

**A PRACTICAL SOLUTION FOR MEASURING OUTCOMES IN YOUTH WORK:
DEVELOPING STRUCTURED 'EXPERIENTIAL' GROWTH GROUPS.**

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Abstract.

This article is a positional paper on the need to reinvent or at least reinvigorate the use of group work in a youth work context. While youth work practitioners work with many diverse groups the imposition of an imposed policy curriculum continues to shape the nature of the group process towards, we contend, a more prescribed set of outcomes. The nature of the journey through life for young people, in a youth work context, can and is often shaped by key youth work practitioners. Is it time to take a calculated risk with young people so that the group process can be used in a much more inclusive and instrumental manner that involves and impacts on individuals as they move through life. By this we mean that the group could be reconstituted to include, explicitly, a structure within which young people grow and learn. What we refer to as 'structured' experiential growth groups'. The group becomes the learning vehicle in and from which young people grow and develop their personal and social skills.

Key Words;

Conformity is the jailer of freedom and the enemy of growth." - John F. Kennedy

Introduction.

Youth workers are in a privileged position: it is a statement of fact and truth.

The chance to nudge or get young people to move themselves off potential negative lifelong trajectories is a central tenet for any successful youth work practice or intervention and is predicated upon the realisation that each person, with whom they come in contact with or indeed engage with, is a truly unique individual. The idea that we have a curriculum to achieve this aim is somewhat naïve in that, as we have literally just observed, *each young person is individual within a complex set of social and personal idiosyncratic worlds*. This is indisputable fact and an unequivocal truth! They do not conform into a singular and restrictive model of engagement, experience or process, in fact they themselves are their own process, uniquely so. They are an unfolding text. However, there are at times common themes and issues that young people often grapple with during adolescent development. For example;

- Improving confidence and self-esteem
- Understanding individual rights and responsibilities
- Personal identity
- Cultural identity
- Understanding prejudice and discrimination

- Developing a healthy lifestyle
- Working at and understanding relationships
- Managing risks in their lives
- Teamwork skills with others
- Peer relationships
- Developing resilience
- Knowledge of and understanding of self-awareness
- Dealing with issues such as bullying and drug misuse
- Developing coping skills.
- And many more.....

What we are suggesting in this paper is that if we *know* the expected outcomes that many young people need to achieve in life in order to make them more resilient and self-aware of their lives, do we need to emulate the formal didactic approach to learning, i.e. as in school? If we have a vehicle in which and from which these outcomes can be achieved do we really need a curriculum? Or more appropriately can the curriculum emanate from the lived lives of the young people themselves?

What if we had such a mechanism, i.e. a structured experiential growth group [**SEGG**] for achieving the expected outcomes using the real lives of the young people as the canvas for personal and social development? This paper presents a practical approach to the measurement of outcomes in youth work. As a precursor to the idea of measurement we present a model that acknowledges that some programmes are in fact predicated upon measurement, e.g. OCNs, City and Guilds and other acceptable courses of study that imbue some of the learning outcomes expected in a more formal setting. What we are proposing is that the 'core' of youth development can be addressed and achieved within an 'experiential growth group' and that the process is indeed the product (Gallagher and Morgan. 2013). In other words we are proposing a move away from highlighting the end product of outcomes or 'expected' outcomes to refocusing on the vehicle in which and from with certain less tangible and nebulous outcomes can be nurtured and recorded. There needs to be a process-driven approach to this achievement of 'fuzzy' but nevertheless important outcomes for many young people. The model begins by acknowledging a split between what is acceptable as measurable outcomes [programmes, workshops, awards and more formal and non-formal approaches to learning and development] and the less understood contextual learning environment of experiential learning and informal educational approaches to personal and social development.

Coyle (1946. pp22-203)) observed that,

“Social group work arose out of an increasing awareness that in the recreation-education activities which went on in groups there were obviously two dimensions – activity, including games, discussions, hikes, or artistic enterprise, on the one hand, and, on the other, the interplay of personalities that crest the group process. To concentrate on one without recognizing and dealing with the other is like playing the piano with one hand only. Program and relationship are inextricably intertwined. Social group work method developed as we began to see that the understanding and the use of the human relations involved were as important as the understanding and use of various types of programme.”

The relationship between the group process is as important as the activity being introduced to young people. In fact it could be argued that the personal experience is the building block for increasing both understanding and engagement with the learning process. Young people will engage in the learning process if the topic resonates with their lives. The list, outlined above, should not be used as a template for the curriculum but as a guideline set of issues that should emanate from a well organised experiential group. The input from young people triggers the 'curriculum' which may reflect some elements of the above list but should not shape or direct the issues being discussed. An additional strength of the group process is outlined by Dartington (2000:78) when discussing the use of the group,

"This applies the fused concept of the 'psychosocial' to group learning, i.e. the synthesis of the individual 'psychology' experience with 'the social' experience of living or working in a specific setting," (Ruch 2009).

What Wilson et al (2009) refer to as 'pragmatic relationships' which engage with critical reflection in a structured and meaningful way (Barron 2004: HEK 2012).

A suggestion that the group is more than the sum of the individuals and indeed postulating that front loading aspects of life that are clearly intent on making young peoples' lives more meaningful, for example:

- Initially dealing with hesitation, fear, anxiety of expectations;
- Creating a safe place in which to take risks;
- Being introduced to self-evaluation;
- Making behavioural change;
- Being hopeful about the future and
- Ending sadness and anxiety about group ending (Ohrt et al 2014:214)

Clearly the group has to be established by creating a working vehicle and a way of working using an 'organic' contract that is both real and meaningful for participants. The contract will guide the work by establishing ground rules which may include how the group deals with serious issues, e.g. mental abuse, health or substance misuse etc. The group is mainly about the group process and the basic emotional support offered for participants in the first instance. In other words the need for experienced and skilled group workers is essential so that participants are aware of the implications of sharing too much.

It is often assumed that if young people share personal information it is an ethical issue. The use of an experiential growth group has to be aware of this potential conflict of interest between the individual needs and the broader needs of the group in an attempt to minimise this potential while conceding that working with young people may result in getting too much information. The issue is not about closing avenues for openness but how to deal professionally with those that arise. The child abuse issues recently are a case in point suggesting that if professionals were more open with young people they may have found out earlier about issues that were affecting them rather than closing off these avenues between

responsible professional workers and young people. Suffice to say that using a group of any type has the potential for opening a Pandora's box. Not something a professional should shy away from in their work with young people.

A Case In Point: Power Exercised, Empowerment Recognised.

"Learners have some responsibility for their own learning: learning is by active involvement and related to experience...learning is a cooperative act, reflecting the reality of adult life"

Royal Society of Arts 1979

Listening to a young 17 year old man with Asperger's syndrome talk about being bullied in school when he was 14 and how he was now much more self-aware in terms of understanding his 'dis'ability and consequently able to cope more effectively, reminds us that youth work interventions are more necessary during adolescent development than at other important junctures in life. The practice of such power, in this case reflecting on experience developing self-awareness, raises the question of what Foucault calls, "*a question of capacity*". He argues that it, "*... brings into play relationships between individuals... or between groups.*" (Faubion: 1994:337). The notion of the importance and power of the group process will be considered further in this paper.

Often it is recognised that young people may not benefit from youth work interventions until later in life. While this sentiment may or may not be an accepted truth, nevertheless there is a '*feeling*' that intentional interventions for some young people, at the correct time and place in their lives, may or may not help them make more sense of their current lives thus placing them on a much more positive and conducive lifelong trajectory.

The young man mentioned above now works for a church-based group, having himself, designed and serviced an online anti-bullying web site. This is something he suggests that would have been miles from his life during school when he was being bullied and indeed he further states that *he* wasn't ready for dealing with these issues until he understood them in a more in-depth and analytical manner. His capacity to understand and evaluate his circumstances permitted him to move himself and his experience forward where it has now become a positive in his life and that of others who access his online service and web site. This is what Weber might consider an "*... action of empirical sociology*", wherein, "*... action in the sense of subjectively understandable orientation of behaviour exists only as the behaviour of one or more individual human beings*" (Weber, 1978:13 cited in Bennett & Khan-Harris: 2004:26)

The action of developing and servicing an online site is, Weber might contend, *social action* in that it takes account of the actions of others in the direction of its orientation and course of action. Ibid. Youth work is social action but informed not just by collective need but the unique set of needs and wants presented by each individual young person whom engage within its structures and processes. Therefore actions can be carried out, as Weber observes by, '*one or more individual human beings*'.

The Creative Trick, Example and Experience: Youth Reclaimed.

Clearly we learn by example and by experience, the old adage, '*to live and learn*', springs to mind. From an intellectual viewpoint the authors have in earlier works considered and

developed material from the viewpoint of Dewey, Vygotsky, Kolb, Schon, Beauchamp and Hart, authors for whom experiential learning lies at the foundation of their thinking and philosophies. Yet whilst the debate continues we might do well to call to mind the words of Nobel Laureate Melvin Campbell, who observed, *“the real creative trick is to get the right answer when you have only half of the data and half of what you have is wrong”*.

For example, Brendtro’s *‘reclaiming youth’* [www.reclaiming.com] outlines the *‘Circle of Courage’* which draws upon a plethora of influences, modern research, early pioneers of youth work and Native American philosophers of child care. They allude to 4 domains that were the focus of youth development and indeed community development within the Native American societies, stating that,

‘...Europeans coming to North America tried to civilise indigenous children with punitive boarding schools, unaware that Natives possessed a sophisticated philosophy that empowered children through:

- **Belonging**
- **Mastery**
- **Independence**
- **Generosity**

The issue for this paper is *not* that ‘outcomes’ were not understood, which they clearly were, but that the system, i.e. Native American culture, de facto achieved these goals. Goals one could argue were more related to life rather than academic and unrelated spurious outcomes. Subsequently, we suggest that youth work practice can indeed achieve similar outcomes if the ‘vehicle’ is tooled up as a system in which and from which learning can take place. While we cannot go back to Native American times we can replicate a vehicle that embeds, embodies and imbues the main expected outcomes that will, one assumes, enhance young peoples’ lives. What we term *‘structured experiential growth groups’* or SEGGs.

Re-imagining group as a youth work vehicle for learning and growth:

If we were to say that there is no prescribed curriculum in youth work would that cause difficulties for practitioners? We contend that initially the curriculum could emanate from within the confines of the structured experiential growth group through the presentation of the lived lives and experiences by young people. The paper will address these issues under the following sub-headings:

- UNDERSTANDING THE EXPERIENTIAL GROWTH GROUP.
- THE NEED FOR STRUCTURE.
- A PRACTICAL MODEL.

UNDERSTANDING THE EXPERIENTIAL GROWTH GROUP.

Many authors and practitioners use experiential groups in the USA (Rosenwald et al, 2013; Kiweewa et al 2013; Mc Carthy et al 2014; Boheker, 2014; Ohrt et al 2014; Humphrey, 2013) to name but a few. Many of the authors promote the use of experiential groups for young people and for the training of professionals. The evidence is compelling in that the

experiential group is exceptionally a positive experience for all involved irrespective of some of the downsides, e.g. ethical issues such as inappropriate disclosure and facilitation skills.

We are proposing a more focussed approach to the use of group work in youth settings that allow professionals to 'shape' the outcomes in a more structured manner to alleviate and mitigate some of the ethical issues. What we present is a '*structured*' approach to youth work that will achieve most of the outcomes expected from youth work practice. The competencies, goals, skills and outcomes [appendix 1] can effectively be achieved using this well developed vehicle for youth engagement.

Understanding 'experiential groups' youth work settings:

We are aware of group work within a youth work setting but claim that a refocusing of this approach to a more 'structured experiential' would have better outcomes for young people. This paper outlines this assertion in the light of the discussion about measuring outcomes in youth work (Morgan 2009; Gallagher and Morgan 2013). The case for retraining youth work practitioners in the art of experiential groups will add value to the experience of young people in youth work practice. At a basic level the experiential group is set up to facilitate most of the aspects of a traditional group, i.e. making contact, friendship, peer-development, tasks, sharing, feedback, emotional growth, respect, reflection, self-awareness etc etc (Benson, *****, Egan, ****, Konopka, ****). However, as Rosenwald et al (2013:322) states, about the potential of activity-based experiential groups, as being:

".....powerful and transformative through the use of planned and spontaneous activity."

It is not therefore in the use of groups that the powerful and transformative elements emanate from rather the use of the group as a sort of microcosm of the lives of the participants. The group becomes the focus of the growth for learning. Rosenwald et al (2013: 323/324) continue,

"When individuals come together in a group and engage in collective activity a fundamental human need is met; members experience connections and belonging and as sense of community emerges."

Clearly Rosenwald et al are alluding to the group as a real living entity and not just as what Bohecker (2014) refers to a '*being in a group*', not looking at '*what is happening in a group*,' a subtle but significant difference in our perception to group work or more importantly the '*use of the group*,' or '*a more effective use of the group dynamics and process*'.

For Dewey (1938 cited in Bohecker 2014:261),

"...the experience was an essential component of profound learning encompassing both the physicality of being confronted with learning and reflections in their physical experiences."

We acknowledge that there are, of course, times when the group is not appropriate for all learning and development. At times there is a need for individual and more didactic approach to learning and information giving which remain part of the youth workers toolkit.

The experiential growth group allows the individuals to continue to reflect upon their experiences through group sharing. Indeed Rosenwald et al (2013: 324) go further by suggesting that,

“...intergroup connections are deepened and the development of shared meaning making and individual identity differentiation are simultaneously made possible.”

An example of this approach to learning might be the use of cross-community groups to understand the two communities in Northern Ireland as participants can relate and relay their understanding of being from either community, i.e. Catholic or Protestant. Being able to draw on real experience allows for the development of deepening and shared meaning making and individual identity differentiation can be understood. However, it could be stated, a bit cynically that many cross-community encounters are based on a more historically related curriculum rather than an experiential ‘growth’ group. The focus on the latter would need to move from ‘explaining’ to ‘experiencing’ the process of the group and what this meant for those participating.

Kiweewa et al (2013:86) suggested that some participants in an experiential group, *‘identified their existence’* due to exploring their personal growth and awareness by dealing with and understanding self-disclosure and conflict [we will return to self-disclosure under ethical issues later]. Kiweewa et al (2013:88) identify the following stages within an experiential group:

1. *Personal growth and awareness is possible through participation in the experiential group;*
2. *Group process is beneficial;*
3. *There are events and factors within the experiential group process and dynamics that aid participants’ growth and awareness.*

There is no doubt that the experiential group offers a powerful tool for youth work practitioners to achieve many personal and social skills and competencies for those young people who are facilitated in the process.

Experiential ‘growth’ groups.

The inclusion the word ‘growth’ is an interesting addendum to the experiential group that clearly states the intention of being in a group. The experiential group uses the experiences brought into the group by the participants thus shaping the process and issues discussed, reflected upon resulting in self-awareness. Kiweewa et al (2013:68), in relation to using experiential growth groups in training outline the following domains that can be progressed through the group;

- a) *Academic performance;*
- b) *Professional development*
- c) *Personal development.*

They differentiate experiential growth groups from therapeutic groups by stating that the former is about personal growth, personal development and awareness while a therapeutic group is more about personal change. Acknowledging that much about what is known about

experiential groups comes from therapeutic groups. Kiweewa et al (2013:70) outline additional aspects of experiential growth groups:

- *Group cohesion*
- *Regular attendance*
- *Continuity of group members*
- *Personality of facilitator*
- *Outside contacts*
- *Group conflict*
- *Individual personality*
- *Guidance from facilitator.*

Kiweewa et al (2013:70) further deconstruct the aims of the experiential growth group as;

- 1) *Personal self-awareness and development;*
- 2) *Understanding ones own vulnerabilities, anxieties etc;*
- 3) *Professional requirements [for training groups];*
- 4) *Programme requirements [where appropriate];*
- 5) *Interpersonal learning – self-reflection;*
- 6) *Development of active listening skills and the ability to time responses;*
- 7) *Role of the group leader – model certain behaviours for group members.*

The material used by Kiweewa et al (2013) is based on training social workers to work in a care home. The participants formed an experiential growth group that discussed the needs of patients with dementia in a care home. The dynamics from the home were integrated into the learning and experience of the group and learning and self-awareness ensued. For those espousing the use of experiential growth groups this integration of the experiences with the issues being discussed and reflected upon has to be 'real' and related to either professional training or personal growth. Brookfield (2009:293) says,

"...for reflective practice to be considered as critical 'it must have as its implicit focus uncovering, and challenging, the power dynamics that frame practice and uncovering and challenging hegemonic assumptions' - those assumptions we embrace as being in our best interests when in fact they are working against us."

A clear impression that the experiential growth group is more than just expressing feelings and emotions although important can additionally be harnessed to deal with and cast light upon values, belief and subsequently create more in-depth self-awareness among participants. Mc Guire (2010) outlines some areas of learning and self-awareness based on students using experiential growth groups during training:

- *'Students' intellectual capacity to understand and influence 'power';*
- *Oppression and discrimination of service users' lives understood;*
- *Their capacity to challenge existing structures;*
- *The ability to examine their own values and beliefs.*

Milne et al (2014) say that experiential growth groups demonstrate their value as 'learning platforms'. Students as participants can discuss the difference between – experience and theoretical concepts; between emotional and cognitive understanding and between structural and personal. The needs of the participants often shapes the learning and self-awareness

while the previous example suggests that this experiential learning can be 'structured' to suit the needs of both the participant and the organiser as a deliverer of the group experience.

A Therapeutic Viewpoint

*We would rather be ruined than changed;
We would rather die in our dread
Than climb the cross of the moment
And let our illusions die.*
-W. H. Auden

Experiential Growth groups, have a specific element of the therapeutic at their core. This is suggested in the aims of *Personal self-awareness and development; Understanding ones own vulnerabilities, anxieties etc Interpersonal learning – self-reflection* as alluded to earlier within this work.

To break these down further is to offer an insight into what might be aspired to and attained in engaging in such a growth group. The American Psychologist, Dr. Steve Frisch, observes,

“... that the emotional consequences of self-imposed interpersonal prison is despair, loneliness, depression, anxiety, addiction, anger, and shame”.

He suggests that the Experiential group, facilitates growth and also,

“... fosters a unique experience that will afford you the opportunity to achieve a better understanding of who you are, how other people experience who you are, the interpersonal strengths that you possess and how well you utilize those strengths, and the interpersonal blind spots and how you perpetuate patterns of behaviour that tend to sabotage your interpersonal goals”.

Further to this, he argues, that such a group offers an opening to self-actualisation and awareness by,

- Providing an opportunity for you to develop a deeper understanding of who you are as an individual and as a participant in a larger interpersonal context.
- Providing you the opportunity to acquire an awareness of your level of competence in interpersonal skills.
- Providing you the opportunity to acquire and develop fundamental interpersonal skills.
- Providing you the opportunity to change the way you act interpersonally in ways that you consider important for yourself (including shedding those patterns that are self-defeating and developing more self-supporting behavior).
- Providing you with feedback from other group members. This component is essential for change because feedback is an important “AGENT OF CHANGE”.

For this to occur, Frisch (1999) suggests that there must also be a process and a structure which we now consider below.

THE NEED FOR STRUCTURE.

Whilst It seems contradictory to suggest that we can or should structure an experiential growth group, as the concept is by nature fluid and flexible, as we deal with presenting issues and problems we none the less do so as it aids interaction, goal setting and inappropriate disclosure in the group setting. However, due to the need to address ethical issues around inappropriate disclosure and the facilitation skills of the leader, we feel it is important to control the boundaries around which and within which the experiential growth group can function.

As observed by Midleman and Goldberg (1998) discuss the importance of the here-and-now, of action and reaction in the living moment, as a potent dynamic in the learning process is widely accepted. There is general agreement that knowing, which derives from direct experience, is significantly different from knowing about, which the more vicarious, didactic methods yield.

They argue that,

“Human relations training, relies heavily on experiential learning. In fact this is its single most distinguishing characteristic. However, not all of experience-based learning makes use of structure”.

Further to this they caution that a structured learning situation can be a closed environment constructed and set in motion by the facilitator. On from this they suggest that any structure might concern itself with the delimiting the arena and spotlight the particular figure or selected aspect of ground that is to be explored and examined. Simplicity within they structure , they suggest, is a prerequisite . Midleman/Goldberg 1998 The Pfeiffer Library Volume 17, 2nd Edition. Copyright © 1998 Jossey-Bass/Pfeiffer

Bohecker (2014) in turn, attempts to impose a mindfulness framework within which participants can grow through self-awareness and personal development without straying into areas that either pose facilitation issues or could be difficult issues to deal with, e.g. self-disclosure. One would assume that most structured experiential groups have a back up for those that need to be referred to other agencies if unspecified issues arise. This potential dilemma or conflict of interests would need to be addressed at the beginning of the group and adhered to in the contract between the facilitator and the group members. Indeed it could form part of the initial induction sessions about how and in what way the group functions. However, it is quite possible that using an experiential group will create a vehicle in which some participants will inappropriately self-disclose. The aim of the structured approach, along with clear initial guidelines, should highlight to participants that some disclosure will be referred to more appropriate services.

We contend that if the structure of youth groups is based around outcomes such as confidence building, self-awareness, resilience, interpersonal skills etc etc then the disclosure should be mitigated by the nature of how and in what way the group is set up to become a ‘structured experiential growth group’. We also acknowledge that there are pitfalls and potential land mines along the young peoples’ journey towards independence that professional youth workers need to take cognisance of in their groups. As Mc Carthy (2014:189),

“Students share personal information in experiential growth groups – frequently noted as an ethical issue.”

A PRACTICAL MODEL.

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.

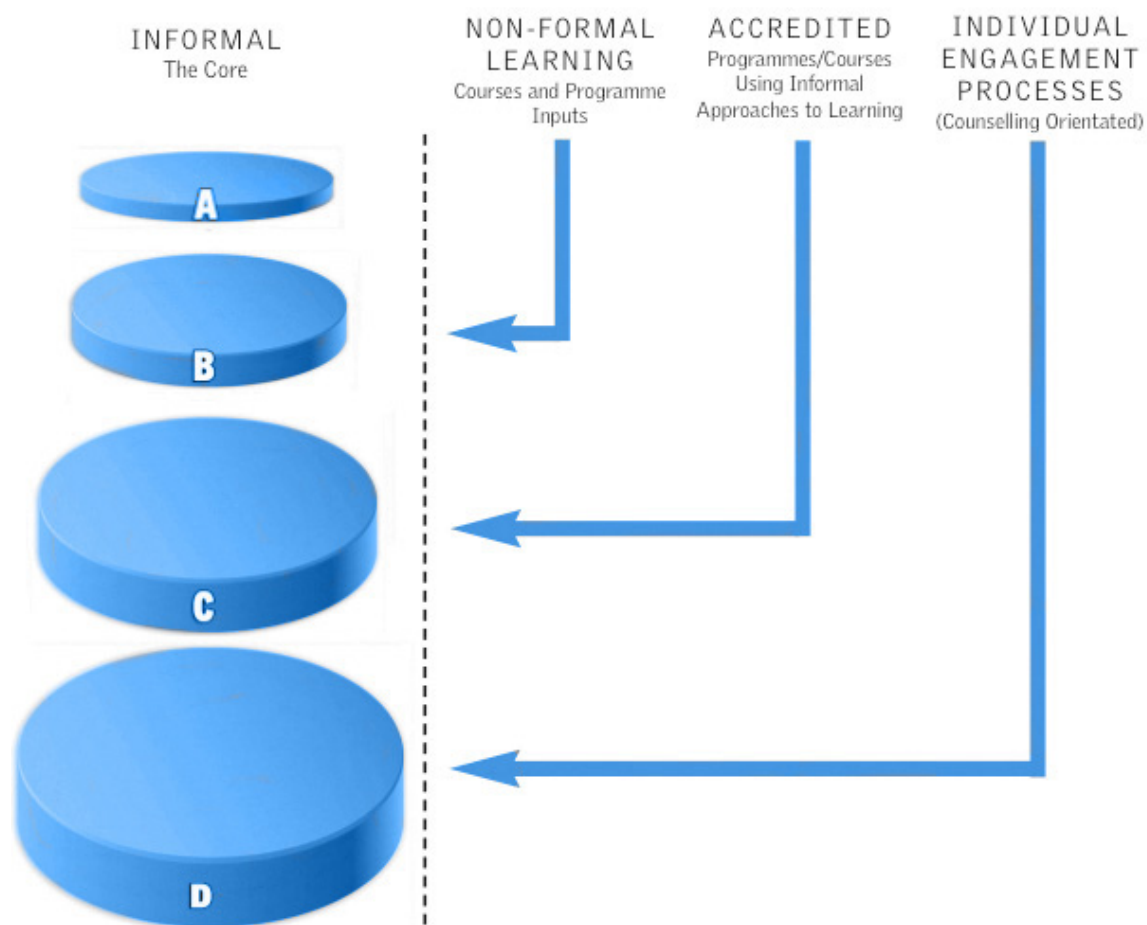
The Model we are proposing is two-dimensional. In essence this means that alongside the core-principles of youth work are a parallel set of interactions that progress and further shape the process that young people go through. The main focus of this paper is on the development of the ‘core’ using structured experiential growth groups.

The Core.

The model suggests that young people need to go through a core that builds social and personal awareness and competencies. The core is underpinned by many practical theoretical concepts and skills such as relationship building, coping mechanisms, understanding self, self-awareness, building on strengths and knowing limitations, dealing with conflict and behavioural issues relating to adolescent development, understanding self in a wider context and global issues etc etc

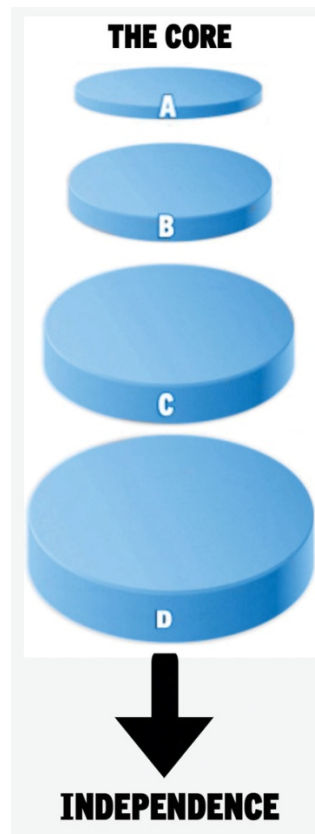
The focus of development in the ‘core’ is normally around ‘real’ needs expressed by young people and used as a loose template to form a quasi-curriculum from which they as individuals can grow. We are proposing that this ‘growth’ can be greatly enhanced by using a more purposeful and intentful vehicle based around the notion of the ‘group’. We are suggesting that the core needs of young people can be ‘front-loaded’ into the group, and with careful consideration act as a conduit for personal and social development via what we term, ‘A structured experiential growth group’ or **SEGG**.

Firstly we present the model:



We are acknowledging that the 3 columns on the right are de facto accepted as learning and are not contested in the first instance. Young people are going through a plethora of these types of experiences and indeed many youth workers in Northern Ireland [Morgan et al: 2009] are being placed in schools to deliver a variety of programmes relating to GCSEs and equivalent awards. We are not dealing with this part of the model only insofar that we are accepting that this approach to learning is understood and recognised as an accepted measurement of outcomes.

The part that intrigues us is the core of the model. The more informal relational and less well understood personal development element that can, we argue, underpin and enhance the development within the formal learning process, however defined. Abilities, skills and competencies developed in the core can often complement the learning journey for many young people within a more 'formal' learning context. Evidence shows that stronger resilient young people with increased self-awareness and coping skills can navigate what was once a difficult pathway through life, namely for some, engagement with the formal education sector which can ultimately lead to future engagement within lifelong learning (Harland and Morgan. 2010). The need to 'switch on' young people to their full potential and take responsibility for their own actions is central to a SEGG.



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.

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. It is also a period for establishing and thinking about developing a 'structured experiential growth group' if appropriate.

- **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 and the possibility of using a SEGG.**

- **Contact cannot be assumed as evidenced when youth workers have to do detached and outreach work which suggests that a group might be formed to attract young people.**

Part B of the core:



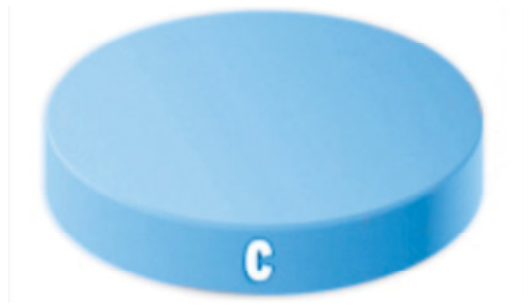
As you will have noticed *Part B* is slightly '*fatter*' denoting the expansion and development of the core for the development of young people. This part reflects a stronger bond or relationship between the adult [the youth worker] and the young person which can be achieved using a SEGG.

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, in this instance in a SEGG, e.g. Understanding their lives, confidence building, self-esteem etc. etc.

- **It is at B that we begin to see the potential for developing a SEGG which includes purposeful 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 within the context of a SEGG.**
- **The young person will begin to believe that the youth worker is interested in them and the relationship grows through interaction and peer reinforcement.**

Part C of the core:



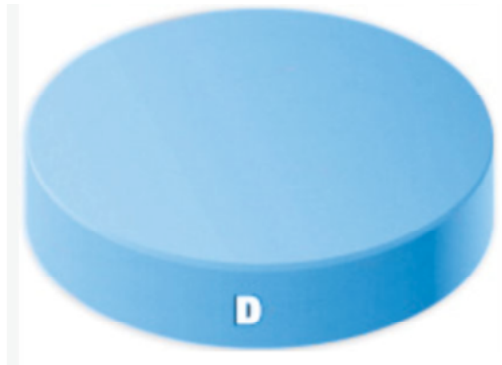
Again the core develops, deepens and is consequently getting stronger; as the youth worker enables and empowers the building and growth of the resilience, coping skills, knowledge base of the young people. The young person is taking more responsibility for their actions and getting involved in a senior 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. The SEGG is a vehicle in which this part of the core can develop, e.g. around issues identified and discussed by the group. The group process is an integral part of the learning process throwing up issues and ideas for developing the experience of the young people.

The base is getting stronger as the self-awareness of the young people is developed through reflective experiences within the supportive and structured SEGG. This enables personal and social growth permitting sustained and recognizable change at a personal and social level of engagement 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, within the SEGG, more responsibility and introduces self-awareness and responsibility endorsed and reinforced through peer-feedback and professional guidance. 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 and the development of projects that highlight young peoples' involvement**

which are celebrated publicly. All of which are outcomes from a well structured experiential growth group.

Part D of the core:



The young person is coming to the end of his/her engagement with adult youth worker and their peers in the SEGG. 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 SEGG is fully functioning at this stage but the next element of the Model encourages both development of independence while acknowledging the need for closure.

- **The SEGG 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. running a project within the SEGG for all involved.**
- **Young people continue to engage in the SEGG at a level that gives them more 'leadership' and 'management' opportunities. This allows the young people to develop skills in a safe and supervised context, i.e. the SEGG.**
- **The young people continue to be exposed to fundamental youth work practices but with a more developmental SEGG processes involved so that they are moving towards independence through the conscious development of transferable skills and increased self-awareness, reinforced in the SEGG.**

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/subject-driven education system that presuppose they have the core resilience, support, capacity, knowledge to benefit from what the formal sector has to offer. The need to have the goal of 'independence' allows the youth work practitioner to have an end goal that shapes the vision for the young person. The young person will understand that the journey is heading towards independence and that the SEGG is one vehicle in which and from which they are developing skills that are needed in 'their' lives. The onus on the voice of the young person not the adult or a prescribed curriculum however designed.

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.

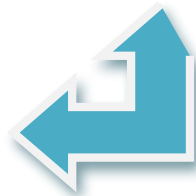


Youth workers can and should offer accredited courses to young people when they feel that the base is strong enough to support this approach to learning. The decision should be guided by young people.

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.

TOWARDS INDEPENDENCE.

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.

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 Bynner, 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 Bynner 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 augmented by the group process.

The community, it can be argued, may inform the raising but it does not need to wholly impact on the individuals growth and development and here the processes contained within our proffered model and use of structured experiential growth groups additionally 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.

The SEGG 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.

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