales Document: An agreement between the Labour and Plaid Cymru Groups in the National Assembly, June 2007

Recognising the policy context for professional education was changing, as evidenced by the above quote, this study was interested in two groups of people: firstly, tutors delivering professional education and, secondly, students who receive such education. We wanted to speak with those mainly involved in 'classroom-based' delivery but also, for comparative purposes, those who were mostly involved in 'workplace' learning. As the period for our research fieldwork drew to a close, we became aware that we had not factored in conversations with those engaged in professional education that did not involve, in some way, higher education institutions. We became aware of a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) pathway being developed within one local authority in Wales but time did not allow us to follow this up and so the subjects here all have links into the dominant form of professional education that is within higher education and so each involves, to varying degrees, work-based training.

THE TUTORS

In the first group of interest to the study, we spoke to five tutors, four from two higher education institutions (HEIs) and one employed directly within a youth work agency – a local authority that delivers modules franchised to them by one of the HEIs. All five deliverers were male and white. None had a disability and three were aged 41 to 54 years with two aged 55 years or over. All work full-time in a permanent post though, as stated above, four consider themselves to be lecturers whilst one records that he is a youth work practitioner – we have settled on the term 'tutor' to describe all five. Only one of these five, a lecturer, stated he did not have a professional youth work qualification with those teaching in the HEIs, as might be expected, also holding a number of postgraduate qualifications

whereas the practitioner held an undergraduate certificate in education.

In terms of qualifications, these five together hold two certificates in education; one diploma in higher education; two degrees; two postgraduate diplomas; and, three Masters degrees. As stated, four held a professional youth work qualification and together they had 74 years experience in delivering professional youth work training with an average of just under 15 years. Whilst the duties they listed in providing such education are similar, the practitioner was the only one to indicate an involvement in mentoring and one of only two saying they managed courses.

THE STUDENTS

In the second group, we spoke to 19 students, the learners, 8 within a HE setting and 11 in a franchise, work-based situation. All of the respondents were white, and only one declared a disability. Of the 19, 11 were women and 8 men, 2 people were aged under 21, 10 were aged 21-40 and 6 people were aged 41-55; one person did not provide an age.

Three visits were made to students in the premises of their learning providers where, on the pilot visit, 4 respondents were met at the first higher education institution (HE1), two of whom were male and two female; one was studying on a post-graduate diploma and three had completed a diploma in youth & community with both courses providing a professional youth work qualification. At the second visit, four respondents were interviewed at the second higher education establishment (HE2). Of these four, 3 were male and 1 female and all were studying on a professionally endorsed diploma in community education. The other 11 respondents were seen at the third visit to a Welsh youth service that runs a franchise from a university. Some of these respondents were employed by this youth service and others by an adjoining service. This group included 8 females and 3 males.

All the students were employed, twelve full time and seven part time, mostly in the statutory sector (17 out of 19) with none in the private sector; and most were on permanent contracts (10) with five full-time, one on a temporary contract and one working as a casual employee. The employment position of two others is unknown. The majority of respondents were employed as youth workers but other job roles included rural partnership worker, social inclusion coordinator, assistant community education officer, custody support worker,

communities first coordinator, deputy youth officer and 'sex & relationships' worker. Members of this group of 19 learners had undertaken a variety of qualifications prior to and sometimes in anticipation of starting their professional courses. The variety included a level 3 award from the Open College Network (OCN), a postgraduate certificate in education (PGCE), 'A' levels, professional accreditation, foundation certificates (the local qualification for youth workers in Wales till 2004), a certificate in youth & community (through a franchise with a university), national vocational qualifications (NVOs), and degrees and diplomas in other subject areas unrelated to youth work. Most of this training and education had been work-based.

THE SAMPLE

There are two main 'communities of practice' (see chapter 1) that this study has been concerned with. There is the 'community of practice' that encapsulates the broad youth work field in Wales, practitioners and managers, and the 'community of practice' that describes the youth work training field, trainers and students. As can be seen in the sample of tutors and students, there is a large overlap between these two communities particularly in Wales where, through the All Wales Coherent Route to Youth & Community Qualifications, many practitioners are involved in training either as students or as tutors. This research, due to time constraints, has focussed on the second 'community of practice', the trainers and trainees. In this respect, with around a fifth of this sample being tutors, their views are favoured numerically since the ratio of students to tutors in most higher education institutions is around 25 to 1 whereas in this study it is 5 to 1. It was important however to speak to enough tutors to form a view though, with only five involved from a possible seventeen lecturers across Wales and only two of these saying they managed their course from four courses in the Principality, this is not going to provide a representative sample.

Instead we believe we have captured a sufficient range of views to engage with Schulz's concepts of workplace learning (see chapter one). Of the four he provides, his last is the most relevant here since it involves exposing a tension between personal learning and professional knowledge creation. For professions, where autonomy to act on behalf of those in need has to be balanced with accountabilities to both a profession and an employer, this tension permeates practice. Youth work training simultaneously expects students to become self-directed learners whilst imposing a set of occupational and educational standards on their learning.

In sampling this 'training' community of practice, we utilised Hodkinson's understanding of situated learning (see chapter one), and looked for discontinuities and linkages, checking for synergies between contexts, concepts and activities. The sample reflected a geographic spread and different training agencies. Within the three training providers, the tutors were self-selected by virtue of their role within their agency. Students were selected by the training agency though no stratified or pre-determined sampling was used. The researchers met whoever was available at the appointed time. However, the sample proved to be sufficiently broad to identify that different 'learning fields' were held together in a variety of ways within different professional education providers. As we spoke to each participant, we were aware, as Hodkinson warned, that the differences between classroom-based and work-based learning might be exaggerated by respondents. It is to these detailed responses we now turn.

4

Comparing Classroom with Workplace Learning

"The important things we learn in life are not done in classrooms." Dr Gilbert Jessup, Deputy Director, National Council for Vocational Qualifications cited in Norton et al, 1994, p24.

Because Dr Jessup's dismissive view of classroom learning is echoed within sections of the youth work profession, we thought it important, in inviting participants to compare classroom with workplace that neutral definitions were given in advance. Workplace learning, we explained, takes place on-the-job and during placements, learning that grows from taking part in the practice of youth work and that necessarily involves contact with young people and is facilitated by an experienced youth worker. Whereas classroom-based learning, we informed, could be considered to be off-the-job, generated from involvement in the study of youth work, perhaps in the company of other learners and led by a tutor or trainer. After clarifying the terms, we asked what specific youth work skills, practical or intellectual, had they as students been able to pick up or develop during professional education. In parallel we asked the tutors about their perception of skills gained by their students. In analysing the responses, we asked ourselves whether the skills, knowledge and understandings associated with one of the two sites of learning could be fostered in the other.

The views provided by students from the two higher education institutions (HEIs) contrasted with those from the franchise group. The HEI groups believe a 'legitimacy' attaches itself to academic study whilst this, they thought, was not true of work-based training. However, the franchise group considered academic 'snobbery' to permeate university courses and, like Dr Jessup, they portrayed practice as the most valid site for learning. This formed an initial and perhaps a fundamental area of contestation that Hodkinson (2005, p524) predicted would exist in a profession. He argued that the make-up of learning communities, that particular combination of spaces, attitudes and capacities for economic, cultural and social capital that frame a professional field would bring unequal practices

and interventions. It seems that youth workers trained at a HEI construct a view of their professional education as superior to that completed in the workplace whilst those whose training is located within practice have created a view that HEIs deliver an elitist form of education. Put another way, as Jessup suggests at the outset of this chapter, the skills needed for life (and youth work) are not picked up in classrooms. As Hodgkinson states, unequal interactions take place that in a youth work context see an ideological battle playing out between those who value a profession based on practice skills and those who prefer one based on theoretical knowledge.

We checked what the tutors said to see if they echoed this student contestation around skills and knowledge but mostly tutors saw a symbiotic relationship between the two spaces, classroom and workplace. We were, however, given a range of views with some tutors seeing practice as a setting for testing and embedding acquired knowledge whilst others saw it as providing short to medium term opportunities for learning skills. Some saw the classroom as a place where it was possible to emphasise longer term gains around knowledge in a more detached way than practice could. Whilst the tutors' appeared to deny the separateness of skills and knowledge, both being necessary, there were still differences between those teaching in HE and the franchise tutor. The franchise tutor considered his trainee youth workers were supplementing their practice-based skills with classroom-based knowledge whilst HE tutors released their students into practice to cement learning gained in class or to reflect on practice to better embed classroom-based knowledge.

Students added to the differentiation over the forms of learning when we asked about skills and knowledge. Classroom-based learning was seen by them to include a greater awareness of theory; of historical shifts in matters such as policy; of professional matters such as ethics; and, in enabling skills such as reflecting, planning, writing and evaluating. Again, some students, like the tutors, asserted the connection between theory and practice, seeing each as informing the other. They did recognise that some skills such as evaluating and some forms of professional knowledge, such as ethics, were learned in the classroom.

Some lecturers, paralleling student views, stated that skills were mostly learned in practice with knowledge and understanding remaining the preserve, in the main, of the classroom. Developing this further, lecturers saw their role as bringing practice into the

classroom but, in doing so, fostering in students the ability to describe and analyse situations and problems. Whilst a couple of the students were dismissive of the classroom's effect on their practice, the tutors and most students emphasised the classroom's simultaneous use of but detachment from practice as a learning tool. A tool that they reported helped workers-in-training to step back from daily work pressures, to explore meanings from their immediate practice, to develop overviews that grew from their work contexts and to take on what one student called a 'higher form of youth work' and what lecturers considered to be 'reflective and professional practice'.

Trying to explore further the tension between skills and knowledge, we asked tutors to identify improvements that workplace or classroom-based training had brought to youth work practice. Workplace learning was seen as a context for the development of technical skills such as those associated with information and communications technologies and opportunities to better understanding individual behaviours or specialisms e.g. detached work. We received competing views suggesting, on the one hand, that skills grew from the needs of practice, that learning was accelerated by workplace experiences and, on the other, that skills came from the practical application of knowledge and understanding generated beforehand in the classroom. There was a consensus that the workplace allowed practical skills to flourish such as interpersonal communications, adaptability, even decision-making with one tutor claiming that this was the significant site of professional development.

Classroom-based learning was seen by tutors to provide time-out from practice to explore models, values and knowledge. It was seen to provide some distinct skills around thinking, analysing and, of course, studying. Whilst it was considered as time away from practice, a more confident but reflective return to the workplace was clearly seen as the main intention though some tutors emphasised the importance of becoming and being a student. Other skills seen to be gained included strategic thinking, care with interpretation and the simplification of complex ideas.

Youth Work Skills, Knowledge & Understanding

We asked students how they gained their youth work skills, knowledge and understanding, inviting them to say whether these emerged from workplace learning only; mostly workplace learning; through a mix of workplace and classroom-based learning in equal

measure; mostly classroom learning; or, through classroom learning only. In asking this, we hoped to précis their previous answers, as reported above, through an evaluation of the impact of these two forms and sites of learning. It had been difficult to gauge the views of tutors since, after piloting it with the first two, this question was re-structured to find the tutors' views but from their students' perspective.¹

When asked about skills, knowledge and understanding, there were a number of differences between the three groups of students (HE1, HE2 & Franchise). However, when asked this more evaluative question, one that required them to compare the two types of learning, a more marked difference emerged. Students from HE1 and HE2 largely answered that classroom-based learning was more influential than work-based, whereas the Franchise students felt they gained more from their work-based learning experiences. All three sets of students appeared to reinforce their constructed understanding of their chosen education space by saying this was the better place to gain skills, knowledge and understanding.

Those tutors answering the re-structured question thought that youth work skills came mostly from workplace learning (2 of the 3) though were less agreed over the source of knowledge and understanding about youth work where the Franchise tutor felt it grew from the workplace and a HE tutor countered this by saying it came from the classroom. The third tutor (HE) thought skills, knowledge and understanding came from work-based and classroom-based learning in equal measure.

The skills that students reported that they had gained from work-based learning included: -

Communication	Record Keeping
Rapport Building	Management Skills
Face-to-Face Work	Time Management
Conflict Resolution,	Finance & Budgeting
People Skills	Fund-raising,
Problem-solving	Multi-agency Working
	Planning & Preparation

The skills students said they gained from classroom based learning included:-

¹ At the pilot stage we had asked if respondents could evaluate using given response categories to two statements on skills and two on knowledge and understanding. These response categories, drawn from a typical Likert scale, asked for answers on a matrix of gradations from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The two responses we received made us realise that contradictory responses were possible and so we altered the question for the other 3 tutors and for the students. See appendix 1, page 48, question 2e.

Information Technology Writing Presenting Listening	Reflecting Studying Evaluating
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From the above lists, it seems skills gained in an academic environment focussed closely on study i.e. presenting and writing whereas the workplace provided a broader and more pragmatic range. Even though respondents were encouraged to polarise the two arenas, some common skills were expected and these settled around skills in communicating though, surprisingly, 'reflection' was seen to be learned in the classroom but not in the workplace. In reviewing each of these skills and their association with one of these two learning places, it is difficult to state that they could only be learned in one place but not the other.

After asking about where skills were gained we turned to knowledge and understanding. For work-based learning, knowledge and understanding centred largely on work-related information, for example: policies and procedures, issue-based knowledge, financial information, planning tools (e.g. SMART objectives), understanding young people and knowledge and understanding of the priorities of partner agencies. The knowledge and understanding gained from classroom-based learning was much broader i.e. management theory, ethics and principles, theory-practice links, youth work curriculum, understanding the youth work value base, ideas and theories underpinning the practice from thinkers such as Maslow and Freire.

Besides the obvious connections around young people and youth work, few commonalities were seen as present in both spaces. Within the classroom, learning was expected to combine knowledge and understanding from the workplace to embed theory whereas the workplace was not expected to use practice to enlighten theory. Reflective learning seen as crucial in the classroom was less expected within the workplace where knowledge and understanding appear driven by an imperative to perform rather than stand back and consider. Again, in taking a broad view of knowledge and understanding, it is difficult to say exclusivity of knowledge rests within one particular site though practice knowledge in higher education is clearly different from that of a youth work environment.

Respondents were asked how their youth work practice has been improved by either work-based or classroom-based learning. Work-based responses centred on practical skills and experiential learning

whereas classroom-based ones were more about the theories that underpin practice. Such theories, it was said, would not necessarily be obvious within day-to-day practice but these might help the worker to understand why a particular approach is used or needed.

When asked for a summative evaluation of which form of learning provided the majority of skills, knowledge and understanding, most respondents indicated that youth work skills were gained in the main through work-based learning, whilst knowledge and understanding about youth work was mostly gained through classroom-based learning. This was true of all three groups of students although, in the Franchise group, perhaps tending to give greater value to the workplace as a source of knowledge, 4 of the 11 stated that skills, knowledge and understanding were gained in equal measure from the two forms of learning.

Influences & Inspirations

When asked what has been most influential and inspirational in improving their youth work practice, a range of responses was given. At HE2 the responses were varied with 2 students saying the tutors were influential and inspirational whilst 2 said this of peers and colleagues. Within the Franchise, 6 of the 11 said qualified youth workers had inspired and influenced their youth work practice, a view reinforced by the other 5 who rated this as the second most inspirational. The question posed at HE1, as the pilot, was slightly different and all 4 said a mixture of the three – this option was not made available to the other groups. Likewise when asked whether a university/college or an employer was most influential, HE2 responses were mixed, 2 saying university and 2 saying employer, whereas most of the Franchise responses rated employers more influential; again HE1 responses were mixed. As seen earlier with skills and knowledge, a tension emerges here between sources of influence and inspiration. Less polarised than earlier, this tension sees practitioners and employers as the main source of influence and inspiration for those trainees engaged in workplace learning though students at HEIs were influenced or inspired by tutors as well as practitioners.

Tutors responses to the same questions displayed similar tendencies. On who is more influential on youth work practice, HE1 tutors, asked this question in a different form, answered that it was a mixture of both practitioners and academics. Whilst the Franchise tutor fell into line with his students saying that other qualified youth workers would be most influential in enhancing youth work practice,

followed by observations of good practice. He rated tutors, books and writers as the least influential. Of the two HE2 tutors, one felt unable to answer the question as he considered the choices offered made “artificial distinctions”; the other rated qualified practitioners as most influential, followed by tutors, followed by books. He commented that “initially youth workers are inspired by someone they have a good relationship with, either practitioners or tutors – sometimes these are the same”.

When asked which agency is more influential in enhancing youth work practice, one HE1 tutor responded that influences on learning delivered are determined less by where it is delivered (i.e. university or employers) and more by who delivers it. Two other tutors had opposing views: the Franchise tutor rated employers as the most influential and placed least importance on universities or colleges, whilst a HE2 tutor rated universities and colleges above employers. This HE2 tutor did suggest that, traditionally, the voluntary sector “governed” youth work practice and that only in recent years have “universities started having an influence.” This comment is a reminder that the community of learning involves those in the voluntary and community sectors as well as in the maintained and statutory sector.

Tutors perspectives on what has been influential differed slightly from that of their students. However, both groups agreed that trainee youth workers are more likely to be influenced and inspired, initially at least, by practitioners and practice more than by academics and theorists. It is an oversimplification but from the sources of inspiration, skills, knowledge and understanding what appears to be constructed within practice is an employer’s requirements for youth work whereas the classroom tends to provide a menu from which trainees construct the kind of youth worker they want for themselves.

Reflection

Aware beforehand that reflectivity might emerge as a bridge between work-based and classroom-based learning and between ‘skills’ and ‘knowledge and understanding’, we invited respondents to say how their training encouraged reflective learning and practice. We invited them to define reflective learning and say how they are currently encouraged to participate, if they are, in such learning. We then asked them to evaluate its importance as a developmental tool for them personally or professionally or for their organisation. As a summative evaluation, we asked them if they were unable to find

time to reflect on their practice ever again, how would this affect their youth work?

When asked about reflective practice, there were no marked differences in the responses of all three student groups. Most respondents had a good understanding of what reflective practice means and all agreed that reflective practice is important for personal and professional and organisational development. Most stated, despite the process being important and beneficial to practice, that they were given little or no time for reflection within their jobs. Within their training on the other hand, classroom-based and work-based, reflective practice was included as a core element.

Similarly, tutors felt that reflective practice was a vital element of youth work practice. However, there were differing opinions on the effects if it was lacking. For example, whilst he thought an unlikely situation for professional practitioners, the Franchise tutor doubted that the lack of reflection would have any impact on their practice. Contrastingly, one of the HE2 tutors felt that reflection is so important that if it were eliminated, the practice would no longer be classed as youth work. This line of questioning triggered two tutors to express, unsolicited, their disregard for NVQ qualifications claiming they don't promote reflective learning, focusing instead, they said, on the performance of tasks in the absence of an underpinning understanding of why these tasks needed to be done. Whilst these two tutors, one in HE2 and the other in the Franchise, shared distaste for such qualifications, only the Franchise tutor went further by criticising the perception that higher education qualifications were necessary for recognition as a good youth worker.

Summary of Classroom & Workplace Learning

After speaking with 4 lecturers, a practitioner/tutor and 19 students, the general view is that work-based learning is more effective for learning practical skills and workplace specific knowledge with classroom-based learning seen as more effective at imparting knowledge and understanding. All respondents felt that reflective practice is a vital element in the profession and that, whilst it is firmly embedded in both styles of learning, it is not as prevalent within practice where pressures to perform perhaps bringing constraints of time and opportunity.

Tensions exist over the home of professional learning with the franchise tutor considering trainees to be supplementing their practice by entering the classroom whilst HE tutors saw practice

cementing classroom-gained knowledge. Views also competed on skill-acquisition with the workplace seen as either as the source of youth work skills or a place to accelerate learning or a site for the practical application of classroom knowledge. The expectation on the classroom to use knowledge from the workplace to embed theory was not matched by practice in the workplace being used to ground theory.

Some common understandings did emerge in that higher education gave youth work knowledge and understanding and enabled a reflective return to the workplace whilst work-based learning provided youth work skills.

Whilst there are similarities and differences between workplace and classroom-based learning and both present different possibilities and constraints, there is some evidence to suggest practice has been constructed to produce an employer's requirements for youth work whereas in the classroom, trainees (employees) construct the kind of youth work they want for themselves as practitioners.

In the youth work contexts examined here, we can refine Hodkinson's expectation of unequal interactions by suggesting the ideological tensions playing out are not simply between those who value a profession based on practice skills and those preferring one based on theory but instead between those who see the workplace as the site of the integration of youth work skills, knowledge and understandings and those who see the classroom as the place of such praxis. This tension is at the heart of the kind of education that best equips professionals and informed by research carried out by Cheetham and Chivers (2000, p383) who see professional development as requiring a blend of five learning domains - professional knowledge with workplace competence, rational and reflective thinking, innovative practice and continuous learning.

Whilst not intended to delve into professional development, the research here was interested in how students picked up their skills, knowledge and understanding, how they were inspired to become youth workers and their views on reflexivity and that's what this chapter has reported. We also wanted to find out why trainees chose the education provider they did and what they considered were the outcomes of their professional education. We also wanted to provide them with an opportunity to sum up, as members of the youth work profession, what they thought about the availability of these two forms of training for future students. It is to these situational factors that this report now turns.

5

Learners & Their Situations

Whilst it did not initially shape it, professional development grew in importance as the research unfolded. Reported on in the last chapter, we were interested in how students picked up their skills, knowledge and understanding prior to their entry to the profession, how they were inspired to become youth workers and their views on reflection. But we also wanted to find out why trainees chose the education provider they did and what they considered to be the outcomes of their education. This theme saw professional development become a more central feature since we asked about possible outcomes of professional courses but, more simply here, we wanted to provide students with an opportunity to sum up, as prospective members of the youth work profession, what they thought about two different forms of training – work-based and classroom-based. It is these situational factors that we now discuss.

We know from the previous chapter that generally students and tutors agreed that skills emerged more within practice, with knowledge and understanding coming mostly from classrooms. By examining motives behind students' choice of education provider and, as such, educational form, we thought inconsistencies uncovered between them might be explained. So section 3 of the questionnaire asked about choice in education provider. Multiple-choice tick boxes were provided and respondents were free to give more than one reason. The factors influencing respondents' choice can be grouped within five categories:

- pre-course knowledge e.g. recommended by somebody;
- practical or funding reasons e.g. employer paying course fees or having an arrangement with the provider;
- convenience e.g. training being close to home or work;
- the quality of the provider e.g. library facilities; and,
- personal practicality e.g. fitting in with the respondents lifestyle.

Franchise students' responses indicated that their choices were based less on convenience or quality and much more on practicality and

financial factors. The majority said that their choices were influenced by recommendations from friends, employers and colleagues with 11 pointing towards practical/funding factors. HE2 students also gave preference to practical factors, in particular that their employer had a pre-existing arrangement with the provider chosen. Pre-course knowledge and geographic convenience were also influential but no respondents in the Franchise nor at HE2 said they had made a choice based on the quality of the provider. HE1 students based their choice of provider primarily on factors relating to the quality of the provider, with all four respondents selecting 'good reputation', 'facilities' and 'library' as influencing their decision though, as with the other two groups, practical and funding factors were important with 75% making their choice because of arrangements between employer and provider and half because no fees were involved. No respondents from any of the groups identified either the availability of childcare facilities or the availability of student loans as a basis for their decision.

The Franchise and HE2 students both explained that their choice of provider was not a real one as theirs was the only provider close by. The students at HE2 had progressed on to the diploma from a local franchise programme and so here too, choice was restricted since this was the only practical option available. HE1 students, however, had a little more freedom about their choices, given the close proximity of other, albeit not Welsh, HE institutions though, again, close links between employers and this education provider saw students reporting they did not look at alternative providers because pathways to qualification were so clearly established. Exclusively 'work-based' pathways to professional qualifications were absent from this research as all Welsh-based students, even franchise ones, seeking to gain a JNC qualification², must currently engage at some point with an HE institution.

The second part of the question looked specifically at why respondents chose to undertake professional education and responses can be seen as either (1) related to work (2) to education, or (3) personal. HE2 students were almost evenly divided with 7 responses indicating work-related reasons, for example increased wages or improving youth work skills, and 8 answers falling into the education category, such as progression from other training, studying theories and ideas or simply to gain a university education. HE1 students also

² JNC – Joint Negotiation Committee for Youth & Community Staff. They are the body in England & Wales that approves courses of training that lead to professional youth work qualifications though they delegate this responsibility to Education & Training Standards Committees.

showed a spread of responses across these first two categories, all four cited skill, salary, prospects and career change as reasons for undertaking a professional qualification, while educational reasons such as training progression, increasing knowledge and studying theories and ideas also had a high rating amongst these respondents. Some personal reasons such as encouragement by family and "life changing experience" were also given by this group. Franchise students identified marginally more work-based factors than educational ones, but overall responses were reasonably balanced with 10 respondents stating they wished to improve youth work skills and 10 wishing to gain more knowledge. 5 respondents identified promotion opportunities and 3 identified progression from previous training.

These results indicate that whilst there were marginal differences between those students whose learning environment was work-based and those who were classroom-based, most respondents chose to undertake professional education for a mixture of work-related and educational reasons. It is the nature of professional qualifications that they carry with them the probability of a salary and career boost and so have a significant influence on the decision to start a course. What is interesting, however, is that all respondents, regardless of their 'route' identified just as many educational factors as they did work ones. It seems that no matter which route to qualification people take, they still hope to gain knowledge and understanding from their studies.

The last part of section 3 of the questionnaire asked respondents to make a clear choice between work-based and classroom-based learning as their preferred form of professional education. Of the 11 Franchise respondents, 7 chose work-based, 3 chose classroom based and one did not make a choice. Five of the reasons given centred on the value of experiential learning and "practical skills development". One respondent stated that "classroom learning gives good background knowledge but work-based is hands on and face-to-face with young people"; another respondent commented "you learn more from face-to-face than you ever can from a book. Situations arise and have to be dealt with there and then, no time to look in a book". Other comments acknowledged the ease of attendance, their course ran at weekends, and the fact that it "doesn't interfere with full-time work". Also commented on were the wide variety of students and the value of sharing ideas.

In HE2 two of the four respondents chose classroom-based learning, citing reasons such as credibility of qualification, enjoyment of the academic process and, as with franchise students, diversity of participants on the course. One respondent chose work-based learning, again reasoning that more knowledge can be gained from hands-on experience but also raising the issue of accessibility of education to all, this respondent felt that some workers would be deterred from going down the classroom-based route because they felt academically unable to do so, “[an individual] may not be as academic and this could cause problems in gaining professional qualifications for the job you already do”. One respondent did not make a choice.

The majority of HE1 students also chose classroom-based learning as their preferred route to professional qualifications with 3 out of the 4 so responding, although these did say that work-based placements were vital. The comments made in this group centred on the quality of the experience, perceived validity of the qualification and the quality of the teaching and learning. One respondent stated that “workers going through the franchise don’t get as good an education as I did. It can be quite rushed, ‘sausage-factory’ style.” The same respondent went on to question the quality of the teaching, not trusting that it is as good as that given in HE institutions. There was recognition amongst this group, however, that entirely classroom-based learning for this particular qualification is inappropriate, a necessity to achieve praxis where “...placements are also vital to be able to link theory to practice”.

Taking all three groups together there were 9 expressing a preference for classroom-based learning with 8 opting for work-based learning and 2 not indicating a preference.

Franchise students complained about the requirement to complete the qualification to progress their careers whilst not learning anything new by doing it. There was a general feeling amongst them of being required to complete a paper exercise rather than enhancing practice by gaining new knowledge, skills and understanding. This feeling was shared to a certain extent by the HE2 students, 3 of whom had progressed from a franchise programme onto the HE diploma, some of whom felt strongly that the JNC qualification is more a barrier for good, practical youth workers than it is a stepping stone.

Contrastingly, there was a general feeling amongst the student groups that work-based learning, particularly via a franchise route,

lacked credibility, that youth work practitioners were not best placed to deliver academic qualifications and that a need exists for youth work qualifications to remain academically credible (this is discussed in more detail in the focus group section on page 35). One respondent commented that work-based learning simply records and accredits existing skills rather than teaching new ones while another respondent discussed the “value” placed on academic qualifications in the professional sphere.

Looking at all responses, the general consensus was that classroom-based learning brings credibility to youth work qualifications, albeit from other professionals, rather than proof of an ability to work with young people, whilst work-base learning brings hands-on practical experience of the youth work role though not necessarily new skills. All respondents acknowledged the necessity for both types of learning although those who had gone down a primarily work-based route placed more emphasis on this type of learning and vice versa for those on a classroom-based route.

Table 2 below analysis the responses given in section 3 of the questionnaire.

Table 2 - Analysis of Section 3							
3.1 Factors influencing choice of education provider					HE 2	HE 1	F
Pre-course Knowledge	3	1	11	Recommended by colleague	1		2
				Recommended by friend			2
				Recommended by employer	2		7
				6 th Form college recommended		1	
Practical/ funding:	1	5	9	No fees involved	1	2	3
				Employer helped with fees	1		2
				Employer gave paid time off	1		
				Employer had arrangement with provider	3	3	4
Convenience:	3	1	1	Training close by to home	2		1
				Training close by to work	1	1	1
Quality of Provider:	0	5	3	Good Library		1	1
				Good facilities attached		1	
				Good reputation of provider		2	2
				PG Dip offered		1	

Personal Practicality:	1	2	7	Knew a tutor			5				
				Knew other students			1				
				Fitted in with lifestyle	1	2	1				
Other:	1	2	1	Dropped out of Uni when younger & wanted to get BA	1						
				Was going to do social work but changed mind		1					
				Life changing experience		1					
				Job description requirement			1				
3.2 Reasons for undertaking Professional Education					U	N	F				
Work based:	7	10	18	To change career	1	2	3				
				To increase wages	2	1					
				For promotion prospects		3	5				
				To improve youth work skills	1	4	10				
				Encouraged by employer	3						
Educational based:	7	11	15	Progression from other training	1	2	3				
				To get university education	2	3					
				To gain more knowledge	3	3	10				
				To study theories and ideas	1	3	2				
Personal:	1	2	4	Encouraged by family	1	2					
				Encouraged by colleague			3				
				Encouraged by employer			1				
3.3 Choice between WB & CB Learning											
Classroom Based:	HE 2	HE 1	F	Work based:	HE2	HE1	F	Both	HE 2	HE 1	F
	2	4	3		1	0	7		1	0	1

Focus Groups

To supplement data gained from individual questionnaires, each of the three sets of students was invited to meet as a focus group to talk about their collective views of their profession. Questions used were intended to provide an opportunity for each group to discuss openly how the nature of their training affected the status of youth work as a profession. Focus groups, as a research method, can encourage more confident contributions since the researcher ceases to be the only recipient of an opinion, views can be expanded upon and individuals can emphasise or build on the contributions of others. This

generative capacity was particularly useful here since individual members of the focus groups were known to each other though established patterns of interaction tended to continue and ranks may have closed over some sensitive and prohibited topics. Generally, when we asked each group how much they felt their training impacted on their professional status, they gave open and frank responses.

Impact of Training on Professional Status

Generally, the groups felt youth work was not understood as a professional endeavour by those outside or even within it since those in the voluntary sector, we were told, were not afforded the same esteem as those in statutory services. Within the Franchise group there was a certain level of mistrust of academic qualifications, with more emphasis being placed on ability to do the job than on an ability to write academic compositions: "a qualification shows that you can write an essay not that you can break up a fight...". There was also some acknowledgement of a need for qualifications to be accessible to all, whether the inequality to be addressed lay in the ability of the student to perform at degree level or in their ability to access HE education, for example if they work full-time or live a significant distance from the institution. There was recognition that an increase in status comes with university level qualifications though there was questioning of the increased professionalisation of youth work where some attributes, behaviours and values familiar within more developed professions appeared to clash with those embedded within youth work. A similar comment was made by one student about employers. "*Youth work principles*", she said, "*often clash with organisational principles but make it difficult to get the results.*" It was considered important to have professional status so that promotion opportunities, salaries and conditions of service are appropriate. Some students reported an increase in respect as 'youth work in schools' brought greater levels of appreciation from the teaching profession.

We asked if the location of qualifications within higher education brought any status to legitimise the profession. Some thought lower qualifications (e.g. NVQs) would diminish the possibility of parity with other professions. Most expressed concern about the division between young people and their youth workers generated by their workers studying for academic qualifications. This resulted in some unqualified workers being put off professional training and some who have undertaken it discovering the academic demands were too challenging.

With all-graduate entry to the profession arriving in 2010, it was asked if a degree is necessary to perform as a good youth worker? There was an acceptance that those undertaking the qualification should be paid more and those without it, capped at a lower salary. It was also accepted that all-graduate entry would bring parity with other professions (such as teaching) with a general agreement that university qualifications ease such recognition. NVQs, it was felt, were of a lower status than university qualifications though some considered these a necessary additional route to a professional qualification for those less comfortable with academic study. One student explained the tension:

" I really don't like classroom based learning but I had to come to uni cause it's the only option available to me for qualification, so why should someone else get to achieve that qualification without having to write essays or do presentations? If I can do it anyone can – so they should!"

Some students at HE1 argued that an NVQ Level 4 should be made available with the provisos that underpinning theories and knowledge are included along with a level of commitment that is commensurate with that for degree students. This, they felt, would make an NVQ4 equal to the degree and sufficient to be recognised as a professional youth work qualification. Students in the Franchise group stated strongly that a degree is not necessary to perform well and indeed commented that in some cases the opposite is true, "... *there are 21 year olds coming out of uni with JNC qualification but they have no experience*". This group felt that a degree won't change either the person holding it or the perceptions of that person held by fellow youth work practitioners or those outside the profession. They also commented that imminent all-graduate entry will inevitably result in the profession losing skills contributed by those who don't have the academic ability to study at degree level but who are nevertheless excellent youth workers.

Where respondents felt that work-based routes were weakest was in their lack of vigour and poor teaching quality. The quality of teaching and, to a lesser extent, the quality of youth work practice was questioned by all three groups of students. One respondent commented "... *all qualified youth workers are not the same, regardless of route to qualification, some should not pass – they have the same status as us but don't deserve it.*"

Largely these weaknesses were perceived to be about a lack of consistency in (1) the quality across franchises, (2) the content of taught elements and (3) the variation in support provided to students. This third concern was emphasised in comments about fieldwork placements and inconsistency of fieldwork supervisors when assessing competency of trainees: "... workers in the field need to fail students on placement if practice quality is not there"... "fit for practice – if in the workplace, who judges this?"... "Local Authorities are keen to pass people regardless of their ability." Interestingly, the Franchise group commented that they did not trust the capabilities of university students with parallel apprehensions raised by the other two groups over franchise routes, for example, "questionable consistency of marking" and "reinforcement of professional values such as time keeping". This could be perceived as mistrust for whichever form of education a respondent had not taken part in, however, notably the majority of students in the two HE groups had either been on a franchise themselves previously or worked in an environment where they regularly witnessed others on a franchise. These perceived weaknesses and criticisms could be seen as a request for standards to be consistently applied.

We asked youth work students if they expected to be treated in a similar way to teachers, social workers and other professionals and if their training should reflect this? From the point of view of equal and relative pay structures, all groups of respondents agreed that the first step was to have parity of qualification with other professions (although the necessity of this related to performance was still questioned in some groups). However, most felt that the level of qualification, whilst influential on the perceptions of other professionals, was less important than raising awareness generally of the profession and the value of youth work. Some students suggested that since some professions, such as teaching, had similar elements to youth work that it would be appropriate for the two qualifications to have modules in common. This, it was thought, would not only raise awareness of each other's professions, it would also dispel myths on both sides and would highlight commonalities between the two professions.

We asked the three sets of students if they felt work-based training is as 'professional' as that based in HE? All groups concurred though differing opinions emerged on the actual professionalism exhibited by the two types of training. HE based training is perceived as achieving professional status. Indeed the profession's pay and conditions clearly makes that distinction, identifying two levels of

pay for those unqualified, the support worker scale, and those qualified, the 'professional' worker scale. Currently in Wales, it is not possible to gain a JNC qualification without engaging with higher education at some point, work-based learning only takes one so far.

How one becomes professionally qualified has no bearing on the JNC, the professional pay scales apply to all those successfully completing a recognised course. Whilst some respondents questioned whether youth workers could or should accept the "cultures, behaviours and value bases of other professionals" it was generally accepted that HE qualifications carry a legitimacy and status that is not assigned to work-based qualifications.

Need for a Regulatory Body

Finally, focus groups were invited to comment on the need for a regulatory body that, amongst other functions, would maintain a register of youth workers in Wales. All respondents agreed that this would be a good idea however many more problems were envisaged than were seen to be solved by this. Questions were raised about who should be responsible for coordinating and regulating such a body, "*[It] needs to be a democratic structure – leading positions elected by members not by government quangos or employers, e.g. WYA³ not independent cause funded by WAG⁴, therefore unable to resist when it was subsumed into YALO⁵*". Some respondents felt that a regulatory body should be made up of "*current practising workers, trainers and managers*" in order for it to carry legitimacy and not become another government initiative to measure and quantify what we do, it "*needs to be an independent audit of practice by peers*". The type of registration was also questioned, for example, whether it should be a 'youth work license' and whether CRB checks should form part of registration. Should a regulatory body be simply a registration tool or should it, like in the case of medical personnel, carry a training requirement? Respondents also wanted to know whether it would involve fees, who would pay them and who would receive the revenue. Whilst some of the students felt that the vague idea is a good one, it needs a lot more clarification. Others felt that a well thought out regulatory body is even more important than the level and type of qualification. It is clear from these discussions that this concept requires further investigation.

³ Wales Youth Agency.

⁴ Welsh Assembly Government.

⁵ Youth & Adult Learning Opportunities Branch of WAG.

Summary

Choice was not always exercised by learners over which form of education to go with since there was a limited availability of courses or the choice was pre-determined by the employer or by a franchise having links with an HEI. If choice was real, practical and financial motivations dominated with quality of provision only being seen as important in one institution.

Regardless of their 'route', respondents identified just as many educational factors as they did work ones and no matter which route, people hope to increase their knowledge and understanding. However, there was some frustration with course content and in having to endure an academic process without benefiting from new learning.

Looking at all responses together, the consensus was that classroom-based learning brings credibility to youth work qualifications, albeit from other professionals rather than proof of an ability to work with young people, whilst work-base learning brings hands on practical experience of the youth work role though not necessarily new skills. All respondents acknowledged the necessity for both types of learning although those who had gone down a primarily work-based route placed more emphasis on this type of learning and vice versa.

Focus groups called for a new kind of profession combined with a new kind of occupation – a professional practitioner. They saw the need for this to be matched by a new form of professional education that enables those with practice competences to translate their tacit knowledge of youth work gained through experience into an explicit set of understandings that maintain a required level of professional knowledge. Similarly, those with academic capabilities but lacking in professional skills need to take explicit knowledge gained and integrate this with learning from face-to-face experiences. This more integrative form of professional education that these students have called for but not so far experienced, is more in tune with an apprenticeship model, and such integration was not limited to those engaged in youth work but also with other professionals such as teachers. They called for greater consistency between providers so that quality was maintained between teaching and practice. A strong regulatory body consisting of practitioners, managers and trainers and separate from government was seen as welcome in improving the status of the profession.

6

The Research Methodology

Whilst both researchers can be perceived to hold a vested interest in classroom-based learning, this was minimised by subjecting the findings to a duality of perspective. The researchers asked were mindful to consider what a supporter of workplace learning would make of each finding and what a person keen on classroom-based learning would make of this outcome. This duality of perspective was aided by both being current youth work practitioners and so appreciative of the importance of both forms of learning. Both engaged with open minds, ready to give value to both forms of learning – classroom and work-based. However, both soon discovered that, for youth work training, any separation, although easily achieved, is a false dichotomy and delineation. Instead, it is a question of balance where the package of skills, knowledge and understanding that professional youth workers require are engendered in part in practice, in part in classrooms and in part in the blending of these two learning forms. It was therefore important early on to look to previous research and literature for help in examining such balanced learning.

A short literature search was undertaken at the outset. Initially this examined on-line publications before turning to written texts. It was found that whilst a body of research on different learning forms exists, the literature on professional education within youth work is sparse. Whilst this might be expected for a relatively small professional field, it meant this research had to draw on more general or parallel research on classroom-based and workplace based learning. Two articles proved particularly useful (Hodkinson & Schulz) though these were supplemented with literature on 'reflective learning', 'professional education', 'apprenticeships' and 'higher education'. Both researchers, as practitioners and tutors, have kept up-to-date on developments in the youth work profession but have sought to deepen this understanding by making use of colleagues from the two fields under study. One was the past chair of the professional body for youth work in Wales, Dewi Roberts and the previous, recently retired, franchise co-ordinator for NEWI, John Parrish. Whilst both helped to improve the data collection tools and

the final draft report, any errors in this report remain those of the authors.

The data collection stage consisted of piloting proposed questions early on in HE1 before rolling these out to others in this institution then to HE2 and the Franchise. In HE1, individual interviews were held with each respondent and the questionnaires were recorded by the researcher. In HE2, one respondent had an individual interview, the other three, due to time limitations, were interviewed as a group though each completed their own questionnaire after each question was discussed and clarified in the group. At the Franchise group, again due to time constraints and to the largeness of the group, the questionnaires were completed by the individuals and a researcher talked them through each question.

Two different types of respondent were targeted in each place, students and tutors. It was envisaged that these two types would present different perspectives and so two sets of questions were designed with this in mind (see appendices). Whilst answers are framed by these different perspectives, by mirroring the two perspectives in the question design, we anticipated different but comparable data.

Based on the pilot at HE1, some of the questions were altered, mainly to make it more difficult for interviewees to prevaricate, to encourage more distinctiveness between work-based and classroom-based learning. The data from the pilot, though less emphatic in some responses, has been included into the analysis as views gathered remain useful.

As well as the quantitative data collected through the questionnaires, each group of respondents took part in a focus group discussion looking at reflective learning, the perceived status given by qualifications and the need, or not, for professional registration of youth workers. Whilst intended mostly as a basis for further research by one of the authors (Miller) as part of an MA dissertation, these sessions generated interesting debates and discussions. These debates were structured using pre-determined questions intended to channel collective responses so that comparisons could be made later of each group's views (see appendices). These debates were reproduced in transcripts and are analysed in chapter 5.

In the Franchise group, but not HE1 nor HE2, the tutor was present during the focus group and so this may have influenced the debate

that ensued. Because of the small number involved and their geographic spread, tutors were not provided with an opportunity to meet as a group and their views were gained only through individual interviews.

The writing up and analysis of the data collected was done over an extended period due to one of the researchers moving to a new job outside Wales. In order to accommodate this change, the work on this report was re-scheduled and so was completed a number of months after the fieldwork had taken place.

Limitations of the Methodology:

There were a number of practical arrangements that may affect the reliability of the data collected. Respondents in the student groups were perhaps not as representative as might have been since we were told that some potential respondents were unable to attend because they were working therefore making it difficult to secure a full group at each of the three places. At HE1, students came in to college specially to take part in the research but numbers were not high. At HE2, due to a combination of factors including work commitments, distance to travel, time constraint, pressure of college work, we could only interview students available on the day and students needed to come out of classes to do so, therefore both they and the course tutors were significantly inconvenienced. This meant that any pre-determined sampling strategy would have proved ineffective.

Also at HE2, there was a constraint of available time since the interviewer was available for only one day and so a limited number of interviews took place. The Franchise group was larger because the interviewer was able to dovetail contact with a taught session. However, this brought an inconvenience to the students' and their tutor's normal routine.

This study had also hoped to question a number of students who were engaged in NVOs related to youth work but had difficulty in identifying such students in time. We understand a number of employers in the youth work field are considering making use of such vocational qualifications though we could only identify one project where these were underway, a local authority in south Wales, but time did not permit extending the research to the students and tutors involved.

Focus groups whilst sometimes used for background (McQueen & Knussen, 2002, p209) were used here after the completion of individual questionnaires to stimulate and orientate discussion towards future professional matters partly to check out each group's awareness of such issues and partly to encourage creative and collaborative debate. As anticipated by McQueen & Knussen, the 3 focus groups generated ideas and views from the interactive dynamic that did not emerge from the more pre-determined questionnaires. There appeared to be more openness, an advantage seen by Pole & Lampard (2002, p133), though sometimes views became locked within the initiator's parameters requiring an intervention by the researcher to avoid premature conclusions.

Limitations of the Findings

This was always intended to be a small scale piece of research to contribute to the debate around the balance between classroom and workplace learning. It was not undertaken to demonstrate the particular advantages or disadvantages of one form of learning compared with another. Limitations are therefore fairly obvious. There were only 19 students and 4 tutors involved, all from training agencies associated with higher education although all actively engaged in professional training that included different proportions of in-the-job, on-the-job and in-the-classroom learning. This is the main flaw in this research - the respondents, even on the Franchise, have or will be involved in classroom-based learning, and that all classroom-based learners will have been involved in work-based learning as well. The distinction between these forms of learning emerged and remained blurred, making differentiation difficult for those involved.

The definitions we provided in advance of workplace and classroom-based learning may have determined the responses we received later in that we suggested that participation in practice only takes place in the workplace and that this is within the control of the student/trainee under supervision by a practitioner. We also pre-determined in our definition of it, that classroom learning is led by a tutor and takes place in the company of other learners. Whilst these definitions were intended to bring clarity to a contested area, there are obvious examples such as apprenticeships where these definitions fall down.

The tightness in terms of time for data collection was matched as an issue by the protracted period involved afterwards in drawing

together the data, analysing it and synthesising this into a report. On a positive note, the findings here can be used to inform, even re-ignite a debate around the training and education of professional youth workers in Wales. To stimulate this debate, this research throws up some important questions.

Further Research Questions

These findings are not thought to be generalisable because the sample was too small and those involved were selected by others mostly on the basis of availability. Different findings might be found from a bigger and more representative sample of students and tutors though we suspect from the strength of opinion found that the same call for a new form of professional education would emerge. The research did find competing views that could be usefully explored by further research: -

- how a regulatory body might work to encompass the diversity of interests in youth work practice – this topic needs further investigation and research with a wider audience
- the vigour of fieldwork placements and their supervision came up from different groups – more information is required on the skills and knowledge needed by supervisors. Do they need more support, time or clearer instructions?
- whilst reflective practice has become a common feature of professional learning, how it is developed by youth workers in order to engender reflectivity amongst young people has a particular importance for the education of youth workers. Someone could usefully explore the tension between the necessity for reflective practice in order to define it as youth work and the lack of capacity to carry it out effectively in practice.

Those involved called for a new kind of professional education – creating the new professional youth work practitioner: providing a new form of education that combines workplace learning with professional knowledge – it's not academic knowledge – it's youth work academic knowledge and as such it provides professional practitioner's knowledge. If these ideas are taken up, at some later date it might be useful to revisit this research to evaluate changes and the impact on students, practitioners, trainers, tutors and courses.

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WE WOULD LIKE YOUR CO-OPERATION!

North East Wales Institute of Higher Education is currently leading a research project into how higher education courses and work-based routes prepare people to become professional youth workers. On the one hand, the view is that professionals located within practice settings are those best placed to provide professional training whilst, on the other hand, those within higher education institutions (universities) who are familiar with ideas and theories are best able to deliver professional education. Whilst there is usually a blend of these two approaches, more recently a range of different apprenticeship style schemes has emerged in Wales. Some participants are described as workers-in-training, others as unqualified workers, some known as trainees but all indicating that employers are investing more in 'home grown' workers drawn from their pool of volunteers or part-time staff and offered the opportunity to engage in professional training. It is the balance between on-the-job and off-the-job learning that will be the focus of this research.

This project is being funded by NEWI from income generated through consultancies and externally funded research.

As an experienced researcher, I am supervising this project through one of our postgraduate students, Helen Miller, will carry out the interviews. She will collect, collate and analyse the completed questionnaires and present findings and conclusions to the research group made up of representatives from the field and the youth & community team in NEWI.

If you have any concerns about this research, the approach by the interviewer or want to find out more about it, please contact myself, my contact details are at the top of this letter.

I hope you decide to support this research project and, if you do, can I thank you for your help.

Yours

Hamish Murphy
Principal Lecturer in Youth & Community Studies

Students/Trainees Questionnaire

This is a survey of workers-in-training in Wales. Anything you tell me will be kept CONFIDENTIAL and NO INDIVIDUAL'S IDENTITY WILL BE REVEALED, although your comments may be used.

ALL SECTIONS SHOULD BE COMPLETED BY THE INTERVIEWER

Before the Interview Starts: Name of Interviewer

Date of Interview..... Time.....

Place

Part One – You and Your Job

1. Could you give me a few details about yourself?

1a What's your Name..... 1.2 Your Gender? Female Male

1b Your Ethnic Origin: *Circle one answer and ensure that the respondent indicates their own ethnic identity*

White Mixed Asian Black Other

1c How old are you? under 21 21-40 41-54 55+

1d Do you consider yourself to have a disability? Yes No

1.1 Employment

1.1a Tell me about your main youth work job at the moment. Which of the following is it?

Not in a Youth Work Job currently Full-time OR Part-time OR Fractional

In Statutory Sector OR In Voluntary Sector In Private Sector

Casual OR Temporary OR Fixed Term OR Permanent

1.1b What is your current job title?.....

Part Two – Your Professional Education & Training

2 Tell us about your professional learning to date:

2a What training and education have you done that has or is preparing you to become a professional youth worker?

2a Supplementary – which of these is mainly work-based learning, including placements [Interviewer puts WB next to these] and which is mostly learned from being in a classroom [Interviewer writes CR next to these] [Some may have both WB & CR and some may have something else]?

This next section invites you to compare workplace and classroom based learning. Workplace learning is learning that takes place on-the-job and during placements, that grows from taking part in the practice of youth work and that will necessarily involve contact with young people and be facilitated by an experienced youth worker whereas classroom-based learning is off-the-job, generated from involvement in the study of youth work in the company of other learners and taught by a tutor or trainer.

2b What specific Youth Work skills, practical or intellectual, have you been able to pick up or develop from your professional training & education?

Skills gained from Work-Based Learning	Skills gained from Classroom-Based Learning

2c What knowledge and understanding (ideas, theories or known solutions) about Youth Work have you gained from these different types of training?

Knowledge and Understanding gained from Work-Based Learning	Knowledge and Understanding gained from Classroom-Based Learning

2d If this training and education has enabled you to improve your practice as a Youth Worker, can you tell us where you think this improvement has come from?

Work-Based Learning has helped me to improve my youth work in the following ways:	Classroom-Based Learning has helped me to improve my youth work in the following ways:

2e Please evaluate how you gained your youth work skills, knowledge and understanding (*please circle the correct answer*): (1) Workplace Learning Only, (2) Mostly Workplace Learning, (3) In Equal Measure, (4) Mostly Classroom Learning (5) Classroom Learning Only:

	Workplace Learning Only	Mostly Workplace Learning	In Equal Measure	Mostly Classroom Learning	Classroom Learning Only
My Youth Work Skills were gained from...	1	2	3	4	5
My Knowledge & Understand about Youth Work was gained from...	1	2	3	4	5

2f (1) How has your training encouraged you to carry out reflective learning/practice?

(2) What do you understand by the term 'reflective learning'?

(3) How are you currently encouraged to participate, if at all, in reflective learning?

2g Is reflective learning important to your work? Yes No

If Yes, please rate and comment upon the following possible reasons for reflective learning. Place a 1 in the rate column for the most important, 2 for the next most important and so on...

Reasons	Rate	Why this reason is important:
It is important for my own personal development		
It is important for my professional development		
It is important for my organisation's development		
It is important for other reasons (please state).		

2h If you were unable to find time to reflect on your practice (ever again), how would this affect your youth work?

2i Are you currently involved in any process of continuing professional develop?

Yes No

If YES, is this a useful process (in what ways)?

2j Place in order the following ways in which your youth work practice might have been enhanced. Put a 1 in the Rate column for the most influential; 2 for the next most influential etc

	Rate
Learning inspired by a qualified youth worker	
Learning inspired by a tutor or academic	
Learning inspired a book or writer	
Learning inspired by something else (please state)	

2k Place in order the following agencies that might have enhanced your youth work practice. Put a 1 in the Rate column for the most influential; 2 for the next most influential etc

	Rate
A university or college	
An employer	
Some other agency (please state)	

2l What do you believe were the strengths and drawbacks of the professional youth work training and education you've undertaken?

<i>Strengths:</i>	<i>Drawbacks:</i>

Part Three – Your Choice of Education Provider

3.1 On what basis did you make your choice of education provider when you decided to do professional youth work training? (Tick as many boxes as you like.)

Recommended

- by colleague by friend by employer
- Student Loan Available There were no fees involved
- Employer helped with fees Employer gave paid time-off
- Employer had arrangement with education provider
- Training close by to home Training close by to work
- Childcare available Good Library Good facilities attached
- Good reputation of provider I knew a tutor I knew other students
- Fitted in with my lifestyle Something else (please state)

3.2 What made you decide to undertake professional education?

- To change career increase my wages open up promotion prospects
- To return to work after raising children progress from other related training
- To get a university education improve my youth work skills
- To gain more knowledge study theories & ideas
- Encouraged by colleague Encouraged by employer
- Encouraged by family Something else (please state)

3.3 All other matters being equal, had your choice been between work-based learning and classroom-based learning, which would you have preferred?

- Work-based learning Classroom-based learning

Why do you believe this would have been your preference?

Can I thank you for helping with this research!

Questions Used with Educators

Students/Trainees Focus Groups Questions

This research is into the different kinds of professional educational for youth-workers-in-training in Wales. Anything you tell me will be kept CONFIDENTIAL and NO INDIVIDUAL'S IDENTITY WILL BE REVEALED, although your comments may be used.

1. How much do you feel that you're training impacts on your status?
2. Does having HE based training give the profession any status, legitimise the profession?

Supplementary: If youth workers expect to be treated in a similar way to teachers, social workers, other professional does our training need to reflect this?

3. Do you feel that work based training is as 'professional' as HE based training?
4. Does the profession need a regulatory body that keeps a register of youth workers in Wales?

What form should such a regulatory body take?

Can I thank you for helping with this research!



Beyond Youth Work Practice