

A Practical Model for Youth Work Practice: Unpicking the Epistemology.

Sean Gallagher and Tony Morgan

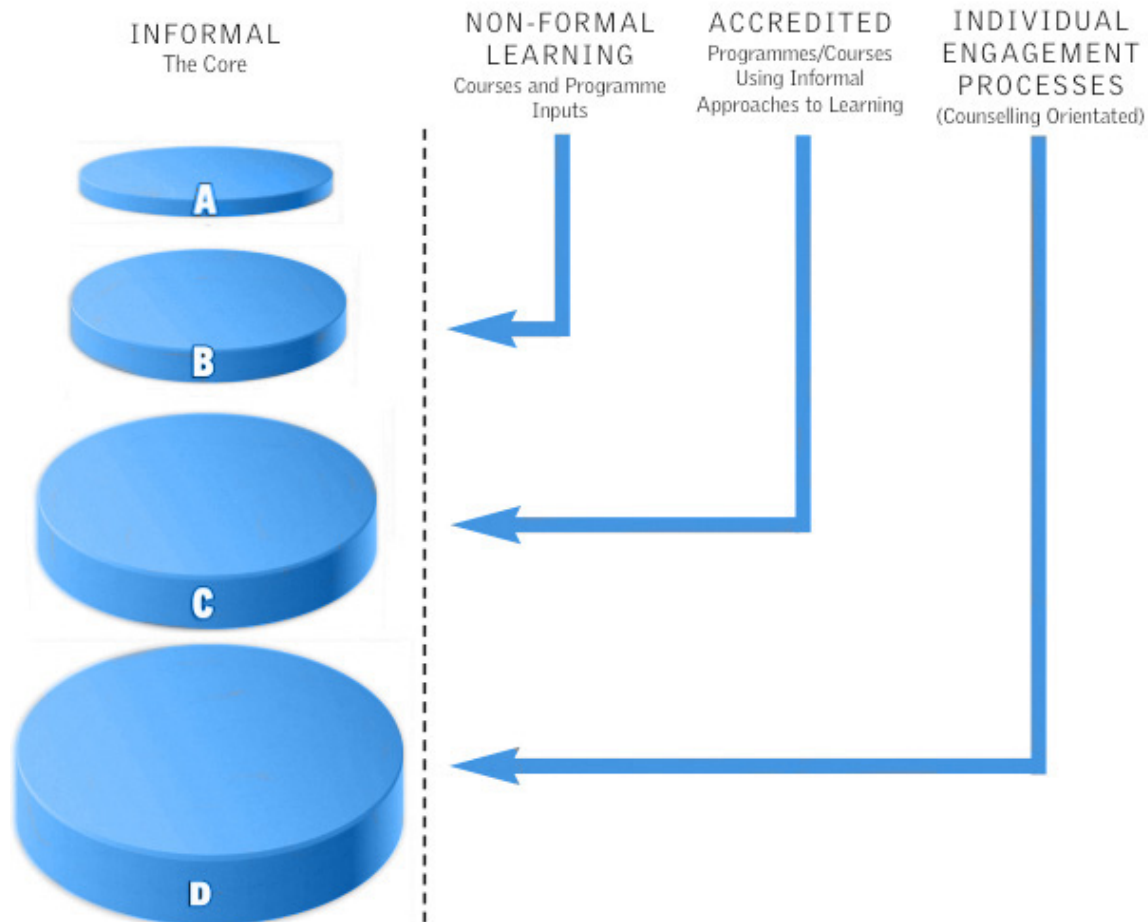
“If we are always arriving and departing, it is also true that we are eternally anchored. One's destination is never a place but rather a new way of looking at things.”
Henry Miller

Introduction:

This article is based on the premise that youth work practice is contained within a Community of Practice (Lave and Wenger. 1998) underpinned by and through experiential learning mirroring a quasi-Steiner approach to learning. The amalgamation of these three tenets make youth work, as practiced mainly by qualified workers, an interesting template that tips the balance of learning in favour of young people rather than based on a more formalized curriculum. The blending of both informal, non-formal and formal approaches within a youth work context is, we will argue, a more holistic approach to the development of learning which is based on the needs of young people. ‘Switching’ some disengaged young people onto the learning process needs to take cognisance of many extraneous variables, too many to mention. However, if a more blended approach to learning was implemented in youth projects and indeed some schools the outcome might be more productive for both the youth and society in general. We contend that the youth work should be weighted in favour of young people and that the ‘core’ should take precedence over the subject or formal qualification. For without this ‘switching-on’ for some young people they will not fully benefit from what is a prescriptive experience in the school system.

In a previous article (Gallagher and Morgan. 2013) it was argued that while youth work should be independent of the school system it could offer a valuable contribution that will complement the learning process. This article takes the debate further by suggesting a model that could be emulated in other youth work projects and that might form the basis of collaboration between the formal and informal sectors. Irrespective of your view of youth work as an informal vehicle for learning this article attempts to put some ‘empirical’ meat on the bones of learning in a youth work context. In other words youth work is based on tried and tested education principles alive and well in other disciplines and expounded through Lave and Wenger’s work on communities of practice, an understanding of experiential learning and encased in a quasi-Steiner approach to ‘schooling’. We hope this article stimulates debate and discussion around informal and, more importantly learning in a formal context.

A Youth Work Model



The model clearly separates the core from the more tangible other facets of youth work practice, purely for illustrative purposes. However, we firmly believe, as stated previously, that the core is central to youth work practice and tips the scales of learning towards the individual. We further contend that this core, while intrinsically informal in shape and approach, is nevertheless an effective learning process that often leads to the other elements, i.e. non-formal learning; accredited programmes and individual engagement. We would further suggest that it is the core that makes youth workers effective in the formal schooling environment and that without this core the youth worker has problems in the formal sector. Many youth work projects feel, rightly or wrongly, that this essential element of youth work practice is being jettisoned in favour of measurable quantifiable outcomes (Gallagher and Morgan. 2013) and have difficulty articulating the importance of this approach even though they know how important it is to youth work practice. The following example is an illustration of how learning, in this Core informal world, has as much credibility and currency as that of the formal system. It should be

noted, that the three columns beside the Core are not de facto endorsing a more formal approach to learning, they are acknowledging that non-formal and formal approaches to learning can be enhanced when a stronger core has been established in some young people.

The nature of learning in the Core.

Over twenty years ago I [one of the authors of this article] started a big band: Young people were trained to read and to play music. It was a mixed band boys and girls in which the differing styles and abilities, gifts and talents of the musicians who came at the process of learning from different routes, blended.

There was within the ensemble two trumpet players who could improvise when playing jazz music. One learned his craft and honed his ability from listening to CDs and playing along, the other went through the formal process of learning and grading gaining a diploma in trumpet playing and a degree in music. One an organic self-taught player the other educated in his understanding and disciplined to produce the exceptional.

What was the outcome? Each could produce, when called upon, interesting solos and with each performance the solo would become more nuanced and developed. Each came at it with a unique and individually formed ability, capacity and capability; each in turn offered something unique and different to the sound of the ensemble and to the rest of the band. I, with no formal qualifications myself recognised the value of love, passion, ability and difference of approach to achieve a shared aspiration goal and vision. They had different reasons for coming to play the same instrument and utilizing it in a unique and profound manner for the betterment of self and others.

As with the analogy of the individual components of a band, each individual musician and talent with unique strengths and abilities who coalesce around the production of a shared sound, youth workers come to the realisation of their symphony of service to young people through and with a myriad of strengths and capabilities visions and experiences. Some come from an organically and intuitive sense of practice and learning, others from a more explicitly learnt and theoretical process of engagement.

Youth work is a 'Community of Practice'.

Youth work we would contend, underpinned by and through evidence based practice, draws upon the development of knowledge directly related to youth work practice. Some workers passionate about external activities, football, sports the physical development of youth, others more circumspect and influenced about the need to evidence their practice through a formal educative setting and attainment nevertheless with a shared objective, to enhance the potential of youth work practice as a process of learning.

What do we mean by this? In a recent article (Gallagher and Morgan 2012) we outlined the need for youth work to embrace both a formal (curriculum driven) and an informal (process driven) approach to youth work practice. Arguing that the formal conventional approach usually assumed contexts are invariant (Guile and Young 2002) and consequently that the narrow transmission model of teaching is predicated upon an assumption that the message to be transferred is unproblematic and clearly understood rather than, as we would suggest, the necessity of incorporating how new skills can be understood in the lived reality of marginalised youth and their life experience (Guile and Young 2002)

Youth work practice seeks to balance a formal approach to the process of learning using accredited courses and evaluations with a recognisably informal approach, i.e. The Core, that seeks to develop young people in a more complementary manner. We would argue that the informal approach, process driven as it is, has as a foundation an underpinning epistemology that draws upon evidence based practice. Furthermore we would contend that 'experienced-based practice' has emanated from the lived experience of professional youth work practitioners. There is a need to ensure that what is offered, to young people as 'education' is more than what the Confederation of British Industry observes within the formal education system as an exam factory ethos with little or no evidence of the development of the person and their skills to socially engage and develop thus offering something of vitality to the community and society to which they will contribute..

For the authors, as will become evident later into this work, it is important to view this debate and proposed model as holding a particular relevance to the field of professional youth work and youth work practice rather than among those who work with young people per se in a more explicitly voluntary sphere of practice. We would contend that the professional youth worker has placed upon their shoulders explicit and determinant expectations that seek to ensure that their practice and work becomes more intentional and subsequently more professional in their pursuance of the goal of youth development.

Understanding knowledge development.

The ingredients within the core are themselves underpinned by a strong and implicit epistemology that itself is founded upon both youth and adult experiential learning processes that themselves are drawn from various and disparate disciplines.

Throughout this article we refer to epistemology, implicit, explicit or otherwise. It may be timely here to offer a working definition of the purposes of our consideration. Epistemology is a phrase coined by the Scottish philosopher James Frederick Ferrier (1808-1864) requires that we ask a series of questions.

- What is knowledge?
 - How is knowledge acquired?
 - To what extent is it possible for a given subject or entity to be known?
- (Encyclopaedia of Philosophy. Volume 3. 1967, Macmillan, Inc.)

Consequently what may be termed an epistemic culture will seek to understand and distinguish between various methods for the production of knowledge considered upon the premise of their varying contexts. This is best summed up by the author, Karin Knorr Cetina in her book *Epistemic Cultures*; she defines epistemic cultures as an "...amalgam of arrangements and mechanisms - bonded through affinity, necessity and historical coincidence - which in a given field, make up how we know what we know".

There is and remains a need to develop what Heidegger terms, '*an education in thinking*'. (1977). He observes the need to account for what is a clear need to explore new possibilities of experience and by doing so allow for, '*awakening a readiness for a possibility*' (ibid 378). If one applies this in terms of the epistemology of development and awareness then it is clear to the authors that this implicitly and explicitly occurs within the day to day practice and process of youth work.

We would posit the argument that youth workers use their experience to develop relationships and programmes that work in the interest of young people and that the '*natural*' result of this is a combination of the elements presented above, sometimes encapsulated within a more experiential learning model considered within a community of practice with an underlying element of scaffolding (Vygotsky cited in Rymarz and McLarney. 2011) especially where the relationship is longer-term between the youth worker and young person.

The central premise revolves around the belief that the youth worker is drawing on well-tested approaches that are grounded in empirical and experiential knowledge to enhance the life of young people. Youth workers will further draw on other models of practice and approaches which offer to them effective tools for use within the sphere of youth development. However, the main ingredients suggested permit professional workers to build their own model around a core of knowledge and understanding which we hope resonates with their current practice.

And the band played on: The challenge to meet the need.

The good life is a process, not a state of being. It is a direction not a destination. Carl Rogers.

To return to the original analogy, whereas all my band members could play their instruments to differing levels and standards, for a professional music teacher all could have learnt the epistemology of improvising from theoretical training. Youth workers have fundamental principles that shape their work, making contact, building relationships, association, discussion, challenging, developing, identifying and consequently offering opportunities etc. and this is similar to the development of 'a' band.

I didn't need to be trained in music to build a band. The organic trumpet player is like a young person who finds themselves in a youth group but likes to do their own thing.

The trained trumpet player has embraced the training needed to succeed by attaining qualifications and an understanding of what they are doing. The band is a community of practice that is guided by either a professional teacher or an interested person. Such a community offers different things to those involved but if the community of practice is run by a professional there are definite outcomes expected and drawn from experiential learning.

This experience emanates from various directions, the experience of the Director [myself with all the limitations in regards to music] through to the experience of the players. One self-taught to suit the needs of the band and the other trained to suit the needs of the band and his career. There was a degree of scaffolding in terms of learning a musical instrument, initially followed by specific training and accredited courses. All members built upon their experiences and were encouraged to develop at their own pace hence the underpinning of Steiner educational principles that we will consider in more detail further into the article.

At the centre of this model, whether it is aligned to youth work or an equally pertinent practice, is the individual and how they develop in a variety of ways and through a myriad of experiences personal and shared. Such experiences may be self-directed, prescribed by a set curriculum or by crisscrossing the formal and informal avenues open to them. As with the players in the band each individual whether in life or in youth work straddle varying degrees of competence, capability, capacity, ability and experience.

The central tenet underpinning all of this is our belief that there is room for both the process driven learning and the various other considered constituent elements deemed necessary to meet the needs of individuals coupled with an identification and layering of additional knowledge and understanding that complements their contextual needs.

Therefore in developing this model we have done so based upon the belief that it will illustrate the interconnection between what we term, 'the core', which is process driven and the various other elements that add to and complement youth development. However, the main claim that we present is that the core, which may be viewed as of lesser importance to youth development than 'measurable outcomes' from programmes and accredited courses, is in reality of greater importance, underpinned as it is by and with a very determined epistemology emanating as it does from other more disparate disciplines.

The Core Dimensions:

*People can't live with change if there's not a changeless **core** inside them. The key to the ability to change is a changeless sense of who you are, what you are about and what you value." Stephen R. Covey*

Let us now consider and examine each dimension of the core as they underpin an epistemology of youth work. Although we contend that these three theoretical concepts

appear to resonate with understanding youth work practice and youth development we would posit the belief that other principles may in fact provide evidence towards the same goal. However, it is our contention that these three theoretical concepts are worthy of active consideration as we attempt to understand generic youth work practice. What follows is a 'brief' analysis of these interrelated theoretical concepts:

- Community of Practice.
- Steiner Education
- Experiential learning.

Communities of Practice (Lave and Wenger.)

'Now more than ever, it is vital to encourage all areas of young people's intellectual and personal capabilities and to recognise that doing this is not at odds with their academic development'.

Professor Ken Robinson

Lave and Wenger observe that learning occurs within the context of a 'community of practice' aided by fellow learners and an expert. The examples they offer relate in the main to apprenticeships in clothing, and dressmaking and indicate that there are skills to learn and that learning is applied. Youth work, as a community of practice, has many of the ingredients to be found within the apprenticeship system and is, in a similar way to Lave and Wenger's model, a community in which and from which learning occurs and occurs through both formal but more pertinently the informal approach. Peer learning and increasingly learning outside the community [*through the use of technology, for example*] alongside the guidance of the expert, in a given context can assist, we contend, youth development within a community of practice.

For Lave and Wenger (1998:98),

"The concept of community underlying the notion of legitimate peripheral participation, and hence of 'knowledge' and its 'location' in the lived-in world, is both crucial and subtle."

Within this statement they are alluding to the concept of a 'community of practice' using a variety of professions to illustrate their point,

"The community of practice of midwifery or tailoring involves much more than the technical knowledgeable skill involved in delivering babies or producing clothes. A community of practice is a set of relations among persons, activity, and world, over time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping communities of practice."

(Lave and Wenger. 1998:98)

We contend that youth work practice and engagement, is a 'community of practice' clearly defined and developed crossing the different aspects of the lives of young

people but contained within a well-defined boundary, often termed a youth club or youth project.

Interestingly, Lave et al (1998:98) observe that participation in the cultural practice in which any knowledge exists is an epistemological principle of learning, a sentiment that these authors share and wholly endorse.

Lave and Wenger offer the following to illustrate what they mean by a community of practice.

“For example, in most high schools there is a group of students engaged over a substantial period of time learning physics. What community of practice is in the process of reproduction? Possibly the students participate only in the reproduction of the high school itself. But assuming that the practice of physics is also being reproduced in some form, there are vast differences between the way high school physics students participate in and give meaning to their activity and the way professional physicists do. The actual reproducing community of practice, within which school children learn about physics, is not the community of physicists but the community of schooled adults.” (1998:99-100)

Although quite a protracted observation the above nevertheless provides some indication about what a ‘community of practice’ might look like in youth work terms. Whereas some of communities of practice outlined by Lave et al also exclude some from membership and are vehicles for reproducing professionally trained individuals a number of the principles resonate with youth work practice. For example, there is an expert [*the professional youth worker*]; there are phases to go through in terms of group affiliation [*outlined later in terms of developing the Core*], e.g. challenging young people behaviour, attitudes, developing skills, coping strategies, enhanced knowledge through educational projects; taking responsibility; understanding self; getting more involved etc etc. Suffice to say that it would not be difficult to outline all the necessary ingredients within a youth work context to suggest that it is indeed a well-defined ‘community of practice.’

Therefore we contend that the core of youth work draws on the knowledge base of Lave and Wenger in that it nominates youth work as a working and developing example of a ‘community of practice’. Further to this we assert the need for further research into this contention while postulating the belief that there is enough evidence contained within Lave and Wenger’s work to usefully suggest it as a potential aspect underpinning an evolving epistemology for youth work practice.

As with Steiner, which we consider directly on from communities of practice, there is a need to establish, within a youth work community of practice, a mechanism for the development of a ‘curriculum’. We postulate that this is achieved in a similar way to Steiner in that the ‘curriculum’ is related to the ‘lived-lives’ of young people, in a youth work community of practice based on experiential learning.

Steiner Education.

Rudolf Steiner (1861 – 1925) the innovative academic was born in Austria and founded his theory upon the central basis of Anthroposophy. He applied his ideas to the fields of education, agriculture, medicine, architecture and social reform and has been referred to by Schikler (2005) as the best kept secret of the twentieth century. Dismissed as a mystic with, as Dahlin observes, the consequence that few if any academics studying his work (2009). The Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship acknowledges Rudolf Steiner as the founding inspiration of modern day Steiner schools and its fellowship web site which is devoted to the work and theoretical application of the late academic states that Steiner education,

- Works for all children irrespective of academic ability, class, ethnicity or religion;
- Takes account of the needs of the whole child – academic, physical, emotional and spiritual;
- Is based on an understanding of the relevance of the different phases of child development;
- Develops a love of learning and an enthusiasm for school;
- Sees artistic activity and the development of the imagination as integral to learning;
- Is tried and tested and is part of state funded, mainstream provision in most European countries;

'Is respected worldwide for its ability to produce very able young people who have a strong sense of self and diverse capacities that enable them to become socially and economically responsible citizens'.

The authors observe that if one considers the above elements attached to the vision of the Steiner model one cannot fail to see the mirror image of youth work within these educational values and principles.

Steiner offers three stages of development:

- Early childhood – (0 – 7 years of age) – Imitation.
- The heart of childhood – (7 to 14 years of age) – Imagination.
- Adolescence – (14 to 21 years of age) - Opinion.
-

One might argue that the latter stages relate to youth work practice as they move young people through imagination towards opinion using relevant and appropriate practices geared towards an age-specific curriculum [albeit loosely defined].

There are ten key components that are seamed through the Steiner education process which we argue resonate with youth work practice. As professionals consider their understanding of this connection we posit the opinion that this model of 'education' is based on a tried and tested experiential and empirical evidence and consequently should offer youth workers some hope and solace in terms of how they operationalise the concept of 'process-driven' learning as they understand it. We offer for consideration

the following material in our shared belief that it supports the core aspects of youth work practice, some measured some not.

A Distinctive Education: Ten Key Points:

Each of us has a different mosaic of intelligences. Uniform schooling ignores these differences. Howard Gardner

1. Creativity

From the perspective and within the Steiner process the conclusion was drawn that the use of drawing, painting, music, movement, poetry, modelling and drama enhances the learning experience in all subjects. A high value is placed on play in the early years, imagination in the middle school and creative thinking at secondary level. This encourages a strong sense for the artistic and cultural life and is supported by an aesthetic teaching environment.

Youth work equivalence: drama workshops on bullying; painting and life-maps for young people; graffiti and painting murals, musical experiences related to local and personal issues.

2. Continuity

In most cases the children are with the same class teacher from age 6 to 14, supported by a range of subject teachers. Key subjects are taught in 'Main lessons': blocks of up to four weeks of the same topic, usually for two hours every morning, allowing for depth, integration and focus. The rhythms of the day, week, month and year give a context that is enhanced by seasonal celebrations.

Youth work equivalence: Centre-based youth workers have a more continuous relationship with young people which enhances their relationship and influence on young people in a given context. Other youth workers who run projects understand the importance of long-term relationships with young people but are often compromised by the needs of funders and time-bound projects.

3. Activity

There is a central place for structured movement, the out-door environment and learning through doing across the entire age-range. The school timetable may include traditional games, sports, eurhythmy (*the interpretation in harmonious bodily movements of the rhythm of musical compositions* :), gymnastics, drama productions and an extensive programme of hand crafts and the development of manual skills.

Youth work equivalence: It is clear that most youth providers use outdoor education to enhance their programmes and develop the personal and social needs of young people. Many bring in 'experts' to deliver games, sports and activities that engage with the needs of the youth often age-specific. Most youth centres have sports halls that are programmed to meet the interests and health needs of young people of varying ages.

4. The Individual and Society

Social and emotional skills are fostered in a variety of ways: by the recognition of childhood as a time of wonder, by the family-like environment of the extended Early Years, by the provision of clear adult authority and guidance and by the exploration of global and social perspectives at secondary level.

Youth work equivalence: This is a central tenet of youth work practice expressed in the model as the core and indeed developed by many youth workers in the latter stages of the relationship when they use various counselling approaches to understand and develop self-awareness in young people. The relationship between most youth projects and the family is central as is the link between youth work and the community.

5. Inclusion and Differentiation

Whole class teaching is combined with individualised and differentiated learning. Imaginative engagement with the lesson material allows all learners, regardless of strengths, weaknesses and learning styles, to work at different levels within their class group.

Youth work equivalence: Three central pillars of youth work in Northern Ireland are Equity, Diversity and Interdependence. These three concepts relate directly with inclusion and differentiation in a real and meaningful sense. Often, it should be stated, based on the belief that young people are not a homogenous group but have individual strengths and limitations.

6. The Spoken Word

The oral and narrative tradition is brought to life through recitation, drama and an extensive use of poetry, stories, myths and legends from all cultures, often told rather than read. Modern languages are taught, ideally two, from age six.

Youth work equivalence: While youth work develops the spoken word rather than the written word this facet of Steiner education is an area that youth work practice could develop.

7. Age-appropriate

Not too soon, not too late. The lesson content and its method of presentation are linked to the children's emotional, social, physical and intellectual development. Formal education, which begins at age six, is introduced in a way and at a pace that respects the child's developmental journey.

Youth work equivalence: All youth work programmes are geared towards different age groups and indeed most centre-based youth programmes have different times and activities for age groups. While not directly linked to the emotional and intellectual development of young people they are definitely linked to their understanding of the social and physical context in which they reside, through projects and sporting involvement etc.

8. Assessment

The unique qualities of each child can be observed and described, but not always measured. The development of every pupil is closely monitored, mainly through ongoing formative assessment and in-depth study.

Youth work equivalence: Programmes and courses that have to be assessed are normally done using a more humanistic approach to learning and evaluation. While not a central tenet of youth work the Gallagher Morgan model acknowledges the use of non-formal courses and accredited courses which are normally built around personal and social development in the first instance.

9. Excellence

Every pupil is expected to give of their best across all disciplines, thus avoiding one-sidedness and early specialisation. Hard-work, determination and good teaching can always build on innate ability.

Youth work equivalence: It is clear in a youth work context that excellence is both demanded and rewarded. Many youth programmes have awards, e.g. badge awards in scouting organizations, celebrations of programmes ending, musicals, presentations of overseas work which include parents and community. Normally the excellence relates to achievements that are about the lives of young people and are therefore meaningful in a more humanistic and organic manner.

10. Context

Steiner schools form the largest group of independent, non-denominational schools in the world. Many are state funded. The first school was opened in Germany in 1919, the first in the UK in 1925. There are currently over 1,000 Steiner schools worldwide and 35 in the UK. There are over 2,000 Early Years settings in a total of 64 different countries.

Youth work equivalence: Youth centres and youth projects tend to be developed in areas of deprivation which suggests that the context is in relation to the need of young people in a given often unequal society.

Youth workers are 'not' Steiner teachers. We observe this as matter of fact and not of judgment. However, there are many aspects of the ten dimensions considered above that ensure that youth work is explicitly differentiated from that of the formal education system in the UK.

We contend that aspects of youth work need to be outside the formal system in order to ensure that the process is not completely contaminated by the formal subject-led curriculum to the detriment of personal and social development and growth. Such growth requires and demands a long-term investment by a youth worker alongside young people so that they [the young people] can move at their own pace using and valuing 'their' strengths and abilities, not those prescribed by the school system.

We freely acknowledge that there are aspects of this approach that could be facilitated within the school system and are of the belief that the current debate centring upon the placement of youth workers going into formal school environments will, without fail result in an ill-conceived and watered-down version of Steiner education. We are clear in our belief that the youth work profession offer and practically utilise an informal

Steiner experience in their engagement with those young people with which they work, even if they do not recognise it as such.

We consider the suggestion that youth work embraces elements of Lave and Wengers (1991) theory of *communities of practice*, in terms of creating a boundary around the engagement between young people and professional worker within which they can additionally influence their development allied to the principles of Steiner presented above.

Experiential learning.

'There are different routes of entry into each child's mind. It is amazing how much can be taught when subject boundaries are taken away'.

Professor Helen Storey

There is no doubt that experiential learning is central to youth development; youth workers draw on their own experiential learning processes to develop programmes and projects that will assist youth development. The starting point for such experiential learning/development is often but not exclusively based on the young people's needs reflected by and in their *'lived lives'*.

Experiential learning is therefore a central tenet of youth work practice and differentiates it from the formal system in that the learning, as practiced through the process-driven youth development core, is based on 'real' issues that affect young people. These tend to be important to young people but may not be relevant in the formal school sector which is primarily based on a prescribed curriculum often unrelated to real life and based on cognitive development around subjects. Brew (1993 cited in Boud, Cohen and Walker) observes that learning is presumed to be cumulative and knowledge incremental. She states,

"There are two conceptions of knowledge contained here. One is the idea that knowing as a quantity. We get more ideas as we proceed. The other sees knowledge as a quality of perception or our way of making sense of phenomena."
(Brew. 1993:87)

Here Brew refers to learning that indicates that new experiences transform learning into something else (p88) and further to this that the presumption that learning gets more and more difficult as you proceed (p89) and that wisdom is thought to come from experience, i.e. the assumption is often that it is the accumulation of experiences which lead to or parallels the accumulation of knowledge (p89). Brew is, we contend, referring to learning that is both relevant and related to the needs of people's lives rather than the formal interpretation of subject-based curriculum-driven knowledge. The latter is of course knowledge we gain through evidence in examinations and course work but the former is nevertheless just as important, and for some marginalized youth, of more value and importance. Brew (1993:90) takes this a step further stating,

“For example, in its emphasis on detached impersonal knowledge, traditional academic inquiry de-emphasises’ the role and value of human subjective experience. Indeed, even within the human sciences such as sociology or psychology, the emphasis on objectivity means that self-knowledge is excluded.”

Brew further posits the opinion,

“Indeed, it is possible to argue that if we wanted to invent a form of inquiry that prevented us from knowing those things which we fear to know and also prevented us from coming to know ourselves, we could do little better than our traditional scientific method.”

We are of the belief that the scientific method here refers to the formal schooling system which assumes the outcomes, e.g. results equals learning. The youth work model operationalises the concept of ‘learning’ in a more holistic manner using experience based on the needs, in the first instance, of young people.

Brew (1993:91) poses the question, *how can we ensure that learning from experience is truly effective?* For Brew there is a paradox with experiential learning. She suggests that we need to unlearn and to throw out what one has learnt and begin afresh. Further to this, she continues, *‘I’m inclined to say that it is the process of learning that is important; that there is only the journey, never the destination,’* and that we must come face to face with our not-knowing.

Brew is proposing that learning is a more ongoing journey than simply attaining qualifications and therefore those involved in experiential learning are always learning new things because they challenge the taken for granted assumptions inherent in our fixed notion of what it is to learn especially in schools. Youth workers, view the learning process in a more holistic, experiential manner, with all aspects of learning up for grabs thus challenging the primacy of one single discipline as a lens for understanding. Consequently the authors argue that it is not just sociological, psychological, political, economic etc. but the experience related to the understanding that individuals bring to the learning process, irrespective of how limiting this may appear.

For many young people the hegemony of formal education has reinforced their understanding of learning and their ability or inability to learn at school. Youth workers have to de-school these young people and rebuild them using experiential learning approaches in a community of youth work practice based, loosely, on a quasi-Steiner understanding of education. Not only do youth workers intuitively know that this approach works but the evidence is overwhelming that everyone ‘can’ learn depending of other factors.

Boud and Walker (1993:81) observe that although we experience barriers to learning as internal – *‘I can’t possibly do that’ or ‘I don’t want to do that’* – they often arise from external influence which impacted on us at an earlier time and which left us feeling disempowered or de-skilled or inhibited. We argue that one of these external forces is

the very system in which and from which learning should take place, e.g. the school. We cannot exclude the school, as the common denominator, for some of the marginalized, disengaged or quietly disengaged young people and their propensity to 'not' learn. (Morgan. 2009)

For Boud and Walker, often the barriers to learning reside in the individual and that even when the key factors seem to be social or cultural there is still the need to understand the individual idiosyncrasies that impede learning. Youth workers are well aware of the need to treat young people individually that they can begin to understand how and in what way they will optimize their learning potential. There is no doubt that starting from where they are at is the only positive and sensible place to start [Steiner education approach]. On from this they suggest

“Sometimes, it is necessary to cease being involved in a certain type of activity in order to become aware that it may not be fruitful in terms of learning.” (Boud and Walker. 1993:81),

Would it be heresy to suggest, as we freely do, that this might apply to schooling for some young people at certain times in their lives? Youth workers will take and build upon opportunities through patient involvement of and with young people, *'a' process of learning that may not, in the first instance, seem like the young person is in fact learning.* This might coalesce around the young person themselves as they take some action around an activity that engages them and begins the process of learning which should lead to an understanding that they can in fact learn, e.g. the organic trumpet player at the start of this article.

Youth workers believe that all young people can learn; this is a statement of fact with which we concur. Boud et al (1993:12) believe that learning is holistic and that we shouldn't differentiate between cognitive (*concerned with thinking*), the affective (*concerned with values and feelings*) and psychomotor (*concerned with action and doing*). They take the position that although it can at times be useful to think of these different aspects of learning, no one aspect is discrete and independent of the rest and no one aspect should generally be privileged over the rest. This is a sentiment that youth workers would applaud as they in their practices look on young people from a truly holistic perspective addressing real issues that affect their lives and that they wish to engage with.

We of course acknowledge the contextualization of the learning process and the influence of what is perceived a 'real' learning and knowledge. It is very difficult for youth workers to argue that the experiential learning that takes place in Northern Ireland is better than that within the school system. Clearly with qualifications young people can go to further education leading to professional and highly paid employment. We are not proposing a change to this hegemonic perspective of education but rather suggesting that the learning process resides in both the formal sector and the informal youth sector, that they are both legitimate and, at times, complementary. The youth work approach is

more holistic based on experiential learning delivering a 'curriculum' that is authentic and experienced from the view point of young people's daily lives and existence.

Where then does all this leave our model of practice? The model that we are proposing has two dimensions that take cognizance of the need for measurement but equally the need *'not'* to measure. The core aspect of youth work, sometimes referred to as 'generic youth work' is built upon the above three interconnected dimensions that resonate with the contextualization of the learning process. Youth work 'is' established and practiced using evidence that is found in educational literature that propounds an alternative approach to seeing the world differently from to the school system. The core of youth work, we argue, is about the whole person, i.e. what makes them tick, why they don't perform in school or other arenas, what are their strengths, what is on offer in the community of youth work practice that will enhance these strengths, how can we make young people self-aware of their strengths and limitations, what experience can we use to enhance their understanding of and responsibility to themselves and indeed how and what they really *want* and *need* to learn and all this in an education system that offers an alternative to the taken-for-granted schooling system that is clearly failing many young people, in the image and form of a quasi-Steiner approach to learning.

Summary.

"We are trying to learn new thinking... but the craft of the hand is richer than we commonly imagine. The hand does not only grasp or catch or push and pull. The hand reaches and extends, receives and welcomes....and receives its own welcome in the hands of others. The hand designs and signs. A gesture meant to carry us into the great oneness". M. Heidegger.

At the core of youth development there are, we suggest, a set of learning opportunities built upon, as young people start to develop their understanding of themselves and others. While the starting point is contact, relationship building etc. it leads to discussion groups, leadership opportunities for some young people, increased use of initiative and increased confidence and self-esteem. The latter qualities have to be viewed on a scaffolding continuum whereby the youth worker can see progress and indeed how and in what way the young people are growing. While this youth development can be monitored it can also be evaluated forming part of a loose *'measuring' process within the core'*. We would argue that the process, in terms of youth development, is more important than the need to measure in the core of the model. We also note that measurement of aspects of the core may and could take place eventually.

We would suggest that while it would be advantageous for youth workers to have an all-embracing model and a depth of understanding of these ingredients it is not necessary in order for effective youth work to take place. However, it is important for professional youth worker to know and understand what epistemological concepts underpin their work.

With the band example, offered at the beginning of this work, the outcomes were similar irrespective of taking a process-driven approach rather than a curriculum-driven approach. Let us consider the preposition *'if'*. *'If'*, the core is youth development is in a community of practice underpinned by youth work values and beliefs; *'If'* there is progress in terms of youth development, and probably most importantly, is about the lived experience of the lives of young people. *'If'* all this is the case then youth work needs to be free to discuss aspects of young people's lives including the formal school system. *'If'* nothing else youth work, in this model, is about critical discussion within a world that is not predictable or deterministic.

THE MODEL

"Only someone who is ready for everything, who doesn't exclude any experience, even the most incomprehensible, will live the relationship with another person as something alive and will himself sound the depths of his own being."
Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet*

Based upon the recent article by Gallagher and Morgan (2013) it occurs to us that the term *'measurement'* in the context of the youth work profession is a contested concept. In real terms this means that both the measurement and context of youth work need to be understood before either can be effectively measured. So what does this mean?

Firstly we must answer the question, *"What are we measuring?"* Is it learning or behavioural change through personal and social development in young people or is it awards for personal and social development that lead to a paper certificate that denotes that those who participated have learnt and achieved something? Or indeed, is it about the quality of the input from youth workers that denotes the learning process?

These questions need to be deconstructed in order to understand what can effectively be measured and what cannot [or more precisely *should not* be measured]. The article by Gallagher and Morgan (2013) was an attempt to grapple with hitherto complex theories around curriculum development in schools, relating more to prescribed outcomes that were pre-set and tangible.

Students gained the award through examination and it was assumed or is assumed that *'learning'* has taken place. Gallagher et al argue that youth work is different from the *'school-based'* educational experience for many young people and is based on *'real'* life issues that influence and impact on their lives. As such they are, de facto experiential as they impact upon the lived lives of many young people, e.g. drugs abuse, alcohol misuse, suicide, broken relationships, emotional difficulties, relationships, resilience, self-awareness etc. etc.

The formal approach to learning is to work from a basis of a preconceived curriculum that is presented to young people, who then feedback their understanding and capacity to remember the facts and figures in and through an examination. The results that young people aspire to attain, range across a variety of levels of award from *A** to *fails*, thus suggesting that the grade pertains to a level of learning. Youth work, on the other hand emphasizes learning as life unfolds, thus the complex nature of different lives, through class, religion, poverty, intellectual capacity etc. etc. has to, not only shape this 'informal' learning process but be relevantly related to it. This we would contend ensures that the youth work learning process is contextualised within the lived lives of those who partake in the process.

However, youth work is about more than developing learning and a curriculum attainment exercise. Youth workers have to create opportunities for engagement in, through and with young people. They have to be creative, accessible and detached and involve in their practice a real element of outreach work, so that they meet young people where they are at not where they think they should be at. They seek to build a relationship that permits young people to make mistakes and learn from these mistakes in an accepting and non-judgmental environment. They aspire to invest in long-term time related relationships built on humanistic approaches to learning and they need to be versatile in terms of the complex nature of both the social and the psychological needs of young people.

Some young people will come into contact with youth workers for longer periods than others while some will only make fleeting contact with professional workers. Others will encounter the youth work profession in schools or through voluntary bodies. Irrespective of where or why young people come into contact with youth workers this model offers a practical approach for making sense of aspects of the work either as a whole or in parts with young people. It should be said that one can expect to have more of an impact with young people if the contact is over a longer period. However, there are times that short sharp interaction will impact favourably on the needs of young people at the micro level.

The Gallagher/Morgan Model

"For every finish-line tape runner breaks -- complete with the cheers of the crowd and the clicking of hundreds of cameras -- there are the hours of hard and often lonely work that rarely gets talked about".

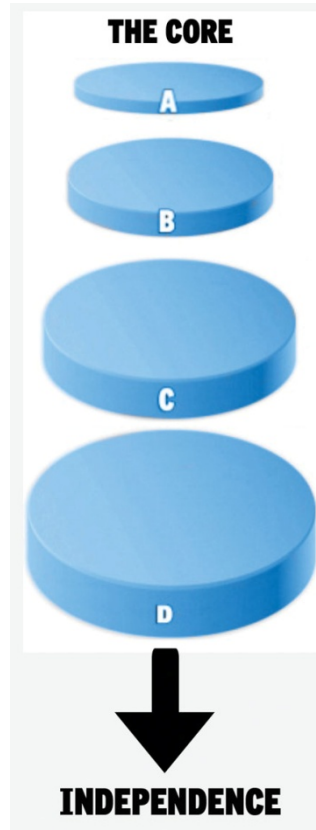
Grete Waitz

A brief overview.

The Model we are proposing is two-dimensional. In essence this means that alongside the core-principles of youth work are a parallel set of interactions that progress and further shape the process that young people go through.

The Core.

The model suggests that young people need to go through a core that develops their social and personal development based on the concepts allude to above. However, we acknowledge that youth work practice sometimes draws on other approaches, e.g. solution-focused work etc. It is for the professional youth worker to *'fit'* their approach into this model. We suggest that the debate is healthy about what exactly underpins the epistemology of youth work and that starting this is a vital part of *'professionalising'* the youth work profession in both practice and training.



Part A of the core:



This is the first point of contact between the youth worker [the adult] and young people. This is an *'intentional'* part of the process normally involving something that the young people like doing, 'a hook' to engage them, so to speak. So running a football tournament for young boys for example, might be a starting point. Having a youth club for young people to come into in terms of developing association is another part A approach as is identifying young women who might want to engage in beauty therapy

programmes for example or have a relaxed place in which to share time and experiences together.

Part A of the core is *non-measurable* and relates to the need for adults to engage with young people using whatever means are necessary to create this starting point for relationship.

- **The foundation for youth work practice is the relationship between the adult and the young person. The base for future development is being shaped. There is 'intentionality' about the relationship.**
- **Contact cannot be assumed as evidenced when youth workers have to do detached and outreach work.**

Part B of the core:



As you will have noticed *Part B* is slightly '*fatter*' denoting the expansion and development of the core for the development of young people. This part reflects a stronger bond or relationship between the adult [the youth worker] and the young person.

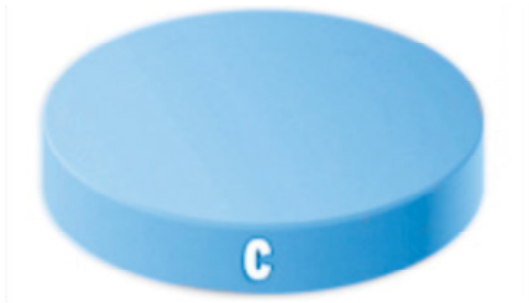
As outlined by Gallagher and Morgan (2013) relationships are the primary building block for future development and trust building and strengthening the base. Again at this stage measurement is optional and the building of relationships takes precedent over the need for measurement. However, most youth worker will evaluate this aspect of their work and should keep confidential files to show engagement and progress, irrespective of perceived importance, e.g. a young person said 'hello' today for the first time etc. etc. Thus the core is strengthened and resembling the metaphor of 'scaffolding' as espoused by Vygotsky in his work, *Mind in Society* (1978).

The youth worker listens to and develops programmes and interventions around '*real life*' issues that come from engagement with the young people, e.g. Understanding their lives, confidence building, self-esteem etc. etc.

- **It is at B that we begin to see signs of a quasi-Steiner approach to learning, e.g. creativity, activity, developing the individual in society, inclusion, age-appropriate etc**
- **The relationship is beginning to reap rewards as the trust between the youth worker and young person builds.**

- **The young person will begin to believe that the youth worker is interested in them and the relationship grows.**

Part C of the core:

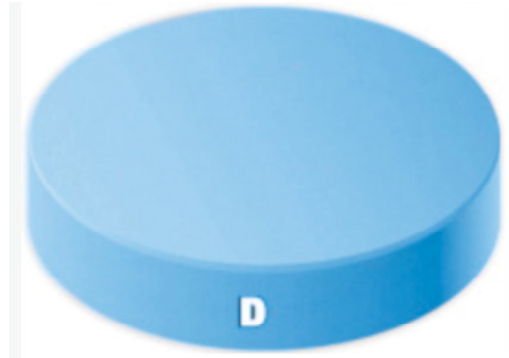


Again the core develops, deepens and is consequently getting stronger; as the youth worker enables and empowers the building and growth of the resilience, coping skills, knowledge base of the young people. The young person is taking more responsibility for their actions and getting involved in senior role in the youth club or taking the initiative or leadership role in a project. This part is a progression from Parts A and B and builds upon the opportunity [part A] for engagement and association and relationship building [part B] that are created intentionally in the youth work process.

Measurement in this part is related to the input from others that help strengthen the knowledge and understanding of personal and social issues that are 'real' for those young people taking part in the youth work experience. The base is getting stronger as the self-awareness of the young people is developed through reflective experiences. This enables a personal and social growth permitting sustained and recognizable change at a personal and social level of engagement, practice for the young person. Ownership and a sense of responsibility begin to take root and inform the life of the young person in question. As Huxley observes, "*Experience is a matter of sensibility and intuition, of seeing, and hearing the significant thing, of paying attention at the right moments, of understanding and coordinating. Experience is not what happens to a person; it is what a person does with what happens to them.*"

- **The youth worker gives the young person more responsibility and introduces self-awareness and responsibility. Like Steiner educationalists the youth workers have to rely on continuity between worker and young person; creativity shared and developed through partnerships and ownership; continued activities that interest young people; age specific; some individualized learning approaches; the development of projects that highlight young peoples' involvement which are celebrated publicly and other quasi-Steiner approaches to learning.**

Part D of the core:



The young person is coming to the end of his/her engagement with adults and youth workers. They have been exposed to a variety of social and personal experiences that have built their self-awareness, resilience, coping skills, understanding, knowledge and enhanced their learning and ability to make decisions that will lead to independence. On and from this base young people can be expected to place hitherto problems that have been hindering their progress, e.g. returning to schooling in either their school or elsewhere. It might be the starting point for building relationships with family and parents or dealing with more demanding issues such as emotional difficulties or depression etc.

- **The youth work is focused on coping mechanisms and facilitating the development of resilience, coping and increased self-awareness in young people.**
- **Young people assume responsible positions in relation to work and their peers, e.g. joining the management committee or taking the lead within a project for example.**
- **Young people continue to engage in some youth work project but at a level of 'leadership' and 'management'. This allows the young people to develop skills in a safe and supervised context.**
- **The young people continue to be exposed to fundamental youth work practices but with a more developmental process involved so that they are moving towards independence through the conscious development of transferable skills and increased self-awareness.**

THE MODEL CONTINUES.

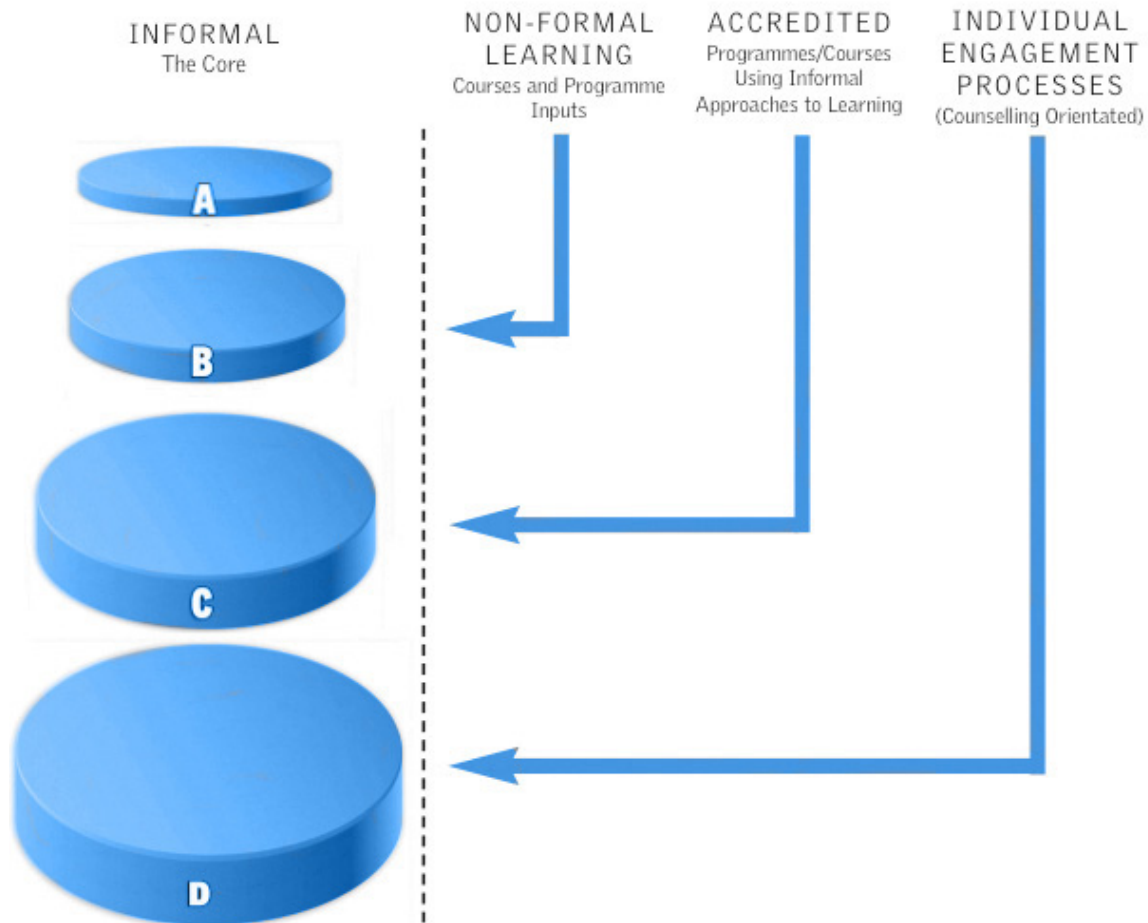
This is only 50% of the model. For many young people progress through life they have stable and supportive families that enhance their life chances. Those who come into contact with youth workers are often the opposite. The need to develop this core is central to the development of young peoples' lives. We cannot assume [as was discussed at length by Gallagher and Morgan 2013) that marginalised young people can take an active part in civil life without their 'core' being strengthened. Not only is this a challenge for the youth work profession but it is also worth considering in the school system. Without the development of this core young people will not and cannot benefit

from a formal prescriptive curriculum driven education system that presuppose they have the core resilience, support, capacity, knowledge to benefit from what the formal sector has to offer.

A PARALLEL PROCESS

Running alongside the core development of youth work are three strands that feed into this process-driven model. The first strand relates to programmes and activities that both inform and educate young people and are, normally, evaluated rather than formally assessed [using accreditation and awards...but can be if necessary].

These inputs, normally relate to information sessions on sexual health, well-being, understanding suicide, bullying, relationship building etc. They relate to context and often to age and therefore vary in level and intensity. This means that programmes for young people will be different to those for adolescents and older adults. The diversity of inputs suggests that it would be foolish or counterproductive to try to measure these inputs in a formal way as it might put some prospective participants off the learning process. Most of the inputs from this strand can take place during Parts **B**, **C** and **D** of the core as the need arises and as young people make demands for knowledge and understanding of issues that are affecting their real lived lives.



Although the three strands are aligned to different parts of the Core it is envisaged that this is a fluid mechanism that might see information sessions being as relevant for **Part D** as they would be for **Part B** or **C**.

On from these accredited inputs may be the starting point for some of the core developments for other young people depending on how and in what way a project recruited or was funded. It should be noted that many voluntary sector projects start with an accredited course and attempt to develop the Core through and within the programme.

We are not making any value judgments but feel that the Core is essential for strengthening the potential and optimising the accredited approach. The final strand that we have included in the Model relates to more profound in-depth needs that are being presented by young people today, for example, *ADHD, dyslexia, depression, emotional needs, self-harm, suicidal tendencies etc.*

Aspects of youth work overlap the needs just outlined and it is for the youth work profession to either tool itself up for these more specialised needs or to bring in

specialists to deal with young people on a one-to-one basis. The option to ignore this profound part of modern day living is not an option and has to be discussed and acted upon.

- ❖ **NON-FORMAL LEARNING: Courses and programme inputs relating to the needs of young people based on experiential learning.**



Aspects of youth intervention offer young people valuable information on issues that affect their lives.

Programmes should be devised around individual and local issues resulting in evaluation rather than accreditation for this stage.

For example, some programmes that could be offered at this stage of involvement and engagement might include:

- Drug awareness;
- Sexuality;
- Alcohol misuse;
- Relationship building;
- Self-awareness;
- Coping mechanisms;
- Resilience;
- Understanding social issues;
- Eco-friendly courses;

- ❖ **ACCREDITED PROGRAMMES AND COURSES: Using informal approaches to learning, e.g. COPE and XL which are based on predefined curriculum-led social and personal development programmes.**



Youth workers can and should offer accredited courses to young people when they feel that the base is strong enough to support this approach to learning. The decision should be guided by young people.

Programmes already exist that assimilate both the personal and social needs of young people and accreditation.

Efforts should be made to accommodate courses other than the social sciences building on a 'strong-based' young person.

- ❖ **INDIVIDUAL ENGAGEMENT PROCESSES: Counselling orientated using methods that resonate with youth work practice and principles, e.g. Solution Focussed Therapy or Cognitive Behavioural Therapy or Neurolinguistic Programming etc etc.**



There are times throughout the relationship with young people when it is obvious that some need individual experienced counselling or therapy. This input can take place throughout the development of the CORE and adds to the strength, resilience and self-awareness of young people moving towards independence. However, it depends on who implements this interaction with the young people. Some might need outside help while others might benefit from skilled youth workers, e.g. group processes or peer-support programmes.

INDEPENDENCE.

"You have made people listen. You have made people care, and you have taught us that whether we are poor or prosperous, we have only one world to share. You have taught young people that they do have the power to change the world."

Kofi Annan: seventh secretary-general of the United Nations, 2001

Let us take as our basis the statement of the National Occupation Standards (2008) that the key aim of youth work coalesces around the enablement of young people to develop holistically in order that they may find *"their voice, influence and place in society and to reach their full potential."* (2008). Coupled with this is that very real desire of young people to exercise their own independence, which they, of course, identify with personal freedom, thought and decisions making in and about their lives and futures. This in itself may pose the dilemma that such a move toward independence may remove them from family support structures but as noted by Rosenfeld (2010) it is

important to note that not all young people are predisposed toward independence and even those of independent spirit may find it challenging and difficult.

We would, in the light of this, contend that a reassessment of the role and understanding of youth work at this time is both fortuitous and necessary as the current debate rages around youth work and its place alongside the formal education sector in Northern Ireland and the aim and impact of such a relationship. We posit the belief that the current debate misses a salient and important element of the jigsaw; that the development of young people is varied and is unique to the individual concerned. Consequently it is affected by individual personality, ability and differing ability, family, social and personal environment and the young person understanding of such environments. In order for a young person to grow into a contributing and collaborative member of the community and society they must first attain a sense of self that permits them to own level(s) of growth and independence from which to launch their individual participation in and with the community.

From this perspective it is important to state that youth work, as a separate and highly effective practice and intervention supports such social and practical development toward individual independence in innovative and creative fashions ensuring the ownership and independence of those young people who voluntarily engage within the process of informal education and empowerment that youth work offers and delivers.

In a very real manner youth work offers inclusivity and acceptance of the young person at their current point of engagement and departure recognizing and encouraging this process as a lifelong process and as a means to the end of self-realisation and self-actualisation within the life that they will pursue, develop and live. For as acknowledged by Brynner, Elias et al in their 2002 report, '*Young Peoples Changing Routes to Independence*', the situation faced by young people today is vastly different from that experienced by their counterparts in the 1970's and 80's with young people now investing more readily and heavily in education and engaging in relationships outside the former accepted practices of marriage and societal norms. Such changes argue, the report authors have transformed the lives and realisation of young people and their aspirations for a better more secure future and life. (2002)

As suggested by Brynner et al (2002), Young people's changing routes to independence, and noted briefly above, "*The situation of young people today is substantially different from that of young people twenty-five years ago*". This realisation needs to sit at the centre of our understanding and developing of processes to enable growth and development in the current and oncoming generations of young people with whom we will engage. That is why the authors hold hard to the belief that any process must be that owned, nurtured, developed and informed by young people and their life experiences. Such processes must be construed from these experiences and consequently as they are embedded into the life and processes of young people they can then be further reformed and refined. This will occur within the process of growing

up and into ownership and responsibility layered by the unique variables of life experienced by each young person at their personal level of engagement.

The community, it can be argued, may inform the raising but it does not need to wholly impact on the individual's growth and development and here the processes contained within our proffered model allow for the building of a advantageous relationship between the youth worker and the young person whereby experience is informed and the constituent elements of life are positively encouraged and engaged while allowing a level of awareness, learning and ownership based upon the ability and the realisation of the individual in question.

It can offer opportunity and understanding developing the person in their own right and can illuminate the future lives of young people by relating to their past and current social, familial and developmental experiences and their subsequent impact on them. In this way young people, working with their peers and in relationship with others within the youth work experience will be enabled to recognise in themselves the potential to move forward, developing the skills and competencies' that will, as noted in the 'Narrative for Youth Work, final draft' facilitate progression and propel them toward an enjoyable, challenging and ultimately independent adulthood. For as [Michel de Montaigne](#) observed "*The greatest thing in the world is to know how to belong to oneself.*"

REFERENCES:

Boud, D and Walker, D. (2002) Promoting reflection in professional courses: the challenge of context (pp91-111) in Supporting Lifelong Learning. Volume 1: Perspectives on learning edited by Harrison, R. Reeve, F. Hanson, A and Clarke. J.OUP: London and New York [Course reader:E845]

Brew, A. Chapter 6. Unlearning through experience cited in Boud, D, Cohen, R and Walker, D; Using experience in Learning. The Society for Research into Higher Education. OUP1993

Brynner, Elias et al (2002) Young Peoples Changing Routes to Independence

Dahlin, K.I.E. (2009) Effects of working memory training on reading in children with special needs

Encyclopaedia of Philosophy; (1967) Volume 3.: Macmillan, Inc.

Gallagher, S and Morgan, T. (2013) *The Process is the Product: Is There a Need for Measurement in Youth Work?* The Journal of Youth Work. Issue 11: pp41 -65.

Guile, D and Young, M. (2002). Beyond the institution of apprenticeship: towards a society theory of learning as the production of knowledge (pp146-163) in Supporting Lifelong Learning. Volume 1: Perspectives on learning edited by Harrison, R. Reeve, F. Hanson, A and Clarke. J.OUP: London and New York [Course reader:E845]

Heidegger, M (1977) *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays.*: Garland Publications

Lave, J. and Wenger, E. (1998) *Communities of practice Learning, meaning and identity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lave, J and Wenger, E (1991) *Situated Learning Legitimate peripheral Participation* Cambridge University Press, 27 Sep 1991

Lave, J and Wenger, E. (2002). Legitimate peripheral participation in communities of practice (pp111-127) in Supporting Lifelong Learning. Volume 1: Perspectives on learning edited by Harrison, R. Reeve, F. Hanson, A and Clarke. J.OUP: London and New York [Course reader:E845]

De Montaigne M, (1595) 'On Some Verses of Virgil' the The Essays; Bk.III; Chp5 Abel Langelier. Paris

United Kingdom National Occupation Standards for youth work. (2008)

Robinson, K. (2011) Out of Our Minds- learning to be creative: Wiley Publishers

M. J. Rosenfeld, 2010. "The Independence of Young Adults in Historical Perspective." in Family Therapy Magazine, May/June 2010, Vol 9, Num 3, P. 17-19

Schikler, J. (2005) Metaphysics as Christology : An Odyssey of the Self from Kant to Hegel to Steiner; Ashgate Publishing

Rymarz, R & McLarney, G. (2011) Using a Vygotskian paradigm a number of suggestions are made on how best to teach Augustinian themes. Journal of Adult Theological Education: Vol 8. No.1, 2011. Acumen Publishing Limited

Vygotsky, L.S. (1978) Mind in Society, The Development of Higher Psychological processes. Harvard University Press.