

**Radical or Neoliberal Participation?**  
**Young People's Perspectives Within and Beyond the Arena**  
**of Participation**

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## Abstract

Over the last thirty years the practice of participation has become institutionalised. This has prompted fears it has become too distanced from its radical, grassroots origins, instead becoming a tool of governance that supports neoliberal agendas. This thesis examines this claim within the context of youth participation in the UK, paying attention to questions of space and time.

Through a detailed examination of participatory practices within three youth participation organisations, using qualitative and participatory methods, I question the extent to which youth participation can be a tool for transformation when enacted within a society driven by individualising neoliberalism. Through analysing the transformation of adult-child relations within these organisations, I contend that spaces of youth participation are intergenerational spaces.

The research unsettles the hierarchical binary between popular/invited spaces of participation by examining processes of conscientisation within invited spaces. I portray conscientisation as a spatial, relational and temporal process, examining how young people are constructed as individuals or a collective. I argue that organisations may be acting *radically enough* within these spaces, therefore reframing invited spaces as potentially *desirable* spaces of participation for those who feared participation had lost its radical agenda.

To maximise effectiveness, ideas within both radical and neoliberal participation ideally must travel beyond the original arenas of participation. This movement of knowledge and resources across time and space is considered through the lens of youth transitions. By listening to the retrospective accounts of young adults previously involved in these organisations, I examine how they curate their past experiences to assist in competitive transitions. I identify three tactics to sustain (re)performances of empowerment and propose the concept of *dormancy* to describe how some (re)performances are stilted by complex transitions. This research discovers how, through small everyday acts, young adults slowly disseminate nuanced understandings of both radical and neoliberal participation.



## **Dedication**

To Harvey Didymus, *my joy*, who has only known me with this thesis.  
As waves to the ocean, you have shaped and been shaped by this work.

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## **Abbreviations**

CEP	Changemakers Experience Programme
CV	Curriculum Vitae
FCLP	Future Cultural Leaders Programme
LGBT	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or Transgender
NEET	Not in Education, Employment or Training
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
ODP	Organisation Development Programme

## **Preface**

### **Lingering Questions**

*In 2010 The Children's Parliament, based in Edinburgh, Scotland, alongside Fife Council and the Scottish Pre-school Play Association, piloted a children's rights programme called Wee Voices. The pilot, carried out in a Scottish playgroup with children aged between two and five, involved a series of creative arts workshops exploring practical ways in which children's rights can be respected for the youngest members of our society (see Ferris and Maynard, 2010). It reflected on the ways in which respecting children's rights affects relations between adults and children, and explored how operating within what the project termed a 'participatory framework' impacted issues of autonomy and voice. As a researcher on this project I, alongside other members of the project team, began to question the impact that attending a rights-respecting playgroup that adopts 'participatory' practices may have on other spaces of the children's lives. How would this affect their interactions at home with their parents? What if they went to a primary school that was 'less' rights-respecting, would the children struggle in a space governed by different rules? Or would they try and bring what they learnt as pre-schoolers into these new spaces? In what ways did enacting this participatory framework affect adult-child relations? Are projects such as these the beginning of a radical transformation for these relations? These questions lingered long after my involvement with the project ended and have formed a starting point for this thesis.*

## **Chapter 1. Introduction**

### **1.1 Introduction**

Over the last thirty years ‘participation’ has risen to ‘buzzword’ status (Alejandro Leal, 2007:539). It has become common place to deploy the term within multiple systems of meaning (Cook *et al.*, 2013) creating commonly used but highly contested terms such as ‘participatory development’, ‘youth participation’, ‘participatory governance’ and ‘participatory methods’. In the process of reaching buzzword status there have been concerns that participation may have ‘lost the radical agenda’ (Percy-Smith, 2010:115), a claim this thesis seeks to empirically interrogate within the context of youth participation in the UK.

Participation, as an epistemology, has multiple, diverse and socio-historically situated origins (Kindon *et al.*, 2007c). To introduce this thesis and the purpose of this research, a brief overview of some of the (evolving, partial, contested) history/ies of participation is necessary. After this, the research questions driving this thesis are presented. This is followed by an introduction to four aspects of this thesis, considering: the transformations that may occur as a result of participation, why it is important to question what effects travel out from a participatory organisation, how this thesis is situated within the geographies of activism, and the ways in which the concept of youth transitions is relevant to this research.

### **1.2 Losing the Radical Agenda?**

At times, participation has been understood as a *radical* epistemology, a radical way of seeing the world and understanding how knowledge is produced within it. It developed this reputation due to its evolution out of writings such as those of Brazilian ‘radical educator’ Paulo Freire (Cahill, Cerecer *et al.*, 2010:409, see also the writings of Swantz, 1986, Fals-Borda, 2006). Freire, writing during periods of political and social unrest in South America in the 1950s and 1960s, sought to support the participation of poor, marginalised rural workers in their ‘conscientisation’ (their ability to perceive and act upon injustices). He believed this process would lead

them to take action to transform their lives. Writings such as Freire's (1970a, 1970b) contributed to an understanding of participation being a tool in a project of radical social (and political) transformation. Central to this project were two key ideas. Firstly, that social transformation should develop through processes of co-production: knowledge is developed not just *for* but *with* those who are experiencing forms of injustice and marginalisation. Secondly, that a radical participatory epistemology is driven by more than a desire to understand the world, its advocates seek to change the world 'for the better' (Kindon *et al.*, 2007c:13). The description of participation as *radical* therefore arises out of a commitment to use it as a tool to challenge, dismantle and transform existing relations, systems and structures that promote and perpetuate marginalisation, exploitation and oppression. These ideas have often stood in opposition to systems such as colonialism, capitalism and neoliberalism. More than critiquing these systems of power, actions driven by a radical participatory epistemology imagine and offer alternative ways of being, renegotiating deeply embedded relations between what Freire (1970c) calls the oppressors and the oppressed (Hickey and Mohan, 2005; Chatterton *et al.*, 2007).

Since the mid-1980s, ideas central to this radical participatory epistemology, for example that 'better' knowledge is generated when it is co-produced between 'experts' and the people 'on the ground', became increasingly popular within spheres ranging from international development to governance to research (Alejandro Leal, 2007). Government and non-government organisations (NGOs) adopted elements of this participatory epistemology and its associated practices introduced above, seeing it as a tool to help effectively govern in an increasingly post-colonial, neoliberal, globalised world. This growing popularity, and associated institutionalisation, left participation, in its many guises, open to critique (e.g. Cooke and Kothari, 2001b; Cornwall, 2004a). For example, discussed throughout this thesis is the troubling *uncritical* acceptance of participation as inherently 'good' and stemming from 'pure' motivations, which masks its contribution to the maintenance of unhelpful effects of power which perpetuate inequality (see Kothari, 2001). The

movement of participation from the 'margins to the mainstream', from the favelas of South America into institutions such as the World Bank, meant that ideas central to a more radical participatory epistemology, such as seeing those who are marginalised as active co-producers of knowledge, often got lost or 'watered-down' (Williams, 2004a:557).

Concerned with the spatial aspects of participation, Cornwall (2004b), amongst others, criticised the uncritical acceptance of this move. She developed an (at times misinterpreted) binary identifying 'arenas of participation'<sup>1</sup> as either 'invited' or 'popular' spaces. Invited spaces were assessed to be those created *for* people who are in some way marginalised. Popular spaces, more akin to the spaces of participation described by Freire (1970c), denote those which are developed organically *by* the people who are experiencing the marginalisation (see also Cornwall, 2002; 2004a).

Taking seriously Mrs Kinpaishy's (2008:295) warning that 'participation is not something that we should open our arms to without looking at it very, very critically', this thesis grapples with these critiques a decade on. In doing so I re-examine concepts such as co-production, paying close attention to how it works in practice. I also unsettle this binary between invited and popular spaces, and in doing so question the extent to which participation has lost its radical agenda.

Empirically this thesis grounds these debates within the institutionalisation of youth participation within the UK. The term 'youth participation' in this context, although certainly diverse and contested, refers broadly to organisations or movements that aim to increase the involvement of young people in society. Farthing (2012:73) defines it as 'a process where young people, as active citizens, take part in, express views on, and have decision making power about issues that affect them.'

Motivations for promoting youth participation vary significantly, ranging from concerns about young people's apparent political apathy, to a desire (often but not

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'arenas of participation' is used in this thesis to denote spaces promoting a participatory epistemology. Reasons for its use are outlined in Chapter 2.

always connected to issues of rights) for structurally unequal relations between young people and adults within UK society to be changed (see Farthing, 2012; Shukra *et al.*, 2012). Youth participation in particular has been criticised in recent years for diluting or losing sight of participation's radical agenda (e.g. Percy-Smith, 2010; Shukra *et al.*, 2012). Youth is (still) seen by many as a period of 'becoming'; understood as an important time to guide, govern and even control or 'manage' young people to help them 'become' 'good' neoliberal subjects (Bessant, 2003:91). Masschelein and Quaghebeur (2005:61) define good neoliberal subjects as 'active, competent, independent, self-determining human beings'. Encouraging young people's participation in both formal and informal spaces of education and politics is seen as one tool to achieve this (see Masschelein and Quaghebeur, 2005; Raby, 2014). Given the current climate of austerity facing voluntary, charitable and third sector organisations in the UK that work with children and young people (see Horton, 2016), it has become more important than ever that these organisations are able to prove their contribution to the construction of this neoliberal society (see House of Commons Education Committee, 2011; Thomas, 2011). It is therefore unsurprising that the focus of organisations that promote participatory practices and the increased participation of young people within society has somewhat shifted away from the epistemology's radical roots to focus on the development of individual (future) subjects. But what has been lost during this shift? Has a focus on *individual* young people overshadowed the collective processes of co-production and conscientisation synonymous with participation's radical origins? Are these spaces where relations between adults and young people are or can be radically reconfigured (Mannion, 2010)? These questions make *youth* participation a particularly interesting and timely space to reinvigorate debates about the spaces and nature of institutionalised participation.

### 1.3 Research Questions

When taking into consideration the radical nature of the participatory proposal for social transformation and the neo-liberal structural-adjustment context in which it has been co-opted, the incompatibility between the two

might seem far too deep-seated to permit such a co-optation to take place (Alejandro Leal, 2007:541)

In response to concerns such as these, through the context of youth participation in the UK, the tensions between participation being a tool for either neoliberal governance or radical transformation are explored within this thesis. This is examined through three research questions:

1. To what extent is it possible for youth participation to be a tool for transformation, particularly of adult-child relations, when enacted within a neoliberal context?
2. In what ways might processes of conscientisation take place within an *invited* arena of youth participation?
3. How are the knowledge and resources created within these arenas of youth participation transferred, over time, to other spaces of people's lives?

Qualitative, participatory research with three organisations involved in youth participation was conducted to assist in answering these questions. Detailed in Chapter 3, in order to understand the practices of these organisations this research included periods of 'observant participation' (Moeran, 2009:140), alongside a review of each organisations' literature and focus groups with staff. As indicated by the title of this thesis, this research paid particular attention to the perspectives of young people. 30 young people aged 15-30 were interviewed for this research. These interviews were carried out between 6 months and 12 years after they had left these organisations, to explore the questions of time asked in this third research question.

To introduce this research further, the following sections develop four aspects of these research questions. After this, an outline for this thesis is presented.

#### **1.4 Transformations Within and Beyond**

Multiple, interconnected 'transformations', or changes, have been argued to occur through processes of youth participation (Hart, 2008; Tisdall, 2013). These include transformations of individual young people who are involved in these processes, transformations of adult-child relations and transformations to society which occur

due to the activities associated with the processes of youth participation. This thesis is particularly interested in the first two types of transformation.

As outlined in Chapter 2, participation's role in the transformation of adult-child relations is also explored in Mannion and I'anson (2004), Mannion (2007) and Wyness (2009). The purpose of this thesis is not to argue if adult-child relations — the ways adults and children and young people typically interact in a variety of spaces — are in need of transforming. Instead this research listens to why organisations involved in youth participation believe adult-child relations need restructuring and considers the ways they attempt to transform these relations.

As will be discussed in Chapter 4, each of the organisations involved in this research desires widespread transformation of adult-child relations across society, however, to varying degrees they recognise that to achieve this they need to model the restructured adult-child relations they are proposing. This research therefore examines how adult-child relations are performed within these organisations. In reflecting on adult-child relations within processes of participation, I seek to examine an aspect of participation that Mannion (2007:413) states has often 'been ignored'. Studying these relations also contributes to the growing body of work interested in the geographies of intergenerationality, in particular '*extrafamilial* intergenerational relationships' which Vanderbeck (2007:202 emphasis in original) describes as 'substantially under-researched' (see also Hopkins and Pain, 2007; Vanderbeck and Worth, 2015a).

Transformation in this thesis is theorised as both a spatial and *temporal* process. It is unlikely (although not inconceivable) that a change in adult-child relations would occur overnight. Such a transformation is more likely to occur slowly, developing as different ways of doing adult-child relations are gradually performed with increasing frequency in a wide variety of spaces (e.g. at home, school, youth activities, but also through altered representations of young people within the media and politics). I suggest, in Chapter 7, that cumulative, small changes may result in the



transformation of relations and the normalisation of new ways of being/thinking/interacting.

### 1.5 Questions of Time

In the third research question driving this research I question how knowledge and resources generated within arenas of participation, both those which promote neoliberalism or favour a radical reconstruction of adult-child relations within UK society, travel into and shape other spaces of people's lives. Neither 'type' of participation is intended to be contained within the arena of participation, nor, as Massey (2005) suggests, is any sort of containment possible due to the pervious movement of thoughts and people through space. Both to varying degrees hope to mould and guide the behaviour of young people — how they interact with adults and understand themselves, the world and their position within it — in other spaces of their lives.

As will be reviewed in Chapter 2, although academic attention is often (perhaps *overly*) focused on actions *within* arenas of participation, some consideration has been given to how knowledge and resources encountered within these spaces travels or 'pushes-out-on' other spaces of people's lives (e.g. Jones and SPEECH, 2001:5; Cornwall, 2004b; Kesby, 2007; Parr, 2007; Vaughan, 2014). As introduced above, this question is particularly pertinent for those who see participation and its associated practices as having the potential to radically challenge and transform existing relations, systems and structures that perpetuate inequality. As with the transformation of adult-child relations, if other desired transformations are to be realised (e.g. that young people feel that their voices are heard, that they are more 'empowered' — a contested term critiqued in Chapter 2), it is essential that the knowledge and resources learnt within these spaces are not contained but spread and are eventually normalised in other spaces of people's lives (Kesby *et al.*, 2007). This thesis seeks to provide greater understanding of this movement of knowledge and resources between spaces.

Building on the concerns of these scholars about this movement between *spaces*, it is also important to consider how these movements are affected over *time*. All ‘performances’ — a term used in this thesis following its use in Kesby (2005) to denote all social interactions — are embedded in both space and time.

Performances can never be identically replicated or re-performed as each performance (action, thought), regardless of how similar it is to the last, occurs at a different point in time, when the subject is encountering a different (socially-constructed) moment in their lifecourse. The term ‘(re)performance’ is used throughout this thesis to acknowledge this, inferring that performances are connected yet always distinct from previous performances. Within this thesis it is argued that theorising (re)performances of knowledge and resources beyond the arena of participation as being affected by dynamic temporal *as well as* spatial processes can facilitate the development of ‘rich[er] seams of understanding’ (Hopkins and Pain, 2007:291). As I argue in Maynard (2017), this theorisation facilitates greater insight into the nature, scale and sustainability of (re)performances.

## 1.6 Geographies of Activism

Each of the three organisations involved in this research could be labelled as doing ‘activist’ work.<sup>2</sup> As explained in Chapter 4, in their own ways they are each challenging the way young people are treated within UK society. Youth participation and activism have a long and entangled history. Some scholars explore the similarities and differences between the two (e.g. Harris *et al.*, 2010; Shukra *et al.*, 2012), whilst others use the terms political participation and activism more interchangeably to argue why children and young people should be considered political beings (e.g. Bosco, 2010; Nolas *et al.*, 2016).

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<sup>2</sup> An activist has been defined as ‘a person who believes strongly in political or social change and takes part in activities such as public protests to try to make this happen’ by the Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary & Thesaurus (2017). As will be acknowledged in Chapter 7, both the terms ‘activist’ and ‘activism’ are highly contested.

This thesis adds to the growing body of work documenting children and young people's engagement with forms of activism (e.g. Hörschelmann and Schäfer, 2005; Hörschelmann, 2008; Bosco, 2010; Hopkins and Todd, 2015); it also considers the relationship between time and the geographies of activism (see Panelli, 2007; Panelli and Larner, 2010 who examine the role of time and space in relation to activism). Considering what travels beyond the arena of participation leads to further questions: do young people, as they age and become adults, continue to be interested in campaigning for the increased participation/human rights of children and young people? Do they look for new causes and collectives to be a part of? What spaces of activism do they engage in after they leave these youth organisations? Do these (re)performances 'count' as activism, is this related to questions of scale? Building on a long history of feminist and activism geographies (e.g. Abrahams, 1992; Staeheli and Cope, 1994; and more recently Horton and Kraftl, 2009; Askins, 2014; Pain, 2014; Pottinger, 2017), these questions are all considered in Chapter 7 as I identify activism in the 'everyday'. Again, temporal as well as spatial dynamics are considered as I propose that it is helpful to think of activism as at times *dormant* (see Maynard, 2017), constrained by an entanglement of personal and structural barriers that limit (re)performances of activism at that present time.

### **1.7 Transitions to Adulthood**

As outlined above, one of the main strands of the empirical research which informs this thesis involved in-depth interviews with young adults after they had stopped being involved in arenas of youth participation. Typically ending their involvement with these organisations at age 18, or before, those interviewed were aged between 15 and 30, with 28 out of 30 of those interviewed aged 18 or over. Although contested, this age range encompasses a period referred to in academia as 'youth transitions' (Furlong *et al.*, 2011). Depicted as a liminal, instable stage within the lifecourse, this period has long been a source of academic interest both within Geography and beyond (e.g. Patiniotis and Holdsworth, 2005; Hopkins, 2006; Henderson *et al.*, 2007; MacDonald, 2011). This positioning is of particular interest

within this thesis for three reasons. Firstly, youth transitions, especially in recent times, has been portrayed as an uniquely challenging stage in the lifecourse, with Jeffrey and McDowell (2004:131) reflecting that 'the transition to adulthood is perhaps more complex and contested than in any previous era'. Faced in the UK with increased responsibilities associated with adulthood, this period of transitions is associated with economic, social and political uncertainty (see Bynner, 2001; MacDonald, 2011). Alongside this, this period often results in geographical isolation as further education or employment opportunities may mean some young people need to move away from previous support networks (see Holdsworth and Morgan, 2005; Thomson and Taylor, 2005). This challenging context makes the questions introduced above, about what elements of young people's experiences at these organisations are sustained over time and transferred to other spaces of their lives, particularly pertinent. This is explored in Chapter 7 in relation to if and how empowered thoughts and actions encountered at these organisations are sustained over time.

Secondly, each of the organisations involved in this research were concerned with addressing the perceived 'imbalance of power' (a concept critiqued throughout this thesis) between young people and adults within UK society. Therefore, the transition from being a young person to being legally considered an adult within the UK corresponds with the movement from being an 'insider' (a young person demanding a greater say, louder voice, increased respect and recognition) within the cause they were championing at their organisations, to being an 'outsider' (an adult). Within Chapter 7 it is argued that this corresponding movement affects the nature of the (re)performances of knowledge and resources, as, now adults, those previously involved in organisations promoting youth participation question the extent to which this remains their concern now they are no longer young people themselves.

Thirdly, there is the hope that investigating questions of youth participation, youth transitions and time will reinvigorate examinations of time within the subdiscipline of Children's Geographies. Geographers are well known for writing critically about

the relationship between time and space (e.g. May and Thrift, 2003; Dodgshon, 2008). Within Children's Geographies, however, temporality has been noticed to occupy a more uncomfortable position (Worth, 2009). This can be traced back to developments within the 'new social studies of childhood'. As scholars became concerned with portraying children and young people as political 'beings' in their own right, whose lives and political actions are (rightly so) worth studying in and for the 'here and now' (e.g. Matthews and Limb, 1999; Weller, 2007; Skelton, 2010), 'less attention' has been paid to temporality and the intertwining of the past, present and future in young people's lives (Kallio, 2016:103). This thesis is one attempt to readdress this (see also Horton and Kraftl, 2006; Gallacher and Gallagher, 2008; Kallio, 2016). It proactively engages with notions of becoming and draws on theorisations of time as always necessarily permeated by the presence of the past and potential futures, to explore the ways in which experiences at these organisations are (re)performed in other spaces and at different moments within the lifecourse (May and Thrift, 2003; Worth, 2009).

## 1.8 Thesis Outline

To begin to answer the research questions, **Chapter 2** situates this thesis within existing literature. It starts with a definition of a participatory epistemology, identifying three core beliefs associated with this. Integrating literature from International Development and Youth Studies, as well as Geography, I then argue that youth participation should be understood as both a spatial and relational practice. In doing so, I contend that arenas of participation should be thought of as *intergenerational spaces*. This chapter also introduces the work of radical educationalist Paulo Freire, outlining his understanding of conscientisation. As introduced above, participation has not evolved without critique. In presenting how power and empowerment are understood within this research as performed effects, critiques levelled at participation and specifically youth participation are reviewed, demonstrating how they inform the approaches taken within this research. This chapter concludes by exploring the ways in which scholars have begun to examine

how knowledge and resources are both transferred *and sustained* from arenas of participation, over time, to other spaces.

**Chapter 3** details the methods used in this research, reflecting on moments of both success and failure as I sought to engage in participatory ways with the three organisations involved with this research. In doing so, I identify and reflect upon what I have termed *participatory guilt* – the constant worry for those conducting participatory research whether their research is participatory ‘enough’. The methods discussed in this chapter include periods of observant participation, a review of each organisation’s literature, participatory diagramming exercises undertaken as part of focus groups with staff and semi-structured interviews with young adults who had previously been involved with these organisations. Throughout this chapter I reflect upon how ‘deep’ participatory analysis is not always practical, appropriate or desirable. This chapter offers two reflective narratives. The first contains a discussion about conducting fieldwork whilst pregnant. I argue that at times the ‘public gaze’ experienced by a pregnant body can become a ‘productive gaze’. The second narrative is written by Adele Richardson, a young volunteer who acted as a peer researcher in this project, whose voice I argue needs to be included in this thesis. This chapter concludes by suggesting how this research has become more than a thesis, for myself, but also for Adele and the organisations involved in this project.

**Chapter 4** contains a detailed look at how participation is understood and translated into practice within the three youth organisations involved in this research. This chapter lays the foundations for interpreting the voices of young people presented in the three subsequent chapters. Through identifying and analysing the discourses being evoked about young people within these spaces, within this chapter I also reveal some of the challenges and tensions faced by organisations promoting youth participation within the UK. This chapter concludes by offering a question, revisited in Chapter 6, as I ask what would it mean for an arena of youth participation to be ‘radical enough’? Can invited arenas of participation radically challenge injustices whilst operating within and alongside a neoliberal culture?

The following two chapters, taken as a pair, explore the tension between understanding participation as a tool of governance driven by a neoliberal agenda and recognising it as something more radical, centred on ideas of dialogue and co-production with the potential to bring about social transformation. Building on arguments made by Masschelein and Quaghebeur (2005); Alejandro Leal (2007) and Raby (2014), these chapters use empirical evidence to explore this tension, paying particular attention to the role of the individual and the collective within discourses of participation. **Chapter 5** draws on empirical evidence from Changemakers, one of the organisations involved in this research, to explore the ways in which participation is being used as a tool to govern young people into ‘good’ neoliberal subjects. This chapter focuses on how participation can be used as a tool to promote the individualisation of young people, reflecting on the extent to which this leads to individual processes of conscientisation. This argument is complicated by what Pykett (2010a:623) calls the ‘paradoxes of governing’ – forming the beginning of the deconstruction of the binary between ‘neoliberal’ and more radical expressions or ‘types’ of participation.

**Chapter 6** predominately draws on empirical evidence from another organisation, Investing in Children, to examine the tensions, difficulties and possibilities of enacting a more radical participatory epistemology within a neoliberal context. This chapter develops the themes of individuality and the collective, highlighting how it is possible for arenas of participation to be spaces where the individual is recognised and respected but where practices are not individualising. After presenting and dissecting the concept of dialogue, this chapter examines processes of co-production, considering specifically the challenges of negotiating (and explaining) relations and relationships between adults and young people within invited arenas of youth participation. The tensions and inconsistencies highlighted in practices at Investing in Children foreground the discussion, introduced in Chapter 4, around whether it is useful to label some arenas of participation as ‘radical enough’. Looking towards Chapter 7, this pair of chapters concludes by demonstrating that despite these challenges, *invited* arenas of participation can still work as spaces which

facilitate collective and potentially powerful moments of conscientisation that may shape young people's actions in other spaces of their lives.

**Chapter 7** examines how knowledge and resources created within arenas of participation travel and are (re)performed in other spaces of people's lives. This question is considered through the context of (often) complicated and fragmented transitions towards adulthood. Developing the themes of individualisation and adult-child relations, this chapter considers first how continued relationships with staff, both real and imagined, become a resource used to navigate these transitions. Drawing on Nancy Worth's (2009) theorisation of time as becoming, I identify how past experiences are manipulated to curate neoliberal futures. This chapter discusses three tactics used by participants to sustain their (individual) empowerment after they have left the organisations, before considering personal and structural factors which limit some of these (re)performances. Finally, positioning this thesis within the growing field documenting small scale activisms, I consider the spaces and scales at which knowledge and resources are (re)performed. This chapter finds that as those involved in organisations promoting youth participation become adults, they themselves become an effective tool through which to slowly, and at times gently, bring about the transformation and normalisation of a different, potentially more radical form of adult-child relations.

**Chapter 8** seeks to directly answer the three research questions set out in this introduction. In doing so I highlight the key and original contributions made within this thesis to geographical inquiries. I then reflect on the spaces of possibility and coexisting narratives of struggle present within this research. I explain these are spaces where alternative possible ways of being and doing, which potentially disrupt and challenge the dominance of neoliberal and capitalist agendas, are imagined and enacted. To conclude this thesis, suggestions are offered for areas of further academic research, alongside practice-based recommendations for those working within arenas of youth participation.



## Chapter 2. Arenas of Participation (And Beyond): A Review of the Literature

### 2.2 Introduction

This chapter situates the research questions raised in Chapter 1 within existing academic literatures. In doing so it reinforces the claims made previously about the importance and relevance of this research, both to academia but also to the practice of youth participation more broadly. Within this chapter I also introduce key terms and concepts used within this thesis. I begin by outlining what is understood by a 'participatory epistemology' and identifying three core beliefs associated with it. These are developed in Chapter 4 as I begin to analyse how epistemologies of participation are applied in practice. Next, I argue that youth participation should be understood as both a spatial and relational practice; in doing so I consider how arenas of participation can be considered intergenerational spaces. The work of radical educationalist Paulo Freire, used throughout this thesis, is introduced. I examine specifically his development of the concept of conscientisation. This review also reflects on how participation and its relationship with power has been critiqued within the literature, drawing from disciplines beyond Geography such as International Development and Youth Studies. Informed by the work of Kesby (2007) and Gallagher (2008) in particular, I detail how power can be understood *as an effect*. The relationship between youth participation and empowerment is also outlined. In proposing that it is useful to understand empowerment, like power, as a performed effect, I contend that it is important to consider the relationship between empowerment and participation critically. Finally, this chapter reviews how others have begun to question the ways in which knowledge and resources are transferred from arenas of participation, over time, to other spaces. Questions arising from the literature about if and how these (re)performances are sustained are also introduced here, as these form a key part of the empirical analysis conducted in Chapter 7.

### 2.3 A Participatory Epistemology

An epistemology is a theory of knowledge, an understanding about how knowledge is created within the world. Those committed to a *participatory* epistemology tend to share the following core beliefs: that knowledge is co-produced; that this knowledge is situated, multiple and understood experientially; and that the world within which this knowledge is produced is (for varying reasons) in need of change. Advocates of a participatory epistemology are often concerned with issues of social justice, believing that collaboration is an effective way to challenge power structures that perpetuate marginalisation. A range of people or organisations may be committed to a participatory epistemology, for example researchers conducting some form of participatory research<sup>3</sup> (for an excellent example see Cahill, 2004; Cahill *et al.*, 2004) or organisations that work with people experiencing and challenging some form of injustice/inequality. This may include organisations or people committed to 'development' work (e.g. 'SPEECH', an organisation undertaking 'participatory development' with women in Tamil Nadu, see Jones and SPEECH, 2001) or those, such as the organisations involved with this research, who work with young people (see examples explored within Cairns, 2006:225-230).

Acknowledged in Chapter 1, the origins of a participatory epistemology, or what Reason and Bradbury (2006b:1) term a 'participatory worldview' and Kesby (2007:2814) calls the 'philosophy of participation', are diverse, being both geographically and socio-historically situated (see Kindon *et al.*, 2007c). Key proponents of this epistemology offer personal accounts of its origins. For example, Columbian researcher Orlando Fals-Borda (2006) situates his account of the rise of a participatory mode of enquiry since the 1970s in relation to those of others across the world, including Brazilian Paulo Freire (1970c) and Finnish scholar Marja-Liisa Swantz (1986) (see also the personal recollections of Hall, 2005). To historically contextualise criticism levelled at the 'mainstreaming' of participation within

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<sup>3</sup> As is acknowledged in Kindon *et al.* (2007c) a wide variety of terms are used to describe research influenced by a participatory epistemology, for example Participatory Action Research.

development since the mid-1980s, Hickey and Mohan (2004b:5) offer a detailed account of the diverse ideological underpinnings which contribute to different participatory approaches. None of these accounts should be read as a singular, linear or complete narrative,<sup>4</sup> as Reason and Bradbury (2006b:1) argue, the history/ies of this epistemology are still ‘emerging’.

The following sections acknowledge these diverse origins and influences whilst outlining three core beliefs typically associated with a participatory epistemology. In doing so, the tension introduced in Chapter 1 between the radical origins and politics of participation and its institutionalisation within neoliberal societies, becomes even more apparent. This tension forms the basis of enquiry in Chapters 5 and 6, the first of which also contains a more detailed look at the literatures surrounding youth participation and its relationship with neoliberalism and governance.

### **2.3.1 Co-production**

Participate means ‘to take part in’ or ‘share in’ an activity with others (Collins English Dictionary, 2017). Within a participatory epistemology humans are understood to be in relationship with each other and the world around them, they are interconnected, a *part of* rather than *apart from* the world (see Fals-Borda and Mora-Osejo, 2003). They are interconnected, co-producers of knowledge. Influenced by diverse religious understandings of humankind’s position in the world, such as from Buddhism (the separate self is the cause of suffering) and Judaism (people are in partnership with God), this line of thinking challenges a Cartesian worldview in which the world is comprised of separate objects with a distinct split between nature and humanity (Heron and Reason, 1997; Reason and Bradbury, 2008). The practice of co-production (working together, valuing each other’s voices and diverse experiences and positionalities) sits potentially in radical opposition to the emphasis on individualism typically found within capitalism and neoliberalism. Its practice

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<sup>4</sup> For a discussion about the dangers of fixing a particular narrative onto a school of thought see Hemmings (2005).

challenges socially-constructed (often hierarchical) discourses surrounding, for example, age, class and gender, on which such societies are often rooted. Co-production is a key concept in this thesis, the literature surrounding its practice is discussed throughout this chapter and then developed more fully in Chapter 6. Considering age in particular, Chapter 6 explores if and how co-production works in practice within organisations advocating youth participation that are operating within the UK, a society with a long (and evolving) history of neoliberalism and individualism (see Jones *et al.*, 2011; Williams *et al.*, 2012; Radice, 2013).

### **2.3.2 Situated and reflexive knowledge**

The belief that knowledge is co-produced rejects a positivist worldview and the associated notion of the existence of objective truth. Instead, a participatory epistemology aligns more closely with poststructuralist perspectives on knowledge. Within poststructuralism the world is understood as socially constructed. There is no knowledge waiting to be 'discovered', instead, as Sanderson and Kindon (2004:125) explain, 'participatory processes produce knowledge specific to their process and participants rather than "uncover" "local knowledge"' (see also Jupp, 2007). There is no singular, 'right' way to understand the world (Pain, 2004). Gibson-Graham (2000:97) explains that whilst this means that knowledges cannot be differentiated by their greater or lesser *accuracy*, 'they can be distinguished by their effects – the different subjects they empower, the institutions and practices they enable, and for those they exclude or suppress'. Drawing from these ideas, a participatory epistemology advocates the importance of being reflexive and explicit about where, how and by whom knowledge is created and how it is being used to effect power over others, acknowledging the situated nature of all knowledge creation (Reason and Bradbury, 2006b). This understanding of knowledge calls for a critical and reflexive examination of the role of power, identity and agency within *all* encounters. As Jupp (2007) reminds, this need for critical examination extends to spaces within which participation is being advocated, which, as will be argued later on in this chapter, should not be misconceived as spaces 'free' from the effects of power.

### 2.3.3 Social transformation

Reason and Bradbury (2006b:6) explain that whilst poststructuralism ‘helps us see through the myth of the modernist world’, its preoccupation with language and text does ‘not help us move beyond the problems it [the world] has produced’. As introduced in Chapter 1, a distinguishing feature of a participatory epistemology is that its advocates want to challenge injustices, not just critique the world but change it ‘for the better’ (Kindon *et al.*, 2007c:13). Reason and Bradbury (2008) argue that social transformation should not be brought about through trying to change others, but by opening up communicative spaces, spaces of co-production, so change can occur *with* others (see also Kemmis, 2001). Although a desire for social transformation is a core belief of a participatory epistemology, neither the form of the transformation, nor the method to achieve it is prescriptive. This is unsurprising given participation’s diverse origins and influences. McTaggart (1997:8-9) reflects in his edited collection about PAR in international contexts that the authors have made appeals to philosophies as diverse as ‘Aristotelian ethics, critical social sciences, Deweyian philosophy, feminism, Buddhism, popular knowledge’ (Kindon *et al.*, 2007c also list Marxism and post-colonialism as key movements influencing participation). Chatterton *et al.* (2007), also writing about Participatory Action Research, advocate a proactive, action-centred approach to bringing about social transformation. They argue that following a participatory epistemology should result in more than collating or even listening to the voices of the marginalised, it should lead to resistance and the dismantling of systems of power. But what form should this resistance take? And at what scale? Can structures that perpetuate inequality be resisted from within? These questions form the basis of the empirical examinations in Chapter 6, which considers the practices of Investing in Children, an organisation that campaigns for the human rights of children and young people by working with existing adult-dominated structures, and Chapter 7, which further explores the connections between participation and activism introduced in Chapter 1.

## 2.4 Arenas of Participation

A participatory epistemology is not just a philosophical set of ideas, it is enacted by people within spaces. This section introduces two sets of literature which are used throughout this thesis, considering how youth participation is both a spatial and relational practice. As will be seen below, these literatures are naturally intertwined and as such are not fully separated into distinct subsections. This section begins by outlining how participation has been theorised as a spatial practice. I then explain why the term ‘arena of participation’ is used within this thesis. Reviewed next is how participatory practices within these spaces are measured and classified, within this section I introduce how models of participation have been used in this research. Following this, and specifically considering *youth* participation, I review how arenas of youth participation have been presented by some as intergenerational spaces.

### 2.4.1 Spaces of practice

Participation, in its multiple forms, is a very spatial concept. Scholars within Geography (e.g. Kesby, 2007; Askins and Pain, 2011) and beyond are interested in exploring the spatial dimensions of participation and its associated practices (see references throughout Hickey and Mohan, 2004a; also in relation to youth participation see Mannion and I’anson, 2004; Mannion, 2007; Percy-Smith, 2010). As Cornwall (2002) explains, the term ‘participation’ evokes spatial images; images of gatherings, people coming together to occupy forbidden spaces through protest, or crowding around tables in discussion, or standing in line waiting to vote. Metaphorically, participation is about making ‘space’ for different voices to be heard, the practice of which will be considered in Chapter 6.

The work of Andrea Cornwall (2002), (2004a), (2004b) has generated interest in the spatialities of participation beyond her discipline of International Development. As participatory practices (e.g. Participatory Rural Appraisal) became increasingly popular within development in the 1990s, Cornwall was concerned that their proliferation failed to account for how they were affected by space. Drawing on Lefebvre’s (1991) understanding of space as socially constructed, or *produced*, Cornwall argues that we need to pay attention to space. She suggests the history of

a space and the associations or memories that a space has for the participants and facilitators, affects how participation is experienced there. Jones and SPEECH (2001) provide an example of this through their research into participatory development approaches with women in Tamil Nadu. They argue that the 'gendered' nature of certain spaces affected how their participatory approaches were perceived by members of the communities. In reference to youth participation, Stoudt (2007) reflects on the situated, spatial nature of participatory practices; he found the dissemination of a participatory research project within a school to be affected by the participant's previous interactions within that space (see also Gallagher, 2006).

This thesis is grounded in the understanding upheld by Cornwall (and others, e.g. Pain *et al.*, 2007) that participation, in its multiple forms, is always a situated, inherently spatial practice; that spaces are not just empty locations waiting to be filled but both produce and are produced by the interactions within them. The following section will further clarify this position whilst explaining why I have chosen to use the term 'arena of participation' to denote the spaces in which participation takes place.

#### **2.4.2 Why an 'arena of participation'?**

Within this thesis I use the term 'arena of participation' to describe a space that is identified as being influenced by a participatory epistemology. An arena is defined as 'a place of activity, debate or conflict' (Oxford Dictionaries, 2015a). The term 'arena' is apt as it resonates with the ideas about performance introduced in Chapter 1 (see Kesby, 2007). An arena of participation may be primarily situated in one place or it may be constituted over multiple sites, linked by a central organisation, project or cause (see Robins and Lieres, 2004 for an example of an arena of participation being constituted over multiple sites, united in their campaign for the improved treatment for those living with HIV/Aids). It may be assembled formally such as through a youth council (e.g. Freeman *et al.*, 2003) or a participatory research project (e.g. Cahill, 2004), or it may evolve more organically and only identify as an arena of participation in retrospect (Cornwall, 2002).

I use this term, instead of the term 'participatory arenas' favoured by scholars such as Cahill (2007c), Kesby (2007) and Askins and Pain (2011) to cautiously emphasise that whilst these are sites where some form of participation is *intended*, the actions within them are not necessarily always *participatory*. It is important to acknowledge this tension/instability at the start of this thesis as it underlies the empirical research presented in Chapters 4-6.

An arena of participation (like all spaces (see Lefebvre, 1991)) is a socially constructed/produced space. It is produced by people, people who move between spaces carrying into them both the experiences of their pasts and their imagined futures (their hopes and expectations). Also travelling with them into these spaces are the memories of their previous encounters with the discourse of 'participation'. For example, for participants in this research this may be their experiences of being on their student council, or engaging in a public consultation, or their feelings about being unable to vote in general elections in the UK until the age of 18. As people are adaptable (perhaps inconsistent) beings, when in these arenas of participation they may adopt some or all of the ideas behind a participatory epistemology to extents that may vary *from moment to moment*. Introduced in Chapter 4, the practices of the staff or the actions of the participants within these arenas of participation are therefore not 'participatory' *all* of the time. It is also useful to think of arenas of participation as fluid; the social relations produced within them both influence and are influenced by the spaces around them (Lefebvre, 1991; Jones and SPEECH, 2001). Therefore, in the case of this research it would be unrealistic to use the term 'participatory arenas' as it masks this instability. These considerations, coupled with the polyvalent use of the term 'participation', have made it difficult to clearly define spaces as 'participatory'. This is evident from the numerous attempts by scholars to classify and measure participation discussed below.

### **2.4.3 Classified and measured: the gold standard**

The following section outlines some of the ways scholars have attempted to classify and measure participation. Cornwall (2002, 2004a, 2004b) argues that the institutionalisation of participation, outlined in Chapter 1, has made it important to



differentiate between different arenas of participation, paying particular attention to the purpose and people behind their creation (see also Cornwall, 2008). In her 2002 paper, Cornwall gave four examples of different types of arenas of participation. These can be summarised as:

1. Regularised institutions — a regular interface between authorities (generally ‘the state’) and ‘the people’, either *of* or *for* the state, e.g. a council meeting or neighbourhood forum.
2. Fleeting formations — one-off meetings or events organised by the state to meet with ‘the people’, e.g. public consultation meetings, or participatory appraisals.
3. Institutionalised spaces through which ‘the people’ seek to influence policy through advocacy or organised dissent — these spaces only exist (and continue to exist) because ‘the people’ want to participate in them, e.g. advocacy-based NGOs.
4. Movements and moments — formed around issues, these arenas ‘fade away’ without the issues around which they identify, e.g. public protests.

Cornwall’s (2002:20) analysis appears to favour the latter two as ‘sites of radical possibility’ distanced from ‘the state’, however, within this paper she remains open to the transformatory possibilities within all these types of arenas of participation. She explains that ‘new ways in old spaces can transform their possibilities, just as old ways in new spaces can perpetuate the status quo’ (Cornwall, 2002:7). She suggests that even regularised, state-authorised institutions, which may appear tokenistic, have the potential for manipulation and transformation.

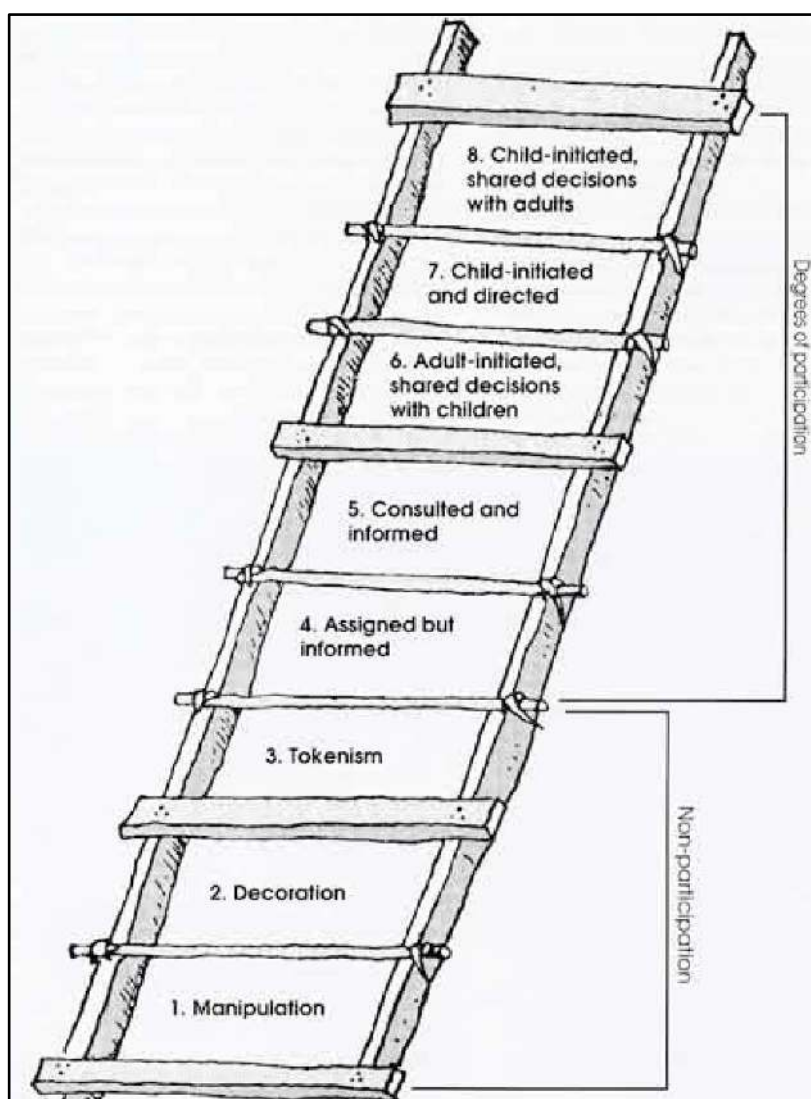
Within Cornwall’s later work (2004a; 2004b) these more nuanced typologies are distilled into two categories: ‘invited’ spaces and ‘popular’ spaces. Perhaps because of this simplifying, the caveats of her previous paper (some of which are still present) are often dismissed or overlooked by her critics (e.g. Kesby, 2007). ‘Invited’ spaces are always brought into existence by what Kesby (2007:2821) describes as ‘external resource-bearing agents’, for example government organisations, NGOs or researchers. At odds with Freire’s (1970c) development of the concept of conscientisation discussed in the following section, they are spaces produced *for* rather than *by* the marginalised — who are ‘invited’ into them. Although acknowledging that these spaces may have the potential to transform social

relations, Cornwall (2004b:83) describes them as limited, as 'always already permeated with the power effects of difference'. In contrast she explains that 'popular' spaces emerge organically. Fashioned by 'the marginalised' who have *chosen* to be there, these are spaces where collective action is formed around a common identification or concern (Cornwall, 2002). In his critique of Cornwall's supposed binary between invited and popular spaces, Kesby (2007) argues that she is uncritically setting up 'popular' spaces to be the 'gold standard'<sup>5</sup> of 'good' and 'authentic' participation. Kesby (2007) argues that in doing this she has exposed her dangerously oversimplified understandings of power (see also Kesby *et al.*, 2007).

The institutionalisation of participation has led to numerous other attempts to 'classify' and 'measure' participation. Creative Commons (2011) identifies thirty models of participation used within Europe between 1969 and 2010. Several of these are variations of Arnstein's (1969) 'ladder of citizen participation' in which the gold standard is 'citizen control'. Like Cornwall's popular spaces, within these models the gold standard is perceived to be when those who are considered marginalised initiate the formation of an arena of participation. For example, Hart's (1992) infamous ladder of participation (see Figure 1) visually implies that the degrees of participation for children and young people increase as adults' control of the arena decreases (Gallacher and Gallagher, 2008; see also Todd, 2012). This type of understanding is reminiscent of the work of Chambers (1992; 1997) within International Development. For Chambers (1992:2) the gold standard of participation is when 'uppers' (by which he means Western outsiders) have 'handed over the stick' to the 'lowers' (local people). These conceptualisations are based on a belief that power is a commodity that can and needs to be redistributed, which will be examined later in this chapter.

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<sup>5</sup> 'Gold standard' is a term used by Hammel *et al.* (2008:1445). They, among others, use it to denote the ideal form of participation, against which others should be measured.



**Figure 1 Roger Hart's Ladder of Children's Participation**

*Reproduced from Creative Commons (2011:5)*

Models and classifications provide a useful way to talk about complex subjects. They also provide a frame of reference for evaluating practice. Within Chapter 3 I outline how two models of participation help in evaluating which organisations to approach to be involved in the empirical research. One of these was Lardner's (2001) 'clarity model of participation', this was also adapted within focus groups with the 'selected' organisations as a way to encourage staff members to talk about their practices of participation. However, despite their value, models, like all forms of classification and measurement, cannot capture the complexities of life. They

cannot account for the instabilities, discussed above, within arenas of participation as the space is produced anew with each passing moment. They also often (albeit unintentionally) mask the complexities of power relations within all arenas of participation (Kesby *et al.*, 2007).

#### **2.4.4 Intergenerational spaces**

There is much interest and debate (e.g. Hopkins and Pain, 2008; Horton and Kraftl, 2008) within Geography about intergenerationality (see Hopkins and Pain, 2007; Vanderbeck, 2007; Tarrant, 2010; Valentine *et al.*, 2012). Studies of intergenerationality explore ‘the connections between different age groups or generations and the contingency they have for each other’s social, political, economic and spatial lives’ (Hopkins *et al.*, 2011:314). In exploring the dynamic relations between these groups the concept of intergenerationality helps to ‘dismantle rigid categories’ through exposing their fluidity and diversity (Hopkins and Pain, 2008:289). Attention to relations between groups also enriches explorations of the lived realities of young people (e.g. Ross *et al.*, 2005).

Recently academic attention has turned to the *spaces* of intergenerationality. Introducing their edited collection entitled ‘Intergenerational Space’, Vanderbeck and Worth (2015b:1) explain that these are more than just sites that have been deliberately ‘designed for the purpose of facilitating and promoting interaction between members of different generational groups’. Instead, they contend all spaces *can* be understood as intergenerational, since space, as introduced in the previous section, is ‘constituted by and constitutive of social relations including relations of age and generation’ (Vanderbeck and Worth, 2015b:2).<sup>6</sup> Therefore, even when multiple generations are not physically present in a space, these spaces are still influenced by discourses about age. This idea is developed in Chapters 4 and 6 in

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<sup>6</sup> As Hopkins and Pain (2008) observe in response to critiques made in Horton and Kraftl (2008), whilst all spaces *can* be described as intergenerational it is not always necessary or useful to do so.

relation to what I term the *silent presence* of adults in designated ‘adult-free’ spaces of youth participation.

Arenas of *youth* participation are interesting intergenerational spaces as these arenas are premised on discussions about age and in/equality. Some scholars believe this aspect has been overlooked within studies of youth participation (e.g. Percy-Smith, 2006). For example, Greg Mannion (2007:413) asserts that attention within youth participation is overly focused on either how children and young people are excluded by adults / marginalised within adult-dominated structures of participation, or on how children construct their own spaces and practices as ‘agents of their own destiny’. He contends that ‘the adult dimension has been ignored’ (Mannion, 2007:413). Instead, Mannion, alongside others (e.g. Cockburn, 2005; Percy-Smith, 2006), argues that spaces of youth participation should be understood as co-constructed between generations. Similar arguments about co-construction have been made by Moss (2006:188) who states that ‘rather than a technician, a worker in a children’s space is understood to be a reflective practitioner, a researcher, a critical thinker, and a co-constructor of knowledge, culture and identity.’ Although, as Mannion (2007) contends, Moss’ use of the term ‘children’s spaces’ unhelpfully reinforces a binary between adults and children, and adult spaces and children’s spaces of participation (see also Moss and Petrie, 2002). As will be argued in Chapter 6, evolving out of the empirical research informing this thesis is the contention that it is important to consider carefully the language used within youth participation, paying attention to which tropes about age and adult—child relations are being reproduced.

Following the title of Mannion’s (2007) paper, this section has introduced how this thesis is ‘Going Spatial, Going Relational’. These two dynamics are important for how practices within arenas of youth participation are analysed throughout this thesis. The next section outlines another key concept used within this thesis: that of conscientisation. Following on from the literature presented above, this section also examines how radical educationalist Paolo Freire envisaged co-construction.

## **2.5 Paulo Freire and Conscientisation**

This section highlights in greater depth the work of Brazilian radical educationalist Paulo Freire, who is often cited as having a significant influence on the development of what can now be identified as a radical participatory epistemology. Within this section I explain how Freire understood the concept of conscientisation and outline how it has been used and critiqued by other scholars. Freire's understanding of conscientisation and his writings about the role of educators within this process provide a framework used within this thesis to analyse the interactions between staff and young people within and beyond the arenas of participation.

### **2.5.1 Conscientisation and the role of educators**

Freire's work seeks to support people's participation in the production of knowledge and in the social transformation of their worlds (Kindon *et al.*, 2007c). His theories stem from his engagement with poor, marginalised rural workers in South America during times of political and social unrest in the 1950s and 1960s (Cahill, 2007c). Freire's understanding of 'conscientizacao' — a Brazilian Portuguese word used by Brazilian philosophers in the 1960s — forms a central part of his writings. Cruz (2013:170) explains it can be literally translated as the 'process to raise someone's awareness'. The term is often translated into English as 'conscientisation'. Freire (1970a:109) understood this as the process by which people came to see their world 'not as a static reality, but as a reality in process'. He believed that an awareness that their world was socially constructed would lead people to challenge and transform the structures that perpetuate inequalities within their lives. Rather than a single moment of 'enlightenment', conscientisation is a long-term, iterative process of reflection and action. He argued it is an exclusively human process as it requires the ability to gain an objective distance from the world to be able to critically reflect and examine your relationship with it (Freire, 1998). Freire (1998:504) believed this critical distance will allow people (either as individuals or whole sections of society) to 'break out of their culture of silence and win the right to speak'. Cahill (2007c:274) explains that Freire identifies the outcome of

conscientisation as ‘becoming more fully human’, which she says some scholars (such as those writing in Nelson and Seager, 2008) identify as empowerment.

Whilst conscientisation *may* happen on its own, in light of his experiences within South America, Freire (1970c) believed that we should not wait for this to happen. Identifying a strong relationship between education and political action, Freire (1970c:62) proposed that through ‘problem-posing education’ educators should encourage the process of conscientisation by enabling their students to become ‘critical co-investigators’ (Mayo, 1999). The educator’s role would be to encourage critical reflection on problems experienced by the students but not to direct the students in what action they should take. Freire (1970c:61) envisaged a ‘dialogue’ between educators and students through which the categories ‘teacher-of-the-students’ and ‘students-of-the-teacher’ cease to exist but are replaced by those of ‘teacher-student’ and ‘student-teacher’. This understanding, as well as the concept of dialogue, is drawn upon in Chapters 5 and 6 which reflect on how relations work in practice between adult staff and young people within organisations promoting youth participation.

### **2.5.2 Freire’s conscientisation: applied and critiqued**

The following section reviews how others have applied and critiqued Freire’s work around conscientisation, before outlining how it is used within this thesis. Freire’s writings and his understanding of conscientisation proved popular both at the time of writing and beyond. They were particularly popular with those who were dissatisfied by ongoing legacies of imperialism and colonialism and how these were being addressed through ‘development’ work (Kindon *et al.*, 2007c). They have also been used to develop participatory research practices which seek to conduct research *with* rather than *on* participants (e.g. Mistry and Berardi, 2012). Cahill’s project: ‘Fed Up Honeys’ provides an excellent example of how Freire’s work has been used to influence a research project. Cahill (2004:275) describes the research as following a ‘feminist Freirean model’. The young women involved in the project underwent processes of conscientisation as they considered how as women of colour they were subjected to stereotyping; they also began to reflect on how they

themselves perpetuated and subscribed to these discourses of stereotyping. This reflection led them to both change their own actions and challenge the actions of others (Cahill, 2007c).

Freire's work has not been accepted without critique. Drawing on their research around HIV competence within southern Africa, Campbell *et al.* (2012) argue that their findings indicate Freire's connection between social awareness and political action is too simplistic as they could not detect notable political change within their participants (see also Gottlieb and Belle, 1990). Others have argued that Freire's work is overly idealistic and fails to pay enough attention to context (e.g. Furter, 1985; Elias and Merriam, 1995).

Freire's work is particularly important within this thesis as I, like Campbell *et al.* (2012), consider the connections between encountering a radical participatory epistemology and subsequent actions. Freire is clear that conscientisation should come from the marginalised – those who are experiencing some form of oppression/inequality. As has been explained above, however, his work also considers the role of educators within this process. This latter point is explored throughout this thesis as I reflect on the processes of conscientisation and empowerment within organisations that seek to work in participatory ways with young people. These spaces are not solely produced by the marginalised (in the case of this research – young people) but rather are co-produced by all adults, including adult staff who could be described as 'educators', and young people involved with these organisations. As stated above, Chapters 5 and 6 of this thesis use Freire's understandings as a framework through which to question and challenge practices and adult-child relations within these arenas of participation. Chapter 7 examines if and how processes of conscientisation lead to actions within other spaces.

## **2.6 Power and Empowerment**

Questions about power and the related concept of empowerment underline each of the research questions this thesis is seeking to answer. This section outlines the relevant literature and critiques of these concepts in relation to arenas of



participation. I also begin to argue how understanding power as an *effect* allows for a movement away from the binary division, set out earlier in this chapter, in which popular arenas of participation are depicted as the favoured gold standard of participation, leaving invited arenas of participation as second choice. Instead I explain how understanding power as an effect allows us to view *all* arenas of participation as spaces where empowerment and transformation, as well as manipulation and resistance, are possible.

### **2.6.1 Power and participation critiqued**

As was established above, over the last few decades elements of a more radical participatory epistemology have become ‘institutionalised’. This institutionalisation resulted in participatory practices being constantly scrutinised and revised, however, the theoretical and epistemological assumptions behind these practices remained relatively immune from critique until the late 1990s. One element that began to be criticised was the relationship between participation and power. Reviewing the literature, particularly within participatory development, Cleaver (1999) argues that this relationship has often been overlooked or oversimplified (this argument is also made in Cooke and Kothari, 2001a). Cleaver was concerned that participatory development practices have naively been based on the (mis)belief that power can be circumnavigated and that a ‘correct’ use of techniques can uncover ‘reality’. Cleaver (1999:605) argues that the swing within development practices from ‘we know best’ to ‘they know best’ has failed to consider the ongoing complex power relationships between development practitioners and the people they are working with. Critiques such as these have been particularly levelled at the work of Chambers (1992) and the overly simplistic notion of ‘uppers’ handing over power to ‘lowers’ mentioned above.<sup>7</sup> Cleaver is also concerned that the power relations between individuals within and excluded from the community or group

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<sup>7</sup> Despite his work being the focus of many criticisms, Chambers (1997:211) was not wholly uncritical of participatory development; he too was concerned about the institutionalisation of participation, commenting that the ‘label has spread without substance’. He was concerned that participation was drifting from its Freireian roots and was not resulting in the reversals of power he had hoped for.

involved in the participatory practices are often overlooked. She urges those working within participatory development to reflect on ways in which participatory methods and practices *exclude* as well as include certain individuals. This latter concern will be addressed in Chapter 6 which considers questions of accessibility within youth participation organisations.

Cooke and Kothari (2001b)'s infamous edited collection: 'Participation: the new tyranny', builds on the critiques of participatory practices and the discourse of participation more broadly made by Cleaver and others (e.g. Mosse, 1994). They argue that this book was a public record of the private conversations that were occurring at the time about the manipulative and potentially harmful elements of participatory development (Cooke and Kothari, 2001a). Cooke and Kothari (2001a) believe that participation (in its many forms) has been uncritically accepted as coming from 'pure' motivations. This, they argue, masks the workings of power. They propose that rather than reversing power relations in research and development contexts, participatory practices (they particularly emphasise PRA) may reproduce and even reinforce existing power relations and inequalities (see Kothari (2001) for an expansion of this argument). Cooke and Kothari (2001a) call for a more critical look at the role of power (as well as the role of structures and agency) within the discourse of participation – a challenge this thesis takes up as it reflects upon adult-child relations within arenas of youth participation.

### **2.6.2 Power and participation with young people critiqued**

As the arenas of participation used empirically within this thesis all involve young people, it is important to review how these criticisms of power within participatory development and research have also been applied to youth participation. Freeman *et al.* (2003) raise multiple concerns about the institutionalisation of participation for young people, arguing that the system within which participation for young people operates often facilitates tokenistic involvement. They highlight how despite nods towards youth participation, the power to demarcate the 'constraints' of participation, such as setting the agenda, the meeting place and the levels of funding, remains with the adults (these concerns are also raised in Bae, 2006;

Farthing, 2012). In Chapter 4 these limitations are acknowledged by some staff attending the organisations involved in this research. Similarly Hill *et al.* (2006) state that one of the main barriers to participation with young people is adults' fear of losing power and authority over children and young people if they acknowledge them as co-constructors of knowledge. Weller (2007) and Wyness (2009) provide examples of potentially tokenistic youth participation within local government, whose sometimes slow and ineffective methods can result in young people becoming disillusioned with participation (see also Deuchar, 2009; Sher *et al.*, 2009). In keeping with the concerns articulated by Cooke and Kothari (2001a), Shukra *et al.* (2012) explain that participation programmes that involve young people can be seen to superficially challenge yet legitimise the existing power structures and power inequalities between adults and young people. They state that whilst young people appear to be given a sense of control:

Controls are inevitably kept on the work/young people by the adult advisors, structures and funding [...] whilst these tend to be motivated by a concern to be supportive, empowering and concerned for the safety of participants, there is always the potential for restrictions to feel controlling and disempowering. (Shukra *et al.*, 2012:42)

Thinking about participation more broadly, as mentioned in Chapter 1, several scholars have argued that youth participation is being used to govern young people into becoming 'good' neoliberal subjects (e.g. Bessant, 2003; Raby, 2014). Bessant (2003:91), whose work is outlined in Chapter 5, argues that youth participation is being used as a tool to manage and direct deviant/disengaged young people, rather than increase their 'democratic participation' (see also Bessant, 2004). Similar concerns are raised by Masschelein and Quaghebeur (2005); Bragg (2007); Raby (2014), whose work is considered in Chapter 5 which outlines how youth participation is understood by some as a mode of governance.

### **2.6.3 Power as an effect**

The following section details how, in an attempt to move the discussion beyond some of these critiques, power has been presented as an effect. This

conceptualisation of power is used in this thesis to further understandings of practices and relations within arenas of youth participation.

The arguments made by Cooke and Kothari (2001a), amongst others, have often been (mis)used to infer that as participation is always a form of power it should be abandoned. This is based on a negative understanding of power. In Hickey and Mohan's (2004a) edited collection of more hope-filled responses to 'Participation: the new tyranny', Williams (2004b) points out that this understanding of power fails to account for spaces of resistance. This point is also made by one young person identified through research by Freeman *et al.* (2003) into young people's experiences of being involved in adult-organised youth councils. They explained that despite the council appearing to be adult-led and tokenistic, 'we took it past this point when we actually started talking and not saying what they wanted to hear'.

Eager for participation and its associated practices not to be abandoned, these arguments are developed by Kesby (2007) for whom power and resistance are intimately entangled (see also Kesby *et al.*, 2007). They are also reiterated by Gallagher (2006); (2008) in relation to participation with children and young people. Both are concerned with how power is conceptualised. Kesby argues that Cooke and Kothari (2001a) use a limited and negative understanding of power, seeing it only as *dominance*, which Kesby argues that Cooke and Kothari understood as only able to be resisted. Kesby also dismisses the conceptualisation of power as a commodity, which can be redistributed. He argues that this understanding is flawed, as the act of 'redistributing' or 'giving' power *is* an act of power: it is conditioned, making the complete transition of power from one person or group to another impossible (also argued in Freire, 1970c). Gallagher (2008) explains that this understanding of power as a commodity is particularly prevalent in research about participation with children and young people, as both practitioners and academics seek to find ways to address the perceived 'power imbalance in the adult-child relationship' (Matthews, 2001b:117). Gallagher (2008:140) argues that power within participation with children and young people is 'often seen as something to be reduced, negated or

worked around', which he demonstrates through empirical research is an oversimplification of the complex effects of power within any arena of participation.

Using Foucault's work, Kesby (2007) says it is more useful to understand power (in this paper he is specifically referring to power within PAR) as an *effect* which is brought into being through actions as a result of the interplay between communicative and material resources. He explains that examples of these resources within PAR include collective action, reflexivity and consensus around participatory techniques. Within this understanding, the 'more powerful' within the arena of participation are those who have access to (and often manipulate) these resources. Kesby builds on Allen (2003) 'modalities of power' to emphasise the multiple and constantly evolving ways power is being utilised within arenas of participation. Domination is just one of Allen's modalities of 'power over' others; Kesby (2007:2817) summarises Allen's modalities as:

- Domination: which imposes a form of conduct and forces compliance
- Coercion: which threatens (and must be able to deliver) force to ensure compliance
- Authority: which requires recognition and needs to be conceded not imposed
- Manipulation: which moulds the actions of others while concealing the intent
- Inducement: which promises advantage to people prepared to bring themselves into line
- Seduction: which arouses desire through suggestion, enticement and the exploitation of existing attitudes.

Allen identifies 'negotiation' and 'persuasion' as two modalities of 'power with', rather than over, others. He also says that in certain circumstances authority can be 'among' others, where it is granted willingly by people who acknowledge their own uncertainties. Kesby *et al.* (2007:22) say an example of this is when participants concede authority to a researcher who also acknowledges their own 'uncertainty and situatedness'.

Kesby (2007) does not see any of these modalities of power as solely negative, he argues that each modality can produce as well as constrain, regulate and close down possibilities. He illustrates this argument with the example of how even power 'as domination' — expressed for example in PAR through the laying down of ground

rules by the researcher — may produce productive effects as the participants build relationships with each other and the researcher through negotiating these rules. Kesby (2007) explains that multiple effects of power may be present at any one moment; they may also be unintentional and difficult to detect. He clarifies that this is a deeply spatial process: the same resources may be deployed but produce very different effects in different spatial contexts (see also Cornwall, 2002:9 who warns, somewhat ironically given the way her later categorisations of arenas of participation have been used, that when it comes to participation and power 'nothing can be prejudged').

Drawing upon literature from those who have engaged with participation in a variety of ways, this chapter has begun to build a picture of practices and relations within arenas of youth participation as dynamic and fluid — changing from moment to moment, person to person as they engage with and perform discourses about age and in/equality. Kesby's unrestrictive conceptualisation of power as an effect is useful as it provides a way to consider this complexity and instability whilst avoiding overly simplistic generalisations. This understanding allows a movement away from the arguments above which dichotomise popular arenas of participation as good and invited arenas of participation as bad. Popular spaces are no longer seen as distanced from power, instead they, like invited spaces, are spaces within which multiple effects of power are present which can both enable and constrain (Kesby *et al.*, 2007). Within both types of space there is the possibility for resistance and manipulation but also, as will be argued particularly in Chapter 6, for transformation.

#### **2.6.4 Empowerment**

Understanding power as an effect has also informed how the concept of empowerment is framed within this research. This section develops how empowerment is understood in this thesis. This concept is returned to in Chapter 7 which considers how 'empowerment' (thinking and acting in ways that may be perceived as empowered) is (and is not) sustained and (re)performed after young people leave these organisations, in other spaces of their lives.

Within both academic and 'grey' literature the term empowerment is often undefined, whilst uncritically heralded as a positive aim and outcome of participation (Kesby *et al.*, 2007; Nolas, 2011). For example, the 'empowerment' of marginalised people is often cited as one of the central goals of participatory development (e.g. Nelson and Wright, 1995; Chambers, 1997), whilst participatory methods are frequently portrayed as a tool to facilitate the 'empowerment' of participants (e.g. Pink, 2006; Opondo *et al.*, 2007). Empowerment, like participation, is a term that has been used in a wide variety of contexts to evoke multiple meanings. It can be understood, for example, as an individual or collective process, or as a goal to be attained. Although often portrayed in a positive light, the critiques applied above to participation as a discourse (that it has been used as a form of governance, that it appears to challenge yet reproduce social hierarchies, that it masks tokenism) can and have been applied to the discourse of empowerment (e.g. Cahill, 2007c).

One of the ways empowerment can be usefully conceptualised is in relation to the process of conscientisation (see Kindon, 2012). As defined above, conscientisation is the cyclical process of reflection and action: people come to realise that the world is socially constructed and this leads them to (individually and at times collectively) challenge and transform the structures that perpetuate inequalities within their lives. Empowerment can be understood as the outworking of this realisation — the performed 'new' thoughts or actions that arise from these realisations about the world.

Like power, empowerment is theorised in this thesis as a performed effect. To explain this, I first acknowledge the ways in which empowerment is *not* being conceptualised; my understanding has developed through my readings of Kesby (1999, 2005, 2007), Jones and SPEECH (2001), Cornwall (2002) and Kesby, Kindon *et al.*, (2007), amongst others. Empowerment, like power, is not a commodity; it cannot be paternalistically 'given' or 'redistributed' amongst peoples. It should also not be seen as inherently 'good' nor as an inevitable outcome of any form of participation. It is neither distanced from, nor the opposite of power. As a

performed effect, empowerment is not a one-time-event, nor is it a linear process in which empowerment is the end goal. It is not confined to one space but neither can it, nor does it move, *unchanged*, between spaces. Building on this emerging definition comprised from the scholars above, I add that empowerment should also not be theorised as a binary state. It is not an identity label where you are either empowered or not empowered, instead your ability to think and act in ways that may be considered empowered may fluctuate between different spatio-temporal moments.

Empowerment is a *performed* effect in the sense that, following Kesby (2005), within this thesis all social interactions are understood to be performative; these performances are saturated with the effects of power discussed above. In using the language of performativity I hesitate to cite the work of Butler (1990); (1993) due to the warnings expressed by Nelson (1999) amongst others that her work on performativity is often evoked automatically (and uncritically) by geographers who wish to draw on this language. Whilst her influence on the language of identity and subject formation is undeniable, one of the key criticisms of her work by geographers is that it fails to fully incorporate the role of space, the consideration of which is essential for an understanding of empowerment as a performed effect (see Rose, 1995; Thrift and Dewsbury, 2000). However, in the spirit of critical reflexivity, which will be developed more fully in Chapter 3, her influence on my understanding should be acknowledged at this stage as since my undergraduate studies her work has had a profound influence on the way I understand social interactions. The language of empowerment as a *performance* is used here to denote an understanding that there is no permanent self, but rather expressions of the self are enacted in relation to the multiple discourses a person is experiencing simultaneously in a spatial setting at any given moment.

It is important to acknowledge that the effects of acting in ways that may be identified as empowered are not necessarily 'good'. Akin to the modalities of power discussed above, empowerment may constrain and close down possibilities, thoughts and actions as well as transform and enable. As Jones and SPEECH (2001)



and Kesby (2005) acknowledge, acting in an empowered way in one space also does not necessarily mean you will be able to act in this way in another space, therefore it is important to consider the discourses and resources that enable that performance within and beyond that space. This is especially pertinent in relation to Chapter 7 which focuses on the third research question of this thesis: considering how the knowledge and resources created within arenas of youth participation are transferred, over time, to other spaces of people's lives. Building on its introduction in Chapter 1, the following section reviews literature which considers this important question.

## **2.7 And Beyond**

As argued in Chapter 1, this question of what is transferred into other spaces beyond the arenas of youth participation is central to both 'types' of participation considered in this thesis. Participation driven by a neoliberal agenda hopes to influence the behaviour of young people in the present but also in the future as they become (good, neoliberal) adults/citizens. As will be argued in Chapters 6 and 7, participation driven by a more radical epistemology, although potentially less explicit, also moulds and guides the behaviour of young people both in the present and in their futures. A radical participatory epistemology encourages certain types of behaviours, for example the co-production of knowledge, prioritising collective thinking and challenging perceived inequalities. This review outlines the existing literature which considers how knowledge and resources encountered within arenas of participation are transferred and potentially sustained in other spaces of their lives.

### **2.7.1 Transferring**

No spaces in our lives can ever be completely separate from other spaces, instead bodies, objects, atmospheres and ideas (including hopes, expectations and memories) move back and forth between spaces (see Massey, 2005; Baillie Smith *et al.*, 2013). This idea is considered by both Kesby (1999) and Cornwall (2002, 2004b) in relation to movement between arenas of participation and everyday spaces. Drawing on the work of Lefebvre (1991), Cornwall (2004b:80) argues that existing

relationships and past experiences are not left behind when you move from one space to another, therefore other spaces continue to 'exert an influence on what is said and what is sayable within any given space'. She quips that 'prevailing attitudes towards excluded groups are not magicked away by the use of a participatory technique or two' (Cornwall, 2002:7). Similarly Kesby (1999), (2005:2056) argues that as arenas of participation 'open up within existing societies/geographies' the processes operating within these everyday spaces 'press in on' and affect actions within arenas of participation (this idea is also discussed in Mosse, 2001 with reference to participatory development).

Responding to Kesby (1999), Jones and SPEECH (2001:5) argue that whilst they agree with his overall argument they also believe participatory spaces have the potential to 'push-out-on' and affect normalised social relations in everyday spaces. In this collaborative piece of writing between Jones and NGO 'SPEECH', they explore how participatory development approaches to working with women in Tamil Nadu, India have the potential to affect other areas of the women's lives. Cahill (2007c) also reflects on the socially situated nature of both arenas of participation and everyday spaces. Cahill (2007:268) initially questions if it is even possible for what she calls the 'new subjectivities' developed within arenas of participation to be sustained in other spaces as they are embedded within the material and social space of the arena of participation (in this case a PAR project - see also Cahill *et al.*, 2004). Critiquing Kesby's (2005) conception of space as too fixed, Cahill (2007) goes on to advocate, like Jones and SPEECH (2001), for a more porous understanding of the interfaces between arenas of participation and everyday spaces. She concludes by listing a few potential performances of these new subjectivities, saying they could range from:

Something as simple as taking women's studies classes in college or introducing a new conversation at the dinner table, to something as dramatic and involved as dropping out of a failing school to go to an alternative student-centered school (as one researcher did). (Cahill, 2007c:287)

Unfortunately, Cahill does not go on to identify if and how the performances of these new subjectivities were sustained over time, particularly after the PAR project had finished.

Considering youth participation specifically, some academic and ‘grey’ literature has detailed the effects of young people’s involvement in participatory processes (e.g. Hannam, 2001; Driskell, 2002; Kirby and Bryson, 2002; Hansen *et al.*, 2003; Neary and A’Drake, 2006). Such research often identifies improved skills, future employment opportunities, personal attributes, altered aspirations or the development of friendship networks as forms of knowledge and resources that may be ‘usefully’ transferred beyond the arenas of participation. Not all scholars who consider the question of what travels beyond the arenas of youth participation overtly connect young people’s experiences with their futures as adults. Askins and Pain (2011:817), for example, carefully consider the impacts of involvement with a participatory art project in northern England for these young people *as young people*. They argue that the ‘materialities of participation’ have travelled beyond the initial participatory project. They explain that enduring friendships, contributing towards community cohesion, have developed between young people from diverse backgrounds as:

The physical and embodied experiences of making art and using art-related materials [which] may prompt or enable new social relations [...which are] both remembered reflectively (discursively) and reflexively (through the body). (Askins and Pain, 2011:817)

Where research has focused on ‘future’ impact it has tended to only be able to identify ‘short-term’ impacts, speculating as to how this may transpire over the years into more sustained changes. Within this literature the time difference between a short-term and a long-term effect is frequently left undefined. Typically, studies evidencing short-term impacts were conducted either during the initiative, or within six months of it ending. An absence of empirical research into longer-term impacts has led to several scholars identifying this as an area in need of further research (e.g. Hannam, 2001; Kirby and Bryson, 2002; Halsey *et al.*, 2006).

As will be acknowledged in Chapter 3 which outlines the methodological decisions taken for this research, existing research which has sought to identify the longer-term connections between young people’s participation and their adult lives has tended to be conducted using quantitative methods or drawing on pre-existing data

sets (e.g. McFarland and Thomas, 2006). This can be seen in the work of Flanagan (2009) who seeks to draw connections between young people's involvement with participation (in its broadest terms) with their levels of political participation as adults (see also Flanagan and Levine, 2010). The 'Side by Side' project, which reported on the impact of young people's involvement in community development charity West Kent Extra, is a useful example of qualitative research within this field. Body and Hogg (2016) interviewed 10 participants whose involvement as young people in the charity had begun several years previously (now age 18 or over, 4/10 were still involved with the charity in varying capacities). Whilst they identified several 'practical' skills and resources that young people had transferred over time to other spaces of their lives, they also noted 'softer' outcomes of this engagement. They commented that:

Young people engaged in these programmes are more likely to volunteer, have a strong desire to 'give back', are more likely to engage in community participation and advocacy, and have an increased sense of social responsibility and supporting others. (Body and Hogg, 2016:7)

Although these lines of enquiry were not the focus of this thesis, as will be evident from Chapter 7, the findings of this thesis resonate with some of these observations.

### **2.7.2 Sustaining**

Chapter 7 also considers how (re)performances, particularly of 'empowered' thoughts and actions, can be *sustained* over time. This is particularly important to Kesby with regards to his work with HIV/AIDS sufferers in southern Africa. Kesby (2007) explores these questions of sustainability with ex-participants who were involved in 'Stepping Stones', an initiative that uses participatory approaches to encourage participants to reflect on their health and lifestyle choices in relation to their HIV risk. Kesby (2007:2820) hopes that the 'strange behaviour' they encounter on the initiative may lead these participants to question their behaviour and what 'constitutes normal relations' in other spaces of their life, particularly the 'domestic sphere'. For Kesby (2007:2824) the question of sustainability is essential as he argues it is not enough for these participants to be able to talk openly about HIV in the space of the project 'but it is in the power-drenched space of the bedroom that

life-saving decision making and empowered agency must be effective'. In his 2005 paper, Kesby is critical of how this issue is treated within academic literature. He says sustainability is either framed as an ethical or a technical problem (the 'remedy' for which is for an intervention to take more time) and therefore lacks the urgency his empirical context demands. Kesby is cautious of this notion that if participants spend longer in an arena of participation they are more likely to be able to enact their empowerment elsewhere as it evokes the linear, enlightenment-esque understanding of empowerment critiqued above and fails to consider the socio-spatial dimensions that may constrain (re)performances in everyday spaces.

Rose (1997a) implies that empowerment can be sustained through opening a permanent participatory space to which participants can return when they need a 'top up'. This is impractical for most participatory projects and, Kesby (2005) fears, could also develop into project dependency. Kesby expressed similar concerns as he is reflexively critical of 'Stepping Stones'' attempts to foster 'peer groups' to provide external, independent support for members of their project trying to sustain their empowered (re)performances within their homes. He argues that whilst these proved useful at the time of the project they were difficult to sustain afterwards as they were reliant on facilitation and coordination from 'Stepping Stones'' workers. Sadly, despite Kesby's (1999, 2005, 2007) repeated questions and calls for further research, alongside his compelling argument about why, given the theorisations of power and empowerment set out previously, this issue is important, he does not go on to offer any alternative (more practical) tactics for sustaining the knowledge and resources created within the arenas of participation in other areas of people's lives.

Jones and SPEECH (2001) also briefly reflect on how (re)performances (such as of new ways of doing male-female relations, or acting in ways that may be considered empowered) may be sustained in other spaces. They emphasise the agency of the women in their research in sustaining these performances, however they also acknowledge that these (re)performances are socially situated within complex cultural and political processes which limited the extent to which these (re)performances of empowerment were possible (Jones and SPEECH, 2001). Using

the empirical material gathered for this research this issue of context is considered in detail in Chapter 7.

This section has highlighted research which considers how knowledge and resources are (re)performed beyond arenas of participation. As Askins and Pain (2011) warn, however, the extent to which these arenas of participation push-out-on other spaces should not be uncritically assumed and therefore requires careful examination. This concern is also raised by both Nolas (2007) and Vaughan (2014). They remind that it should not be assumed that involvement within an arena of participation will inevitably lead to empowerment or transformation for participants, or that even if this is the case, that these effects can be sustained outside of the arena of participation. Interviewing young people from Papua New Guinea five months after they were involved with a participatory research project, Vaughan (2014:185) found that even though her participants had begun to think critically about health issues whilst on the project, this did not necessarily lead to ‘critical *action*’ outside the project. Campbell *et al.* (2012:607) also expressed concerns about assumptions made about the effects of being involved in an arena of participation. They argue that some ‘participatory feminist scholars’ have overly ambitious agendas of ‘social change’, failing to fully consider the role of very real, structurally-embedded inequalities. Campbell *et al.* (2012) believe it is important to be explicit about the kind of change an arena of participation is trying to bring about. Taking heed of this, Chapter 4 analyses who it is that each of the organisations involved in this research are trying to change. Furthermore, the empirical research conducted as part of this research tried to remain ‘open-minded’ when considering what, *if anything at all*, travelled beyond the participatory arenas, seeking to identify not just the ‘predicted’ effects (e.g. empowerment) but the more unexpected forms of knowledge and resources that may travel and be used in unpredicted ways beyond the arena (Hickey and Mohan, 2004b; see also Staeheli *et al.*, 2013).

## 2.8 Conclusions

Alongside introducing key terms used throughout this thesis, this review has traced some of the complex histories of participation. In doing so it has become clear that (youth) participation is being co-opted to serve multiple, political agendas, in ways that many would not consider very radical. As was evident from the critiques above, this had led some to question whether participation has drifted too far from its origins and whether it should be abandoned (e.g. Cooke and Kothari, 2001b; Alejandro Leal, 2007). In writing this thesis these concerns and critiques have never been far from my mind. Nevertheless, like Kindon *et al.* (2007a:3) I contend that practices driven by a participatory epistemology hold ‘radical potential’ for challenging injustice, agreeing with them that whilst all aspects of participation need to be analysed critically it should not be given up lightly. In seeking to address some of these critiques, this review has sought to bring together literatures that acknowledge the complexities of participation. I have argued for the value of understanding youth participation as a spatial, temporal and relational practice. This review has hinted at the struggle felt by scholars to understand how relations and relationships (such as between adults and young people) should ‘work’ when following a radical participatory epistemology — a dynamic explored in Chapters 5 and 6. In an attempt to be open to the multiple possibilities of experiences within these spaces in my research, I have adopted an understanding of power and empowerment as performed effects, rather than understanding power one-dimensionally as a force that can only be resisted or a commodity that needs to be redistributed. Taken together this approach enables this research to challenge the plethora of dualistic thinking that is present within the field of youth participation, such as the hierarchical divisions between adults and children and young people, and invited and popular spaces of participation.

Another key aspect of this review has been to situate my work within existing literature about the movement of ideas and actions from arenas of participation to the everyday spaces of people’s lives. This thesis builds on the work of those outlined above, responding to their calls for more research that considers not only

which aspects push-out-onto other spaces, but also how knowledge and resources encountered within arenas of participation are (re)performed over time. In doing so I also heed the warnings above to consider the temporal-spatial *context* of these (re)performances. Therefore, as introduced in Chapter 1, this research pays attention to how the experiences of so-called transitions to adulthood may impact (re)performances beyond the arenas of participation.

As is evident from the diverse literatures presented in this chapter, the term 'participation' is used in diverse spatial settings to evoke a variety of meanings. In reviewing this literature, I found at times the often broad and unspecific use of 'participation' (alongside the terms 'power' and 'empowerment') meant it was difficult to identify the purpose or desired social transformation behind participatory practices. There is a need for explicit, reflexive questioning within research about participation (Tisdall, 2013). It is important to consider: what is meant in this context by participation? What is its purpose? Who is participating (and who is being excluded)? What form does this participation take? These questions are considered in Chapter 4, in relation to the three case study organisations involved in this research, and returned to in Chapter 6 which traces practices of inclusion and exclusion within arenas of youth participation.

Looking towards the next chapter, the empirical focus of this research, taking an in-depth qualitative, participatory approach, was in response to the call made by Cohen and Uphoff (1980:213) and restated by Cornwall (2008:269) for greater 'clarity through specificity' in participation (see also Cahill, 2007a). Time and attention is therefore paid in this thesis to details, to the mechanics of practices. The following chapter outlines the methodology and the literature that has further informed this detailed approach.



## Chapter 3. Methodology: Reflections on a Participatory Project

### 3.1 Introduction

The production of this thesis has spanned several years. It has evolved iteratively, being driven by a cycle of reflection and action, influenced by a combination of (fluctuating) academic, sector-driven and practical interests and concerns. This chapter details this journey.

#### 3.1.1 Reflexivity

In doing so I reflexively explain the choices (and circumstances) which have informed the direction of this research. Reflexivity is defined by Tisdall *et al.* (2009: 229) as ‘the thoughtful reflection of a researcher upon the impact of her or his research on the participants, their social world, on the researcher her-or-him-self and on the knowledge produced’. These ‘thoughtful reflections’ are often made either before or after fieldwork: in anticipation of, or reflection on, the effects the researcher’s positionality may have on the process of data collection. Although such reflections are found within this chapter, following Nagar and Geiger (2007:277) this research was guided by a desire to undergo ‘processual reflexivity’: detailing how I sought to reflect with others *during* the process of research. As others also engaging in participatory forms of research have argued (e.g. Kobayashi, 2003; Nagar and Geiger, 2007), reflexivity is not without its dangers and limitations. Full reflexivity, or even complete self-knowledge has been deemed impossible (Mauthner and Doucet, 2003; Gallacher and Gallagher, 2008). Kobayashi (2003) argues that reflexivity without purpose, without a connection to a wider agenda of social change, is of little use. It can (often unwittingly) serve to reinforce the power of the researcher by privileging their narrating (academic) voice. Therefore, it is with caution, and following the work and guidance of others before me (e.g. McDowell, 1992; England, 1994; Rose, 1997b; Cahill, 2004; Moore, 2004; Cahill, 2010), that in this chapter I detail the messy processes of reflexive, participatory fieldwork, and write myself as honestly as possible into this narrative.

### 3.1.2 Mess, Failure and Participatory Guilt

This notion that fieldwork is a ‘messy’ process is now broadly accepted within Geography (see Crang and Cook, 2007; Horton, 2008; Jones and Evans, 2011). It is highlighted in particular by feminist geographers seeking to challenge lingering masculinist tendencies within the discipline that gloss over or deny the realities, including the emotional labour, of fieldwork (see Billo and Hiemstra, 2013; Coddington, 2015). Like Harrowell *et al.* (2017), however, in this chapter I go beyond simply highlighting the mess or ‘everydayness’ of fieldwork (Horton, 2008:363). I recognise moments where fieldwork was ‘successful’ (producing expected or more-than-expected outcomes) and when it failed. In exploring the emotions associated with failure, I identify what I have termed *participatory guilt* — the constant worry for those conducting participatory research whether their research is participatory ‘enough’. I attempt to avoid the ‘temptation to sanitise the realities of fieldwork [...as this adds] one more filter between what happened ‘on the ground’ and what finds its way onto the page’ (Harrowell *et al.* 2017:1-2, see also Katz, 1994, Punch 2012). As Harrowell *et al.* (2017) argue, writing about moments of mess, doubt, embarrassment and failure as honestly as possible is one way to challenge ‘the logic of intense competition and individualism engrained in the contemporary neoliberal university [which] strongly discourages this kind of candour’ (Harrowell *et al.*, 2017:7). Honesty and vulnerability therefore has become a form of academic activism; in a small way through moments of this chapter I hence seek, as others have (e.g. mrs kinpaisby, 2008; mrs c kinpaisby-hill, 2015), to disrupt the forces of individualism, capitalism and neoliberalism which can dominate academia. These themes of failure and of the emotional dynamics of conducting participatory research are returned to in the final chapter of this thesis.

This chapter begins by introducing the collaboration with human rights organisation Investing in Children, that shaped the direction of this research. This is followed by an explanation of why a qualitative approach was chosen. The next two sections detail the methods used whilst conducting participatory research with, firstly, youth participation organisations and then with the young adults who were previously

involved with these organisations. Alongside examining the mechanics of these methods, these sections reflect on the challenges of conducting collaborative, participatory research. They also emphasise some of the unique ethical considerations for this project. I then highlight the challenges and possibilities of conducting participatory research as a pregnant researcher, before introducing the reflections Adele Richardson, a young volunteer who acted as peer researcher on this project, offered about her involvement. Finally, I wrestle with the challenges of participatory analysis before outlining the ways in which the outputs or impacts of this project have been *more than* the production of this thesis.

### 3.2 A 'Participatory' Collaboration

This research was developed from its onset in collaboration with human rights organisation Investing in Children, based in County Durham, UK. In response to the appeal from Klodawsky (2007:2845) for greater transparency surrounding the motivations behind participatory research 'partnerships', this section outlines what drove this collaboration. I also begin to reflect upon the extent to which this research has been driven by a 'participatory' approach. The term 'participatory' is in scare quotes at the advice of Kesby *et al.* (2005) who emphasise the importance of transparency and honesty about the depth of participation when conducting research influenced by a participatory 'worldview' (Reason and Bradbury, 2006a:1).

At the time of applying to do a PhD I was working as a Research and Policy Officer in a social housing provider; I had practical experience of how research could inform practice and potentially change lives. Echoing many researchers, I did not want to conduct research from an 'ivory tower' (Bond and Paterson, 2005; Cahill *et al.*, 2010:331); my primary concern was that the research produced was 'useful', needed by someone to 'better' the world. Alongside the questions lingering from my MSc research, identified in the preface of this thesis, this passion drove my interest in pursuing a *collaborative* PhD.

Through the involvement of one of their directors Felicity Shenton, Investing in Children became a collaborating partner in this research from its proposal. The

original research topic — looking at the long-term impacts on young people of being involved with ‘participatory’ organisations — was proposed prior to my involvement, in conjunction with Professor Rachel Pain who had previously conducted research with Investing in Children (see Armstrong, 2010 who acknowledges some of the dis/advantages of conducting a PhD on a pre-set topic). Two motivations, held in tension with each other, appear to have encouraged Investing in Children to pursue this collaboration. Firstly, to enact social transformation it is imperative that organisations that promote a participatory epistemology do not just become ‘isolated islands’ of participation (Cahill and Torre, 2007; Kesby *et al.*, 2007:25). Investing in Children staff recognised this. As detailed in Chapter 4, staff expressed that whilst the participatory activities happening within their organisation are important in and of themselves, they wanted their work to affect adult-child relations beyond these spaces. This research, therefore, was one way of exploring if and how this was happening. Secondly, this research was understood to be potentially ‘useful’ to Investing in Children. Stated in their literature (e.g. Cairns and Brannen, 2005; Investing in Children, 2015b) and reiterated in conversations surrounding this collaboration, staff emphasised that their work is not about preparing young people for adulthood. Since the economic crisis of 2008, however, the youth sector in the UK has been particularly vulnerable to funding cuts (e.g. Department for Communities and Local Government and Pickles, 2010; Watson, 2010). This scarcity has led to a renewed need for organisations such as Investing in Children to prove their ‘worth’ (to a capitalist, neoliberal society) (House of Commons Education Committee, 2011; Thomas, 2011). Horton (2016:350) observes this creates ‘a particular atmosphere’ which is both competitive and fearful. Anecdotally staff knew *some* of the effect their work continued to have on young people after they had left Investing in Children; this project offered the opportunity to capture more formally this increasingly necessary information. Staff therefore welcomed this collaborative research as an opportunity to improve practice, but also acknowledged its utility to secure future funding.

This collaboration was influenced by our shared commitment to a ‘participatory research epistemology’ (Kesby *et al.*, 2005:146). The people involved in this research, staff and young adults, are not ‘informants’ or ‘respondents’ but co-participants. Knowledge is co-constructed between participants, it is not waiting to be discovered by the researcher (Sanderson and Kindon, 2004; Jupp, 2007). When informed by this epistemology, the term ‘participant’ signifies more than the sharing of voices (although this is important), it is an acknowledgement that they can and should play an active role, such as Investing in Children did, in shaping ‘some or all’ of the research process (Kesby, 2000; Pain, 2004:652).

This research undertook ‘a [partially] participatory approach’ (Kesby *et al.*, 2005:162) — it was a form of participatory research but it was not fully participatory for all participants, all the time. For example, through Felicity Shenton, Investing in Children shaped the direction and design of this research, however neither the other organisations, nor the young adults interviewed as part of this research were involved in these preliminary discussions. Consistent was my desire to act in ways that were ‘participatory’, being collaborative, inclusive, respectful and reflexive (Pain, 2004; Kindon, 2010). Nevertheless, what resulted was not always the ‘deep’ form of participation outlined in Kesby *et al.* (2005:160). Although desired at the start of the research, as will be argued throughout this chapter, given the constraints of the project this would not have been practical, nor, at times, appropriate (see Maxey, 1999; Kindon *et al.*, 2007c; Diprose, 2014). This latter remark, echoed in discussions throughout this chapter, is a reminder that although often an ethical and innovative methodology, participatory research is not without its dangers and limitations (see Guijt and Shah, 1998; Cooke and Kothari, 2001a; Kindon *et al.*, 2007b). As such it should be undertaken with the same critical caution and reflexivity required of all research methods.

### **3.3 A Qualitative Approach**

Silverman (2013), amongst others (e.g. Stratford and Bradshaw, 2010; Winchester and Rofe, 2010), stresses that it is important to ensure that your methodological approach aligns with the angle from which you are looking at a research topic, and

the type of questions you want to answer. As noted in Chapter 2, existing work on the effects of youth participation has tended to involve large, quantitative studies (e.g. Hansen *et al.*, 2003; Finlay and Flanagan, 2009; Flanagan, 2009; Flanagan and Levine, 2010; Ozer and Douglas, 2013). These studies have involved the use of (often longitudinal) surveys to categorise the outcomes of young people's involvement in processes of youth participation. This quantitative approach is useful for investigating preconceived outcomes. Within this research, however we, as a 'research team' (Investing in Children staff, my PhD supervisors and I), wanted to undertake a less prescriptive approach to this research topic. We were interested in the predictable 'outcomes' of being involved in arenas of youth participation but also those we, as practitioners and academics, had not thought of. Reflecting our participatory epistemology, we wanted to value the insight of those who had lived experiences of what we were studying and ensure that they were able to 'generate knowledge and share information on their own terms' (Kindon *et al.*, 2007c:17). Learning from others who are also interested in concepts such as empowerment and the question of what travels beyond the arenas of participation (e.g. Jones and SPEECH, 2001; Kesby, 2005; introduced in Chapter 2, but also Bishop and Bowman, 2014 who reflect on Oxfam's attempts to 'measure' women's empowerment), we did not want our methodological approach to limit our ability to hear of the small scale, 'everyday', unpredictable effects these past experiences may have had. Furthermore, following the reminder in Askins and Pain (2011), we wanted to create an approach that did not presume that involvement in participatory processes had *any* impact on other spaces of people's lives. As introduced at the end of Chapter 2, we were also interested in developing a depth of understanding into the practices of participation, a 'clarity through specificity' (Cornwall, 2008:269). Therefore, akin to the methodological approach favoured by Body and Hogg (2016) in their research on this topic, we concluded that a qualitative approach, which focused on listening in detail to individual experiences, was most appropriate for this research.

### **3.4 Participatory Research with: Youth Participation Organisations**

Shaping the direction of this research, Investing in Children wanted other organisations to be involved in this project: they did not want to be the sole focus of the research. The motivations behind this concern were unclear; it may have centred around (mis)conceptions about research needing to be ‘representative’ — in the early stages of the research proposal Investing in Children staff emphasised that they practice a specific rights-based form of participation that may be very different from other participatory organisations. They may also have been eager to share out the ‘burden’ of collaborating with a researcher to avoid organisational ‘research fatigue’ (Clark, 2008:953, see also Israel, Krieger et al., 2006 who reflect on the burden of participatory research within community organisations). The following section details the process of, firstly, recruiting other organisations to be involved in this practice. I then reflect on one significant ethical negotiation that must be considered by all researchers conducting participatory research with community organisations: whether to name or attempt to anonymise the organisations involved in the research. Finally, this section details the methods used to engage these organisations in research, focusing on this project’s use of participatory diagramming.

#### **3.4.1 Recruitment**

Practical considerations primarily drove the decision to seek to collaborate with other organisations that were based in the North East of England. Operating on a limited budget and knowing it is important to establish ‘strong working relationships’ when conducting participatory research (Elwood *et al.*, 2007:173), it made sense to conduct research in an area which I could access easily. My supervisors and Investing in Children staff also had contacts with other organisations within this region, acting as valuable gatekeepers.

Two criteria, evolving out of the original research focus, dictated which organisations were approached to be involved in the project. Firstly, organisations needed to be working in ‘participatory’ ways with young people. As acknowledged throughout this thesis, this term is evoked in different ways. Rather than impose a

definition, I sought organisations that *self-identified* as working in participatory ways with young people, although as will be seen in Chapter 4 this identification did not necessarily mean they readily embraced the term ‘participation’. Secondly, we were interested in how knowledge and resources encountered at participatory organisations were transferred over time, therefore recently established organisations or those who would have no access to people who had left their organisation (for example by keeping no contact details) were not approached to be involved in this research.

A snowballing approach was used to identify potentially interested organisations. Reflecting on the importance of selection and sampling within qualitative as well as quantitative research, this approach was chosen to ensure that those contacted were not limited to those already known to the research team (Baxter and Eyles, 2004). In particular, the Director of the Regional Youth Work Unit (renamed Youth Focus: North East in 2014) directed me to a diverse range of organisations engaging in participatory ways with young people. Of the 31 organisations contacted, 16 responded, leading to exploratory discussions with 10 organisations. 7 of these expressed an interest in being a part of the project. Cameron (2007) reflects that establishing effective participatory research relationships is time consuming, therefore, we sought to involve 4 organisations (including Investing in Children) in the project, seeing this as a manageable number.

The selection of these organisations was based on three overlapping considerations. Firstly, as a research team we decided that it would be interesting to include where possible a range of approaches to participation. As established above, this research undertook a qualitative approach, therefore the aim of this was not to construct a representative sample of participatory youth organisations across the North East of England, but rather to reflect this *may* be an interesting point of analysis (Stratford and Bradshaw, 2010). Using information generated from the exploratory discussions, three diagrams were created to explore and highlight these variations (see Appendices A-C). The first two diagrams are based on pre-existing models used to categorise participation (the originals can be found in Creative Commons, 2011);



the third depicts my analysis based on meetings with the gatekeepers at these eight organisations. For reasons discussed in the following section, the four organisations selected to be involved in this research are named within these diagrams, the other four organisations have been anonymised. Simplified versions of these diagrams, containing only the four organisations selected to be included in this research, are presented in Chapter 4.

Secondly, I wanted the research to be useful to the organisations. This influenced the decision to engage with Changemakers, as during our exploratory discussion their staff expressed a desire to be involved in an academic collaboration and a need for such work to help support their funding applications.

Thirdly, selection was based on the extent to which organisations felt they had the time to be involved in this research and the mechanisms to initiate contact with those who had left their organisation.

Following these criteria, three organisations (alongside Investing in Children) were approached to be involved in this project.

- Changemakers — a not-for-profit organisation based in Newcastle that seeks to promote and enable the leadership of young people within society.
- Scotswood Centre — a community-led charity that seeks to improve the lives and opportunities of those living in Scotswood, Newcastle.
- Youth Almighty Project — a youth-led project for young people in Sunderland.

Their involvement in this research project is outlined later in this chapter. Chapter 4 details their individual practices and reflects the extent to which each organisation is driven by a participatory epistemology.

### **3.4.2 Participatory ethics: a positive impact**

The 'real' names of these organisations are used within this thesis. Whilst discussing questions of confidentiality, each said they wanted their organisation to be identified in the research outputs (e.g. this thesis, but also associated academic presentations and papers such as Maynard, 2017). These conversations were rooted

within a participatory approach to ethics (see Cahill *et al.*, 2007). Rather than premise this research on a belief that research should have no *negative* impact on the organisations involved, we wanted to think about how this research could have a *positive* impact (Pain, 2004). For these organisations, this meant benefiting from what they perceived as the positive association of being involved in academic research. This approach is in line with the arguments made in Evans (2004) who contends that anonymity is not always the most appropriate ethical stance in participatory research as it limits the ability of participants to interpret and use the research in ways beyond those conceived by the researcher.<sup>8</sup>

These ethical negotiations were not without tensions – I was eager for the organisations to be aware of the ‘risks’ that came with being identifiable (e.g. potentially unwanted media attention). At times it felt like I cared more about this than the organisations themselves. I was also concerned that my ability to take a critical stance on their work may be restricted by their identification and would therefore impact the credibility of this research. This has, to date, proved unfounded; in writing the proceeding chapters I have not tempered my critique (both positive and constructively critical) of practices of these organisations. Nevertheless, despite assurances from staff welcoming such observations, a lingering sense of apprehension remains as they have yet to read this thesis.

These ethical negotiations were multiple and ongoing, they were part of the ‘processual reflexivity’ introduced at the start of this chapter (Nagar and Geiger, 2007:277). The collaborative, participatory nature of this research, involving cycles of reflection and action, meant that ethics became more than a ‘tickbox’ exercise conducted prior to fieldwork (Askins, 2007). I initiated the discussion about identification on several occasions, for example as staff at the organisations changed over the years. It was considered in greater depth when new research outputs were

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<sup>8</sup> Pseudonyms have been used for the young adults involved in this research. This is in recognition that the research design of this project did not allow for the time/space required to have ethical negotiations about this topic, such as those carried out with the organisations, with each young adult involved.

proposed. For example, a situation arose where I was to present preliminary research findings at an academic conference in a session in which an Investing in Children Board Member was also presenting. Given my critiques of some of their practices, I was hesitant to name the organisation within this setting. I therefore offered to send them a copy of what I intended to say prior to the presentation. Both staff and the Board Member at Investing in Children insisted I continue to identify them in the presentation, welcoming the opportunity for open discussion.

### **3.4.3 Research on, research with organisations**

The following section focuses on the use of participatory diagramming within focus groups as a tool to conduct research *with*, as opposed to purely research *on*, these organisations (see Lykes, 2001b). Prior to this, however, I spent time reading each organisation's literature (e.g. their project reports, websites, handbooks). The purpose of this was to familiarise myself with their practices and proposed aims, which informed the analysis in Chapter 4. Key phrases used to describe their participatory approaches were identified during this process; these were used in the participatory diagramming activities outlined below.

Concurrent to this, staff at Youth Almighty Project, Changemakers and Investing in Children invited me to undertake a period of 'observant participation' (a method also used by Brown, 2007; Moeran, 2009; Woodyer, 2012, amongst others). I was encouraged not just to observe, but to participate in some of their activities to gain a sense of their work and ethos beyond what their literature or staff could tell me. This period fostered my ability to propose and develop appropriate, informed research methods; it was also an important time for building rapport with organisational gatekeepers. Observations made within this period, recorded in a research diary, such as about the unusualness of adult-child relations and the influence of neoliberal ideas within these spaces, informed the development of the project research questions.

As relationships developed, staff at Investing in Children and, over time, at Changemakers, were invited to shape the direction of the research. These

discussions directed the overall research questions; they also, to a lesser extent, shaped some of the specifics of what was asked within the research interviews with the young adult participants, outlined in the next section. As will become evident throughout the proceeding chapters, the voices of the young adult participants were also vital in shaping this thesis.

#### **3.4.4 Participatory diagramming: failures, resistance and participatory analysis**

A focus group was conducted with staff at three out of four of the organisations to explore these emerging questions and discuss my preliminary observations. My intention in this was to include the perspectives of multiple members of staff within this project, rather than just the initial gatekeepers. These groups were conducted in meeting rooms within each organisation, during working hours. Aware of the dangers around voluntary consent when conducting research within organisations (Ritchie *et al.*, 2013), I emphasised to gatekeepers that attendance should be voluntary, reiterating this during the focus group.

Unfortunately, a focus group was not carried out at Scotswood Centre. My attempts to arrange this group (or build effective relationships necessary for undertaking observant participation) were hindered by the unexpected loss of the project gatekeeper at this organisation (see Buchanan *et al.*, 2013 who highlight staff loss as a particular challenge of conducting research over time with organisations). I subsequently failed to foster productive relationships with other members of staff, instead connecting more easily with Adele, a young volunteer who became a peer-researcher on the project. Staff began to see this as 'Adele's project' and were happy to 'let us get on with it'. They did not readily offer up their time, nor did I seek to impose myself on them, recognising this research was not their priority during these difficult times of staff changes and the strain of funding cuts. Reflecting back, failing to organise this group had repercussions for the research. Recruitment of interviewees at Scotswood Centre proved difficult in part due to limited support from staff in this process. In particular, this failure has haunted the *writing* of this thesis. Evident from the comparatively shorter analysis of participation at Scotswood Centre in Chapter 4, I did not understand the practices and

accompanying motivations at Scotswood Centre in the same depth as at the other organisations. This has meant the observations made about practices of participation at this organisation were more speculative; I felt less confident drawing on examples from Scotswood Centre and as such the voices of these young adults (and their comparative perspective of being in a geographically-orientated as opposed to cause-orientated organisation) unfortunately feature significantly less than those from the other organisations. Furthermore, personally I feel a lingering sense of guilt for not working harder to organise this group, echoing Hadfield-Hill and Horton's (2014) observations that emotions associated with fieldwork can continue to have effect long after leaving the field.

The focus groups were structured around three participatory diagrams. Through introducing these exercises, this section reflects on the, at times challenging, role of the researcher when undertaking participatory diagramming and the potential these techniques have for facilitating participatory analysis.

Diagramming techniques are frequently used in projects informed by a participatory approach (e.g. Cahill *et al.*, 2004; Pain *et al.*, 2010). Diagramming is a visual technique which uses graphic and/or tactile materials as a way to encourage the inclusion of multiple participants, without overly prioritising verbal forms of communication (Alexander *et al.*, 2007; Bagnoli, 2009; Worth, 2011). Diagramming techniques can take many forms, including the production of maps, spider diagrams, flowcharts, timelines, Venn diagrams and the use of matrix and ranking exercises (Chambers, 2007; Kindon, 2010). As both Kesby *et al.* (2005) and Alexander *et al.* (2007) argue, using diagramming techniques does not make a project *participatory*. *Participatory* diagramming techniques are those informed by a participatory epistemology. For example they need to be used in ways that emphasise co-production, shifting attention away from the researcher (Alexander *et al.*, 2007). Furthermore, more than information gathering, Kesby *et al.* (2005:150, emphasis added) explain that:

In a *participatory* project, diagramming techniques should aim to achieve two goals simultaneously: (a) obtain the best and fullest impression possible

of the subject you are investigating, and (b) facilitate participants' own learning, self-reflection and analysis.

The first diagramming technique used with the organisations sought to generate conversations around how they construct and perform their frameworks of reference (Cameron, 2010 identifies this as a common objective within an organisation-centred focus group). The group were asked to imagine that a new member of staff had joined their team. I proposed that this person had heard some terms being used relating to the organisation and wanted to understand what these meant and whether they were meaningful to the staff. Five cards containing the terms 'Citizenship', 'Community Development', 'Youth Participation', 'Children's Rights' and 'Empowerment' were presented to the group. These terms emerged as potentially significant to the project through my analysis of the initial discussions with organisational gatekeepers. These prompts were included with the intention to stimulate what could become an abstract discussion and allow for comparison across the groups; staff were also given blank cards to include their own key phrases on their diagrams (Figure 2). In retrospect, I can see how at times these terms, reflecting to a certain extent *my* values, analysis and priorities unhelpfully limited/steered the conversations. This is a reminder that participatory diagramming is not (and should not be presented as) a 'neutral technology' (Cleaver, 2001; Pain and Francis, 2003; Alexander *et al.*, 2007:117).

The diagrams, as 'end products', reflect a consensus reached by staff about how to best describe their organisation, however, they mask the negotiations and disagreements that took place during their production (Mohan, 1999; Cahill *et al.*, 2007). Of greater value, for both the project analytically but also for staff as they reflected on their practices, were the extensive discussions that the exercises provoked. As the extract from the Changemakers' focus group below illustrates, it was during these processes of knowledge production that the messy (instable, fluctuating) nature of participation, that is identified and analysed in Chapters 5 and 6, began to show.

Staff 1: I don't know about that [points to Children's Rights card]. I'd question that.

Staff 2: I don't think [agreeing], yeah me too.

Staff 3: Yep

Staff 1: Not your traditional youth participation but youth participation linked to empowerment.

Staff 2: I'm drawing links.

Naomi: What's its difference from traditional youth participation do you think?

Staff 1: Um, (...) I dunno I think we are (...) I mean we want to hear from the young people and we listen to the young people's voices and we empower young people but I think it's at a bit of a, a higher level of engagement as well and a higher level of sort of change that we're trying to make.

[Changemakers staff focus group]

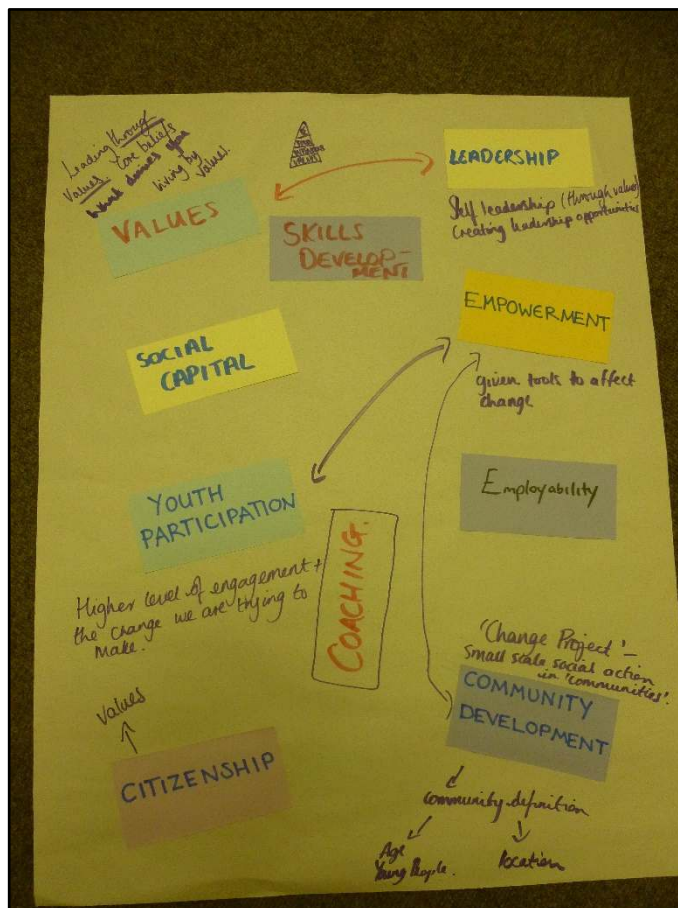
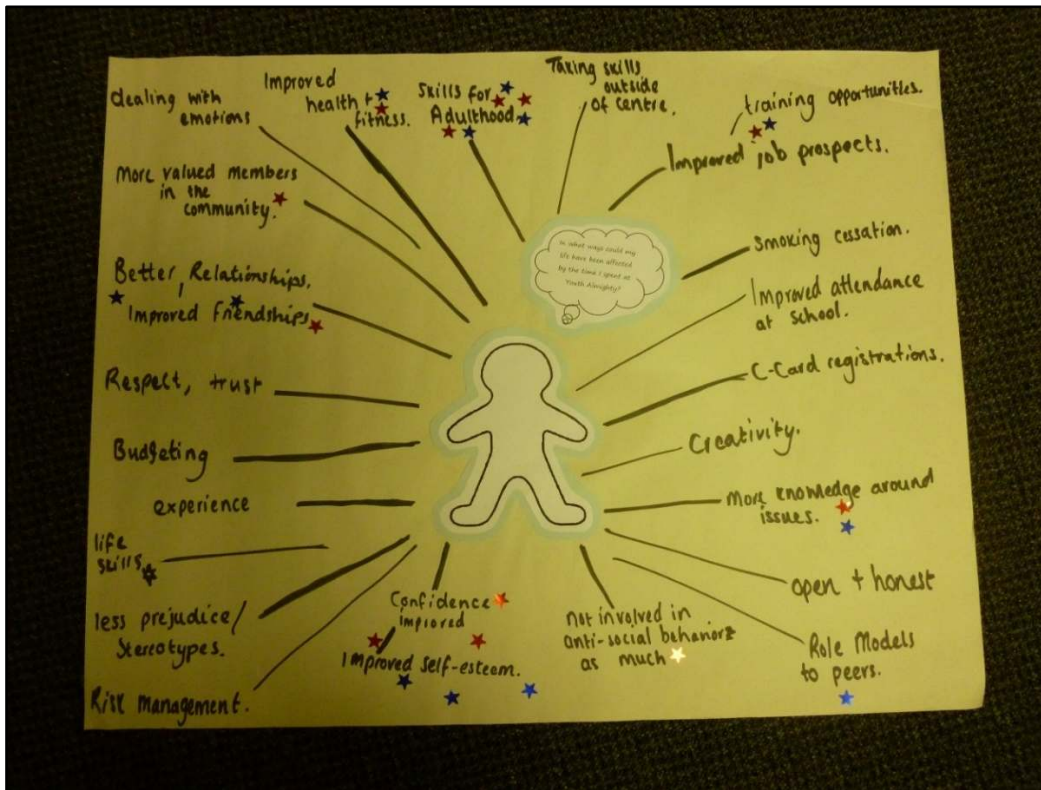


Figure 2 Exercise 1: Changemakers 'Key Phrases'

Participant analysis was encouraged during each diagramming exercise. This process was particularly illuminating during the second diagramming exercise (Figure 3).



**Figure 3 Exercise 2: Youth Almighty Project ‘Naming and Ranking Impacts’**

Together, staff were asked to list any impacts they perceived their work to have on the young people they engaged with. They were then asked to undertake a ranking exercise, placing up to three red sticky stars next to impacts they would most *like* to see in young people at their organisation and up to three blue sticky stars next to the impacts they observe occurs most frequently.<sup>9</sup> Staff were asked to complete this stage individually, initially without discussion. This was an attempt to limit the effects of organisational/group think (see MacDougall and Baum, 1997) and produce findings that were not solely developed via consensus, which Cooke and Kothari (2001a) and Kothari (2001) argue can dangerously mask difference. With little prompting, some of the staff (but not all) critically analysed each other’s perspectives and engaged in a form of (albeit brief) participatory analysis. They

<sup>9</sup> Staff were instructed that they could place all three stars next to one impact or spread these out between multiple impacts.



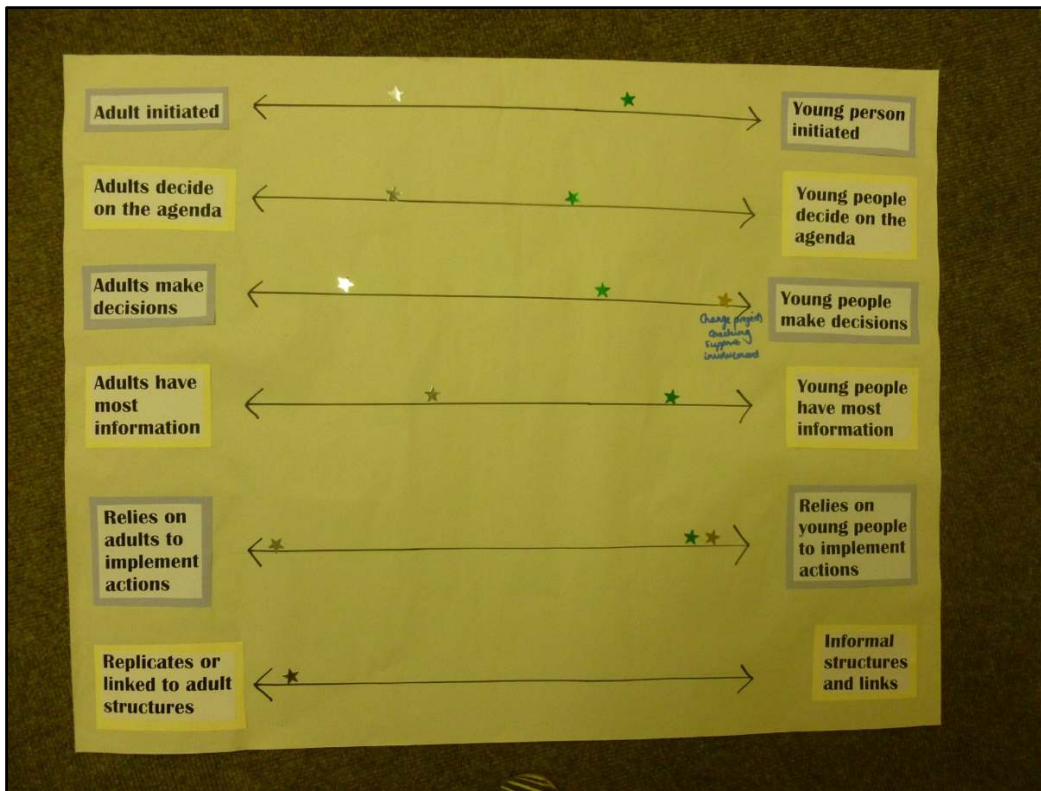
identified and discussed points of difference and similarities; one staff member at Youth Almighty Project excitedly explained 'there's a common theme!'. I also used this time to test out my own initial interpretations of what was emerging, which Alexander *et al.* (2007:116) suggest may improve the 'depth and quality' of analysis whilst also acting as a form of 'member checking'. This exercise provoked discussions around un/intentional impacts. Illustrated in the discussion below from the Investing in Children focus group about money, it also stimulated conversations about the perceived differing motivations and priorities of the staff and young people. This theme, including how these may evolve over time, is returned to in Chapter 7.

Staff 1: I think a lot of them would say 'money', and I think they'd say the money because the money makes them feel valued. So, I thought about putting money down [with her blue star]. As a lot of the young people say, it's the first thing they ask sometimes. But I didn't want to put that as it's so badly understood by lots of people. 'You're bribing young people, giving them a fiver every time they come' you know? But they feel valued by us because we...

Staff 2: They work for that money don't they!

Staff 3: Some young people I think initially come for the money and that makes them feel valued but then in the long term I think the money becomes something that's over there and it's nice to have and it does still make them feel valued, but I think that they feel valued because of how they're listened to and how they're part of that group and they feel like they belong and that their ideas are part of it all. And that's why they feel valued in the long term but I think initially money is valued, how they feel valued.

[Investing in Children staff focus group]



**Figure 4 Exercise 3: Changemakers 'Clarity Model of Participation'**

There were moments during these focus groups where I had to resist the urge to steer the diagramming process, allowing participants to adapt and use the tools as they desired. Similar to the experience of Alexander (2009a) in her PhD work with young people, facilitating in this 'relaxed' and participatory way at times resulted in unexpected and rich material. This was evident during the third participatory diagramming exercise, which used an adapted version of Clare Lardner's (2001) 'clarity model of participation' to facilitate a discussion about participatory practices, concentrating on the extent to which their organisation was led by staff or the young people (Figure 4). The organisations responded to this exercise in different ways. Staff at both Changemakers and Investing in Children expressed their reservations about models of participation. Shown in Figure 4, the staff at Changemakers adapted my instructions, placing two or three stars (as opposed to a single star, as I envisaged and had directed) on each line to reflect variations across their programmes. Staff at Investing in Children in their words 'resisted' making any marks on their diagram. Although this exercise did not proceed as I intended, I found

that significant conversations and potentially the 'richest material' emerged as some of the staff 'interviewed' (analysed, interrogated) *both* the research tool and their (non)diagrams (Alexander *et al.*, 2007:116). Highlighted in the extract with Investing in Children staff below, this exercise exposed the differences between what an organisation wants to do and what happens in practice, demonstrating the value in conducting these focus groups as opposed to only reading the organisation literature:

Staff 3: This [young people side] is where we want it to be but it draws back over there. That's where us as workers want it to be and where us as an organisation want it to be, but actually in reality it's often drawn towards the adult's side as the adults ask us to do the piece of work or it's the adults that have the funding for the project, or it's the adults that have...

Staff 1: (laughs) I see we've resisted putting any stars anywhere!

Naomi: Yeah, you don't have to.

Staff 1: (laughs) I think that's really funny isn't it! (...)

Staff 3: because I don't wanna put them anywhere near the adults [side].

[Investing in Children staff focus group]

Each of these exercises generated important knowledge used in the production of this thesis and associated dissemination tools. Through moments of participatory analysis, however, this was not the only outcome from these focus groups. As Kesby (2000) reflects, one of the values of participatory diagramming is that research 'results' are immediately available for participants to use. Staff at Investing in Children and Changemakers asked for photos of the diagrams to stimulate further discussions with staff members who were not present. In contrast to staff at Youth Almighty Project who were predominately concerned with if they had 'given me what I wanted', staff from Investing in Children and Changemakers commented that the focus groups had been significant spaces for *them*, stimulating organisational learning and reflection.

This section has highlighted the challenges and potential (particularly with regards to moments of participatory analysis) of using participatory diagramming techniques. It is certainly not an 'easy' research method, requiring forward yet

flexible planning, sensitive facilitation and high levels of ethical awareness (Kesby *et al.*, 2005). Nevertheless, its use can generate rich material which, in the case of this project, could be used by both the researcher and the focus group participants.

### 3.5 Participatory Research with: Young Adults

To answer the project's research questions, specifically how knowledge and resources created during young people's time at these organisations was transferred, over time, to other spaces of their lives, it was important to design a methodology that engaged directly with people who had previously attended these organisations whilst they were young people.<sup>10</sup> Their lived experiences were essential to this research. Several of the potential participants no longer lived in the North East of England, therefore semi-structured interviews conducted through a variety of media (face to face, telephone and via email, Skype and Facebook Chat) were chosen as the most appropriate method of engagement. This method (as opposed to either a survey or a focus group) was also chosen as interviews provide the chance to understand in significant depth how 'individual people experience and make sense of their lives [...] considering meanings people attribute to their lives and the processes which operate in particular social contexts' (Valentine, 2005:111). Interviews also provide individuals the space to reflect and explore experiences and assumptions (Hoggart *et al.*, 2002). Furthermore, as Bissell (2014:1995) reflects during his research into commuters, interviews are a:

privileged site for cultivating receptivity to leap into the virtuality of the past through the way that it creates a disconnection from the habitual activities of the present moment.

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<sup>10</sup> Changemakers defines a young person as someone aged 16–25. For Scotswood Centre and Youth Almighty Project anyone under age 18 is considered a young person, although at Scotswood Centre some of those in this age category may now be considered 'volunteers'. Investing in Children considers those under 18 to be young people, unless they have been in care, in which case they are defined as a young person until age 21.

This reflective space, separated to a certain extent from their everyday lives, was particularly important in this project which needed participants to recall and interpret experiences that may have occurred several years previously.

This section outlines and reflects on the strategies used to recruit participants for these interviews, before detailing the parameters of this stage of the research. Finally, the use of alternative modes of interviewing is discussed, considering the extent to which these should be read as comfortable, ethical and silent research spaces. Throughout this section attention is paid to the emotions of undertaking participatory research.

### **3.5.1 Recruitment: evolving strategies, fieldwork failures**

Staff acted as gatekeepers, contacting where possible those who had previously engaged with their organisation as young people. Whilst this was an effective recruitment strategy, to avoid un/conscious recruitment bias whereby a researcher is only directed to those who have had a positive or 'transformatory' experience (as Reeves (2009) encountered during his research with young fathers), other strategies were deployed. Through the development of a project video, Facebook page and an information article, a call for participants was distributed via the organisations' webpages, electronic newsletters and social media streams. To increase the credibility of this research, I attempted to develop a strategy to access what Baxter and Eyles (2004:513) call 'negative cases'. For this research, this meant considering how to access those for whom the experience at these organisations was either negative, unusually brief or did not hold significant meaning. Knowing they were unlikely to still be in contact with staff or the organisation (and therefore hear about the research through these avenues), I sought to reach these cases through the networks of other project participants, asking each participant at the end of our interview if they could put me in touch with any others who had been involved alongside them at the organisation. This strategy was particularly effective at Investing in Children where young people often joined the organisation with their school friends, and therefore often knew several others who had been involved. As will become evident in the analysis in Chapters 5–7, despite these strategies, for the

majority of those interviewed for this project their experiences at these organisations had been overwhelmingly positive. Nevertheless, some narratives of indifference or those that spoke of negative experiences were still present in this research and are highlighted in these chapters. Others for whom the experience was less positive or meant little to, may have been contacted about the research via these strategies but declined to participate.

After struggling to identify participants at Scotswood Centre, in conjunction with peer researcher Adele Richardson, whose involvement with this project is detailed in Section 3.7, a further recruitment strategy was deployed. Outlined in the following chapter, several of those who were involved in community-led charity Scotswood Centre as young people, continue their involvement as adults. To access some of these adults a short online survey was embedded into the centre's computers, with completion encouraged at adult sessions. This had the dual aim of gathering brief qualitative and quantitative information for the centre to use in funding bids about the impact of their youth work and, as a recruitment tool, inviting those who participated to take part in the project interviews.

A similar strategy was devised for Youth Almighty Project after several months of failed recruitment via the other strategies. Due to delays in communication, miscommunications with staff about the aims and nature of the project and my period of maternity leave 'disrupting' the continuity of fieldwork, recruitment for this stage of the research at this organisation was unsuccessful. As introduced at the start of this chapter, acknowledging moments of failure within fieldwork is becoming more prevalent both within Geography (e.g. Pain and Francis, 2003; Nairn *et al.*, 2005; Horton, 2008) and the social sciences (e.g. Kent, 2000; Gill and Temple, 2014) (see also the strikingly honest reflections in Rose, 1997b). Bergman Blix and Wettergren (2015:691), writing about research with elites, describe the process of gaining and maintaining access and research relationships as a form of 'emotional labour' (see also Punch, 2012; Billo and Hiemstra, 2013 who explore emotions within fieldwork). Within this project I found that the breakdown of this potentially exciting research collaboration with Youth Almighty Project, took its emotional toll.

It was difficult to decide when to divert the energy spent on recruitment strategies onto the other organisations. As a participatory researcher, I felt a sense of *participatory guilt* about not adapting the focus of this research to fit this organisation – was I holding on to the research aims, topic areas and parameters too tightly?

### **3.5.2 Parameters and piloting**

Table 1 details the breakdown of interviews by organisation. The decision not to write out my interactions with Youth Almighty Project from this thesis was one I made easily. Despite my potential (personal and professional) embarrassment and feelings of regret about this failed research relationship, I do not want to ‘smooth over’ (Kay and Oldfield, 2011) or ‘hide’ (Punch, 2012) the realities of fieldwork (see also Scott *et al.*, 2012; DeLuca and Maddox, 2016 who reflect on embarrassment within fieldwork). Doing so not only endangers the transparency and credibility of the research, but continues the reproduction of unrealistic representations of fieldwork which discourage and disempower new researchers.

Table 1 also details the ages of participants and the length of time since they had attended the organisation as a young person (some remained involved as adult volunteers, adult service users or employees). As outlined in Chapter 1, this research was interested in interviewing those who had attended these organisations as young people and were now undergoing a period often labelled ‘transitions to adulthood’. Although this would have enabled interesting comparisons, due to variations between how long each organisation had been operating (Changemakers (in its current form): 4 years, Investing in Children and Scotswood Centre: 20+ years) and the difficulties with recruitment outlined above, it was not possible to limit participants to those who had left the organisation a set number of years ago. To pursue an interest in questions of time and how these experiences affect other spaces of their life, in consultation with the organisations, one of the parameters set for the project was that participants must have ceased involvement with the organisations as young people at least 6 months previously.

	Number of interviews	Ages of participants	Time since attended organisation as a young person
<b>Investing in Children</b>	12	20–30	6 months–12 years
<b>Changemakers</b>	11	20–26	6 months–3 years
<b>Scotswood Centre</b>	7	15–22	6 months–5 years
<b>Youth Almighty Project</b>	0	-	-

**Table 1 Number of Interviews by Organisation**

Interviews were semi-structured, meaning I followed a topic guide asking similar questions in each interview. These questions were piloted during the first five interviews and revised accordingly. As acknowledged above, this project was interested in individual experiences, interviews were therefore conducted individually, except in the case of two sibling groupings (see Punch, 2009 who explores the dynamics of interviewing sibling groups). As reflected upon further in Chapter 8, it would have been interesting to ‘follow’ a group of participants over several years, logistically a longitudinal study did not fit with the time constraints of this PhD. Although greater involvement may have constituted ‘deeper’ participation, I chose to conduct a single interview with participants (and then to engage them further via email, as outlined below in discussions about participatory analysis) as this did not put an excessive research burden on participants. For participants who were no longer personally involved with these organisations, I also recognised that their involvement in this research offered little personal advantage, save potentially the opportunity for personal reflection provided through the interview space. I



therefore prioritised these ethical considerations over my desire to conduct deeper participatory research.

Initially I intended to use participatory diagramming techniques as part of these interviews. During the pilot stage of this project I attempted to facilitate spider diagram and life-mapping exercises, however, several participants ignored these prompts to use pen and paper, explaining they were comfortable ‘just chatting’. I was relieved: although these techniques have been successfully used by several other researchers (e.g. Henderson *et al.*, 2007; Wilson *et al.*, 2007; Worth, 2011), I found them awkward in this one-on-one setting. Also, their use would have been limited to the interviews conducted in person. As the following section explores, for both practical and epistemological reasons this research sought out alternative ways to conduct interviews.

### **3.5.3 Alternative modes of interviewing: comfortable spaces, ethical spaces, quieter spaces?**

The ‘conventional’ qualitative research interview involves a face-to-face encounter between a researcher and their participant (King and Horrocks, 2010:79). The mechanics of this has been the subject of numerous academic books and articles (e.g. Wengraf, 2001; Holstein and Gubrium, 2004; Valentine, 2005; Dunn, 2010). Interviewing face to face is often presented as the ‘default’ for qualitative interviewing, with some method-focused textbooks failing to acknowledge alternative forms (e.g. Flowerdew and Martin, 2005).

<b>Mode</b>	<b>Number of Interviews</b>
Face to Face	17
Telephone	5
Email	5
Facebook Chat	2
Skype	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>30</b>

**Table 2 Modes of Interviewing**

As Table 2 shows, over 40% of the interviews in this research were conducted via 'alternative' modes of interviewing. The decision to conduct interviews via a variety of methods was driven by both practical and ethical concerns. As stated above, several of the potential participants no longer lived in the North East of England. My limited research budget would have reduced the number of participants I could have interviewed if alternative modes were not considered (or if extra funding had been secured would have resulted in an increased carbon footprint for this project, a concern raised in Hanna, 2012). Ethically, I was aware that some of my potential participants may feel excluded from face to face interviews due to, for example, mobility difficulties or carer or work commitments. As discussed below, in an age of widespread internet proficiency I was also aware some participants may *prefer* being interviewed over the internet (see Ayling and Mewse, 2009). Additionally, I was encouraged by Sturges and Hanrahan (2004) who found that participants liked being offered a choice of mode when participating in interview-based research. Finally, I felt that presenting participants with a choice over *how* as well as *when* an interview could take place reflected my commitment to placing participants at the centre of the research, conveying in part an understanding that I viewed this research as a collaborative process.<sup>11</sup> The remainder of this section reflects upon some of the unique potentials and challenges of conducting interviews using these alternative methods, questioning the extent to which these are *comfortable, ethical* and *quieter* research spaces.

The location of an interview is widely accepted to play a role in shaping the interview encounter (see Elwood and Martin, 2000; Sin, 2003; Evans and Jones, 2011). James and Busher (2009) suggest that interviews conducted via alternative modes occur within three spaces: the two physical spaces occupied by the researcher and the participant, and the virtual space. Each of these spaces impacts on and is a part of the research encounter. This was evident when conducting an

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<sup>11</sup> For face to face interviews participants were also encouraged to determine *where* they would like the interview to take place. This resulted in interview locations including a local sports centre, a coffee outlet and a kebab shop.

interview via Skype (for discussions on the use of Skype as a research tool see King and Horrocks, 2010; Cater, 2011; Hanna, 2012; Cater, 2013). The interview was located both in my home and the home of Jenn, the participant, creating what Hanna (2012:241) describes as a 'neutral yet personal location'. We were both affected by our own physical spaces: their smells, temperatures, the photos on our walls, the texture of our seats: physical factors which the other was unaware of. Yet at times these places became part of the research encounter: as Jenn's cats raced past her computer, as she heard the whistling of my kettle. We were separate yet together, also sharing the experience of the virtual space: the distracting cameras reflecting our own images and the slight time delay.

These methods created comfortable research spaces. They were often physically comfortable as interviewing via alternative modes meant both parties could choose their location, but also comfortable due to their convenience. For example, interviews conducted over email take place at the pace of the participant who could respond at their chosen time, whilst telephone and online interviews eliminated the research burden of travel on participants (Bertrand and Bourdeau, 2010). Furthermore, I found that some participants felt more emotionally comfortable being interviewed via these methods. During initial contact, one participant expressed a concern about being interviewed by a researcher in person. He was worried he would not be articulate enough for me, a concern which may have arisen through preconceptions about my class, which, despite not having met before may have been evident through my educational status and the language of my introductory email. Able to suggest we conducted an interview via another method, he chose to communicate via Facebook Chat, a medium he was confident and comfortable with.

As these examples suggest, alternative modes of interviewing potentially foster highly ethical research encounters (see Buchanan, 2004, an edited collection examining virtual research ethics). Illustrating this further is the relative ease alternative methods offer for participants wishing to withdraw from the research. Unlike in a face to face encounter, there is little awkwardness on the part of the

participant in simply no longer replying to a researcher's online messages, whilst a telephone or Skype conversation can easily be terminated or rescheduled (Bertrand and Bourdeau, 2010). It was difficult, however, to identify if consent had been withdrawn when interviewing via email. Mirroring the experiences of Kazmer and Xie (2008), I lost contact with participants at multiple stages of this project (e.g. some participants stopped responding after an initial expression of interest, yet others conversed over several emails before abruptly ending contact) (see also Meho, 2006). Occasions of repeated failed contact and ambiguity surrounding issues of consent led me to omit some of the interviews conducted via email from this thesis.

Considering this issue led on to broader reflections about informed consent in this context. The practice I adopted included attaching an information sheet about the research at the point of initial contact (usually via email). I then reminded participants of the purpose of the research and highlighted ethical considerations in the main body of the text when I sent or asked the first set of questions. In retrospect, a more proactive stance may have been more appropriate. For example, as email interviewing is asynchronous, it is not as easy for the researcher to get confirmation that the participant understands the purpose and potential uses of the research. I was also concerned that the popular culture of skim-reading emails or simply ticking that you accept 'terms and conditions' (see Smithers, 2011) may resonate in online research encounters. Therefore, it may be beneficial in future research to consider a short telephone conversation with participants prior to online engagement to inform them in greater depth about the research and allow them a more overt opportunity to raise questions.

For reasons beyond Hamilton and Bower's (2006) concern about transcription manipulation (see also Ayling and Mewse, 2009), I was excited that text-based modes of interviewing allow participants to be co-producers of the transcript, believing this was a further embodiment of doing participatory research 'deeply' (Kesby *et al.*, 2005). However, I found that transcript interpretation was not completely redundant, having to interpret participant's use of acronyms and

abbreviations. These methods also allowed participants to retain (and therefore revise) the transcript. Whilst I saw this as an advantage in terms of research transparency, Kazmer and Xie (2008) warn that there is the potential that the existence of multiple copies may endanger the privacy of both the participants and the researcher. More acute concerns about privacy were heightened whilst using Facebook Chat to conduct interviews. This method left participants potentially exposed: whilst I could control my own online privacy settings, I could not determine those of the participants (see Baker, 2013).

One criticism of alternative modes of interviewing is that it is difficult to develop rapport with your participants, which is commonly accepted as an essential feature of 'good' qualitative interviewing (see Valentine, 2005; Hamilton and Bowers, 2006). This is because when interviewing over the telephone or online, aspects of the researcher and the participant may be visually silenced. Novick (2008) contends that several scholars have uncritically assumed this visual silencing limits the development of rapport with participants and ultimately reduces the quality of the research (both claims he contests). I found my positionings within these spaces to be quieter but not silent. Unless I articulated them, my ethnicity, class, age and pregnancy were quietened, partially obscured during these modes of interviewing. I suspect, however, that presumptions were still made about my age, ethnicity and class through my tone, accent, educational status and choice of language (and potentially my use of emoticons, see Opdenakker, 2006).

Within this section I have demonstrated how using alternative modes of interviewing forces conventional ethical and reflective considerations to be examined from a different standpoint. I have argued that — particularly for this (Western) generation, who are often confident and prolific internet and telephone users<sup>12</sup> — alternative methods can facilitate both comfortable and ethical research

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<sup>12</sup> The Office for National Statistics (2016) reports that 99.2% of adults age 16-24 in the UK are recent internet users, using the internet in the last 3 months. 96% of adults age 16-24 in the UK own a smart phone (Statista, 2017). And 96% of adults age 16–24 in the UK consider themselves confident internet users (Ofcom, 2015).

spaces. I also began to reflect on my own positionality within this research. One aspect of my positionality that was hidden within alternative interview spaces was my pregnancy. Conducting fieldwork between five and nine months pregnant, the following section reflects on how this affected the research process.

### 3.6 Disclosing: Reflections from a Pregnant Researcher

*Interrupted, stalled, altered. Speeding up, slowing down (both the research but also my once-active body). The aches and pressures, the wandering mind, the focused mind. Being under the 'gaze', seeing their questions, judgements, concerns and joys.*

McCormack (2004); Moore (2004) and Moss (2009) detail the challenges of conducting participatory research and completing a PhD. I added a third 'P', being pregnant, to this combination. This, as hinted at through the prose above, added a further layer of emotions to conducting research as I navigated the physical and temporal pressures of doing a participatory PhD through the lens of pregnancy. My ever-changing body being subjected to the 'public gaze' (Reich, 2003:364) — a gendered, scrutinising, (overly)concerned, intrusive, yet, as will be argued below, at times productive gaze.

Being a pregnant researcher had very real consequences for conducting participatory research. Participatory research is meant to be conducted slowly, ensuring it is flexible enough to encompass change (Gaventa and Cornwall, 2001; Castleden *et al.*, 2012). Pregnancy imposed a deadline on my fieldwork: as time sped up (and I slowed down) recruitment strategies had to be changed and/or abandoned as I sought to complete my fieldwork interviews. I was concerned that I should capitalise on the productive relationships with the organisations and participant gatekeepers, fearing these may fade during my period of leave. Nine months later, on my return, I found situations and relationships had changed. For example, at Scotswood Centre a key gatekeeper had left, with new staff curious about the project. This led to re-negotiations of ethics and access, but also potentially brought more starkly into focus the challenges of conducting *participatory* research. I had to reluctantly admit to these new staff members I no longer had the time or

the energy to conduct the further fieldwork they had envisioned, shifting the parameters of this research to fit their needs. The time away from the field meant it was too difficult to return to it with the same vigour, I had to move on (to analysis and dissemination) (see Northway, 2000 who considers the challenges of 'ending' participatory research). I directed them onto other researchers but the participatory guilt remained.

England (1994:84) writes that 'a researcher cannot conveniently tuck away the personal behind the professional, because fieldwork is personal'. This is no truer than when you are a pregnant researcher, unable to hide, ignore or discount the ever-more apparent *person(al)*. There is significant debate about how much a researcher should share about herself in a research setting (e.g. Avis, 2002; Goodrum and Keys, 2007). Evident from the extracts from my research diary below, this tension riddled my participatory research encounters — I understood the interview as a co-produced space, yet also did not want the sharing of my own experiences to detract from the research topic:

**6/11/13** When to share of yourself and when not to? During Sarah's Changemakers interview she spoke about religion and how she didn't like one young person praying for a girl on the residential — this made me conscious/cautious not to disclose that I'm married to a vicar — this might make her feel uncomfortable. Yet I shared with Lexi about doing a PhD, where are the boundaries?

**20/11/13** I felt I had quite a lot in common with Maria (sports especially). I wanted to share of myself a bit more — ask her if she knew of Korfbal. I held back as I didn't want to intrude on the purpose of the interview (especially as she was talking a lot) although I think she would have welcomed the input as she did when I talked a bit later about doing a Masters. It was difficult finding the balance between intruding and facilitating a productive relationship!

[Extracts from research diary]

Unlike in these extracts, however, the decision over how much to share was not always as firmly in my hands as these reflections imply. Reich (2003:365) reflects 'pregnancy indisputably provides for the biography of the researcher to be apparent to those researched in the field setting'. Like Kannen (2013), I therefore began to consider how my pregnant body was both an asset and a hindrance in the research

space. Several participants commented on my protruding bump at the start of the interview — often marvelling at the fact I was ‘still studying’. I became acutely aware of Allison’s (2007:30) reflection about pregnancy in academia, that ‘the very physical experience of pregnancy, birth, and motherhood powerfully and irreversibly reshapes her identity’. I was, generally, happy to discuss my state, although constantly reminded of Pillow’s (1997:351) observation that ‘what the mother does with her body — what she eats, where she goes, how and when — is open to public scrutiny’ (see also Kannen, 2013). This openness led to moments of connection and sympathy/empathy, as topics such as pregnancy discomfort, proposed baby names and child-rearing experiences were encountered, negotiated, relived. Such moments often facilitated a sense of ease and comradery, that we were in apparently similar ‘stages’ of life or shared similar experiences, which could be read as the development of ‘good’, ‘productive’ rapport (see Reich, 2003 who had similar experiences conducting research whilst pregnant).

Unlike Reich’s (2003) research, however, this project was not about issues specifically connected with pregnancy/children. Therefore, whilst I often felt these conversations were productive (potentially encouraging the reflections about participation, human rights and child rearing explored in Chapter 7) at times they distracted from the research topic. Furthermore, the unavoidably visual nature of my pregnancy, which particularly in the latter interviews would have been socially difficult for participants to leave unacknowledged, unfortunately may also have brought into the research space unwanted feelings and memories (for example of the loss of a child) for some participants. The visual silencing enabled through some of the alternative modes of interviewing was therefore occasionally a welcome break from both the emotional labour involved in sensitively navigating this topic and the weight of conducting research whilst in the public gaze.

### **3.7 Unsilencing: Reflections from a Peer Researcher**

Collaboration is not merely a tool to generate new descriptions or anecdotes pertaining to isolated projects; in fact, it can serve as a conceptualization of social justice that is committed to reshaping the agendas, products, and possibilities embedded in academic research. (Benson and Nagar, 2006:587)



The fieldwork for this research was not conducted alone. Adele Richardson, an 18-year-old woman who had previously attended Scotswood Centre as a young person and now volunteered her time there, became involved as a peer researcher in this project. The use of 'peer' or 'community' researchers is a common feature of participatory research (e.g. Bland and Atweh, 2007; Cahill, 2007a; St. Martin and Hall-Arber, 2007; Cahill *et al.*, 2010; Hampshire *et al.*, 2012). It overtly conveys the belief, synonymous with a participatory approach, that participants are capable of being involved in all stages of the research. It also holds many practical advantages, with peer researchers often serving a dual role as gatekeepers. The use of peer researchers is seen as one way to produce better quality findings: participants are often perceived as being more willing to disclose (certain types of) information to their peers (Stoudt, 2009, see also Nairn and Smith, 2003 who reflect on some of the challenges and variances in disclosure when using peer researchers). In this way the use of peer researchers is seen to potentially offer the opportunity to readdress some of the power imbalances present within research (Higgins *et al.*, 2007; Nagar, 2013), however as Kesby *et al.* (2007) remind, several modalities of power are still at work within these (still unequally experienced) research relationships. This section details Adele's role in the project before presenting her reflections. Her reflections are revisited in the conclusion of this chapter, which considers reciprocity within participatory research.

Adele was interviewed (alongside her sister) as part of the pilot stages of this project. During this discussion it emerged that Adele was interested in becoming a peer researcher in the project — conducting interviews with others who had previously been involved as young people at Scotswood Centre. As indicated above, recruitment at Scotswood Centre was slow, therefore Adele co-designed the survey used to identify further participants. Her knowledge of the place (and therefore the language that should be used in this survey) was invaluable (see similar reflections in Higgins *et al.*, 2007). Together we used this knowledge, and my relatively greater expertise in the mechanics of survey design, to develop an effective research tool that gained qualitative and quantitative information from forty participants which

was of use to the centre. This survey led directly to the interviews of two participants. I conducted informal training with Adele to equip her to lead on interviews in this setting. Together we interviewed a former member of staff. Shown in Adele's reflections below, she considered herself an observer in this interview. In contrast, I perceived her role as a co-interviewer as we planned the interview together and took turns to ask questions and prompts. Adele then led interviews with two further participants. This differing perspective highlights the importance of including the reflections of peer researchers within methodological accounts to improve their credibility/accuracy. Caretta (2015:490) laments: 'the voices of assistants are rarely present in texts; rather, these contributors are just briefly acknowledged and thanked in dissertations'. Whilst Molony and Hammett (2007) and Turner (2010:206) also note, too often those who contribute to the production of research (such as research assistants, translators, gatekeepers) are 'silenced', edited out of written accounts. Alongside reducing accuracy, this exclusion, I argue, is a form of 'epistemological violence' (Teo, 2010:295). This silencing perpetuates (often unintentionally) the notion that academic knowledge and perspectives are of greater value than those of others. It also denies those involved in the production of research the (recognised, respected) reflexive space afforded to me in writing this chapter, which I found both productive and, at times, personally therapeutic.<sup>13</sup>

In an attempt to rectify this and to recognise (in a limited, but I hope not tokenistic way) that this research was only possible due to the time and efforts of several others, I asked Adele if she would write her reflections on this project for inclusion within this thesis. Adele responded with the account below; this is given in full and is unedited, meaning I have not altered any of what she has written. As with all written reflections, what is written is still performed and partial: she wrote it at my behest, knowing it was for an academic audience (see Hyland, 2002b; Hyland, 2002a for a discussion on writing for academic audiences). The inclusion of her experiences does not amount to co-authorship of this chapter. Regrettably, as acknowledged in

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<sup>13</sup> For broader reflections about how the process of research can be therapeutic see Birch and Miller (2000) and Etherington (2004).

Klocker (2012), who reflects on the tensions between individualism and collectivism within Participatory Action Research projects, academic restrictions require that a thesis is produced through sole-authorship (see also McCormack, 2004).

Nevertheless, I hope, as the reflection on collaboration from Benson and Nagar (2006:587) states at the start of this section, that this inclusion can contribute in a small way to 'reshaping [...] the possibilities within academic research' (see also mrs c kinpaisby-hill, 2015).

### **3.7.1 My experience as a PhD Research Assistant, by Adele Richardson**

*I first met Naomi in the autumn of 2013 when she was conducting interviews with different young people from Scotswood Area Strategy about their different experiences. She interviewed both myself and my sister as we had both been involved with the Strategy since we were 10 and 11 years old and would later become volunteers of the youth centre being involved in different projects and events.*

*As I was about to embark on my own Human Geography degree the following September I found the process itself very interesting and keen to help out where I could. I did this by bringing in my own experiences of a young person as well as a volunteer for a "closed" group youth project. I wanted to make it easy enough for the young people to understand as well as ensuring Naomi got the results that she wanted. I found Naomi's topic of her thesis very interesting and it demonstrated that there was a connection between youth work and human geography, both of which have a strong emphasis on people and their own sense of place.*

*Naomi had allowed me to sit in on an interview with one of my ex-youth workers and see how she conducted interviews and what their opinions on youth work were which would prove to be vital data collection. Doing this showed how lengthy the process of collecting qualitative primary data can be; as the interviews themselves may take up to an hour and then the transcription can take a lot longer depending on the person your interviewing and the quality of data. As well as watching Naomi interview my ex-worker I visited her at Durham University where I looked around the University's quite large Geography department, met one of the lecturers who specialises in urban political issues as well as sat in a lecture which proved to be very interesting. We also sat down together and planned out a new interview which I would conduct myself and how we could make it more young person friendly.*

*In addition to seeing Naomi interview my ex worker she allowed me to interview young people who I previously worked with and knew from around the local area. I*

*thought this was a great idea as it allowed me to get first-hand experience of interviewing participants and conducting my own research which would prove vital for my own dissertation research in the final year of my degree. The interview went well from what I can re-call and I think it put the young people more at ease as I was doing the initial interviewing rather than someone they've only met once or twice.*

*Overall, my experience as a PhD research assistant was insightful and very interesting. I think the whole experience went very well as it allowed me to work with Naomi and get a small glimpse at what working on a PhD thesis would be like. It was very different to anything that I had done before and made me realise that Geography is something that is incredibly diverse and helped me to decide upon which degree I wanted to do as I was still undecided at the time. I think working in a small group setting proved to be a great way of collecting important data as you can spend as much time as you need with the participants and get to know what their experiences were in depth. Moreover, I had a great time working with Naomi on her thesis and saw how much work was being put into it and how dedicated you have to be.*

### **3.8 Making Sense: Participating Alone**

Following Holland *et al.* (2008:15), I understand analysis as threaded throughout qualitative research projects, present from 'the development of research questions and occurring throughout data generation and beyond' (see also Nind, 2011). Not all the moments or stages of analysis in this project were collaborative/participatory. Recognising Nind's (2011:359) contention that participatory analysis can take many forms, it can be 'informal and formal, unstructured and structured, trained and untrained, explicit and implicit', this section outlines who was involved in which stages of analysis.

As detailed above, processes of participatory analysis were woven into the participatory diagramming exercises. Akin to the experiences of Nind and Seale (2009), concurrent data production and analysis was then sustained with (some) staff members throughout the research process through formal and informal conversations about the project. Staff were involved in discussions about the format of the project outputs (resulting in the production of individual organisation reports,

posters, briefing notes, case studies and presentations)<sup>14</sup> and commented on their content. These, however, were not written collaboratively. Due to concerns with confidentiality, staff did not have direct access to transcripts of the interviews (nor did they have the time to spend being involved in the project to this depth), therefore their comments/analysis were reliant on the interpretations of the data I was 'curating' (Morse, 2014:48).

Unfortunately, due to the break in continuity in my research relationship with Adele during my maternity leave, she was not involved in analysis of the transcripts. Upon my return, she was concentrating on her A-Level exams. I therefore undertook the post-fieldwork stage of analysis alone, conducting systematic readings (and re-reading) of transcripts, developing (overlapping) emic and etic codes and documenting where phrases and images are evoked and used across transcripts (following Cope, 2005; Crang, 2005; Cope, 2010). This analysis was assisted by qualitative analysis software NVIVO 10. Each participant was sent draft copies of the output materials produced for their organisation and was encouraged to comment on and edit these. This proved an important form of verification and 'member checking', however, it was not the deep participatory analysis undertaken in some participatory projects that I had hoped to do and saw as the 'gold standard' of participatory research (Kesby *et al.*, 2005:162; see Cahill, 2007b for examples and reflections on the process of deeper participatory analysis). Nevertheless, upon rediscovering an entry into my research diary I am reminded that within participatory, collaborative projects we each need to take on a 'role' that is appropriate in relation to our 'resources', e.g. time, expertise, interests, motivations (Nind, 2011:357,359). Therefore, for now, I set my participatory guilt (Was I inclusive

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<sup>14</sup> Copies of the report, case study and briefing notes written for Investing in Children are available at: [http://investinginchildren.weebly.com/uploads/5/2/3/4/52347457/looking\\_back\\_project\\_pack\\_iic.pdf](http://investinginchildren.weebly.com/uploads/5/2/3/4/52347457/looking_back_project_pack_iic.pdf). See also Appendix D and E which contain examples of dissemination outputs for Youth Almighty Project and Changemakers. All other dissemination materials are available from the author on request.

enough? Should I have tried harder to involve others in the formal analysis stages?) aside, concluding that sometimes not all analysis can or needs to be collective, sometimes it is ok to be participating alone:

**20/05/15** I love this: hearing from my participants what they think of the report, what should be included. It might not be full-fledged participatory analysis but it is working for me. It doesn't require loads of their time but still feels more like a conversation than a 'take and grab' situation. I love how Jenn (a participant) felt she could just do 'tracked changes' on the report I had sent her without asking. I am learning how participatory projects need to be adaptable, they can't all mirror a certain type of participatory project but have to fit with expectations, time frames, participants' interests.

### **3.9 Conclusions: More Than a Thesis**

Kesby *et al.* (2005:162) state that 'a participatory approach is not defined by particular techniques'. Rather, as has been argued (and I hope demonstrated) throughout this chapter, it is fostered through intentions and actions, understandings and framings. This chapter has been riddled with the tensions (and joys!) of conducting participatory research: the participatory guilt, the moments of failure and regret sitting alongside those of encouragement, revelation and discovery. It has detailed my use of both participatory and more 'conventional' qualitative research methods (Kesby *et al.*, 2005:162) and has reflected upon the role my pregnancy and maternity leave played on the production of this research. Although at times it may have felt and appeared like I was participating alone, all the knowledge produced for this project has been done so collectively (see Cahill *et al.*, 2010 ; mrs c kinpaisby-hill, 2015). Behind this thesis is, therefore, not just my story, but, as Adele's reflections begin to reveal, those of many others. This final section considers how this project was more than a thesis for, firstly, the organisations involved, secondly for Adele the peer researcher and finally for myself.

As noted earlier in this chapter, the findings of this project were disseminated in several different ways. For each organisation personalised outputs were produced. These included project reports, briefing notes and case studies that could be used in funding applications, and presentations to staff/board members. Although I had not 'completed' the research at Youth Almighty Project, to uphold my personal and

ethical commitments to the organisation I engaged staff in a discussion about how best to present the work that had been done. A poster was produced which contained quotations from four focus groups I had led with young people about the work of Youth Almighty Project I had conducted at the start of the project (Appendix D). The intention was that these quotations would be used in future funding applications. Some of the dissemination outputs provoked emotional responses from a few staff members:

Thanks for sending on the report. It's so lovely to read and really gets the essence of what we were doing and why we were doing it. I got a bit teary at some of the quotations. [extract from email with staff member at Changemakers]

Some of the young adult participants responded with similar emotions, with several commenting that they had enjoyed and/or appreciated the space to reflect back on these past experiences:

It is really awe-inspiring to hear what differences a different attitude and working practices can make [...] reading that article made me quite nostalgic and overwhelmingly proud. [extract from email with Jaquinda, a participant from Investing in Children]

For some staff this project was and/or became about more than producing useful materials they could use in funding applications. Participation in the focus groups and the dissemination presentations had prompted them to reflect (and potentially alter) their working practices. I was told by several that it was a source of encouragement: affirmation of the impact their work was having and reassurance that they should continue in their efforts to address inequalities between children and young people and adults.

The account above, from Adele, shows that for her this project was more than what is contained in this thesis. Adele was aware of the 'value' she added to this research: she brought her 'own experiences of a young person as well as a volunteer' into the project, using these to make the project 'easy enough for the young people to understand'. Echoing reflections by others working with peer researchers (e.g. Nairn and Smith, 2003; Higgins *et al.*, 2007; Stoudt, 2009), she identified that her presence

as an insider was beneficial: it 'put the young people more at ease as I was doing the initial interviewing rather than someone they've only met once or twice'. But her comments also highlight what she gained by being involved in this research. Adele developed skills and experiences, which she said 'would prove vital' for her own dissertation research. Following a participatory approach to research I wanted the involvement of any peer researchers to not just benefit the project but be positive for the researchers themselves. Therefore, trying to cultivate what Maiter *et al.* (2008:321) call an 'ethic of reciprocity', I arranged for Adele to attend Durham University for a day and meet an academic who could advise on admissions. She reflected that this experience 'helped me to decide upon which degree I wanted to do'. Although emerging more organically, this notion of reciprocity was present through many of my interviews with the young adults. Often a few years older than those I was interviewing I was seen as a 'resource' to assist them in their transitions to adulthood (a topic considered further in Chapter 7) — being questioned for example about career paths, further studies and transitions to independent living.

Finally, this project has been about more than the production of this thesis for me. Learning to work in participatory ways with these organisations (and observing how they already do this with young people) has exposed me to new ways of doing research and working collaboratively. It has challenged the ways I lead and communicate in other areas of my life and profoundly affected how I raise my own child. In writing this thesis I have also shifted my own thinking about academic research. As I stated at the start of this chapter, my primary motivation for undertaking this project was to produce research that was 'useful' to these organisations. I initially felt the real 'purpose' of this project was over once I had produced the dissemination products for/with the organisations. Yet in writing this thesis I have come to understand the possibilities in what Horton and Kraftl (2005:133) term 'more-than-useful' research. I have begun to appreciate that what is written in these following chapters can be both practical ('useful') but also theoretical, reflective and, at times, emotional ('more-than-useful'). I have come to see how some of the beauty, the progressiveness, the vibrancy in research comes



through research whose use is not strictly predetermined. Dreaming, collaborating, producing and writing both this research project *and* this thesis has therefore been a journey of both academic and personal discovery.

## **Chapter 4. Polyvalent Participation? Investigating Three Approaches to Youth Participation**

### **4.1 Introduction**

Participation has been described by Cook *et al.* (2013:757) as a polyvalent term, meaning it 'is capable of attaching [itself] to more than one system of meaning to produce quite different effects'. As introduced in Chapters 1 and 2, youth participation in the UK is being deployed in a variety of spatial settings to promote both radical and neoliberal agendas. Through a detailed look at how participation is understood within three youth organisations, this chapter examines how nuanced differences in understandings of the epistemologies of participation translate into practice. As reflected in the title of this thesis, this research is primarily concerned with the perspectives of young people: how they understand, interpret and (re)perform participatory epistemologies.

Understanding variations between arenas of participation and how these are understood and enacted by staff each working under the banner of youth participation, is an important foundational step to achieve this aim. This chapter, however, does more than contextualise the perspectives of young people explored in Chapters 5–7. It also reveals some of the challenges and tensions faced by organisations promoting youth participation within the UK as they seek to reconfigure adult-child relations against the backdrop of neoliberalism and austerity.

### **4.2 Youth Participation in the North East of England**

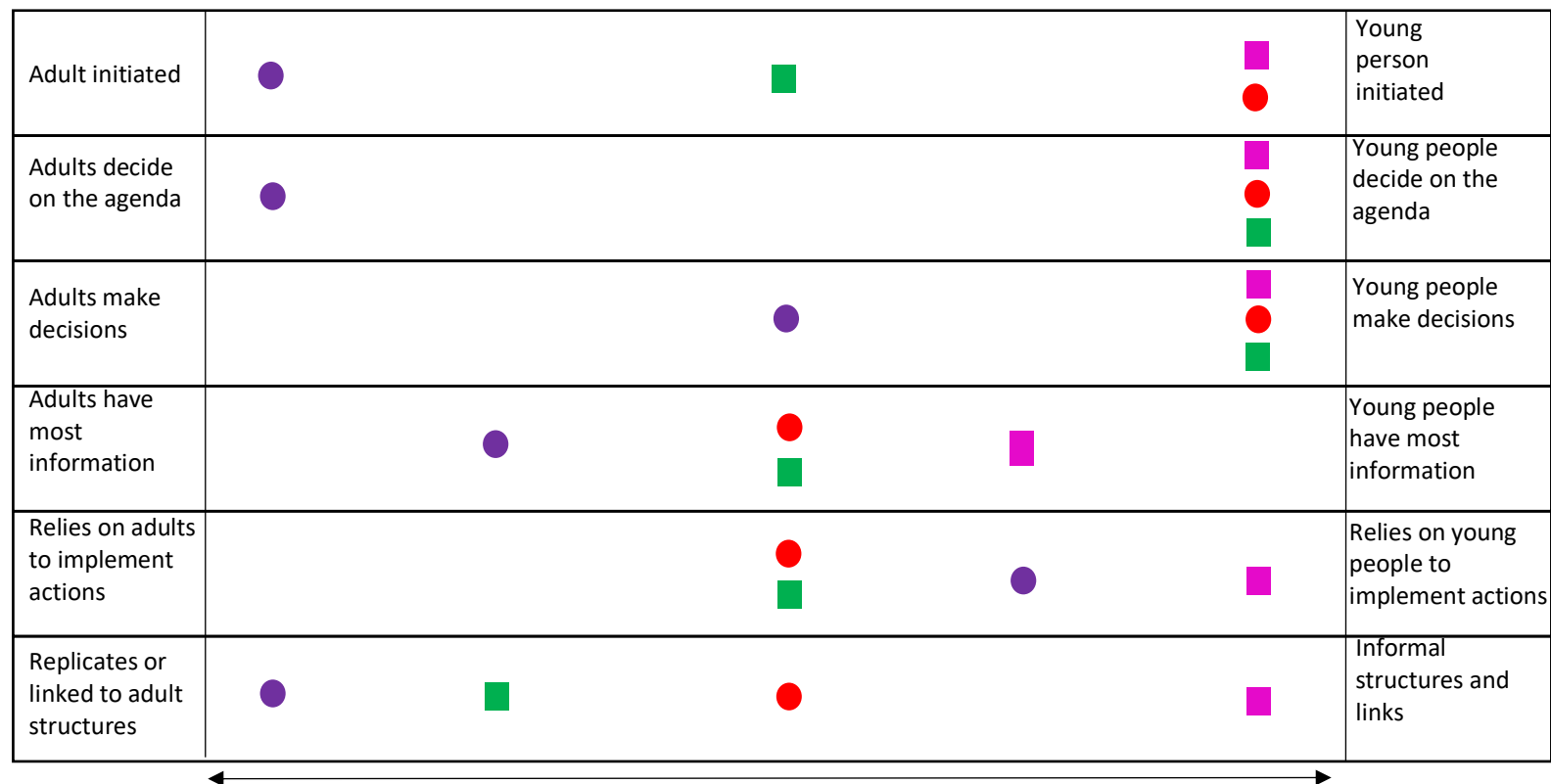
As acknowledged in Chapter 3, four organisations in the North East of England were initially selected to participate in this research. These were Changemakers, Investing in Children, Scotswood Centre and Youth Almighty Project. Conducting this research in the North East of England was in part motivated by its accessible location (in terms of geographic location but also due to the research teams' contacts in this area), however, it also provides an interesting and timely case study for examining youth participation. Historically, the North East of England is known for its entangled relationship with politics and activism, characterised by the closure of the pits and subsequent strikes of the 1980s. Bright (2011b) argues

that the legacy of this is still felt acutely by young people living in the region (see also Bright, 2011a; Bright, 2012). In recent times, the North East has become a region known for high levels of youth un/underemployment and child poverty (North East Child Poverty Commission, 2017). Since 2010, youth services have suffered greatly due to cuts made in the name of austerity policies (see Mercer, 2016; Tallentire, 2016). Politically, alongside several other regions in the North of England, this is a region that often feels geographically distanced from those ‘in power’ in Westminster, with anger frequently expressed about economic and political north-south divides (see Baker and Billinge, 2004; Maxwell, 2014; Hurst, 2017). As argued and explored by Cairns *et al.* (2016) in relation to Portugal, a combination of deep-rooted historical tensions, geographical factors and the disproportionate effect austerity policies can have on young people, potentially creates an illuminating case study for investigating the participation of young people.

#### **4.3 Polyvalent Participation: An Initial Analysis**

Outlined in the previous chapter, one of the factors influencing the selection of which organisations would be involved in this research was their varying approaches to youth participation. The diagrams contained in Appendix A–C were created to assist in this selection, using information generated from the exploratory discussions with gatekeepers at the eight organisations which expressed an interest in this research. Figures 5–7 are simplified versions of these diagrams: only detailing the observations made about the four organisations selected to be involved in the research. Figures 5 and 6 are based on pre-existing models categorising participation (see Creative Commons, 2011). Figure 7 depicts my preliminary analysis from the exploratory discussions of the motivations influencing these organisations. As will become evident in this chapter, this initial analysis, created *before* undertaking the focus groups and interviews outlined in Chapter 3, does not always align with my subsequent observations. What these figures reveal, however, is a wide variation of understanding across the organisations in the role of young people (Figure 5), what constitutes ‘participatory’ activities (Figure 6) and in their motivations (Figure 7).

**Figure 5 Clarity Model of Participation – Based on Model by Lardner, 2001 (Creative Commons, 2011)**



Key			
Changemakers		Investing in Children	
		Youth Almighty	
			Scotswood Centre 

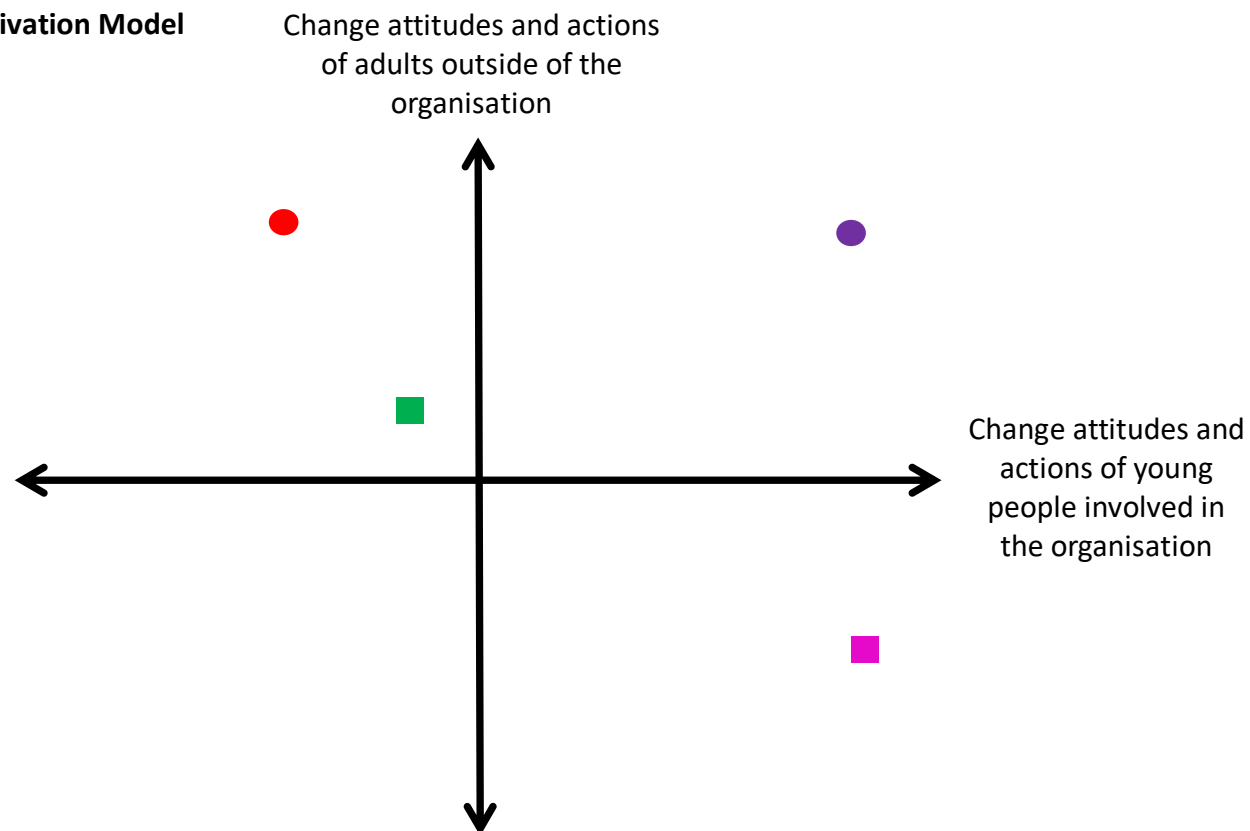
**Figure 6 Matrix of Participation – Based on Model by Davies, 2009 (Creative Commons, 2011)**

	Individual complaints or feedback	Surveys and consultations	One-off events or annual participation events	Participation projects – often using arts or media	Peer-led activities e.g. training, research and evaluation	Youth forum, youth grant making	Young people involved in governance
Youth initiated – shared decisions with adults					■		●
Youth initiated and directed				● ● ■	●	■	■
Adult initiated – shared decision with youth		■ ■					
Young people are consulted and kept informed							
Young people are assigned tasks and activities		●					

**Key**

Changemakers ●	Investing in Children ●	Youth Almighty Project ■	Scotswood Centre ■
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**Figure 7 Organisation Motivation Model**



Key							
Changemakers	●	Investing in Children	●	Youth Almighty Project	■	Scotswood Centre	■

Building on this analysis, the remainder of this chapter introduces and examines each of the three organisations involved in this research. For ease of reference, Table 3 contains a brief overview of these organisations. For reasons outlined in Chapter 3, Youth Almighty Project is excluded as they did not participate in the latter stages of this research. These subsections first introduce the aims of the organisation and then detail their activities which involve young people. After this, drawing from the work of Kindon *et al.* (2007b), the practices of these organisations are considered in relation to five features of a participatory epistemology. These expand on the three core beliefs discussed in Chapter 2 to include processes of *collaboration*, *co-production*, a focus on *inclusivity*, a belief and acknowledgement of the *plurality of knowledges* and a desire for *social transformation*. Finally, drawing from the focus groups, informal interactions with staff and a review of each organisation's available literature, I question who these organisations are trying to change. In considering the balances between desires to change society and to change young people, I begin to identify the tensions of trying to enact a radical participatory epistemology within an environment which prioritises individualism and neoliberal thinking. I conclude this chapter with five observations. These are foundational to the arguments about neoliberal and radical participation and adult-child relations which are developed in the following chapters.

**Table 3 Overview of Organisations**

	<b>Aim</b>	<b>Main activities involving young people</b>	<b>Age range of young people</b>	<b>How are young people recruited?</b>	<b>Where do young people come from?</b>	<b>How is the organisation funded?</b>	<b>Young people paid?</b>
<b>Changemakers</b>	To promote and enable the leadership of young people in society.	Changemakers Experience Programme (CEP), including attending the INSPIRE Residential.	16–25	Schools/higher education institutions; word of mouth; regional newsletter.	Across the North East.	The National Lottery; research contracts; small grants.	Yes
<b>Investing in Children</b>	To promote the human rights of children and young people.	Project groups; Research groups; Agenda Days.	Up to 18; Up to 21 for care leavers	Schools; social media; word of mouth; through other youth projects.	Across County Durham.	Durham County Council (up until 2013); research contracts; Heritage Lottery Fund.	Yes
<b>Scotswood Centre</b>	To improve the quality of life for people in Scotswood.	Educational/training programmes; Campaign work.	Up to 18	Schools; word of mouth.	The ward of Benwell and Scotswood, Newcastle.	The National Lottery; Small grants	No



## 4.4 Changemakers

### 4.4.1 Who are Changemakers?

Changemakers work to unlock the leadership potential of young people. Our ambition is to create a world in which young people have the confidence to lead in business, public life and society at large, and everyone understands that we need them to. (Changemakers, n.d.-a)

Changemakers is a not-for-profit organisation that seeks to promote and enable the leadership of young people within society. It was founded in 1994 by a coalition of educationalists and non-government organisations (The Foyer Federation, 2014). Although Changemakers has always been a *youth* organisation, its size and primary focus has shifted in the last twenty years between youth citizenship, community building, youth volunteering and now youth leadership. Changemakers is funded through a range of sources, these include large project-specific funders such as The National Lottery and The Department for Health as well as smaller trusts and foundations.

At the time of my first interview with Changemakers in 2013 the organisation had twelve members of staff working across three locations: Birmingham, London and Newcastle. This research has focused on the staff and young people involved in Changemakers North East. Although their office is in Newcastle, they engage young people across the North East of England. Changemakers North East had three staff members, two of which had been ‘changemakers’<sup>15</sup> themselves before becoming staff members. At the organisation’s request, and fitting with the desire to ensure this research benefited the organisation as set out in Chapter 3, this research only involved young people who have been involved in Changemakers since its focus on youth leadership began in 2009.

### 4.4.2 What do they do? Supporting organisations

Changemakers’ primary goal is to create a social and political landscape where the leadership potential of young people is fully recognised and utilised. As outlined in

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<sup>15</sup> ‘changemakers’ (with a lower case ‘c’) is the name given to young people currently or previously involved in Changemakers.

the following sections, to achieve this goal Changemakers supports both organisations and individual young people.

There are three primary strands of their work which work with organisations to support this goal. Firstly, the Organisation Development Programme (ODP) supports organisations to improve their engagement with young people, either as customers or employees, by placing a changemaker within an organisation (e.g. local council, museum, heritage site) to work on a project to explore how the organisation can more effectively engage young people. The changemaker is paid by Changemakers for ten days work within the organisation over a period of six months.

Secondly, Changemakers developed an initiative called the Future Cultural Leaders Programme (FCLP), funded by The National Lottery. This operated from 2009-2014. The aim of the FCLP was to ‘place young people at the heart of the planning, decision-making and delivery of the Cultural Olympiad in the North East’ through engagement with the arts sector (Changemakers, 2014). This was achieved by operating the ODP specifically in the arts sector, working together to increase their volunteer opportunities for young people and encourage youth-led initiatives such as the development of arts and culture festival ‘The Wonders of the North’.

Thirdly, Changemakers works in partnership with other organisations to support initiatives that promote young people’s voices. For example, they developed the ‘Change your Mind about young people’ programme which supported GP surgeries in the North East to listen to the voices of young patients, working in partnership with Youth Focus: North East and Tyneside Mind (for further information see Cheetham *et al.*, 2015).

#### **4.4.3 What do they do? Supporting young people**

The Changemakers mission is to unlock the leadership potential of young people. Developing their skills, confidence and values enables them to understand that there are many ways to lead and that they each have the potential to make a difference. (The Foyer Federation, 2014)

Central to Changemakers’ support of young people in leadership was the Changemakers Experience Programme (CEP). This was a three-month course which

operated twice a year. A 'cohort' of young people from each region (Newcastle, London and Birmingham) would be selected onto the programme, they would come together on the 'INSPIRE Residential': a residential trip typically lasting three days. Whilst away, the young people would participate in leadership exercises designed to 'unlock' their leadership potential. Several 'skills days' would be held in the weeks following the residential, these included sessions on self-reflection, interview skills and public speaking.

As part of the CEP the changemakers would also develop a 'change' project. This was a short project aiming to bring about a change in their community that the young people identified as important. Changemakers holds a very loose definition of community, encouraging young people to explore what this means for them; for example, this may be a geographical community or a social-interest community. The young people identify, plan and deliver this project, with minimal support from Changemakers staff.

As part of the programme the young people were also offered optional one-on-one coaching sessions with trained 'coaches' (usually Changemakers staff or ex-changemakers). The INSPIRE Residential handbook for coaches explains that the purpose of coaches is to:

help you find new ways of looking at things, and coping with challenges, all in line with what really makes you tick – your core values. And the way they do this is through listening to you, asking helpful questions, and bringing a great positive attitude. (Changemakers, n.d.-b)

Alongside these elements of the CEP, the changemakers undertook their paid placements within organisations as part of the ODP.

As this extract from their website illustrates, Changemakers staff hope the experience does not end once the programme has finished:

Young people who become changemakers become part of the Changemakers *movement*, a network of people who want to lead positive change in the world around them based on their values. (The Foyer Federation, 2014, emphasis added)

Although the programme varied slightly between cohorts, each of the participants in this research project has been involved in the core elements of the CEP: attending the INSPIRE Residential and doing a paid project within an organisation. Some but not all participants were involved in a 'change' project and chose to take part in coaching sessions or engage with the aftercare provided by staff.

The practices introduced above, in particular the INSPIRE Residential and one-on-one coaching sessions, are examined in Chapter 5. Chapter 7 reflects upon young people's perspectives of the aftercare offered by the Changemaker's staff.

#### **4.4.4 Which young people?**

Changemakers define 'youth' as any person aged 16–25. They consciously do not target a specific 'type' of young person; there are young people on each cohort who are in education, training and/or employment alongside those who are not (often termed NEET young people). Most of the young people come from Newcastle, however, Changemakers also recruits from surrounding areas including Sunderland and Northumberland. On occasion, recruitment areas were limited due to funding restrictions. Diversity monitoring statistics from the CEP over the last 5 years are not available, however, statistics about young people involved with the FCLP indicate that the vast majority of young people involved with Changemakers were White British (92%) and able-bodied (96%) (Changemakers, 2014).

The CEP is advertised in the Youth Focus: North East news bulletin, reaching other youth organisations across the North East. It is also advertised via educational institutions, social media and through recommendations from past changemakers. Young people must apply for the programme. Staff emphasised that selection was not based on qualifications but on whether the selection panel (which included past changemakers) saw potential for the CEP to be beneficial for the applicant, as explained by one young person involved in this panel, judgements were made on an applicant's apparent willingness to step outside of their 'comfort zones'. It was a conscious decision to recruit changemakers with diverse life experiences. Staff anecdotally praised this 'social mixing', pointing to examples of peer-to-peer

learning between changemakers of different ages and experiences. In a comment to the Education Committee on services for young people Changemakers explained that getting to know people from different backgrounds was a critical part of children and young people's social development (Changemakers, 2010). One staff member repeatedly expressed frustration at the difficulty of capturing this 'added value' for funders:

From a funders point of view it's difficult to then demonstrate the impact that [social mixing] has on a young person. I mean we could probably articulate or talk about it but it's hard to put it down on paper or into numbers or figures the impact that it has, but how I'd like to describe it is that you'd get young people who were in school or college and were thinking about going to university and mixing with young people who were at university [...] would that social mixing necessarily happen *without* our programme? I'd probably say no.

This is considered further in Chapter 5, which examines the role social mixing plays in the practice of self-reflection at Changemakers.

#### **4.4.5 A participatory organisation?**

I was encouraged to approach Changemakers to be involved in this research by a staff member at Youth Focus: North East who described them as a 'participatory' organisation. The staff were slightly reluctant to identify as an organisation that did 'youth participation', as one explained:

I mean we want to hear from the young people and we listen to the young people's voices and we empower young people but I think it's at a bit of a, a higher level of engagement as well and a higher level of sort of change that we're trying to make [than 'youth participation'].

The staff felt more comfortable using terms such as 'empowerment' explaining that what they do was 'not your traditional youth participation but youth participation linked to empowerment'.

Changemakers campaigned for greater inclusion of young people, in **collaboration** with adults, on issues that affect them. In a written response to the government about youth service provision they argued that young people should have more say over youth service budgets and that 'youth-led' service provision commissioning

should be developed through a collaboration between young people and local authorities (Changemakers, 2010). Changemakers outlined what a collaboration between adults and young people should look like in their 'Best Practice Guide's which explain how adults should 'support' and 'trust' the young people whilst maintaining 'high expectations' for the work young people produce (Changemakers, 2012a; Changemakers, 2012b). The ODP demonstrated Changemakers' belief in the value of collaboration between adults and young people whilst, as discussed above, by creating diverse cohorts of young people on the CEP Changemakers is also fostering collaboration *between* young people.

Changemakers' **co-production** approach is explained within their Best Practice Guide for local services:

Some of the most successful examples of involving young people in local decision making take a 'co-production' approach, by which adults give young people the tools to enable them to make decisions but then expect young people to make these decisions. The respectful relationship between young people and adults should work both ways. Decision making should not just be about adults listening to the views of young people; young people should also be aware of the context in which adults have to make decisions. Therefore, young people should not be sheltered from important data such as financial information, in order to challenge the decisions young people are making. (Changemakers, 2012b:47)

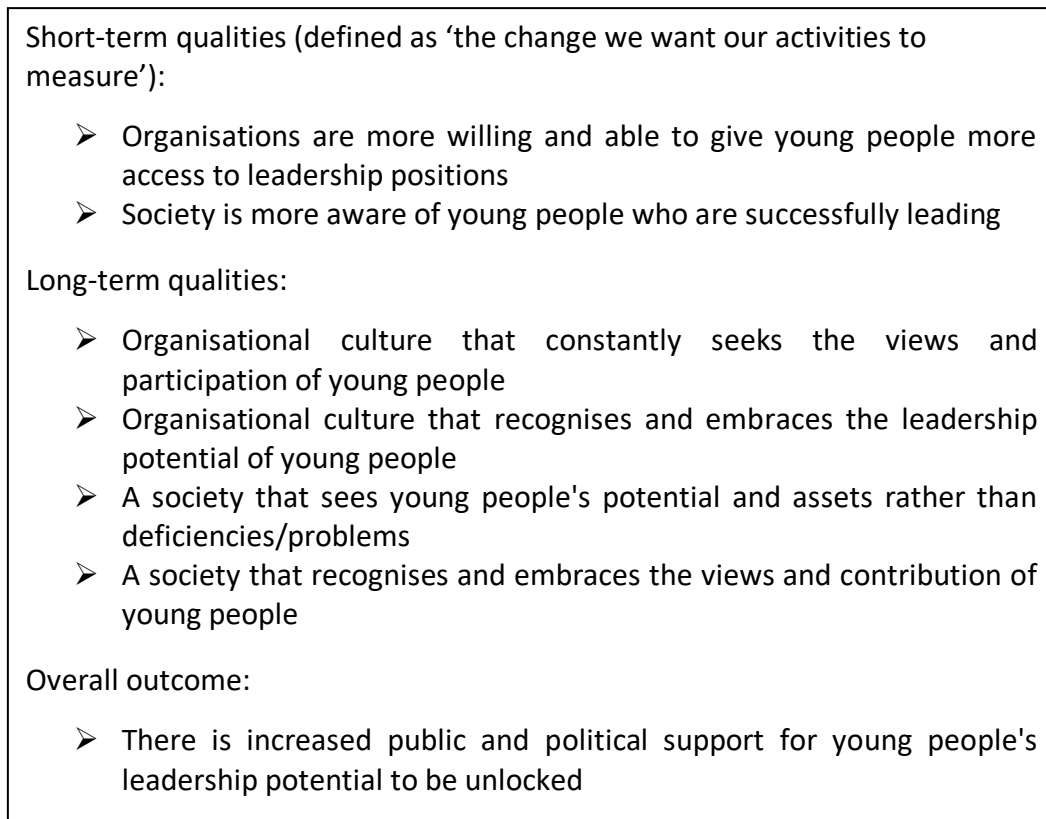
This explains that co-production is an **inclusive**, two-way process with both adults and young people listening to each other and understanding the context each other is working within. This inclusivity is also emphasised within their Best Practice Guide for the arts sector which states that: 'adults should recognise that making mistakes is not something unique to young people' and that 'young people should be on an equal footing with adults: if adults are being paid for their time to work on a project, then young people should be paid too' (Changemakers, 2012a:15-16).

A belief in the **plurality of knowledge** was evident in the way the staff and coaches interact with the young people. Within the focus group, staff explained that not only were they 'not there to *give* the answers' but that they were 'not saying we *have* the answers at all'. Their role was to coach or 'guide' a young person with reflective

questioning so the young person would form their *own* opinion. Even though Changemakers is offering a framework to help guide young people, discussed in the following section, the staff were keen to emphasise that: ‘we're not saying the way that we do things is the “be all and end all” and you have to adopt it but if it works for you great and if not, it's fine!’

Changemakers helps other organisations listen to young people but they also try and do this themselves. At the end of each cohort they run a focus group and use a feedback form to listen to what the changemakers think should be changed for the next cohort. Although staff were clear the ideas could not always be implemented, they stressed it was important to make the process transparent, making sure everyone was informed, had a say, felt part of the decision-making process and understood the reasons behind the outcome. Changemakers argue that this process of listening to young people is not happening enough in society. They call for a reconceptualisation of how young people are respected and valued within society.

Their outline for **social transformation** is detailed in their theory of change<sup>16</sup> (Figure 8).



**Figure 8 Extracts from Changemakers’ Theory of Change (2013): Organisations**

#### **4.4.6 Who do Changemakers want to change? Change society**

Changemakers has two main aims as an organisation: to change the current ‘culture and attitudes’ towards young people as leaders within the UK and to ‘unlock the leadership potential’ within young people (The Foyer Federation, 2014). Their ‘ambition is to create a world in which more young people have the confidence to lead in business, public life and society at large, and everyone understands we need them to’ (Changemakers, 2010). This dual approach is reflected in their programmes

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<sup>16</sup> A ‘theory of change’ is a tool that maps the pathway towards achieving the overall change an organisation hopes to make. Typically, this will include details about an organisation’s activities, outcomes and impacts. For more information see Kail and Lumley (2012).



outlined above which focus on changing organisations (ODP) and young people (CEP).

Whilst initially this dual approach appears complimentary, there are subtle tensions and inconsistencies within it which become evident through an analysis of Changemakers' pedagogy, questioning who they trying to educate (or change) and what 'ways of being' Changemakers are trying to instil. These questions and tensions, introduced in these two sections by drawing from written materials produced by Changemakers, the focus groups and informal meetings conducted with staff throughout this research, are analysed further in Chapter 5 which examines the relationships between participation, neoliberalism and governmentality.

The work of Changemakers is based on the belief that the world needs changing, specifically that society's relationship to young people as leaders needs reassessing. Their work is premised on the hypothesis that changing the culture within local communities (such as the arts sector within the North East through the FCLP) will lead to wider social and political change and ultimately will 'change the world' for young people. These desires are reflected in Changemakers' theory of change (Figure 8).

Considering the motivations behind these desired qualities and outcomes, in conversation with Changemakers staff it emerged that they believed young people are 'a group who are offered fewer leadership opportunities [than other groups]' and that this was not right as 'young people could lead as well if not better in some cases than adults on particular topics'. The language staff used was about rectifying an injustice. This language was less evident within their written materials. Rather than depicting young people as victims of an injustice, within Changemakers' Best Practice Guide which was designed to encourage other organisations to 'involve young people in the cultural sector', young people were objectified. They were framed within a capitalist narrative as 'resources' to be 'harnessed' as a way to improve service provision:

Changemakers thinks that many of our country's social and economic challenges could be overcome if we effectively harnessed the leadership potential of young people. The fresh thinking, new ideas, curiosity and ambition of the UK's young people are a natural resource that needs to be utilised. (Changemakers, 2012a:3)

This example can perhaps be explained away with reference to audience: this guide targeted organisations that may need convincing of the value to them of engaging young people; in contrast I was introduced to Changemakers as a researcher interested in children's rights and participation, therefore the language used in conversation with me may reflect this. It highlights, nevertheless, the subtly different and at times contradictory, discourses being used about young people within this setting. This tension will be explored further with reference to the extent to which young people are framed within this organisation as in need of changing/improving.

#### **4.4.7 Who do Changemakers want to change? Change young people**

This section considers four elements of the question: to what extent are Changemakers trying to change young people? I examine first the concept of transformation and then introduce Changemaker's understandings about values, self-reflection and directions, notions which are returned to in greater depth as I introduce the perspectives of young people in Chapter 5.

When asked how Changemakers viewed young people in society, one staff member explained it was about:

Seeing young people for their skills, talents, passions rather than seeing as homeless etc, not seeing them from a deficit view, seeing them for what they are and what they can bring and that young people can do anything really if they put their mind to it.

This last clause is crucial '*if* they put their mind to it' as it indicates that some action is required on the part of young people.

During a focus group activity, outlined in Chapter 3, staff were asked to list the impacts they perceived involvement in the CEP would have on a young person. They were then asked to indicate (using the red stars) which of these they feel

Changemakers would most like a young person to come away with. All three staff members put one of their three allocated red stars on 'transformational experience' (Figure 9).

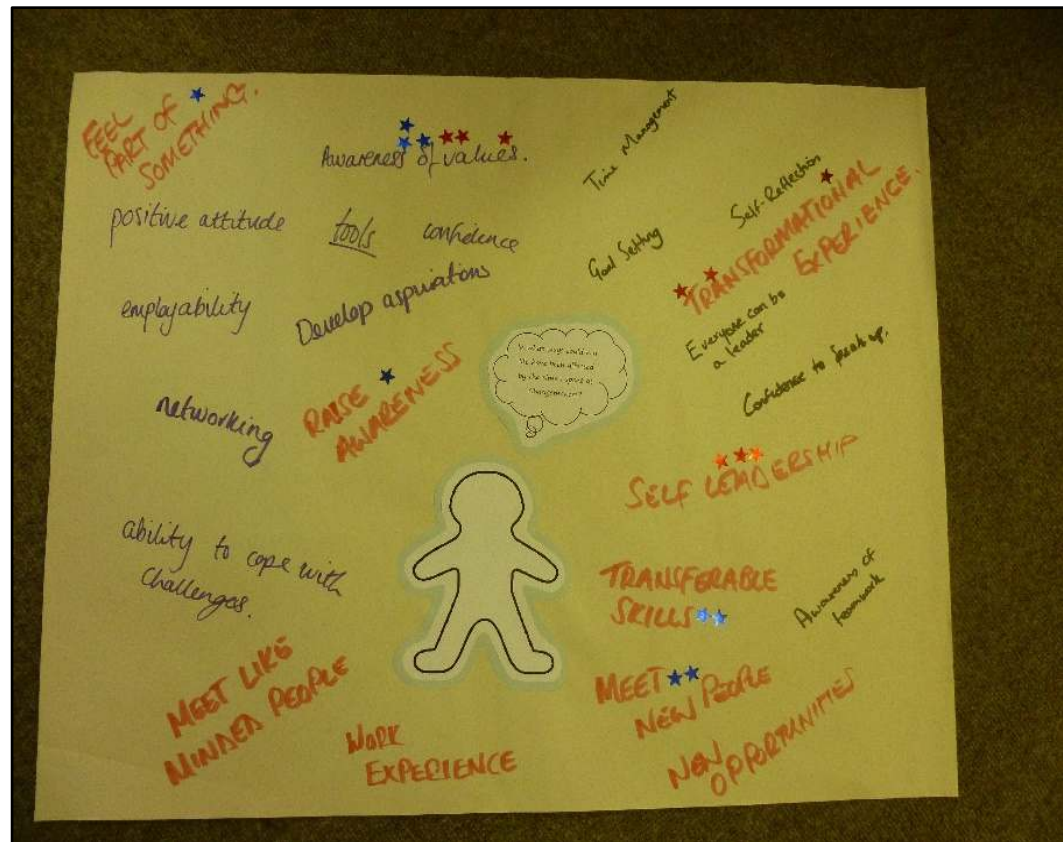


Figure 9 Focus Group Exercise 2 Changemakers

By being part of the Changemakers Experience Programme young people will:

- Increase in confidence and confidence around communication
- Increase in ability to influence others
- Increase in resilience/ability to cope with challenges
- Increase in self-motivation
- Increase in feeling prepared for employment and future life
- Increase in desire to affect change/influence society
- Increase in development of aspirations
- Increase in social capital/social networks — new friends from a variety of backgrounds

Figure 10 Extracts from Changemakers' Theory of Change (2013) : Young People

This theme of transformation was reiterated throughout our conversations. Its significance is indicated within the INSPIRE Residential handbook: as part of the welcome on Day 1 a past changemaker will ‘give an inspirational speech about their experience and the *transformation* they have had’ (Changemakers, n.d.-b italics added). This idea of transformation, or change, was also documented within Changemakers’ Theory of Change which details qualities young people should ‘increase in’ through participation in the CEP (Figure 10).

It would be easy to conclude from this document that Changemakers believes that young people attending the CEP are in need of changing/improving, for example that they lack self-motivation or a desire to influence society and that this can be rectified through the CEP. But in conversations it became apparent that this Theory of Change was created for funders in response to an outcome-driven culture, a culture that greatly frustrated the staff. Furthermore, the language used within this Theory of Change sits uncomfortably alongside the organisation’s stated desire to create ‘a society that sees young people's potential and assets rather than deficiencies/problems’. Therefore, as will become further evident through an examination of three other key facets of the Changemakers pedagogy, the understanding of transformation expressed by Changemakers staff cannot be understood as simplistically as ‘young people need to change’, nor is it motivated by a belief that it is the young people that are in deficit.

As explained in the Changemaker’s handbook, given to young people on the residential, knowing your values is an essential part in the Changemakers ‘way of being’:

Everything you do as a leader or in life is based upon the values. They inform everything you do. The foundation of Changemakers’ leadership is values [...] when you are aligned with your values, that is, making decisions and actions with them in mind, your intentions are going to be right. When you are acting with the right intentions, then you are going to get better, more positive results. We want to champion intentions that benefit the world that our changemakers live in. To maximise the benefit your intentional actions can have it’s important to be using the right tools. The synthesis of all of this is a way of “being”, or rather when Values, Intentions, and Tools are in

alignment then you are Being a changemaker. (Changemakers, n.d.-b:3 emphasis in original)

Changemakers' values are 'authentic, brave, maverick, loving and savvy'. Whilst these organisational values are introduced to the young people on day one of the residential, their purpose is not to prescribe values for the young people to adopt, but as one staff member explained: 'it's almost raising awareness of what values *are*, giving them some examples [...] by no means are we saying that coming they have to do these five values.' This emphasis on Changemakers' values being directive but not prescriptive was also made clear in the handbook which states 'as an organisation it's more important for us to support changemakers to see how their personal values are aligned with ours, rather than saying "ours are the only way"' (Changemakers, n.d.-b:3). The young people are therefore given time on the residential to formulate their own values.

Self-reflection is understood as essential for young people to formulate these values. There are opportunities for self-reflection throughout the CEP. For example, at the end of each day on the residential the changemakers are encouraged by their coaches to question:

How have you made progress towards your intentions today?

What have you noticed about yourself today?

How do you want to be tomorrow? (Changemakers, n.d.-b:8)

Staff explained that they hope this self-reflective questioning will become an engrained way of being outside of the CEP. It is designed as a way to ensure the changemakers keep going in the 'right' direction, a direction that is 'true' to their values and intentions.

This language of direction and journeying was foundational within the CEP which is premised on the understanding that having a direction in life is beneficial and necessary. However, as with Changemakers' values, the staff were eager to emphasise that the nature of this direction (both on the CEP and in wider life) is never imposed by the staff or coaches:

We're there to guide and kind of question and maybe challenge at times young people but it's very much their journey and it's up to them the stages that they go on, the speed that they go through it on [...] all we are doing is raising awareness of things that they might want to find on their journey through the programme.

Young people [...] set their own aspirations and whatever and we don't ever say like 'you should go to university it would be really good'.

These three aspects of the Changemakers pedagogy: an awareness of values, a self-reflective attitude and the development of a direction in life, form a (voluntary) framework to guide a process of change within young people. The specifics of this change are left up to each young person, as staff recognise that each young person experiences the programme differently:

I think that's what's nice about the programme is that people don't actually always leave with the same thing but they always do leave with something and I think one of those things it's definitely possible to see is that kind of self-reflection and understanding themselves more than they perhaps did at first and being really kind of switched on about aspirations and intentions, um, and where they want to go. So no matter where they're at, at the moment I think it helps them to plan the next steps or kind of where they want to be.

I think for every young person it's transformational in some way but for some of them, like, their lives become completely flipped around.

Changemakers believes that following this framework will help to 'unlock' leadership potential already within young people. They consider this necessary, not so much to 'improve' the young person per se (although staff commented that their programme may create a 'happier' person), but as it is one step towards their wider goal of creating a society which recognises and values young people as leaders. As one staff member explained, individual change or at least reflection is necessary as 'if you want to make a change [within the world], you need to start with yourself'.

This section has outlined some of the ideas driving Changemakers. In doing so Changemakers has been introduced as an organisation whose ways of working between adults and young people are, although perhaps not always explicitly expressed, premised on values associated with a participatory epistemology: notions of listening, inclusion and a strong desire to challenge injustice. However, it

has also become evident that practices at Changemakers put a great deal of emphasis on young people as individuals, a tension that will be examined further in Chapter 5.

## **4.5 Investing in Children**

### **4.5.1 Who are Investing in Children?**

Children and young people possess the same human rights as the rest of humanity. They will experience a better quality of life if society in general, and the services used by them in particular, recognise and respect these rights. (Investing in Children, 2015b)

As introduced in Chapter 3, Investing in Children has been a collaborating partner of this project from the start. Investing in Children is a Community Interest Company based in County Durham that seeks to promote the human rights of children and young people, working towards the vision stated above.

Investing in Children was founded in 1995 by a group of senior managers from the NHS and Durham County Council who wanted to find a new way to provide services to children, young people and their families within the region. They were concerned with the negative representation of young people in the media (explored further in Valentine, 1996), heightened at the time by the murder of James Bulger by ten year olds Robert Thompson and Jon Venables (Cairns and Brannen, 2005). Young people were portrayed in the media as a threat in need of containing and controlling until they ‘emerged’ several years later as ‘responsible’ adults (Tallentire, 2013). The founders of Investing in Children has two further concerns: that agencies working with children and young people in the area operated separately, and that children and young people were often being left out of local and regional conversations.

Although based in County Durham, Investing in Children has operated across the country and has been involved in international projects. The range and scale of this work has fluctuated over the last twenty years due to funding constraints. Up until 2013 Investing in Children operated within Durham County Council before becoming a Community Interest Company. Investing in Children is now funded by a range of sources, these include contracts with the NHS, the County Council and funding tied to specific projects, such as the ‘Heritage Hunters’ project at Auckland Castle funded

by the Heritage Lottery Fund (see Heritage Lottery Fund, 2015). Investing in Children also generates income through the services they offer such as consultancy, research and training.

#### **4.5.2 What do they do? Group work**

Many people still believe that ‘children should be seen and not heard’. Investing in Children tries to change this, by creating spaces for children and young people to come together and come up with good ideas, and by working with adults who want to listen and do something about it. (Investing in Children, 2015c)

The following section introduces three ways Investing in Children seeks to create these spaces.

Investing in Children supports children and young people to identify issues that are important to them and raise these issues with decision makers. This is done through the facilitated regular gatherings of young people, divided into groups based on issues of interest, identity or location. One example is Investing in Children’s ‘eXtreme group’, a group named and led by young people with disabilities. They have campaigned on a range of issues including better access to leisure centres and improved accessibility on public transport. They have made a short film and written an academic article about disabilities and youth transitions (Investing in Children eXtreme Group, 2014; Rome *et al.*, 2015). Other examples of Investing in Children groups include those for children and young people who are in care; young people who identify as LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender); young people who are located in East Durham; or young people who are involved in ‘CAMHS’, the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services.

The groups and their agendas are not always formed organically. In some cases, they develop out of formal partnerships between the children and young people and decision makers, facilitated by Investing in Children. For example, Investing in Children’s ‘Type1Kidz’ group, formed in 2001, works in partnership with the NHS to improve the lives of children and young people with diabetes. They have successfully campaigned for a fully-funded insulin pump therapy service (see Cairns, 2009), increased access to psychological support and developed peer mentoring and



training packages for schools. Aside from their formal engagement with the NHS, the group also operates as a support hub for diabetic children and young people and their families, holding monthly social activities (Type1Kidz Investing in Children, 2015).

Another way groups can decide on which issues are important to them is through 'Agenda Days'. These were described to me as adult-free sessions facilitated by young people who listen to the voices of children and young people. This practice is explored in detail in Chapter 6. The outcomes of these Agenda Days and group meetings are varied; they are decided by the young people but may include campaign work, research projects, report writing or the production of education materials. Highlighting Agenda Days as an example of good practice, Todd (2012:195) reflects that they 'have contributed to the development of many different organisations including schools, health services, sports facilities, the delivery of social support services and many more'.

Young people can also be involved in the 'Decisions Group'. This group meets monthly to talk about the work of Investing in Children and discuss what changes should be made to improve the organisation. This group is supported by 'young directors' — young people who are members of Investing in Children's Board of Directors. Their role is to ensure that young people's ideas from the decisions group are fed back to the board.

Young people are often simultaneously involved in multiple projects and groups throughout their time at Investing in Children. This was true for the majority of participants in this research, whose involvement with Investing in Children ranged from 2–8 years.

#### **4.5.3 What do they do? Consultancy, training and research**

Investing in Children staff also offer advice and support to organisations looking to improve the way they engage with children and young people. They offer training on topics such as e-safety and communication which are co-delivered by a staff member and young people. Staff and young people also undertake research work,

either independently or in partnership with a university. Several of these projects have led to academic articles written either with or by young people (e.g. Brown *et al.*, 2004; Fletcher and Stamp, 2012). This process of co-authoring an article is outlined from the perspective of a young person in Chapter 6. Through this research and their dialogue with organisations that engage with children and young people, Investing in Children hope to contribute to local, national and international debate about the human rights of children and young people (Investing in Children, 2015b).

#### **4.5.4 What do they do? Membership award**

Organisations can apply to receive an Investing in Children membership award; they will be visited by a staff member from Investing in Children who will speak with both the staff at the organisation *and* the children and young people who use the service to get evidence from them of 'good practice and active inclusion of children and young people in dialogue resulting in change' (Investing in Children, 2015a). The reports written by the Investing in Children staff member about the service are read and endorsed by the children and young people who use the service. Figure 11, which contains an extract from Investing in Children's website, details why they consider this award, and the process of involving children and young people, important.

##### **Membership: why does it work?**

- It responds to the challenge "Where I live my life."
- By including dialogue and change in the criterion it focuses on outcome as well as process.
- It provides an opportunity for children and young people to experience being active citizens, influencing the world around them.
- By seeking evidence from children and young people themselves it shifts power to them and avoids tokenism.
- There is a lot of persuasive evidence to show that the process helps produce efficient, cost-effective services.

(Investing in Children, 2015a)

**Figure 11 Extract from the Investing in Children website: Membership**

#### 4.5.5 Which young people?

Investing in Children define 'children and young people' as anyone up to age 18, or those who are in care up to age 21. In principle anybody within these age limits can be involved with Investing in Children, Cairns (2001:351) explains that they focus on 'creating opportunities for children and young people from any background to say whatever they want to say'. He states that this 'universal approach', which seeks to work against defining a child or a young person by a particular status (e.g. as a looked after or disabled child) is 'at the heart of Investing in Children' (Cairns, 2001:350). Nevertheless, in practice, it is at times necessary (due to funding constraints and the appropriateness of certain group activities) that some of their groups are only open for children and young people who fit the specific criteria as explained above.

Young people hear about the work of Investing in Children through Facebook, Twitter, their website or via word of mouth from other young people or through other youth services they are already involved with. Some young people, including several of the participants in this research, initially became involved with Investing in Children through their schools and then continued their involvement after Investing in Children's project with their school had ended.

#### 4.5.6 A participatory organisation?

Akin to the staff at Changemakers, staff at Investing in Children were reluctant to embrace the term 'participation'. This was because they felt it was frequently used to mask what they considered to be 'consultation' — a term used very negatively by the staff to describe a 'tokenistic' process which may involve *listening* to children and young people but not responding to their voices with action/change, what they described as a 'tick box exercise'. Despite their reluctance, several of the activities and ways of interacting with young people at Investing in Children reflect a participatory epistemology.

Since its foundation Investing in Children has encouraged **collaboration** between different organisations working with children and young people. They also advocate

for collaboration between children and young people and adults, arguing in Investing in Children's 'Statement of Purpose' that children have often been denied their 'right to participate in decisions that affect them' (Investing in Children, 2015b). This collaboration was described by staff using the term 'dialogue', which one staff member expressed as a 'two-way conversation, equal on either side'. Another staff member framed this in the context of 'rights'; explaining that he felt everyone has 'got equal rights in relation to having a conversation, whatever *the subject is*'. This is one step further than Investing in Children's Statement of Purpose or Article 12 of the UNCRC which declares 'the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely *in all matters affecting the child*' (United Nations, 1989). As one staff member explained:

Dialogue for us is all about change, it isn't just about, we have a sort of strapline 'we don't do consultation' as it's a really one-way process, whereas dialogue opens up all sorts of things you can't control and it is up to other people as well.

At Investing in Children collaboration, or 'dialogue', goes beyond having a conversation, it is about a conversation that leads to (undetermined) action which is **co-produced** between all parties involved in the issue. By having 'young directors' who are directly involved in the decision-making process, Investing in Children demonstrate their belief in co-production, going beyond *listening* to children and young people's views about how Investing in Children should be run. The Investing in Children bi-monthly newsletter could also be seen as an example of co-production: whilst a young person edits the newsletter, both adults and young people contribute articles, ensuring it is a joint and inclusive space where neither the voices of adults *nor* of children and young people are exclusively prioritised. The issue of whether the voices of adults or children and young people are prioritised in spaces of participation is returned to in Chapter 6 which considers the notion of intergenerational spaces.

Investing in Children advocate **inclusivity**. This is evident through what one staff member described as their 'pedantic' distinction between 'children's rights' and the '*human* rights of children and young people'. Although Investing in Children is

specifically campaigning and promoting the human rights of *children and young people*, this is because they believe they ‘possess the same *human rights* as the rest of humanity’ and that these are not fully being acknowledged (Investing in Children, 2015b, emphasis added). They demonstrate their pursuit of inclusivity through their decision to pay children and young people for their work at Investing in Children, a practice discussed in Chapter 6. Investing in Children are also concerned to promote inclusivity between groups of children and young people: campaigning for the rights of those who may be perceived as marginalised, such as people with mental health issues or who identify as LGBT. Furthermore, staff were eager to demonstrate their commitment to inclusivity by suggesting they did not just work with the ‘usual suspects’, a term used in this instance to describe confident, articulate young people who may already be involved in participatory work such as through a youth forum or school council (see Nairn *et al.*, 2006; Jupp, 2007). Investing in Children Director Liam Cairns acknowledges the limits of Investing in Children’s drive for inclusivity between all children and young people, writing that:

In order to claim to be truly universal, the project would have to be able to ensure that every child and young person in County Durham was kept fully informed of their rights to be involved, and the resources are not available currently to do this. (Cairns, 2006:229)

At an Investing in Children ‘Agenda Day’ there are opportunities for young people to express their voices in a variety of ways, not just verbally but through writing and drawing. This is to ensure that one type of voice (typically the loudest) is not misrepresented as the voice/opinion of all the children and young people present. This care to ensure the **plurality of knowledge** (or that there isn’t just one answer/one synthesised voice) reflects a theoretical position expressed in Cairns (2006) that Investing in Children is based on a ‘participative democracy model’. Within this model opportunities are created for everyone to take part *in their own right*, as opposed to a ‘representative democracy model’ where some children and young people (and therefore their knowledge/opinions) are set up as representatives of other children and young people. In this instance the views of children and young people potentially get synthesised and then presented as a

dominant voice (this echoes the concerns of Kothari, 2001, outlined in Chapter 2). Cairns and Brannen (2005) argue that a participative democracy model leads to more 'effective' participation as more 'challenging' voices are not watered-down but each voice is seen as a separate entity and each individual as a potential constructor of knowledge. The tension surrounding the role of the individual within radical participation is explored in Chapter 6.

The final characteristic of a participatory way of being presented here is a **desire for social transformation**. Investing in Children are concerned that 'children aren't taken as seriously as adults [as] many people still believe that 'children should be seen and not heard' (Investing in Children, 2015c). In our focus group one staff member explained that in her opinion young people are currently seen by society 'as second-class citizens'. She felt that this was 'no different to the way women were seen or disabled people seen or black people seen'. Investing in Children's activities outlined above work towards their desire to challenge and change these attitudes within County Durham and more broadly across the UK and Europe.

#### **4.5.7 Who do Investing in Children want to change? Change society**

It is clear from the outline above that Investing in Children was created and continues to exist because they believe that there (still) needs to be a change in the way the human rights of children and young people are respected by adults within British society. This following section will identify *which* adults Investing in Children are trying to change.

Staff at Investing in Children sweepingly criticised the category of 'adults'. When pressed further within the focus group, however, it became clear this primarily meant 'decision makers' — Investing in Children wants to change the nature of interactions between children and young people and decision makers who are involved in service provision. Some staff asserted that whilst there is now a culture within County Durham that does at least encourage decision makers to engage with children and young people on matters that affect them, this engagement is often tokenistic. Making a further broad generalisation, one staff member commented

that ‘adults consult them (children and young people) then they go off and do what they were going to do in the first place’. These generalisations about ‘adults’ occurred throughout the focus group. When I highlighted this the staff agreed that a process of ‘othering’<sup>17</sup> was occurring — a process which is examined in Chapter 6. Despite the age range of staff in the focus groups (approximated at late twenties–fifties), one staff member reflected on this saying ‘I don’t know that we always think of ourselves as “the adult”’.

Investing in Children would like their work to impact the attitudes and actions of a large number of adults, however, their practices do not necessarily allow for this. As reflected upon further in Chapter 6, Investing in Children primarily prefer to promote the human rights of children and young people through transforming the processes within existing adult structures rather than campaigning against them. Their approach is highly relational, concentrating on ensuring individual decision makers understand the value and purpose behind Investing in Children’s way of engaging children and young people. Investing in Children focus on demonstrating rather than preaching their message, which one board member reflected was a conscious, albeit at times frustrating, decision. He said they would rather use their limited resources to ‘be doing good work than talking about doing good work’. In a presentation led as part of the dissemination of this research, he reflected that ‘the message is not widely known but very deeply known, who says that’s not more powerful?’

#### **4.5.8 Who do Investing in Children want to change? Change young people**

Our sole motivation is to ensure that young people are involved in decision-making processes because they have [the] right to be. If there are additional unintended benefits that's great but that isn't why we do what we do.  
[Extract from email correspondence with a staff member whilst discussing the proposal for this research]

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<sup>17</sup> Othering is the process of defining yourself by your difference from someone else. The ‘other’ group is typically represented as negative. In this instance the staff at Investing in Children were grouping themselves with children and young people, in opposition to a generic group they referred to as ‘the adults’.

The quotation is from an email exchange between a staff member at Investing in Children, my supervisor and me. The staff member wanted to make it clear that the purpose of Investing in Children is not ‘personal development benefits for individual young people’. Investing in Children is premised on the belief that children and young people are ‘rights bearers’ and ‘citizens now’. Children and young people are framed as ‘experts’ in their own ‘lived lives’ (see Gallacher and Gallagher, 2008, for a critique of this concept) and therefore are depicted as not in need of changing/improving, except potentially to develop an awareness of their own rights (Investing in Children, 2015b).

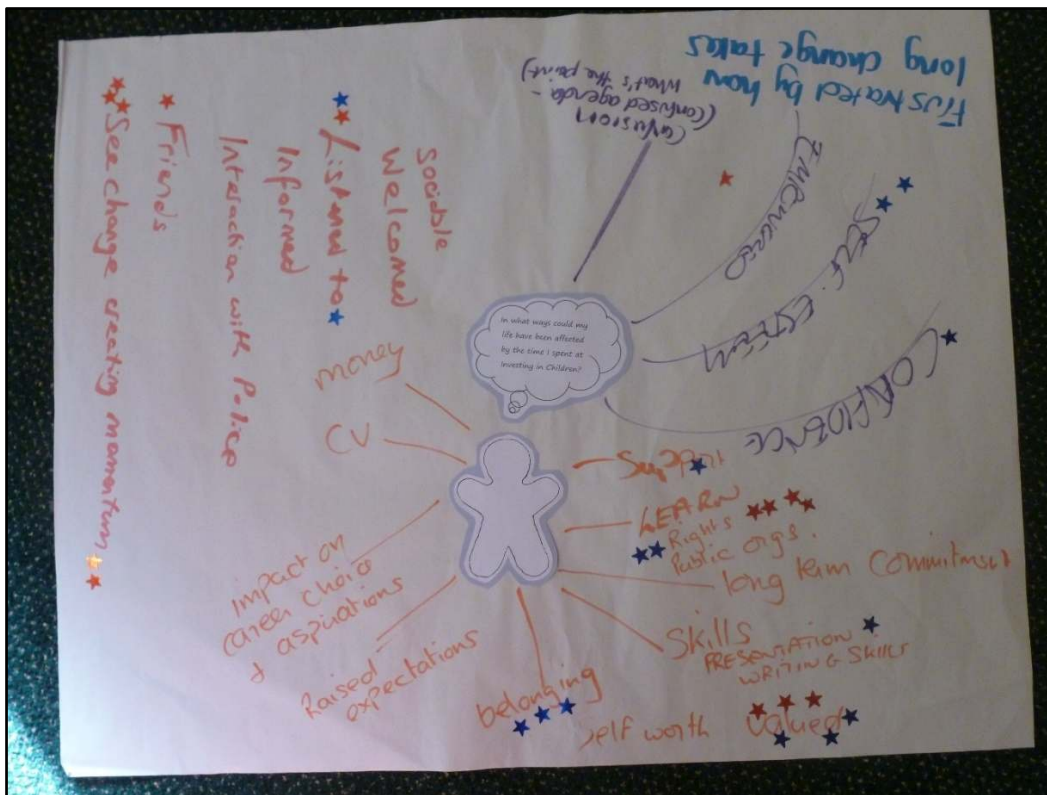
Investing in Children argue that the rights of *all* human beings should be respected, that this is not happening and that something needs to be done to reposition children and young people on equal footing with adults, as people and as citizens. The language used is about rectifying a societal injustice; the ‘problem’, in Investing in Children’s view, is with society, not with children and young people. One staff member explained it is about ‘just seeing a person as a person, not just seeing “children and young people” as “children and young people” just seeing them as a person in their own right really and not reflecting on their age’. Interestingly, although Investing in Children do not divide children and young people by age they are still grouped by identity markers. Whilst this is certainly a practical necessity, perhaps the idealism of the staff member’s comment ‘just seeing a person as a person’ is not quite the reality as markers other than age are still used to distinguish people.

Staff at Investing in Children were very keen to distance themselves from discourses that portray children and young people as future-citizens-in-training. They said they would actively not use the term ‘citizenship’ due to its connection with *Citizenship Education*, preferring the term ‘active citizen’ (although there was some confusion about how they define this). When asked about the potential impacts of their work on children and young people, one staff member said that he was ‘even scared to admit it’ but that perhaps Investing in Children’s work does contribute to young people’s understandings of ‘issues about citizenship that they might use into



adulthood', indicating that discussions at Investing in Children are at the interface between a resistance to portraying young people as 'becomings' and a society that in many ways structures adolescence as a period of preparation. This tension surfaces throughout this thesis.

Although the purpose of Investing in Children is undeniably not the personal development of individual young people, staff were still able to name multiple potential impacts their work had on individuals (Figure 12). They were aware that being involved with Investing in Children might help a young person with their 'CV' (Curriculum Vitae) and that some young people consciously used Investing in Children as a platform to help 'get them to where they want to be'. They proposed that involvement with Investing in Children may improve the levels of confidence, self-esteem and self-worth of some young people, alongside gaining (potentially useful) knowledge about how systems such as the local council are run. Staff emphasised that none of these outcomes were explicitly targeted or taught at Investing in Children but developed as bi-products of being in the environment created at Investing in Children.



**Figure 12 Focus Group Exercise 2 Investing in Children**

In a focus group staff were asked to indicate which of the potential impacts they think that Investing in Children as an organisation would most like their young people to come away with. All five of the staff highlighted 'see change creating momentum' as one of their three choices. This was explained as an instance where a young person sees a small change as a result of their involvement and therefore they become committed to be involved in 'something bigger':

You might get them doing something very local in improving their park and then you might get [them] involved in something that's about leisure more broadly and then you might get them involved in something country level [...] it's not starting out with the 'do you want to help us develop our three-year strategic leisure plan?', it'd be [first] about something that was really important to them.

Sitting slightly in tension with the previous representation of young people being involved 'as they are', this progression scale conjures images of a 'good' young person/citizen being someone who is not just passionate about change on a local, individual level but is concerned in national issues.

This section has introduced some of the key concepts informing the practices at Investing in Children, including the concept of human rights, the practice of dialogue and a participative democracy model. It has also become evident that unlike Changemakers, Investing in Children is not explicitly seeking to change young people, although as will emerge through the recollections of young people detailed in Chapter 7, young people are often transformed through their experiences there.

## **4.6 Scotswood Centre**

### **4.6.1 Who are Scotswood Centre?**

Scotswood Centre (previously known as Scotswood Area Strategy) is a community-led charity located in the ward of Benwell and Scotswood in Newcastle. Calculated using the Index of Multiple Deprivation, this ward is one of the top 10% most deprived wards in England (Department of Communities and Local Government, 2011). Unlike Changemakers and Investing in Children, Scotswood Centre exists to serve a specific, localised geographic community. It was set up by local residents nearly 25 years ago as part of a campaign to improve the quality of life for everyone living in Scotswood (Scotswood Area Strategy, n.d.-b). It is run by part-time staff and volunteers. Scotswood Centre is funded through grants from organisations such as The National Lottery and the local council.

Scotswood Centre's building has community facilities including meeting rooms, an IT suite and a community-run café. One staff member commented that the primary purpose of Scotswood Centre was to 'provide a safe space for young people to congregate, where they could develop productive and trusting relationships with the staff team'. Another described it as a place where young people could increase their 'social capital' and 'build up their own skills and make changes that affect their own lives'. They explained that, for example, Scotswood Centre would not run a toddler group *for* young mothers but would support young mothers to run their *own* toddler group.

Although Scotswood Centre runs activities for all community members this research has only focused on its work with young people. As detailed in Chapter 3, a focus group was not carried out with staff at Scotswood Centre. The observations made in

the following section are therefore drawn from informal conversations with current and previous staff members, either in person or via email and the information about the organisation provided on their website. They are perhaps less nuanced than those made about Changemakers and Investing in Children, illustrating the value of gatekeepers and the importance of developing deep and effective relationships when conducting participatory research, argued in Chapter 3.

#### **4.6.2 What do they do? Educational programmes**

Staff at Scotswood Centre run drop-in activity sessions for young people alongside training and education programmes. These include courses about drugs, sexual health and cooking. With the support of the staff, young people volunteer to run these courses for other young people. Young volunteers are also encouraged to identify, plan and lead day and overnight recreational trips for other young people in the area.

In partnership with a local school, Scotswood Centre runs an Alternative Youth Education Project, working with small groups of 13–15 year olds who are experiencing problems at school such as bullying, racism, low self-esteem or behaviour difficulties. The course seeks to address these issues through sessions around confidence building, art and design, cooking and independent living skills (Scotswood Area Strategy, n.d.-a).

#### **4.6.3 What do they do? Campaigning**

Some young people, encouraged by some members of staff, are actively involved in campaign work and attend political protest marches. For example, one participant, whose perspective is explored further in Chapter 7, with the support and encouragement of staff, spoke at a protest about how the cuts to youth services in Scotswood were affecting the lives of young people. This echoed a representative model of participation where some young people were chosen to represent, or speak on behalf of, other young people.

#### **4.6.4 Which young people?**

Scotswood Centre is embedded in its local community, as such its services primarily target and attract young people who live in Scotswood. Their ‘young person’ activities and courses are aimed at people aged ‘8 to adult’ (Scotswood Area Strategy, n.d.-b); this was clarified by one staff member as up to the age of 25.

The pathway to becoming a young volunteer was not explicitly detailed in the available organisation literature, however, conversations with both previous staff members and young volunteers revealed that young people who showed commitment to the Centre were encouraged to become further invested by training to become young volunteers. This pathway is examined in Chapter 6.

#### **4.6.5 A participatory organisation?**

Participation is listed on Scotswood Centre’s current website as one of their five desired outcomes. Demonstrating the range of scales they envisage the development of participatory practices to impact, participation is defined as:

People having a voice and being able to effect change within their family, a group or the community. We also help people engage with decision making in the Strategy [Scotswood Centre], and contribute to local and citywide consultations. (Scotswood Centre, 2014)

When I conducted fieldwork at this organisation in 2013 its understanding of participation was not as explicitly articulated. Scotswood Centre became involved in this research when I was interviewing one of their staff members about another participatory organisation. The staff member encouraged me to include Scotswood Centre in the research as she described it as an organisation that worked with young people in ‘participatory’ ways. She provided me with the information used to make my initial analysis detailed at the start of this chapter in Figures 5–7.

Another staff member explained how participatory epistemologies affected their working practices:

As much as I could, I try to make the fact it was an equal relationship with young people and workers, you know, so the young people felt like and did have their say and their contributions and rather than going in and saying you must be doing this, it would be kind of a case of: ‘have you thought

about this?’ and letting them making decisions for themselves and it’s all about empowerment really and for me, and for other workers, some of the workers on the project is more about empowering people to make them decisions for themselves [...] it’s not a teacher/young person relationship, it’s not about us having power and you haven’t got power.

Alongside this typically ‘participatory’ language of equality and empowerment, what is noticeable is the staff member’s emphasis that these are the views held by ‘some’ but not all staff members. She goes on to say:

I think other workers were quite similar in the way I am [but] other workers did enjoy the power and were quite dominant [...] I think it just varies and people have different working styles.

This highlights the importance of acknowledging that all arenas of participation are made up of people, each with their own situated views and opinions about both participation and engaging with young people. The practices discussed below emphasise where a participatory epistemology was evident, however (as at each of the organisations involved in this research) these practices and this driving philosophy were not evident in the actions of all staff members, reminding that care should be taken to avoid homogenising the views or practices of participatory organisations.

Scotswood Centre is described as a ‘community-led’ organisation, based on a **collaboration** between staff, volunteers and residents working together to improve the quality of life for people in Scotswood. One staff member explained that they believed that collaboration was not the long-term goal but:

what you should be doing is you should be empowering the local people as much as you can, even doing yourself out of a job really, and you should be aiming to get at that place where you don’t have to work there anymore and that the local people can stand up for themselves and do it all themselves.

Scotswood Centre’s work with young people was described as a ‘cyclical process of discussion and dialogue between adults and young people’, as, for example, ground rules for behaviour at the centre are collectively created and reviewed by staff and young people. This model of discussion and dialogue encourages **co-production**. For example, if a group of young people say they would like to go on a trip to a local zoo, instead of the staff member arranging this, they support the young people to plan

the trip themselves. The young people will be supported to research transport options, make a budget, investigate what else there is to do near the zoo and, if the young people decide the trip is viable, fundraise for it and advertise it to other young people. Through encouraging young people to be co-producers in the activities/services offered by Scotswood Centre, one staff member suggested that a 'shared **knowledge** and understanding around issues such as racism, relationships' is constructed. Some also emphasised the importance of supporting young people to make 'informed' yet *independent* decisions.

Scotswood Centre tries to ensure greater **inclusion** for young people in their area. They facilitate young people's involvement in both local authority consultations and local and regional youth council elections. Within Scotswood Centre the staff try to encourage greater inclusivity by involving a wide variety of young people who use their services in consultations. Contrasting the observation made previously about young people representing the voices of others when they are speaking at protest marches, one staff member explained that they purposely do not have young people sitting on their board *representing* other young people or have a core group of young people who are always involved in planning the activities but prefer looser structures that could include more young people.

Discussed in the following section, staff wanted to **transform** the lives of young people in their area. They felt that due to economic deprivation the young people in their area did not have the same 'chances and opportunities' as young people from neighbouring areas and therefore had 'narrower' horizons and aspirations. They also wanted to change their local environment to ensure the voices of these young people could be heard.

#### **4.6.6 Who do Scotswood Centre want to change? Change society**

The work at Scotswood Centre with young people reflects the organisation's desire for greater value to be placed on young people's voices within society. They seek to model this through their practices, for example through deliberately positioning young people as speakers in their campaign work and at protest rallies, with the

hope that this practice will become normalised in the surrounding areas. They want young people to be respected in their community and British society more widely and to achieve this they encourage young people to voice their opinions and interact with decision makers at political events.

As one young volunteer explained, more locally they want to reframe how young people are portrayed in Scotswood:

[They want us to] make an impact on the community. Like a lot of people, not just this West End but across the North East a lot of people say that young people are hooligans who just wanna go out there and like not doing anything, wanna wreck things and wanna things, and get sent to jail or get an ASBO. We're not all like that. So it's like making an impact on the young people but also trying to change the opinions of the older generation. That's quite like an important thing.

This comment illustrates the dual approach undertaken by the organisation to change both young people (and their behaviour) and the attitudes of adults. Staff saw this latter aim as being achieved by ensuring there was a visible presence of 'good' young people in the community. Increased opportunities for participation of young people in community decision making was therefore framed as one strategy to promote greater intergenerational inclusion and community cohesiveness, rather than as a 'right' held by young people.

#### **4.6.7 Who do Scotswood Centre want to change? Change young people**

As alluded to previously, some of the ways young people were conceptualised by some staff members at Scotswood Centre did not sit comfortably with the participatory discourses being used by other staff members. Some staff members saw it as *their* role to change young people, whilst others wanted to 'empower' young people to change themselves. Nevertheless, throughout conversations at Scotswood Centre there was the sense that regardless of approach, young people needed changing.

The youth activities at Scotswood Centre could be seen to be designed to 'improve' young people by relocating them 'off the streets' into a 'safe' space where they are trained and educated. Some staff emphasised the need to support young people to



widen their horizons and aspirations. This desire is based on the (problematic) premise that having 'wider' horizons and aspirations is a necessary and desirable quality that leads to an improved quality of life. Although almost certainly motivated from good intentions, notions of 'widening' or 'raising' young people's aspirations are steeped in normative assumptions privileging certain worldviews, scales and pathways (see Sellar *et al.*, 2011; Sellar and Storan, 2013). Young people within this representation are seen as in need of help (from adults) as their existing aspirations are deemed inappropriate (Brown, 2012).

Scotswood Centre supports young people to develop skills. These skills are designed to help young people both now and into the future. One staff member explained that the young people are encouraged to practice 'key skills' but also to '*know* they have practiced them' [staff member's emphasis]. She felt that young people from Scotswood were selling themselves short in this competitive economic culture by not being able to identify and demonstrate to those outside Scotswood Centre the skills they had learnt. Personal development is therefore not solely about gaining skills *for yourself*, but is also a performative display for others, used as a tactic to 'get ahead' on normative pathways. This competitive, directional, future-orientated concept of 'getting ahead' has become part of the normative discourse surrounding young people and their involvement with voluntary organisations. For example the National Citizen Service uses this concept in their promotional material to both parents and young people (National Citizen Service, 2015a; National Citizen Service, 2015b). These emerging ideas are developed in Chapter 7 which examines how young people curate their experiences at organisations such as these to assist in competitive transitions to adulthood.

One staff member explained that they felt these conceptualisations of young people as in need of improving were in part due to an increased pressure to demonstrate outcomes to secure funding for the centre's work. They felt that this meant that some staff members had become 'more focused on the paperwork and getting the action done, rather than sitting around the table and sitting and talking to young people'. As will be discussed below, examples such as these point to the complexity

of arenas of youth participation, particularly as they operate within competitive, neoliberal environments. More broadly, this section has introduced some of the key practices at Scotswood Centre. It has demonstrated that whilst one of the aims of the centre is to change the way young people are viewed in society, however, unlike Investing in Children and to a certain extent Changemakers, there is a greater emphasis on the role and responsibility young people play in making this change possible.

#### **4.7 Conclusions**

This chapter has examined three different approaches to youth participation. The purpose of this has not been to compare these organisations, although some comparisons are unavoidable, but rather to introduce and examine different ways a participatory epistemology can be interpreted and implemented. In this conclusion I offer five observations about these approaches. Each of these reflections are developed and threaded through the following chapters, which draw upon the perspectives of young people to probe the relationship between radical and neoliberal participation.

Firstly, in outlining the practices of inclusion at these organisations, contrasting circulating discourses of young people have emerged. The notion that there are ‘good’ young people, and that these young people should be visible, pushed forward and celebrated was present at both Changemakers — through their selection process and focus on young *leaders* — and at Scotswood Centre. Despite their (well-intentioned) rhetoric about wanting to change perceptions within society for young people *as a collective*, their practices appear to create further divisions between the category of young people: elevating some young people who, for example, show potential or behave in the ‘right’ manner. In contrast, at Investing in Children there was a more rooted concern, based in the language of rights, on the position of, and perceived injustices experienced by, *all* young people in society. These subtle, potentially unacknowledged differences signal a need for continuous self-reflection by organisations which work in participatory ways with young people, reflecting on:

which young people are the activities they offer targeting? Are their practices creating further (hierarchical) divisions within the category of young people?

Secondly, differences between the approaches undertaken by the organisations became more apparent through an examination of who each organisation was trying to change. At Scotswood Centre a measure of responsibility was placed upon young people for their unequal position in society. Young people were presented as having the capacity to alter or overcome this through training. At Changemakers, the individualising language of self-reflection and values was deployed to a similar end. Such a language was noticeably absent at Investing in Children: staff (echoing the organisation's literature) forcefully claimed they were not trying to change or improve young people. They argued that the responsibility for unequal relations between adults and children and young people within society lay with adults who had failed to fully acknowledge and uphold the human rights of children and young people. These contrasting approaches reveal varying ways young people, as a category or collective, are theorised within arenas of youth participation. Supporting the first half of Cook, Kesby et al.'s (2013:757) definition of participation as a polyvalent term, they show how participation has become attached to practices with substantially differing aims. The second half of their claim, that attaching itself to more than one system of meaning can 'produce quite different effects', will be investigated in Chapter 7.

Thirdly, through introducing the practices undertaken at these organisations a commonality between approaches has emerged. Practices of co-production and collaboration, packaged as a form of participation, often (although not exclusively) distanced adults away from children and young people. Adults are positioned as 'supporters': shadowy, or as will be argued in Chapter 6, at times silent presences within these processes.

Fourthly, this chapter has begun a process, continued throughout this thesis, of revealing the tensions and complexities present within arenas of youth participation. For example, this chapter detailed how staff at Scotswood Centre had,

at times, conflicting understandings and motivations concerning participation: a reminder of the danger of homogenising or synthesising the views of those who work for an organisation. At Scotswood Centre young people were framed in contrasting ways through various practices: at times they were positioned as representatives of other young people, whilst in other spaces this was discouraged. Juxtaposing discourses which positioned young people as beings and/or becomings, as in need of improvement or as not, were also evident within this organisation. This chapter, by focusing on the detail and complexity of these organisations, has therefore begun to expose the fallacy and misleading nature of binary thinking so often present within portrayals of youth participation.

Finally, the detail of this chapter has unearthed a question: what would it mean for an invited arena of youth participation to be ‘radical enough’? Can organisations such as these radically challenge injustices whilst still operating (comfortably) within and alongside a neoliberal culture? Through comments made by staff and an analysis of the organisations’ literature, it has become evident that each of the organisations involved in this research were not detached from the neoliberal culture introduced in Chapter 1 that dominates youth participation in the UK. For example, staff at each organisation narrated how their work was constrained and/or limited by issues of funding, accentuated during austere times. Staff at Investing in Children explained that they explicitly chose to work *with* rather than campaign *against* adult structures of participation — as explored in Chapter 6, positioning themselves as the ‘enemy within’ more neoliberally-orientated models of participation. Yet as the analysis presented here indicates, each organisation was still influenced, to varying extents, by ideas evolving out of a more radical participatory epistemology. The question of how these competing discourses of radical and neoliberal participation interact *in practice*, how organisations which promote the participation of young people position themselves to be radical enough, is explored, from the perspectives of both staff and young people who had previously been involved in these organisations, in the following pair of chapters.

## **Chapter 5. Neoliberal Participation? Governance, Self-Reflection and Individual Conscientisation**

### **5.1 Introduction**

Chapter 2 traced the origins of a participatory epistemology, locating these in the radical writings of Paulo Freire amongst others (e.g. Swantz, 1986; Fals-Borda, 2006). Within this chapter I identified one of the objectives of participation as the transformation of social, cultural, political and economic structures which perpetuate marginalisation. Participation was presented as at times a radical project of liberation, a philosophy and a set of practices driven by a common desire to make the world a 'better' place (Kindon *et al.*, 2007c). It was explained that, significantly, to avoid this project being simply 'humanitarianism' (which Freire (1996:36) argues 'itself maintains and embodies oppression') participation should be carried out with and by those who are marginalised themselves. In tracing its origins, this chapter observed that as the concept of participation became evoked in more institutionalised spaces, it was accused of losing its radical agenda (Percy-Smith, 2010). Critiques emerged which reinterpreted participation as a tool of governance.

The following two chapters, taken as a pair, listen to the perspectives of young adults to explore the tensions between understanding participation as a tool of governance driven by a neoliberal agenda, and understanding it as something more radical, centred on ideas of dialogue and co-production. Building on arguments made by Masschelein and Quaghebeur (2005); Alejandro Leal (2007) and Raby (2014), these chapters use empirical evidence to explore this tension, paying particular attention to the role of the individual and the collective within discourses of youth participation.

As was argued in Chapter 4, the organisations involved in this research advocated different (complicated, overlapping) approaches to youth participation. This first chapter, focusing on how participation has been evoked as a tool of governance, draws on empirical evidence from Changemakers. Practices at Investing in Children

are examined in the second chapter. This format has been chosen as these arenas of participation provide two somewhat contrasting case studies of how participation has been constructed and practiced with young people in the UK, yet as will be clear throughout both chapters they also both trouble any neat divide between participation being a tool of (neoliberal) governance or a tool for more radical social transformation.

This chapter starts by outlining what is meant by governance and governmentality before setting out how existing literature presents participation as a tool used in the governance of young people. It then uses practices developed at Changemakers to illustrate ways in which arenas of participation have become governed sites which assist in the construction of young people as 'good' neoliberal subjects. This chapter complicates these arguments by considering what Pykett (2010a:623) calls the 'paradoxes of governing' before finally addressing how for some young people, being involved in these arenas of participation has led to processes of individual (and at times collective) conscientisation.

## **5.2 Governance, Governmentality and the 'Good' Neoliberal Subject**

The following section outlines what is meant by governance, governmentality and the 'good' neoliberal subject. Before exploring these terms it is important to briefly explain how the term neoliberalism will be used in relation to these arguments, as it is often used (unhelpfully) without explanation (such as by Roulstone and Morgan, 2009). Neoliberalism is recognised as a complex term, difficult to succinctly define, with books such as Eagleton-Pierce's (2016) 'Neoliberalism: the Key Concepts' even shying away from offering a definition (see also Saad-Filho and Johnston, 2005). Thorsen and Lie (2006) suggest that David Harvey has come closest to offering a concise definition:

[Neoliberalism is] in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade. (Harvey, 2005:2, quoted in Thorsen and Lie, 2006:11)

It is primarily understood as an economic theory which advocates for a decreased intervention by the state in the market, however, significantly for this chapter, the ‘project’<sup>18</sup> of neoliberalism also has political and social dimensions encouraging increased personal responsibility, self-care and self-*governance*. Subjects are framed as independent individuals who must learn to manage their own development and wellbeing rather than making a claim on those in power (Khoja-Moolji, 2014). As such, neoliberalism can and has been understood as one of the ‘dominant technologies of government of our times’ (Khoja-Moolji, 2014:107). The arguments put forward within this chapter do not seek to define neoliberalism but rather pay attention to the role of arenas of participation in producing the type of characteristics associated with a ‘good’ neoliberal subject, ‘one that can hope to be successful in a neoliberal economic and social order’ (Khoja-Moolji, 2014:106). To do this I use Masschelein and Quaghebeur’s (2005:61) definition of ‘good’ neoliberal subjects as ‘active, competent, independent, self-determining human beings’ and Raby’s (2014:80) definition of ‘ideal global neoliberal subjects’ who through self-governance are ‘autonomous, self-reliant, responsible and able to personally negotiate risk and the marketplace without relying on state support’ (see also Ilcan and Lacey, 2006; Newman, 2010).

My understanding of governance and governmentality comes primarily from the (highly accessible) explanations presented in Masschelein and Quaghebeur (2005) and Smith (2014) both of which draw on the work of Michel Foucault. To ‘govern’ is more than to command or prohibit certain actions, but it is ‘a means of exercising power which attempts to guide or ‘conduct’ human behaviour’ (Smith, 2014:8). Governmentality, a neologism coined by Foucault which has been developed by scholars such as Rose (1999) and Dean (2010), encompasses an interest in the

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<sup>18</sup> There is much critical debate about whether neoliberalism can be termed a coherent ‘project’. (e.g. Barnett, 2005). Clifford and Tewdwr-Jones (2013) provide a useful summary of these debates. I use this term in its broadest sense understanding it as something identifiable yet only loosely held together by the common commitment to forms of intervention and control which occur indirectly/at a distance as they seek to act on and through the motivations and identities of subjects.

problem of *how* to govern, or an interest in the ‘conduct of conduct’ (Sokhi-Bulley, 2014). It is therefore broader than the strategies associated with top-down measures where power is expressed primarily through tactics of domination. A perspective on governmentality identifies (often subtler) modes of power that guide thoughts and actions of both yourself and others. These modes of power may not immediately influence the actions of others but rather, as Masschelein and Quaghebeur (2005:54) explain quoting Foucault, they act ‘upon their actions, on existing actions *or on those which may arise in the present or future*’ (Foucault, 1982:220, emphasis added). The role of internalised practices, such as self-reflection, self-direction and self-care, are important features within the concept of governmentality. These practices are identified as having a dual aim of fostering a (desirable and productive) sense of ‘freedom’ within individuals whilst simultaneously encouraging individuals to self-regulate their own actions in ways that ‘fit’ with societal ‘norms’ (Gallagher, 2015).

Practices of governing ‘from a distance’ are popular within current (predominately westernised) forms of government which seek to reduce their influence in the market. Despite this, governmentality should not be understood as a coherent strategy of governance, various strategies are often being evoked simultaneously (Rose, 1999; Li, 2007). Governmentality is also not exclusively conducted by those in *political* power (Bessant, 2003). Strategies of governmentality have been identified as operating at a variety of scales and in a variety of spaces, such as at an NGO /voluntary sector level (e.g. Ilcan and Basok, 2004; Taylor *et al.*, 2004; Ilcan and Lacey, 2006) and within education spaces for both children and young people (e.g. Bragg, 2007; Pykett, 2007) and adults (e.g. Wainwright and Marandet, 2013). It should also not be conceptualised as a one-way process, owned exclusively by those who are exercising ‘power over’ others, as will become evident throughout this pair of chapters it is messy and multi-directional. Finally, and crucially for this thesis, governmentality should not be regarded exclusively as an oppressive or negative force. This was argued in Chapter 2 in relation to understanding power as an effect (see also Kesby, 2007). To govern is not (necessarily) an attempt to ‘brainwash or



indoctrinat[e]' but rather to guide, to encourage certain forms of behaviour, acknowledging within this guidance there is always the possibility that ideas will be manipulated or resisted (Smith, 2014:10, see also Pykett, 2010).

Governmentality as a theoretical perspective is useful within this thesis as it facilitates a distancing from a simplistic understanding that arenas of participation such as those involved with this research are doing 'good' and 'noble' work. Whilst this may be the case, a governmentality perspective allows for productive critical reflection on the practices and strategies being evoked within these socially constructed spaces and challenges any lingering idealistic notions that arenas of participation are spaces where young people are 'free' from power and can 'be themselves'.

### **5.3 Participation as Governance of Young People**

As was established in Chapter 2, youth participation has become 'a popular part of contemporary political talk [...] in many Western societies' (Bessant, 2004:387). A recognisable shift in Western styles of governing 'evolving towards a partnership [between the state and the individual] built on mutuality and reciprocity, with a common sense feeling of "no rights without responsibilities"' has led to participation being presented as one way to involve children and young people in governance both as current and future citizens and/or consumers (Vandenbroeck and Bouverne-De Bie, 2006:156). This topic has generated significant academic interest (e.g. Arnott, 2008; O'Toole and Gale, 2008), however, the following section moves away from these wider debates to focus not on how young people have become involved in governance through participation, but how arenas of participation have become spaces through which young people are governed. This section focuses specifically on how participation is used as a tool of governance in relation to *young people*, nevertheless it is important to acknowledge that these critiques are embedded in/stem out from wider critiques of participatory initiatives and practices particularly developed within the field of participatory development outlined in Chapter 2 (e.g. Cleaver, 1999; Henkel and Stirrat, 2001; Kothari, 2001; Williams, 2004a; Cornwall, 2008). As reviewed by Kraftl (2015), it should also be acknowledged that

participation is just one of many 'tools' critically evaluated for its role in governing the lives of young people; for example Evans (2010) explores the use of media in the governance of young people's health and Pykett (2007) considers how policy documents contribute to the governance of young people within educational spaces.

The claim that participation is a tool used to govern the behaviour of young people is set out comprehensively in Bessant (2003). Contextualising this claim within Australian politics, she argues that 'youth participation' is part of the response to twentieth and twenty-first century representations of young people as both the causes and victims of crime (see also Valentine, 1996). Bessant (2003:87-88) argues that youth participation is used as both a remedial and a preventative tool to encourage young people to "reconnect" or become more "integrated into society". After analysing a series of policy documents from Australia and the UK, she concludes that youth participation has ultimately been used as a tool to 'manage young people rather than improving opportunities for democratic participation' (Bessant, 2003:91).

Writing in relation to participatory practices being used within a formal education context, Masschelein and Quaghebeur (2005) also consider this claim (see also Fielding, 2001). Drawing on Hart (1992) and De Winter (1995) they argue that participation has been misrepresented as a 'freedom' or a solution to the silencing and domination of young people within (some) educational settings. Instead they contend that using a governmentality perspective has allowed them to see how participation 'generates a particular way of looking at oneself (and others), a particular way of bringing freedom into practice and a particular way of behaving for the individual' that they somewhat pessimistically argue, 'always excludes others' (Masschelein and Quaghebeur, 2005:53). They argue that participation governs through subtle effects of power such as persuasion (as opposed to coercion). It:

governs by presenting to the individual the possibility of a specific way of putting her freedom into practice and, hence, of becoming a subject, of forming her identity. (Masschelein and Quaghebeur, 2005:61)

This specific way is through self-governance. Masschelein and Quaghebeur (2005:61) argue that the particular kind of individuality presented within participatory practices in schools compliments neoliberal ideals: that of the individual governing *themselves* and encouraging themselves to 'behave as active, competent, independent, self-determining human beings'. This type of individuality casts 'good' subjects as *in-* rather than *inter-*dependant.

Bragg (2007) similarly uses a governmentality analysis to express concerns about participatory practices within educational settings such as the use of 'Students as Researchers'. Bragg usefully highlights the (mis)presumptions built into participatory initiatives which involve young people, for example that young people 'naturally' want to participate, desire to have a voice/express a will and crave individual responsibility (Cornwall, 2008, applies this observation to participatory initiatives more generally). Bragg (2007) is concerned that whilst participation can encourage the development of new networks of power it can also reinforce existing power differentials between young people (connected to comments made in Nairn *et al.* (2006) about participation involving the 'usual suspects'). Making similar points to Masschelein and Quaghebeur (2005) about participation being a tool which encourages young people to become 'good' neoliberal— and she adds 'middle class'— subjects, Bragg (2007:356) also highlights the illusionary qualities of the 'freedom' offered by participation. She argues that whilst it 'appears volunturistic' you can only 'freely choose to be the right sort of person'. Masschelein and Quaghebeur (2005:59) identify, through reviewing 'grey' literature on participation (e.g. handbooks, manuals, programmes), that this 'freedom comes explicitly to be understood in terms of the capacity of an autonomous individual to establish an identity through shaping one's own life as autonomy' (see also Rose, 1999).

Specific participatory practices have been identified as encouraging the production of 'good' neoliberal subjects. Lareau (2011) suggest that verbal skills, such as the confidence to interact with those in authority, resonates with ideal, Western middle-class cultural behaviour; whilst the emphasis within some participatory practices on consensus building can mean that more 'divergent', diverse, (and

therefore potentially less ‘socially acceptable’) views are rarely brought to the fore (Kallio and Häkli, 2011b:72). Raby (2014:80) explains that negotiation and decision-making processes, common within participatory practices, prepare young people to be/become ‘consumer driven choice making subjects’. This idea that young people are being governed through participatory practices to be/become consumers is also developed by Shukra *et al.* (2012). They suggest that participatory practices position young people as consumers within society (of, for example, education, training or services) with responsibilities to help improve these services. This, they argue, encourages young people into a form of (individual) ‘active conformity’ whereby they are supporting and helping reproduce mainstream politics and norms about how a society should be governed (Shukra *et al.*, 2012:45). This construction of ‘acceptable’ and individual-focused ways for young people to participate in society in effect closes down and delegitimises alternative (perhaps more collective or self-directed) expressions for bringing about social change, potentially even foreclosing the imagination of such possibilities (see Kallio and Häkli, 2011b; Bäcklund *et al.*, 2014).

Common to all these examples is that the type of participation they are criticising happens in spaces where adults have ‘invited’ young people to participate (following Cornwall, 2004b) and where participatory practices are seen primarily through the lens of the individual. Building on the work of Masschelein and Quaghebeur (2005); Alejandro Leal (2007) and Raby (2014), the following sections will draw on empirical research with Changemakers, an invited arena of participation, to firstly identify instances where participation is being used as a tool of governance and the individual is prioritised over the collective but then to demonstrate the complexities of understanding these arenas solely within this framework.

To illustrate these arguments, both within this chapter and the following chapter, I draw on the concept outlined in Chapter 2 of ‘conscientisation’, distinguishing between what I have termed individual and collective conscientisation. I understand collective conscientisation to be the type predominately envisaged by Freire (1970b); (1970c) — where collectives of people (Freire was primarily writing about

the poor, marginalised rural workers in South America) would come to see their world ‘not as a static reality, but as a reality in process’ (Freire, 1970a:109) and that this realisation would lead them to collectively challenge and transform the structures that perpetuate inequalities within their lives. Within this collective process they question: what inequalities are affecting *us*? how are *we* going to change them? In contrast, the questions associated with a more individualised form of conscientisation are: what inequalities are affecting *me*? how am I going to change them? Within this latter form individuals lack a wider sense of collective in/justice.

#### 5.4 Tools of Governance: Distance and Self-Reflection

As outlined in Chapter 4, Changemakers aims to change the world for young people; they believe that young people are ‘woefully under-represented in positions of power and influence’ within the UK, that this is wrong and needs to change (Changemakers, 2010). They advocate for a greater level of participation of young people in the governance of society, arguing that ‘there is no reason why young people can’t be trained to have a far greater involvement in decisions about the design, development and evaluation of local services’ (Changemakers, 2012b:4). Changemakers draw on the concept of participation — both the beliefs associated with a participatory epistemology (e.g. change should be brought about with those who are marginalised) and by using ‘participatory’ practices — to achieve their vision for a society where young people are respected and valued as leaders. Claiming that they wanted to ‘empower’ young people, staff also explained that they saw:

young people for their skills, talents, passions, rather than seeing as homeless etc., *not seeing them from a deficit view*, seeing them for what they are and what they can bring and that young people can do anything really if they put their mind to it

This sentiment is critiqued in Chapter 4 for its subtle responsibilisation of young people. Through reviewing ‘grey’ literature, Masschelein and Quaghebeur (2005:57)

explain that this type of ‘potential-based-approach’, which rejects a ‘deficiency- or problem-oriented approach’, is a common defining feature of organisations that claim to work with children and young people in ‘participatory’ ways.

The following sections outline how sitting alongside these intentions are practices performed within this arena of participation that can be read as tools used to govern young people, potentially into ‘good’ neoliberal subjects. I start by considering the motivations and implications of locating one aspect of the Changemakers arena of participation (the INSPIRE residential) at a distance from young people’s everyday lives — before focusing on how self-reflection is both a governed and governing, individualising, ‘participatory’ practice.

#### **5.4.1 The INSPIRE Residential: using distance to govern and joining a ‘cult’**

At the start of the Changemakers 6-month programme the young people go away together on what is called the INSPIRE Residential. These were located in large houses/activity centres surrounded by nature, a stark contrast to many of the participants ‘usual’ urban environments in the North East of England (e.g. Newcastle/Sunderland). 10/11 of the young adults interviewed for this project (hereafter referred to as the participants) attended a residential for approximately 3–5 days. The majority reported that they did not know what to expect: they were going away ‘to the middle of nowhere’ with a group of people they had either not met before, or only met at an introduction day. What is clear from its name is that they were meant to return in some way ‘inspired’.

As argued by Askins and Pain (2011) in relation to arenas of participation and Kraftl (2015) in relation to spaces for alternative education, the physicality and materiality of a space impacts what is learnt or experienced within it. Staff commented that it was a deliberate decision to dislocate young people from their usual environment and take them away somewhere that was ‘far enough that you can metaphorically leave it all as well as physically, and far enough as well so that people couldn’t go home’, where there were no electronic distractions (mobile phone signal, internet, television). Practices such as these are not new or unusual. Statements made by the

YMCA and the Scouts movement in the early twentieth century contain similar ideas: both organisations were keen to remove young people from ‘the perceived dangers’ and ‘moral corruption’ of the city (Cupers, 2008:174) and the ‘grim’ urban surroundings and ‘restrictions of home and school’ (Bannister, 2014:36) and take them away on camp, to spaces that they believed would encourage ‘good’ character building and self-improvement. A similar argument is discussed in Nagel and Staeheli (2016) in relation to their study of citizenship in Lebanon. One of their interviewees explains how he sends young people away on camp to the countryside in the hope that removing them from the ‘deep-seated antagonisms and divisiveness’ prevalent in the space of ‘the city’ will encourage them to form positive relationships which will foster ‘unity’ (Nagel and Staeheli, 2016:248). This idea is also present within literature about therapeutic and health camps; Kearney (2009), in his examination of the value of taking ‘seriously ill’ children away on camp, argues that a ‘complete separation’ from the outside world can potentially have a transformative impact on the children’s mental states when they return home (see also Spevack *et al.*, 1991; Dunkley, 2009). Masked within these arguments, particularly those made in Bannister (2014) and Cupers (2008), is a conceptualisation of young people as in need of ‘improving’. This sits uncomfortably alongside the staff at Changemakers’ rhetoric about not seeing young people from a ‘deficit view’ and, more broadly, the radical participatory epistemology outlined in Chapter 2 where everybody’s knowledge is valued *as it is*.

Staff said they hoped that the residential would help ‘embed’ their messages in young people’s ‘brains’ (particularly those about values and self-reflection introduced in Chapter 4 and discussed further in the following sections). Participants had mixed reactions to the prospect of going on the residential and being dislocated from the comforts of their everyday lives. Participants such as Kyle and Pete, significantly speaking in retrospect after having ‘positive’ experiences at the residential, could articulate the value of this dislocation:

I got on the bus and didn't really know what to expect and for me that was amazing — not really knowing what you were going to do but going to a

different place, away from all the material things and away from all the distractions that life sometimes brings. [Kyle]

I didn't know what to expect, I really didn't have a clue. Yeah it was an absolutely brilliant weekend loads of different activities. I think what I really valued about that weekend was the fact it took you out of your usual routine, plonked you in this big house in Cheshire and had time to reflect really! [...] it was a good kind of time-out period for me. [Pete]

In contrast, others such as Maria felt 'stuck' far away from home, and the unusualness of the situation led her to repeatedly question 'where am I?':

I expected oh with young people we'd be staying in some sort of youth hostel-ly type, but yeah we were in this 5-star hotel [...] breakfast was like bacon sandwiches every morning and like a range of like whatever you wanted basically. So I was like 'oh my God, where am I? This is amazing!' There were twin rooms and we had like a double bed each! [...] But um, it was very sort of, I dunno the word, like hippy-ish [...] it was like, because obviously one of their [Changemakers'] values is 'loving', it was very like we all need to love each other and be 'at one' with the. And I was like 'oh my God what have I got myself into? I've joined a cult! [...] It's like I'm stuck in Dover in this cult! [...] At the end of our sessions they'd have group hugs and stuff and I was like 'oh my God what is this?'. [Maria]

Maria's use of the word 'cult' was also used, unprompted, by a staff member in reference to the residential, indicating an awareness that this was a term that *could* be used to describe their work:

I'd probably say they wouldn't forget the programme and what they've learnt, [it is] embedded in their brains, because we're a cult! (Laughs) [...Naomi explains this word has been used by some participants]. No we're not but yeah, I think the word is probably most associated with the residential because we take them away but when they come back they obviously mix with their normal, daily lives but possibly come and see us on a fortnightly basis, less of a cult then isn't it? On the residential it's really intense, you're away from everything, you get very little signal on your mobile, no telly, internet never worked. So I can see why people think that, I guess it could be taken as a positive and a negative connotation. [Staff member]

Pranali, another participant, also used the term unprompted in reference to the ongoingness of being a 'changemaker':

[Changemakers] is, not in a bad way, bit like a cult if you could say 'once you are a changemaker it literally means you are a changemaker'



Definitions of the word 'cult' include references to groups who often physically separate themselves from the 'world', are centred around charismatic leaders and whose beliefs are considered 'strange', 'extreme' or 'socially deviant' (see Stark and Bainbridge, 1987; Richardson, 1993). Despite attempts by academics to revive the word (see Bainbridge, 1997), in popular culture the word 'cult' has predominately negative connotations. As examples within Enroth (1977)'s iconic book entitled 'Youth, brainwashing and extremist cults' demonstrate, they are depicted as spaces where vulnerable people are liable to be 'brainwashed'. Young people, who are seen to be at a stage in life when they are trying to 'find' their 'identity' are understood as at particular risk of becoming involved with a cult (see also Cushman, 1984).

Popular, negative imaginings of a cult as a group separated from the world, duped by a charismatic leader preying on vulnerable (young) people, make it seem too strong a word to accurately describe the Changemakers residential, nevertheless there are enough constancies between the definitions above and Maria's experience on the residential to understand why she chose to use it, and made further consideration of the term in relation to arenas of participation potentially illuminating.

In going on the residential Maria has been removed (albeit voluntarily) from her usual surroundings, the unexpectedness of where she finds herself (in a 5-star hotel) means she feels out of place. She is also surrounded by adults who are using unfamiliar terminology centred on Changemakers' five values (authentic, brave, maverick, loving and savvy) and expressing ideas that are deviant in some ways from those she encountered in other spaces of her life. Implied later on in her interview, she is also unsettled by the presence of energetic, charismatic adult 'coaches' who are being deliberately positioned as 'role models' to assist her in her transitions to 'adulthood'. Although in light of other accounts from participants the negative use of the word 'cult' to describe Changemakers may be considered extreme and not a label I would attribute to this organisation, for Maria her choice of language is an understandable way to express an awareness that something out-of-the-ordinary

was happening within this space which she identified as (uncomfortably) trying to govern her future behaviour.

Further to this, Maria is connecting the word 'cult' to references associated with the 'hippie movement' of the 1960/1970s: abundant love, hugging and being 'at one' with nature/the world. Like the hippie movement (see Miller, 2012), enacting a participatory epistemology is being conceptualised here as something *countercultural* to its time. Maria's discomfort is a reminder that, despite the popularity of 'youth participation' within the UK, enacting the values of a participatory epistemology has not (yet) become normalised. Her comments also powerfully remind those working within arenas of participation that, despite best intentions, not all young people's experiences in these spaces are wholly positive. Maria was visibly disturbed when recalling her experiences at the residential; despite interweaving her narrative with elements of humour it was evident she had felt deeply uncomfortable with the dual expectation that she would happily disconnect from her 'everyday life' and 'connect' (emotionally through sharing her 'troubles' and physically through acts such as hugging) with other young people she had never met before. As the literature above indicated, dislocating young people from their everyday spaces is a potentially powerful tool which should not be undertaken lightly.

Returning more broadly to the decision of some youth organisations to situate their activities at a distance from young people's everyday lives, research indicates that this distance creates the *potential* for new ways of being to develop. Philo *et al.* (2005:786) explain in their study of mental health training spaces, that spaces at a distance from 'mainstream society' have the potential to be imaginatively reconfigured with 'new' social norms and discourses. These training spaces became for some an (unusual) 'haven of tolerance, understanding and even mutual respect' (Philo *et al.*, 2005:787). Places at a distance, such as youth camps, can become spaces to try out new identities (see Alexander, 2009b) or spaces where old rules no longer apply and coping mechanisms may no longer work (Bell, 2003). Some participants embraced this feeling of being 'out-of-place', threw themselves into

new experiences and, like Bannister's (2014:42) 'Girl Guides', they were willing to do different things from their usual, what she terms their 'off camp' selves. Recalling an incident on the Changemakers INSPIRE Residential, Kyle explains:

We did this thing called 'I've got the ball' and it started off with the host [...] she'd stand in the middle and say 'I've got the ball' and she'd do like a move and everyone else would have to follow her and then she'd pass it on to someone. But we'd just met everyone and had lunch and weren't comfortable but I can remember asking [staff member], who was standing next to me, and said 'are you going to do it?' he said 'well if it's thrown to me I kind of have to'. I kind of just saw that approach as very much he didn't care and for me then throughout the weekend that was the same for me.

Participants commented on the unusualness of interactions at the residential. It was (perhaps somewhat idealistically) described as 'a nice prejudice-free environment' and a space where 'there was nobody like huffing either, nobody kicking off, no like bad language'. The 'differentness' of these spaces at a distance from their everyday lives may therefore have encouraged an openness to try out new (potentially more participatory) ways of being. I contend, therefore, that arenas of participation not only *produce* "'unusual" social contexts', as Jones and SPEECH (2001) argue in relation to their work with women in southern India, but that unusual social contexts (such as taking young people from an urban environment away from technology and into nature) are *deliberately constructed* to facilitate and encourage new and potentially 'participatory' interactions.

The construction of arenas of participation intentionally produced at a distance from young people's everyday lives raises two further concerns. Firstly, that arenas of participation such as these become 'havens' (Philo *et al.*, 2005:787) or 'isolated islands of empowerment' (Kesby *et al.*, 2007:24) which are too separate from other aspects of young people's lives. The (at times radical) 'differentness' of arenas of participation may cause young people to struggle to transfer any new ways of being they have encountered there into the other spaces of their lives (Cushing, 1999; Kesby, 2007). This concern will be explored in Chapter 7 which discusses how knowledge and resources are transferred beyond these arenas of participation. Secondly, the differentness of these spaces masks that these are still *governed*

spaces. Like the examples given in health and citizenship studies, some arenas of participation are *deliberately* created at a distance from people's day-to-day lives. These are not spaces where young people can explore how to 'freely' be themselves at a distance from 'worldly distractions', but rather are where young people are being taught how to "'act out" their agency in ways imagined *by others*' (Bäcklund *et al.*, 2014:321 emphasis added). This concern will be explored further in relation to the practice of self-reflection.

#### **5.4.2 Self-reflection: a governed practice used to govern**

Reflection is an important element of a participatory epistemology; it facilitates essential thinking about social inequalities which enables them to be challenged rather than mindlessly reproduced (Freire, 1970b; Reason and Bradbury, 2006b; Percy-Smith, 2010). Distilling to the individual scale Kurt Lewin's iterative cycle of reflection and action, so often used within participatory initiatives (e.g. Cahill, 2007a), Changemakers' teaching materials present *self*-reflection as a necessary precursor to action. Staff explained that you must know yourself (and they added know your values) before you can lead others.

There were daily opportunities for self-reflection on the residential. As introduced in Chapter 4, building on a specific 'teaching' session about self-reflection, at the end of each day the changemakers were encouraged by their coaches to question:

How have you made progress towards your intentions today?

What have you noticed about yourself today?

How do you want to be tomorrow? (Changemakers, n.d.-b:8)

Connected with this practice of self-reflection is the formation of 'values'. Alongside an 'increase in overall confidence' and an 'increase in self-motivation', an 'increase in awareness of values' is listed as the primary outcome for the residential (Changemakers, n.d.-b:1). To recall, the explanation of this logic, set out more fully in Chapter 4, is explained in the Changemakers handbook:

When you are aligned with your values, that is, making decisions and actions with them in mind, your intentions are going to be right. When you are

acting with the right intentions, then you are going to get better, more positive results. We want to champion intentions that benefit the world that our changemakers live in. (Changemakers, n.d.-b:3)

The Changemakers organisation values are ‘authentic, brave, maverick, loving and savvy’. As discussed in Chapter 4 in relation to the language of direction, whilst these are introduced to the changemakers on day one of the residential, staff explained their purpose was not to prescribe values for the young people but to ‘give them some examples[...]by no means are we saying that coming they have to do these five values’. This emphasis on the Changemakers values being directive but not prescriptive was also made clear in the handbook which states ‘as an organisation it’s more important for us to support changemakers to see how their personal values are aligned with ours, rather than saying “ours are the only way”’ (Changemakers, n.d.-b:3). Despite this, awards were presented at the end of the programme to changemakers who had demonstrated one of these five values the most clearly.

Notwithstanding the claims and caveats made by staff above, the practice of self-reflection, and related practice of value formation, is a *governed* practice. By this I mean it is not a ‘neutral’ practice nor has it been developed ‘naturally’ by the young people themselves; it is a practice actively taught and encouraged, and through the presence of the handbook questions *structured*, by the Changemakers’ staff. Staff explained that they hoped the self-reflective questioning promoted in the ‘distraction free’ space of the residential will, through repetition in this space, become an engrained ‘way of being’ outside of the residential. They explained that this simple practice is designed as a way to ensure the changemakers keep going in the ‘right’ direction, which they describe as a direction that is ‘true’ to their ‘values’ and ‘intentions’. Drawing on Judith Butler’s 2003 lectures entitled ‘Giving an Account of Oneself’, Masschelein and Quaghebeur (2005:55) remind us that no practices of reflexivity happen in a vacuum but occur within the context of specific ‘regimes of truth’. They explain whilst these:

never fully constrains the subject’s subjectivation; [they] merely provide norms for the act of subjectivation, without producing the subject as their

necessary effect, albeit that the *subject is never free fully to disregard these norms*. (Masschelein and Quaghebeur, 2005:55, emphasis added)

Relating this to Changemakers, the set of ‘norms’ which cannot be fully disregarded by the young people include premises such as ‘values are useful and necessary’, ‘values should be directed towards benefiting “the world”’ and more broadly that ‘self-reflection is both desirable and even possible’ (a point articulately considered in Gallacher and Gallagher, 2008). It would be difficult for the young people to continue the Changemakers programme without submitting to these norms. Similarly (despite the comments made by staff above) being introduced to Changemakers’ five values *prior* to formulating their own values make it almost impossible for young people to fully disregard these. The structured nature of the practice of self-reflection (e.g. through the three ‘set’ questions) frame what kind of responses are expected/appropriate. This, therefore, closes down the possibilities for alternative responses and also potentially limits the possibilities for young people to explore other practices of self-reflection (see Henkel and Stirrat, 2001 for a similar critique of mapping practices within PRA). Therefore, whilst self-reflection and value formation are presented on the Changemakers programme as ‘participatory’ practices which lead to ‘freedom’ (the perceived ability to know yourself and therefore dictate your own actions/direction in life), to realise this ‘freedom’ means submitting yourself to these norms and associated acceptable identity.

Recalling that the practice of governance does not necessarily mean to ‘brainwash or indoctrinate’ (Smith, 2014:10) but can be used to describe practices that guide, it is therefore clear that the practice of self-reflection is both a governed practice and one which governs young people. The problem or tension occurs when the practice of self-reflection within arenas of participation is misrepresented as free from external interference/governance, as is the case in this example.

#### **5.4.3 Self-reflection: an individual and individualising practice?**

One facet of this argument deserving further analysis is the extent to which self-reflection is an individualising practice, which reinforces the neoliberal subject

(defined above as active, competent, *independent*, self-determining human beings) instead of an interdependent subject. To examine this, I explore the role of two other groups within Changemakers' self-reflection practices: the coaches and the cohort.

At Changemakers the practice of self-reflection leading to action is undertaken in conjunction with **coaches**. Young people (voluntarily) meet with adult coaches (Changemakers staff or ex-changemakers) who help facilitate this reflective practice. As introduced in Chapter 4, staff emphasised that coaches were not there to '*give* the answers' but that the coach's role was to:

help you find new ways of looking at things, and coping with challenges, all in line with what really makes you tick — your core values. And the way they do this is through listening to you, asking helpful questions, and bringing a great positive attitude. (Changemakers, n.d.-b)

Promoting the neoliberal characteristics listed above of being active and self-determining, coaches used mantras that encouraged the young people to be proactive in 'following their dreams' and setting their own paths. Coaches were positioned as both positive supporters and active listeners in this practice; however they were not designed to be co-producers who could freely share their experiences and advice, nor were they what Freire (1970c:61) describes as 'teacher-students' who both teach and *learn from* 'the marginalised'. The young people were constructed as 'experts in their own lives', a phrase often touted in connection with arenas of youth participation or participatory research involving children and young people (e.g. McGrath *et al.*, 2001; Burke, 2005; Clark and Statham, 2005). This construction has assisted in important (and much needed) work in recognising the capabilities and agency of children and young people within the 'new social studies of childhood' (see James *et al.*, 1998), however, it troublingly reinforces children and young people as independent (as opposed to interdependent) subjects. Gallacher and Gallagher (2008) address this claim through taking issue with the notion of 'expertise', arguing that full self-knowledge is an impossibility, whilst others critique this claim by emphasising that children are just one of many experts in their lives (e.g. Lancaster and Broadbent, 2003). This construction of 'marginalised' people (in

this case young people) as experts within arenas of participation is evident in much work on participation, particularly within International Development (e.g. Chambers, 1992; Chambers, 1997), however, it sits in tension with other (more radical, liberatory) readings of participation which emphasise continued learning and co-production (e.g. Pain, 2005; Gallacher and Gallagher, 2008). Setting the marginalised up as (individual) experts (admittedly often with ‘good’ intentions about ‘redistributing’ power) shifts the responsibility for change onto individuals whilst isolating them from others’ knowledge and experiences. Changemakers’ deliberate quietening of the coaches in the spaces of self-reflection is an example of how concerns within arenas of participation about listening to the voices of those who are marginalised and recognising that they are experts in their own lives have drifted away from foundational features of a participatory epistemology in which knowledge production is a collective, relational practice (e.g. Freire, 1970c).

The practice of self-reflection was focused on the individual, yet, particularly on the residential, it was being experienced within the wider context of **‘the cohort’**. As introduced in Chapter 4, a Changemakers ‘cohort’ is a deliberately chosen group of young people aged 16–25 from a variety of social backgrounds who attend the residential and subsequent ‘training days’ together. Staff were proud of this engineered ‘social mixing’, arguing it was the aspect of their work they most wanted to ‘shout about’ to funders.

Staff offered two distinct reasons for the creation of cohorts. Firstly, they believed encountering people who had had different experiences in life would influence young people’s self-reflections and subsequent actions through widening their horizons and raising their aspirations. In particular, staff hoped changemakers at the younger end of their age range would be inspired by older participants to, for example they said, travel abroad or go to university<sup>19</sup> (see Brown, 2012 for a discussion on how participation was used during the ‘Labour’ years in the UK to

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<sup>19</sup> Although it should be acknowledged that in subsequent interviews staff insisted they were not there to encourage people to attend university.



widen and raise young people's aspirations). This could be seen as one instance of young people being 'used' to govern other young people to act in ways favoured and imagined by adults, a strategy which will be considered in the following chapter. It can also be read as the clever 'alignment of individual aspiration and institutional direction' which Holdsworth and Brewis (2014:207) say in relation to student volunteering is the 'cornerstone of control'.

Secondly, staff hoped exposing young people to people who were 'different' to them (in terms of age, sexuality, religion and socio-economic background) would make them more accepting and tolerant of difference. Staff explained that their deliberate 'social mixing' was designed to:

challenge people's perceptions or their frame of reference if you like, because if you don't have young people in your circle who are this or that or the other you might have a certain perception about them so just putting them in that room and just having a conversation with them challenges people's beliefs and perceptions.

It was hoped that these encounters would influence the way young people thought about both themselves and others. Therefore, although other members of the cohorts were not always present within the spaces of self-reflection, through their advice/experiences as well as their 'differentness,' they could be described as deliberately positioned *silent presences* in this practice.

Complicating the question of whether self-reflection is an individual practice, on the residential there were both formal and informal opportunities for collective self-reflection. Some participants welcomed this more collaborative practice, benefiting from peer-to-peer support/advice and the chance to verbally process their reflections and desired actions. Others found this process very uncomfortable and at times confusingly juxtaposed next to group activities:

So you'd have an hour where everyone was sitting crying about how rubbish their life is and reflecting on it, but the next half an hour you'd be out doing like blindfold tasks and really exciting stuff and really adventurous stuff and I'm like 'oh yes let's do this' and then it'd go back to self-reflection[...] some of the activities were really good but then there were just these moments of really intense emotional situations. [Maria]

Although ultimately participants understood that the practices of self-reflection were about them as individuals:

It's about you, so it's not about the bigger picture and everyone else which is around you, it's, yes there is multiple people there but it's about giving the individual the time to think about what they want actually from life, what they aim to achieve by doing this. [Pranali]

These examples of other people's roles in the practice of self-reflection, coupled with the previous section's critique of its structured nature, have illustrated the complexity of analysing this practice within arenas of participation. Even when practiced alone, the silent presence of coaches and members of the cohorts mean that self-reflection is not solely an individual practice. The preoccupation (even during collective practices) with the individual and finding your 'direction in life', however, indicates it is an *individualising* practice — reinforcing the construction of young people within arenas of participation such as these as independent and self-determining subjects. When thinking about participation's intended 'power' to challenge social inequalities and bring about social change, this construction of young people as individuals is dangerous on two levels. Firstly, as Arnott (2008) argues, when an organisation's focus is on developmental and individual aspects of participation this can result in young people being only constructed (and therefore Arnott fears only respected in political spaces) as individuals rather than as a legitimate group with *collective* concerns. Secondly, if the focus is on them as individuals, young people themselves may not be/become aware of the (political) 'power' they could wield as a collective.

Supporting observations made in Masschelein and Quaghebeur (2005) and Raby (2014), these sections have shown firstly that some invited arenas of youth participation are governed spaces, which deliberately dislocate young people from their everyday lives as a tactic to assist in embedding their messages. And secondly that these spaces are sites which support and at times actively encourage the construction of young people into 'good' neoliberal subjects. One characteristic of the 'good' neoliberal subject is that they are autonomous and independent: they are self-sufficient and therefore not a burden on the state. Confusingly, despite

evidence that young people are not alone or acting independently (free from the influence of others) within these spaces, organisations such as Changemakers continue to promote and favour a construction of young people as independent as opposed to interdependent. These sections have shown how in particular this neoliberal obsession with independence is being fostered through practices such as self-reflection. Through this practice young people were encouraged to ‘find themselves’, however, the versions of themselves they were encouraged to find and/or aspire to were distinctly neoliberal: autonomous beings who were confident, independent and self-determining as well as knowledgeable and accepting of difference, with ‘middle class’ aspirations (e.g. travel, attend university).

### **5.5 The ‘Paradoxes of Governing’**

The arguments made in the sections above have, therefore, presented a case in which Changemakers could be labelled as one (amongst many) invited arenas of participation working with young people that could be said to be a tool within the ‘project’ of neoliberalism. Pykett’s (2010a; 2010b) reflections on governance and pedagogy in relationship to Citizenship Education within the UK help illuminate some of the nuances and tensions within this argument. She argues that practices promoting self-governance cannot simply be understood as monolithic projects of control since constructing (young) people to be ‘free’ ‘self-determining’ individuals ‘holds within it the conditions for its own challenge’ as they may not choose to use their ‘freedom’ to act in the desired ways — she calls this the ‘paradoxes of governing’ (Pykett, 2010a:623, 632). Similarly, rather than seeing practices of governance which encourage neoliberalism as an ‘assault on critical thinking’ (e.g. Connaughton *et al.*, 2016), Pykett suggests that (young) people may use their critical thinking skills encouraged and developed within practices such as self-reflection to reflect on and challenge the very institutions/structures which taught them (see also Staeheli *et al.*, 2013; Raby, 2014). This will be explored further in Chapter 7, which considers how skills such as these are (re)performed beyond the arenas of participation.

Through her consideration of Citizenship Education, Pykett (2010a) also problematises ‘analyses which seek to name a unified state agenda’. Neither neoliberalism nor participation should be understood as structured, cohesive projects of governance as they are undertaken within a range of spaces by diverse actors who often hold competing or even contradictory aims and values (see also Barnett *et al.*, 2008; Clifford and Tewdwr-Jones, 2013). Each of these actors may also manipulate and even resist any ‘message’ ‘from above’. Applying this to Changemakers, it becomes clear that although there is an ideal ‘type’ of young person being encouraged (and as conversations with several participants indicate, *produced*) through practices within this arena of participation, this is still open to manipulation and resistance. Participants were generally very uncritical about their experience at Changemakers (‘I wouldn’t really change anything’; ‘think experience-wise it was pretty much ideal’), nevertheless, they did not always fully immerse themselves in the practices they were being guided to do. Several disengaged with the collective ‘change’ projects<sup>20</sup> — explaining that they were frustrated working with cohort members. Maria, introduced above, did not participate in the ‘very open’ collective self-reflection sessions, simply saying she did not have anything to share. Similarly she explained her desire to return as a coach on a subsequent Changemakers cohort was not (as staff presumed) because she was passionate about the Changemakers philosophy, but rather because she was ‘really bored’ during the summer holidays so responded to an email request from the organisation which she admits at the time she had ‘forgotten about’.

The coaches at Changemakers provide a further example of the complexities of governance. Like teachers within Citizenship Education, the coaches ‘cannot be considered as either totally autonomous or merely automatons’ (Pykett, 2010a:628). They listened and were often guided by the instructions of staff and the

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<sup>20</sup> ‘Change’ projects were not run on all cohorts. Perhaps the most obviously ‘participatory’ element of the Changemakers programme, as outlined in Chapter 4, these were projects in which the cohort as a collective (with very limited support from staff) reflected on one aspect of their community (very broadly defined) that they felt needed changing and then devised a project to make this change.

handbook, however, as recalled by several participants who went on to become coaches themselves, they did not all always follow advice about being (merely) active listeners. For example, Holly explained that what she loved about being a coach was ‘trying to *advise* people and help people on different parts of their life’ — a stance not encouraged by staff who wanted their coaches to be active listeners. This deviation and distinction between staff members (or in this example coaches) echoes the observations made in Chapter 4 with regard to the contrasting actions and philosophies of staff at Scotswood Centre.

The depiction that Changemakers encourages/produces ‘good’ neoliberal subjects also needs further nuancing. The organisation (as represented by the views of its staff and those expressed within its materials) can be seen to be manipulating, and as will be discussed in Chapter 8 even eventually resisting, the ‘message’ ‘from above’ that programmes such as Changemakers should be (measurably) producing ‘good’ neoliberal subjects. Staff did not align their work alongside neoliberalism: one staff member declared (unprompted) in a focus group, ‘neoliberalism is the worst!’ whilst another lamented, ‘what kind of society do you want to live in when you have slightly more money and unhappier people? It doesn't work for me’. They saw themselves as an organisation that was radically challenging how success was defined in society, philosophising:

Measures are such prescribed on us about what is success: so having a full-time job is 'success', owning your own house is 'success', being educated to degree level is 'success'. But actually nowhere is that is it about are you doing a thing you love? Does it feel right? Can you get up in the morning because you feel excited about the day? [Staff member]

Staff wanted young people to be happy (as opposed to necessarily economically successful). They actively encouraged young people to leave employment which made them unhappy; this resulted in young people (including participants in this research) pursuing less economically stable, freelance careers. The pursuit of happiness might not initially appear to be an immediate concern of the neoliberal subject, and given the statements about success above may lead young people to ‘reject’ economic stability. However, the relationship between neoliberalism and

‘happiness’ is complicated. Lemke (2001:106 emphasis added) says that ‘the key feature of the neo-liberal rationality is the congruence it endeavours to achieve between a responsible and moral individual and an *economic-rational actor*’. Khoja-Moolji (2014:106 emphasis added) states that neoliberal citizens are expected to work for their own ‘*economic and social development*[...]making decisions that enhance their own *well-being*’. These comments indicate there is a role for happiness within neoliberalism, but perhaps only if it leads to economically rational decisions. Comments by staff further illustrate this complexity. Unwittingly connecting the discourse of happiness with being an ‘active’ subject (one of Masschelein and Quaghebeur’s (2005:61) characteristics of a ‘good’ neoliberal subject), one staff member said, ‘I think when you're happier you have more space in your life to get involved in different things as well’. This discussion therefore highlights the need for caution against overly simplistic arguments that neatly align participation as a tool to impose self-governance and foster the production of ‘good’ neoliberal subjects.

## 5.6 Conclusions: Individual Conscientisation

Central to this discussion on how arenas of participation become spaces used to govern young people into ‘good’ neoliberal subjects is the construction of young people as independent individuals. This final section considers how this construction aligns with a participatory epistemology which calls for social change.

Changemakers aimed to change the way young people as a collective were viewed in society, arguing that they deserve greater respect as effective and capable leaders. Following the concept of conscientisation as developed by Freire (1970c), Changemakers hoped that as young people became aware of the inequalities they faced within society they would go out and challenge them (either literally or by being examples of effective, capable young leaders). However, Changemakers added an extra step into this process, as one staff member explained, ‘if you want to make a change [within the world], *you need to start with yourself*’.

This prioritisation of self-reflection (and potentially self-*improvement*) led some participants to miss the point about Changemakers' wider aims concerning change for young people as a collective. Thinking back over the purpose of their time at Changemakers, some participants highlighted how it was 'about' them as individuals:

I just remember thinking that it was really like about *me*, about what I wanted to do [Lexi, her emphasis]

I think it was like Changemakers encouraging people to kind of get the best out of what you want to do with it, it's more like encouraging you to follow, it might sound a bit cheesy, but follow your dreams, like what their aspirations are, but it's finding out like, it's really like finding out who *you are* and encouraging you *not to forget it*. [Kyle – his emphasis]

Changemakers, it's more about yourself its more about what I am doing and how I want to go forwards with things and how I want to progress. [Pranali]

Others acknowledged Changemakers' wider message but appear to have misunderstood it. For example, Esther explained that Changemakers wanted to spread the message that 'we should listen to young people and kind of not discredit them', however she went on to say:

I think there is quite a negative image of young people and it's quite nice to be like well 'don't be surprised that I am a good young person, there is lots of good young people out there; you just see the bad ones before you see any of the good ones'. [Esther]

Although making an important point about young people and the media, Esther fails to challenge the way young people are portrayed *as a collective*, instead she differentiates herself as a 'good' young person, in opposition to other 'bad' young people. Similarly, Holly explains how she has to 'now see myself as not *just* a young person' and explains that the Changemakers experience has led her to 'think now to be "savvy" and sort of look for opportunities and not be sort of disheartened or put off *because I'm young*'. Through framing her age as something to be 'overcome', Holly, like Esther, is reinforcing rather than challenging (negative) constructions which position young people as 'less than' adults.

The type of conscientisation that *was* identifiable amongst participants was what I have termed ‘individual conscientisation’ — where an individual questions which inequalities are affecting them and how they are going to change them, without necessarily relating this to their position within a wider collective experiencing injustice. Comments from participants focused on overcoming *personal* injustices and proving they *personally* were ‘good young people’, or to use Pranali’s words, personally felt ‘empowered’. Kyle’s comments epitomise this individual conscientisation:

I am a lot more confident in standing up for what *I believe in* [...] I think it’s just to know despite who you are, *you can go and change something*. [Kyle, emphasis added]

Several participants seem to have the ‘blinkers’ on — primarily using their Changemakers experience as a platform for personal advancement; however, complicating the temptation to develop any binary between individual and collective conscientisation, a few participants showed glimmers of connecting their experiences at Changemakers to wider arguments about young people in society. For example, Pete understood ‘the main message Changemakers are trying to drive forward is that young people can and do need to be involved across a wide spectrum of different activities and decisions and events and opportunities in life’. Pete said his experience with Changemakers ‘made me realise what I was worth’, this realisation encouraged him to tell *other* young people what they are worth through both his job at a university and by developing (in conjunction with Changemakers) a series of TedX talks<sup>21</sup> which gave young people in the North East a platform to talk about issues that were important to them. Pete’s process of individual conscientisation led him to look beyond himself and think about young people as a collective.

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<sup>21</sup> TED stands for Technology, Entertainment, Design. A TedX talk is an independently organised event which their website says is ‘designed to help communities, organizations and individuals to spark conversation’. (see TED, 2016).



This chapter has explored how constructing young people as individuals within invited arenas of participation is a complicated process which has become a tool of governance to support the production of self-governing neoliberal subjects. The type of participation described through the example of Changemakers appears to have drifted from Freirian roots to become (despite their stated aims) primarily a project of self-improvement (albeit one that is open to manipulation and resistance). There were glimmers that 'up-scaling' this project of self-improvement to consider the wider positionality of young people in society was possible; nevertheless, participant narratives suggest this is a rarity and given the overwhelming 'noise' young people face about the importance of self-improvement this is perhaps unsurprising. However, does this mean that collective conscientisation is not realistic within invited arenas of participation or that the re-politicisation of 'participation' under neoliberalism should be passively accepted? The following chapter considers these questions, exploring what happens when the individual is not the primary focus in an invited arena of participation, when young people are invited to consider *together* how they are facing injustices as a collective, ultimately questioning what does (or could) a more radical, collectively-focused approach look like within an invited arena of participation.

## Chapter 6. Radical Participation? Dialogue, Co-production and Collective Conscientisation

### 6.1 Introduction

It is interesting how Freire's thinking has rarely been incorporated into how participation is currently practiced. Have we lost the radical agenda? (Percy-Smith, 2010:115)

The previous chapter illuminated the widely articulated fear that some arenas of participation have become spaces 're-politicised in the service of the conservative, neo-liberal agenda' (Alejandro Leal, 2007:544). Whilst highlighting some nuances and inconsistencies, it was argued that participation has drifted from its more radical (Freirean) roots outlined in Chapter 2. However, as has been acknowledged throughout this thesis, participation, as both a label and a concept, can and has been evoked in many different ways (see for example Farthing, 2012 who examines the multiple ways the term 'youth participation' is evoked). Its practices do not have to promote neoliberalism nor its associated individualism, but can (and as is argued in this thesis, should) be framed through discourses which connect back to participation's origins in more 'radical politics', promoting interdependence and collective concerns orientated towards issues of social justice (Kindon *et al.*, 2007a:2; Raby, 2014).

As introduced in Chapter 1, the term *radical* is used in this context to denote a type of participation that is committed to challenging, dismantling and transforming existing relations, systems and structures that promote and perpetuate marginalisation, exploitation and oppression. Often standing in opposition to systems such as capitalism and neoliberalism, actions driven by a radical participatory epistemology should both form part of this critique and offer alternatives to these systems of power (Chatterton *et al.*, 2007). As explained by Kindon *et al.* (2007c:13), this type of epistemology represents a radical challenge to scientific positivism through suggesting 'it is not enough to understand the world, but that one has to change it for the better' (see also Lykes, 2001a). This concern

with social transformation is central to advocates who understand participation (both its epistemology and its associated methods) as one way to instigate radical change. As explored and critiqued in the previous chapter, some of these advocates (e.g. Hickey and Mohan, 2005) argue that this concern with social transformation is missing from participatory initiatives rooted in neoliberalism.

One of the reasons some types of participation are labelled *radical* is that its proponents propose significant alterations to existing social interactions between those considered either more or less ‘powerful’ (Kesby *et al.*, 2007). Hickey and Mohan (2005:250) explain that radical participation is ‘a project that seeks to directly challenge existing power relations rather than simply work around them for more technically efficient service delivery’. This idea will be explored within this chapter as I consider relations between adults and young people within invited arenas of participation.

Building on the work of Alejandro Leal (2007), Kindon *et al.* (2007a) and Raby (2014), this chapter examines whether and how it is possible for youth participation to enact (and reclaim) its radical roots and reincorporate more collectively-orientated practices such as those articulated within the work of Paulo Freire. This chapter focuses on the extent to which this reclaiming is possible within an *invited* arena of participation. These are spaces that have not been created by those who are marginalised (e.g. young people). Young people have been invited into these spaces by others (e.g. adults) who are considered ‘more powerful’ which, as explained in Chapter 2, are those who have greater access to resources to influence the effects of power (Cornwall, 2004b; Cornwall, 2004a; Kesby, 2007). To illustrate these arguments I draw predominately on empirical research with Investing in Children, described by its director Liam Cairns as ‘the most radical children’s rights movement in the UK’ (Tallentire, 2013). Sitting alongside this claim is the fact that a substantial part of Investing in Children’s work is positioned with and within *adult-led* arenas of participation (through for example facilitating consultations, working with local councillors, conducting research projects and speaking at conferences), a tension

explored in this chapter. Examples will also be drawn from Changemakers and Scotswood Centre where appropriate.

This chapter begins by arguing that it is possible for arenas of participation to be spaces where the individual is recognised and respected but where practices are not individualising. By this I mean that, unlike the construction of young people explored in the previous chapter, within these spaces the individuality of young people is acknowledged yet they are primarily conceptualised as relational and interdependent beings. Next, the concept of dialogue is explored, emphasising that evoking a *radical* understanding of participation necessitates that practices of youth participation are more than ‘giving’ young people a voice — they must lead to a form of social transformation. The remainder of this chapter discusses the tensions and difficulties for organisations such as Investing in Children as they attempt to enact a radical participatory epistemology in practice. Explored first is the concept of co-production, considering the challenges of negotiating (and explaining) relations and relationships within invited arenas of youth participation. I then explore the concept that organisations can be ‘radical enough’, introduced in the conclusions of Chapter 4. This highlights the tensions, difficulties *and possibilities* experienced within invited arenas of participation, working within a climate of neoliberalism and austerity, which seek to radically change how young people are treated within UK society. Looking towards Chapter 7, this chapter concludes by demonstrating that despite these challenges, invited arenas of participation can still work as spaces which facilitate collective and potentially powerful moments of conscientisation.

## **6.2 Individuals but not Individualising**

As set out in Chapter 4, Investing in Children believe that young people as a whole group (or ‘collective’) within UK society are facing an injustice — their human rights are not adequately being recognised or respected. They do not, however, describe themselves as a ‘campaigning organisation’, instead they seek to change this culture through small to medium scale projects which bring young people and adults into dialogue, ideally creating new and enduring practices of participation and cooperation. Investing in Children works closely with small groups of young people

— making it necessary to briefly examine how they theorise young people as individuals within this collective.

Despite Investing in Children's concern with the injustices facing young people as a collective, an analysis of their literature (e.g. their newsletters, website content and academic articles) indicates that young people are also theorised as individuals, particularly as individual rights holders, who have an 'individual human right to be heard' (Cairns, 2006:230). As discussed in Chapter 4, this is connected to Investing in Children's favouring of a participative democracy model over a representative democracy model. Cairns (2006) argues forcefully that at Investing in Children young people are not representatives of other young people but participate in their own right (see also Cairns and Brannen, 2005). He emphasises that young people are 'knowledgeable about their lives and competent to take part in discussion about them' and that they must determine both 'what they want to say and how they want to say it' (Cairns, 2006:228). Part of Investing in Children's determination to theorise children and young people as individuals is a stand against generalised conceptualisations, such as those examined in Valentine (1996), where children and young people are portrayed as either angels or devils. As one staff member explains:

It's like totally, for me still one sided, children and young people are still, the state are carrying that view really negatively, or getting worse perception, certainly some specific groups within the children and young people kind of age range so it's kind of trying to break down that. Just seeing a *person* as a *person*. Not just seeing 'children and young people' as 'children and young people' just seeing them as *a person* in their own right really and not reflecting on their age.' [staff member's emphasis]

Grappling with the concept of age, this comment points to the theoretical complexities of seeing children and young people as a collective who are facing an injustice, yet also acknowledging their individual status as a person. It highlights the difficulty of acknowledging this individuality ('just seeing a person as a person') without diminishing their intersectionality (the relationship between parts of their identity such as their ethnicity, social status and their age) and the everyday lived reality they encounter due to their age (see Hopkins and Pain, 2007). Investing in Children staff hold these two views in tension — young people are both

marginalised (but not generalisable) collectives and unique individuals. This dual focus was articulated by participants such as Kate who understood that Investing in Children was there for both individuals *and* as part of a wider collective of children and young people in need of a voice:

[Investing in Children] treat young people as individuals and respect their opinions and most importantly listen and give children and young people a voice. I felt very empowered whilst working with Investing in Children. [Kate]

As evidenced through Figure 12, in Chapter 4, depicting the diagram about the effects of their work on young people produced by staff at Investing in Children as part of this project's focus group, staff had a clear understanding of the benefits their work has on individual young people. Similar to the young people at Changemakers highlighted in the previous chapter, young people undoubtedly gained valuable skills and experiences at Investing in Children and these led to significant moments of individual self-reflection and identity formation. Nevertheless, as the comments below illustrate there was a clear understanding amongst both young people and staff that this is not the *primary* purpose of their work, supporting Raby's (2014:85) observation that it is possible to have participatory processes that 'still produce individualised subjectivities, skills and self-knowledge but do not prioritise individual autonomy':

I think the impact Investing in Children has had on the facilitators was not the original intention [which was to make a difference on a wider scale] and so these effects are more astounding. It is more of a positive *by-product* of their working practises, which sets a great example for other young people orientated organisations. [Extract from email correspondence with participant Jaquinda, after reading dissemination report. emphasis added]

Although Investing in Children acknowledges that there may well be benefits to young people personally from participation and that there are benefits to society, politically etc. etc. our sole motivation is to ensure that young people are involved in decision making processes because they have a right to be. If there are additional unintended benefits that's great but that isn't why we do what we do. [Extract from email correspondence with a staff member before research began]

It is clear Investing in Children value young people as individuals (particularly as rights holders), however the way they envisage bringing about a recognition of

these rights is not *individualising*. Unlike the approach to participation outlined in Chapter 5, participation is not being used to ‘produce’ individuals who ‘act in and of one’s interests’ ‘as a free individual — that is, an autonomous, self-reliant, self-reflective, self-responsible individual, who invests in participation as a way to invest in herself and to (trans)form herself’ (Masschelein and Quaghebeur, 2005:56,60). Any ‘transformation’ that does occur is a (welcome) ‘by-product’ but not the primary focus. Instead participation is seen as a mechanism to effectively enable individual young people to relationally ‘*take part in* a discussion about them’ (Cairns, 2006:228 emphasis added). This is encouraged through the concept of *dialogue*, examined below, that conceptualises people as interdependent rather than independent, and that Investing in Children believe if adopted as a way of working with small groups and individual young people will eventually radically change the way children and young people are treated *as a collective* in UK society.

### **6.3 Dialogue: More Than Voice? Being ‘Truly Heard’**

Investing in Children staff identified dialogue (leading to change) as one of the cornerstones of their participatory epistemology. As explained by Williamson (2003:7) in his evaluation of Investing in Children’s working practices, at Investing in Children dialogue is understood as a multi-directional process in which groups of people listen ‘carefully’ to each other and learn from each other as they work towards some element of change or social transformation. He explains dialogue is ‘reflexive’ in that it helps people think about issues in systematic ways whilst also changing ‘everyone’s perceptions of what these problems are and, at least in principle, [it] opens up new ways of dealing with them that might not have come to view’ (Williamson, 2003:8). During a focus group, staff described dialogue as ‘a two-way conversation, equal on either side’ between both themselves and young people, but also between young people and other adults (such as those involved in service provision). The staff agreed with Williamson that dialogue was productively unpredictable as it ‘opens up all sorts of things you can’t control’ which can lead to new and exciting ways of thinking and acting. They acknowledged that the downside of this unpredictability was that dialogue is dependent on ‘other people’ which left

some staff frustrated when ‘other adults’ did not engage with dialogue: ‘they see it still as a kind of consultation, a one-way process, they just want to get the views of children. They're not really interested in having a discussion.’

Highlighting the centrality of dialogue at Investing in Children, Figure 13 outlines some of the key features of Investing in Children’s approach to working with children and young people, as identified by one of their directors Liam Cairns.

- **Start with a clean sheet.** One of the ways in which adults exert their power is by managing the agenda. We have found that starting from a blank sheet, and then addressing the agenda created by children and young people themselves, is the most successful strategy.
- **Dialogue, not consultation.** We quickly learned that consultation is seen as an avid, barren process, and that young people want to be, and are capable of, involvement in the dialogue.
- **It takes time and resources.** If the dialogue is going to be equitable, we need to allow the young people the same opportunity to prepare that adults take for granted.
- **A genuine prospect of change.** Participation in the political process needs to be seen as a means to an end, not an end in itself.
- **Change ‘where I live my life’.** Any change must be tangible. We need to spend more time listening to children and young people telling us about what matters to them, and responding to this.
- **Avoid adult-generated structures.** We have concerns about initiatives in which the mechanisms through which young people might participate politically are designed and managed by adults. Youth parliaments, school councils, youth forums — often they have the effect of channelling debate into safe areas. With Investing in Children we attempt to provide support and resources, whilst the young people themselves choose **how** they wish to engage in the dialogue.

*Extract from Cairns (2002:5-6)*

**Figure 13 Investing in Children’s Approach to Working with Children and Young People**

Staff reiterated throughout this research that ‘genuine’ participation required dialogue, as opposed to ‘consultation’ (see Percy-Smith, 2010 for a critique of consultation within participation). Participants such as Jaquinda also understood this distinction:



The dialogue must first happen for effective change to work, and that dialogue must NOT just be listened to, but truly heard. AND finally this dialogue must have some sort of an impact, whether it results in actual change (which is the aim, although it isn't always possible) or just simple feedback and progression of dialogue. [Jaquinda, interviewed via email, emphasis in original]

In explaining that dialogue is more than being 'listened to' but is being 'truly heard', Jaquinda reinforces an understanding of dialogue as an active, interdependent, relational process — dependant on others as together they work towards change (see Cahill, 2007c in which the process of being 'heard' is also theorised as being therapeutic). One participant, Tim, reiterated this:

It [Investing in Children] was about what you were interested in, about what you were passionate about, what you wanted to change. They were always really big on that element of it, it's not just enough to say well we've had some meeting with young people, 'what's the change? what's the outcome?' was always the jargon which was used which I thought was really important. [Tim]

Participants spoke of this change being slow at times, Josh reflected realistically that 'not everything that you worked with actually came true or that like young people wanted happened, but some of it did and that's kind of better than nothing'.

Dialogue goes beyond the popular (and arguably problematic) practices associated with youth participation of 'giving' children and young people 'a voice' or ensuring they 'have a say'. As youth participation has become more institutionalised, these phrases have become almost synonymous with a call for 'increased participation', resulting in concepts of voice receiving academic attention from both within Geography (see Kraftl, 2013 for an acknowledgement of these and those trying to move 'beyond' voice) and more broadly within the social sciences (e.g. Hill, 2006; Fielding, 2007; Taylor and Robinson, 2009). This thesis is not primarily concerned with critiquing this concept of voice as this has been done widely and effectively elsewhere (Matthews and Limb, 2003; e.g. Bragg, 2007; Lundy, 2007; Philo, 2011; see also Mills, 2017 who moves these discussions in a new direction by considering sonic geographies). Indeed several of these critiques could equally be applied to the concept of dialogue as, like Fitzgerald *et al.* (2009:301) remind us, it would be:

both idealistic and naive to approach dialogue as if it were devoid of power, or to assume that deeply embedded practices of power and authority can be readily untangled from the ways we listen to, interpret and act upon what children have to say.

It is, however, important to briefly differentiate between the two. The concept of voice is entwined with Article 12 in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (see Lundy, 2007) and the associated (and at times unhelpful) conception of children and young people as *individual* rights holders (see Bae, 2006 who argues that rights should be understood relationally). The theorisation of children and young people who have a right and responsibility to exercise their unique, individual voices has been criticised for being individualising, promoting independence rather than interdependence, which scholars such as Bragg (2007) identify as part of the neoliberal agenda discussed in Chapter 5. Steeped in paternalism, the phrase '*giving* children and young people a voice', has also at times been presented as 'an end in itself' resulting in allegations of tokenism (see Matthews, 2001a; Weller, 2003 for examples of young people's frustrations when this happens). This leads to youth participation being described as a 'tick-box' exercise (see Deuchar, 2009; Sher *et al.*, 2009; Wyness, 2009). In contrast, as argued in Figure 13 and Freire (1970c), dialogue should never be an end in itself. The concept of dialogue attempts to simultaneously respect individuality yet position it within the context of interdependence. Freire (1970c:69-70) explains the pointlessness of speaking in isolation (what he calls saying 'a true word alone'), of having a voice for having a voice's sake. He understands dialogue as a necessarily relational and active process:

And since dialogue is the encounter in which the united reflection and action of dialoguers are addressed to the world which is to be transformed and humanized, this dialogue cannot be reduced to the act of one person's 'depositing' ideas in another nor can it become a simple exchange of ideas to be 'consumed' by the discussants.

Like Jaquinda and Tim (and Cairns, 2002), Freire is arguing that it is not enough to have a voice or exchange ideas but that these ideas must (collectively) go somewhere and do something, they must be 'truly heard' and acted upon. Arenas of participation can, and should, ensure what they are doing goes beyond voice (and

certainly beyond consultation) and that dialogue leads to action and social transformation. The remainder of this chapter discusses the tensions and difficulties for organisations such as Investing in Children as they attempt to put this into practice, concentrating first on the concept of co-production.

#### **6.4 Co-production: Negotiating Relationships, Transforming Relations?**

Co-production was introduced in Chapter 2 as one of the foundational beliefs associated with a participatory epistemology. Like participation, co-production is a term that has been used in multiple ways. Tisdall (2013) explains that the word originates from concerns about service delivery and public management (see Bovaird, 2007; Bovaird and Loeffler, 2012). In these circles, like participation, it has often been evoked in the service of capitalism and neoliberalism. Through promoting 'equal and reciprocal' relationships between 'professionals, people using their services, their families and their neighbours' co-production is seen as a tool to improve services (or research) (Boyle and Harris, 2009:11). Co-production, however, can also be evoked alongside a more radical participatory agenda and the call for social transformation. The enactment of *equal* and *reciprocal* relationships between two structurally unequal sections of society, (e.g. men and women or children and adults) could have potentially radical consequences for relations between these two groups.<sup>22</sup>

Co-production, as evoked in this latter context, is not simply the *existence* of equal and reciprocal relationships (although as explained below these are important within co-production), it is an active process through which knowledge is co-produced as each person adopts a position of learning and becoming (for an excellent example of co-production in practice see Cahill, 2007a). Discussed later on in this chapter, when coupled with a radical participatory epistemology co-production is not about the redistribution of power, a phrase critiqued throughout

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<sup>22</sup> Within this thesis the word *relationship* denotes the interpersonal relationship between two people, whilst *relations* is used to discuss the broader, structural positioning between two groups within society such as adults and children/young people.

this thesis, but is concerned with taking into account the needs of *all* parties (Stuttaford and Coe, 2007). The work of Freire (1970a); (1970c) shows that there is space within the concept of co-production for differing levels of experience or expertise but that an attitude of learning is essential. As introduced in Chapter 2, critiquing ‘banking’ theorisations of education, Freire (1970c:61) explains ‘through dialogue, the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: “teacher-students with student-teachers”’. In contrast to the connection explored in the previous chapter between self-reflection and self-improvement, Freire (1970c:61 emphasis added) stresses that ‘no one teaches another, nor is anyone *self*-taught, people teach each other’. Both students and teachers become critical learners, learning from each other so much so that ‘the roles of educator and learner become almost interchangeable’ (Mayo, 1999:65). Mayo’s use of the word ‘almost’ and Freire’s continued use of the term teacher are significant: co-production does not overlook or dismiss greater levels of experience held in certain situations by particular people, but rather positions all people as co-producers of knowledge whose contribution is valued *as they are* — meaning each person’s experiences and situated knowledge are seen as important and necessary.

Co-production is a deeply relational process. Firstly, as suggested above, its enactment could result in radical restructuring of *relations* between groups in society (such as adults and children) which are currently not interacting in equal and reciprocal ways. Secondly, as a process it is dependent on individual *relationships* — such as those between adult staff and individual young people within arenas of participation. Relationships based on a radical participatory epistemology which values co-production are potentially radically different from those people in the UK (and beyond, see Jones and SPEECH, 2001) encounter in most spaces of their lives. The unusual or radical nature of co-production has led to studies reflecting on how these relationships work in practice, particularly in the context of participatory research (e.g. Mohan, 1999; Cahill, 2007a; Castleden *et al.*, 2012; Leeuw *et al.*, 2012). Early work within the arena of youth participation has tended to focus one-dimensionally on the experiences of children and young people in these spaces (Hill

*et al.*, 2006). The presence of studies such as Mannion (2007), Wyness (2009) and Jupp Kina (2012), however, indicate there is an (albeit slow) shift towards recognising the importance of relationships, such as those between adult staff and young people in these spaces, and more broadly, for this to structurally impact relations between the two groups. Mannion (2007:409) argues that ‘altered child-adult relations’ is one of the key (and he argues most often ignored) outcomes for any participatory initiative (see also Steele, 2005).

Building on this work, the following sections examine how relations between adults and young people, as well as specific interpersonal relationships, within arenas of participation are understood and negotiated. Considered first is how adult-child relations<sup>23</sup> are enacted by staff and experienced and interpreted by young people at Investing in Children. This section begins by listening to the reflections of participants on these relations, before questioning the extent to which some of the practices at Investing in Children constitute co-production, as defined above. It concludes by examining the language used by young people to describe the way they interact with adult staff within these spaces. Following on from this, empirical material is drawn from all three organisations involved in this research to consider how relationships are negotiated between young people within these spaces, particularly in relation to how some young people take on positions of responsibility over others. The findings from these sections are finally brought together with a discussion about the implications of using the phrase ‘mini-adults’ to describe some young people within these invited arenas of participation.

#### **6.4.1 Staff and young people: relationships and relations**

Interpersonal relationships between staff and young people featured heavily in participants’ narratives. All participants spoke positively of these relationships — with several recalling how they felt valued, respected, included and trusted by staff at Investing in Children. One participant commented that working alongside staff

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<sup>23</sup> Akin to its use in Mannion and I’anson (2004), the term ‘adult-child relations’ is used as shorthand to refer to the relations between adults, and children *and young people*, as two categories in society.

‘just made you feel smart! Made you feel capable, trusted [...] I am valued, my work's important’. These sentiments were identified by several participants as being very different from how they felt in other spaces of their lives:

I just felt like we weren't, um, like even if it was they needed us it was like we were important, like our opinions counted because we were the *best* people to see that sort of thing, and it's not usually how you're treated when you're homeless and alcoholic and any other things. [Jade, her emphasis]

‘[Staff member] really inspired me, the way he approached things. The attitude that he had was just so different from any adult in a position of authority I'd ever met [...] I was just kind of in awe of him really, but I could see he did practical stuff as well [...] he just trusted you to get on and organise things and treated you with a respect that I didn't see from school teachers [or] many of the police.’ [Tim, his emphasis]

When asked to think more broadly about relations between staff and young people as a whole at Investing in Children several participants emphasised the large part young people played in the work of the organisation, framing staff in a ‘supportive’ role:

The way I experienced was that the young people identified the issues, developed the project and seek the outcomes with the support of Investing in Children. [Jenn]

The culture was very much about putting young people in charge. We always led the events we ran, we decided how to spend our budgets and what we should do next. The workers were obviously supportive in this. [Rosa]

Two participants gave particularly vivid examples of this approach: Vanessa recalled how she, along with another young person, was asked to co-author a book chapter with one of the Investing in Children directors. Questioned on how that process worked, she explained:

We did our own bit ourselves, [staff member] didn't really have much involvement, he just explained what it was about, the topic, because we were talking about what topic we wanted to write about because we'd done so many projects [...] we decided we'd write about [names project] and then he just sort of sat back. He wrote the ‘add in’ bits to make it like a bit more academic, and obviously we wouldn't have had a clue how to make it more academic. We wrote our bit and then he sort of did the beginning and then tied together, to link it all in. [Vanessa]

When asked about what she thought about this way of working she explained:

It shows that they trust you I guess, putting a lot of faith into you, definitely. Because we were supporting Investing in Children so for them just to sit back and let us get on with it could have had a either positive or negative effect on our organisation. Like they put their trust in us and it went to plan luckily!  
[Vanessa]

Kerry described a similar way of working when asked to give a speech at a large conference. She recalls that she wasn't asked to read the speech to any staff member beforehand:

They don't sit you down and say 'you must say this, you must say that'. It's what you want to say, is what you will say. And to me that's really important as well, it shows that they're from the heart rather than the other youth organisations. [Kerry]

These examples illustrate that relations (as well as specific relationships) between staff and young people at Investing in Children are built on high levels of trust and respect given to young people at Investing in Children, but do they constitute dialogue or co-production? As explained above, co-production is closely connected with a theorisation of knowledge as constructed and situated (as opposed to pre-existing and waiting to be 'found' — see Sanderson and Kindon (2004)). Co-production is seen as a productive way to work towards social transformation as each person contributes their own situated knowledge, their unique skills and insights, to collectively bring about change. Vanessa's description of developing a book chapter indicates that in some of the practices at Investing in Children this model of co-production is evident: the staff member wrote the parts to 'make it more academic' which Vanessa says she 'didn't have a clue about' but she was able to write about her experiences without their input.

In other practices this is less evident. As hinted at through the descriptions from participants above, staff often deliberately distanced themselves from the young people, eager to give them responsibility and the space to lead. This distancing is most evident through practices of working such as their 'Agenda Days', which, as introduced in Chapter 4, are deemed to be 'adult-free' spaces. The idea of an 'adult-

free space' contradicts the notion of *co-production* as the experiences and insights of staff are removed from the space. Rather than promoting equal and reciprocal relationships between adults and young people (which potentially would lead to a restructuring of relations between these groups), adults have been removed from this space. Investing in Children's approach starkly contrasts that of Cahill (2007a) on the Fed Up Honeys project. Both the work of Investing in Children and the Fed Up Honeys project could be defined as participatory projects with both taking place in 'invited' arenas of participation. Cahill invited young women to develop a project with her, however, she did not exclude herself from the process. Instead she saw herself as a co-producer (she uses the term co-collaborator), present in discussions and free to express her opinions. Reflecting on the difficulties of this, Cahill admits she did monitor and, where necessary, modify her behaviour in these spaces. She was careful not to dominate debates and sought to clarify that when she disagreed she was doing so from her own opinion not as a voice of authority. Nevertheless, unlike staff at Investing in Children, she remained an active and present co-producer of knowledge within this space.

Investing in Children's decision to distance adults from Agenda Days appears to be at odds with their notions of dialogue and co-production and their stated desire for improved relations between adults and young people. This decision may be a reaction against pre-existing conceptualisations of youth participation. Drawing upon unhelpful understandings of power as a commodity, discussed in Chapter 2, the elimination of adults may be seen as part of an attempt to 'redistribute' or 'reduce' adult power and therefore empower young people (see Gallagher, 2008). It may also be part of a reaction to fears that arenas of youth participation, particularly *invited* arenas such as Investing in Children, can be tokenistic spaces which are still dominated by adults. This fear appeared to govern the focus group activity with staff (described in Chapter 3) which used Lardner's (2001) 'clarity model of participation' to assist in discussions around the extent to which activities at Investing in Children were adult or young person initiated. Staff longed for their work to be young person initiated (what they considered the 'ideal' place to be as an arena of youth



participation) but as one staff member lamented, ‘things get drawn back there [towards being adult initiated]’. This diagramming activity is revisited later in this chapter. These concerns about power and tokenism have, therefore, resulted in some staff members becoming so ‘distanced’ from young people that some of their practices, such as Agenda Days, cannot be labelled dialogue or co-production.

#### **6.4.2 Staff and young people: describing co-production — friends? employees? equals?**

The process of co-production, where present, is dependent upon relationships. Participants described their relationships with staff using a variety of terms. Several conflated ideas about being ‘supported’ by staff (often but not always from a distance) with notions about ‘working together’ and ‘being a team’. Some participants described staff as ‘friends’. This term was used to describe their relationship during their time with Investing in Children but, as will be analysed in the following chapter, for some these friendships were still significant several years later. As described above by Tim who was ‘in awe’ of one staff member, these relationships filled with trust, responsibility and respect were very different from those with other adults in their lives (e.g. teachers, police, parents). Given this, and the amount of time some participants spent at Investing in Children (‘I was there every night’; ‘all I really stuck to was Investing in Children’; ‘it was probably something I did more than anything else I did in my spare time’), it is perhaps unsurprising that young people described staff members as friends. During dissemination sessions and informal conversations, however, some staff were uncomfortable with this terminology, preferring to be described as ‘colleagues’, potentially due to societal fears that these ‘friendships’ might be labelled inappropriate. This type of concern is echoed in literature about relationships between youth workers and young people, with some finding ‘friendship’ a useful concept to describe these relationships (e.g. Walker and Larson, 2006; Blacker, 2010) whilst others arguing that youth workers should be ‘friendly’ without becoming friends (Sapin, 2013:69).

Jade used the language of the workplace to describe her relationship with staff:

There wasn't a single person there who wasn't nice, like actually not a single person. Even if they weren't like 'friendly, friendly' it was just that you were treated with a lot of respect. You were never treated with any sort of 'young person' sort of anything, you were working, that was it [...] There was also no like 'stay away from me and talk to me professionally'. You're a person. You weren't treated like, like a youth worker would treat you like at an arms distance. I don't mean in an inappropriate sense, you'd be there and you'd be talked to like a person they'd interact you like another, almost as if I was naive at the time but I felt like I was another employee [...] There was no like mollycoddling [...] you didn't feel like they were negotiating anything, they were just negotiating a work place. [Jade]

Jade, who during her time at Investing in Children was living in a hostel, uses this language to try to make sense of this new relationship in comparison to her relationships with other adults in her life (e.g. youth workers, staff at her hostel, teachers). This language of the workplace is natural given that Investing in Children pay young people for their time spent on projects<sup>24</sup> (the ethics and practicalities of which are discussed in Kirby, 2004; Alderson and Morrow, 2011). Now 24, 5 years after her involvement with Investing in Children ended, Jade reflects that it is almost 'naive' to think that she was another employee, yet she feels this is the best language available to her to describe this sense of being respected and being 'talked to like a person' by an adult.

Jade's comment about not being treated 'like a youth worker would treat you' indicates that it is insufficient to theorise these relationships in the same way as a relationship between a youth worker and young person. Although there are many overlaps between youth work and participation (see discussions throughout Hart, 2016), unlike a youth worker relationship which typically *predominately* aims to 'develop' or 'improve' young people (e.g. Young, 2006; Sapin, 2013), as presented in Chapter 4, within arenas of participation such as Investing in Children the focus of the relationship between staff and young people is on working *together* as co-producers on issues of social justice.

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<sup>24</sup> During the timeframe of the participants' involvement covered by this research (2002-2012), this was typically £5 per hour.

Neither the language of friendship nor of colleagues (nor youth work) adequately describes these relationships, working at times towards processes of co-production, between staff and young people at Investing in Children. Echoing the description by Boyle and Harris (2009:11) of co-production being centred on 'equal and reciprocal relationships', staff favoured a description of young people as their 'equals'. Introduced briefly in Chapter 4, equality was highlighted as a central concept at Investing in Children by staff in a focus group (see Figure 14).



**Figure 14 Focus Group Exercise 1 Investing in Children**

Questions of equality are historically entangled with questions of participation and particularly of human rights. Fitzgerald *et al.* (2009) describe participation as a struggle over recognition and argue that the claim for (legal and political) participation of children and young people, particularly in the 1960s and 1970s, was centred on a claim for equality. This entanglement between participation and

equality is developed by staff at Investing in Children: as noted earlier one described dialogue as ‘a two-way conversation, *equal* on either side’ whilst another explained one of Investing in Children’s main aims is ‘about challenging the status quo in terms of equality’. Discourses about equality were perpetuated at Investing in Children, particularly in relation to young people’s human rights. A review of the organisation’s literature and conversations with staff revealed that they believed young people should have an equal (if not greater) say in matters that affect them, such as service provision, than adults. One participant identified staff at Investing in Children’s commitment to equality in their ways of interacting with young people:

The staff were always on a ground level, you never felt as though, you know, they were better than you. [Kerry]

This attitude of equality is essential for the process of co-production, yet as the previous discussion has shown, some practices at Investing in Children do not fully constitute co-production all the time. They also do not reflect equal relations between adults and young people all the time. As Jade’s comments about her ‘naivety’ implies she is aware, young people are not fully equal to staff at Investing in Children. Basic disparities are evident in terms of employment rights and levels of pay. As will be discussed later on in this chapter when analysing the practical challenges of being a ‘radical’, invited, institutionalised arena of participation, disparities are also evident within decision making. These two sections have, therefore, demonstrated the difficulties and tensions of putting the idealism of co-production into practice. As shown within Chapters 4 and 5, it is difficult for organisations to *consistently* apply their desire to follow a participatory epistemology, which demands radical social transformation, in all their practices and interactions.

### **6.4.3 Young people and young people**

Alongside highlighting the messiness of enacting co-production, the previous section illuminated the struggle over language within invited arenas of youth participation. Before commenting on the implications of this, it is useful to examine how arenas of participation are also spaces where relationships between young people are

negotiated. These relationships are an important element in the process of co-production.

Some participants formed friendships with other young people they met and 'worked with' at Investing in Children; they encountered young people who were from different geographical regions or as one participant said from 'completely different backgrounds' to them. Participants interacted with young people they predicted they would not have met within other spaces of their lives. Interestingly, unlike research into other 'extra curricula' or 'organised' activities (see special issue edited by Fredricks and Simpkins, 2013), friendships between young people did not emerge as a dominant theme within this research. Participants spoke at greater lengths about their relationships with the staff. Where 'friendships' did endure beyond their time at Investing in Children, these were typically with either staff members or young people with whom they were already friends before they both became involved with the organisation. This section, therefore, moves beyond friendship and examines how relationships between young people as 'workmates' (as one participant, Mike, described them) were negotiated within arenas of participation — relating this notion back to the concept of co-production.

#### **6.4.4 Young people and young people: (un)equal participation?**

As argued above, participation, and particularly co-production, are based on notions of equality, yet enacting this (idealistic) theory in practice is challenging. Therefore, before examining relationships between young people using examples from all three organisations involved in this research, it is important to recognise that participation (meaning in this case 'involvement') with these organisations is not experienced equally by all the young people they come into contact with.

This inequality in participation is fuelled by the misconception that to restructure adult-child relations, adults can and should 'hand over' power to children and young people (e.g. Morrow and Richards, 1996; Chambers, 1997; Matthews, 2001b). As discussed previously, to varying degrees the organisations involved in this research have sought to do this but in seeking to 'increase' young people's 'power', a middle

ground has opened up between adults and young people, potentially creating a new 'tier' of governance within these spaces, dominated by some young people. But which young people are involved in this new 'tier' of governance? How do young people become involved in positions of responsibility at these organisations? Are all young people able to participate equally at these organisations? These questions of access, which are considered in both practice-based (e.g. Kelleher *et al.*, 2014) and academic inquiries into youth participation (e.g. Couch and Francis, 2006 who are concerned about the marginalised voices of young refugees and Nairn, Sligo *et al.*, 2006 who identify young people in the 'excluded middle'), are vitally important, particularly if arenas of youth participation wish to avoid simply reproducing existing power structures and want to radically restructure adult-child relations.

Through the periods of observant participation and the examination of organisation literature outlined in Chapter 3, unequal levels of participation were identified at each of the organisations. These practices were introduced in Chapter 4 but are presented here in greater detail.

At Changemakers young people applied and were selected to participate in the Changemakers Experience Programme. These young people were deliberately selected to be from a wide age range (16–25) and from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds. They each were subjectively identified by the selectors (ex-changemakers) as having the potential to display the Changemakers values (authentic, loving, brave, maverick and savvy). Those selected went onto facilitate the involvement of other young people through their placement organisation's participatory projects.

Activities run through the Scotswood Centre were open to all young people from their local area. Within these some young people became 'young volunteers', taking on greater responsibility for leading the activities. These volunteers typically were young people who showed interest and commitment to the activities; staff actively encouraged these seemingly more committed young people to become young volunteers.

At Investing in Children some young people also took on positions of responsibility. These included teaching other young people about their human rights and/or facilitating sessions such as Agenda Days to generate information from other young people. To become a facilitator, young people had to have previously attended an Agenda Day 'as a young person'. They were then encouraged by staff to undertake this role. It is not clear from accounts in this research how staff decided which young people they actively encouraged. Tim makes reference to some young people being 'chosen or interested in, a bit of both I suppose' to become involved with projects that thought about challenging rights injustices on what he calls a more 'strategic level'. This echoes the gradual process described by staff in Chapter 4 whereby young people were not asked at first "'do you want to help us develop our three-year strategic leisure plan?'", it'd be [first] about something that was really important to them.' Tim describes this movement of young people into more strategic levels of involvement as the creation of 'almost a second tier of children and young people'.

These descriptions importantly provide the context for the following section which analyses the practicalities of how this new tier of governance is enacted and negotiated. They also indicate that organisations such as these need to carefully consider which young people can firstly access their organisation and secondly move into a position of responsibility within it.

#### **6.4.5 Young people and young people: negotiating a new 'tier' of governance**

Enacting and negotiating this new 'tier' of governance was both practically and conceptually difficult. This is seen clearest through another look at Investing in Children's practice of Agenda Days. Participants at Investing in Children who had been involved in running Agenda Days were eager to emphasise that adults were not involved in these spaces, explaining that it was 'young people leading young people'. It was evident through focus groups and interviews that both staff and young people were proud of this — identifying Agenda Days as one of their best practice examples of youth participation. Troublingly this again indicates a

conceptual confusion that participation is primarily about the ‘redistribution’ of power rather than co-production.

Mike, a participant, described how an Agenda Day was organised:

As far as I can remember [staff member] would phone you or you would be in the office and he would say ‘well there is a project going in Renton, I don’t know if you know the area but the Council has just given them £10,000 and they want to know what young people think where the funds should go’, so say me, John and Simon [other young people], we would go into the office, we’d find out like any details, everything we need to know and then we’d go like into a room or to a table and draw out the questions that we want to ask the young people, which were often similar to ones that we had done before, but I don’t know where we got the first set of questions to replicate, and then we’d take them to [staff member] and say this is what we think, we then ask them, and he would just say ‘alright’.

Reflecting on the culture at Investing in Children, Mike explains how he behaved whilst leading an Agenda Day:

It’s just relaxed, really informal but still you know that you tell them what needs to be told and that’s something like ‘that the information will go *somewhere*, that you are not being judged’, which was the way that you had to behave as like a facilitator at the meetings as a young person talking to the young people, it’s the way that they [staff] taught you how to behave, but it was definitely the best way. [his emphasis]

In acknowledging that he should behave in a certain way as the facilitator, Mike is aware of and reinforcing a distance between himself and the other young people participating in the Agenda Day. Although these are ‘adult-free’ spaces, they do not look vastly different from how they might if an adult was facilitating the session. Mike has adopted the position of leadership ‘usually’ occupied by an adult in these spaces, performing the role of facilitator in the way that he was ‘taught’ by staff. His comments show he mimics actions he has seen performed by staff (e.g. reassure young people they are not being judged and that their contribution will be used), whilst he bases the session he is leading on questions potentially devised originally by staff members (‘I don’t know where we got the first set of questions to replicate’). Reminiscent of the subtle involvement in the structuring of young people’s periods of *self*-reflections at Changemakers, discussed in Chapter 5, it is



evident that although Agenda Days are physically ‘adult-free’ spaces, the *silent presence* of the adult staff is still detectable. This echoes comments made by Buckingham (2000:96) in relation to the effects of the media on the lives of children that ‘if children have their own culture, it is a culture which adults have almost entirely created for them — and indeed sold *to* them’. This concern is also raised by Mannion (2007:409) who, as reviewed in Chapter 2, critiques the concept of ‘children’s spaces’ and of children creating their ‘own’ spaces, as this ‘misleads us to think that the context for children’s participation is not (invariably?) mediated by adults and mainstream culture in some way’ (see also Mannion, 2010). This example therefore indicates it is misleading to call Agenda Days (or any spaces (mis)labelled ‘children’s spaces’ of participation) ‘adult-free’: they are intergenerational spaces where relationships between adults and young people are being negotiated.

This example has also shown that it is important to critically analyse the workings of all forms of participatory facilitation to avoid misrepresenting facilitation, particularly *insider* facilitation, and associated ‘consensus-building’ as a ‘power-free’ practice (Kothari, 2001:146). Dissolving any false binary between these two organisations, Investing in Children, like Changemakers in the previous chapter, is a space where questions of power and governance are performed and negotiated. These observations have also further complicated the arguments made above about co-production — is physical presence a requirement of co-production? The difficulty here arises in the fact that the silent presence of adults in these spaces is not *acknowledged*, they are hiding their role as co-producers of knowledge in these spaces.

As introduced in Chapter 4, this ‘second tier of children and young people’ is also evident in practices at Scotswood Centre. Staff said they aimed to ‘empower young people to make decisions themselves’ and then act on them. The conversation below between two participants, however, illustrates that it was predominately young volunteers who took on this role, with the young people who were not ascribed the label of ‘volunteer’ (described tellingly by Winnie as ‘normal young people’) primarily being passive recipients in these participatory practices:

Nia: Like volunteering you work alongside young people, whereas if you're a young person you just come along to do different things and go on trips but when you're a volunteer you have to actually work for it. And it's like not as easy as it seems. You get loads, you meet loads of different people so it's quite good that way and you get to be a part of loads of different activities and help with the planning as well so it isn't just based around what youth workers want to do, but the young people have a total say as well so that's quite good

Winnie: Being a volunteer like, you're taking on that role; you're taking on a role rather than being a young person you're taking on a role of being a volunteer. Instead of being like a normal young person you're actually helping out and you're actually like, what's the word?

Nia: Rather than just like getting someone else to do it for you

Participants at each organisation recall the challenges of negotiating these positions of responsibility with both other young people and adults. At Investing in Children Kerry recalled occupying the difficult position of mediator between autistic young people and their parents, whilst Jaquinda, distancing herself from other young people at the organisation, reflected that: 'what young people ask for can't always be achieved so sometimes I had to come up with ideas on the spot which would act as a middle point'. At Changemakers Maria had difficulties negotiating her position with both young people and adults. During her placement with the council she had to lead a team of five other young people on a project about young people's involvement in after-school activities:

Maria: It was my project, I think they [council staff] were expecting to give me a lot more support than what I thought, coz I thought it was like 'there's your project go off and do it' and then they'd be like 'oh right so what *we're* doing' but 'we'd already done it, sorry!'[....]

We had like a day at the beach, a day at the town, and obviously there had to be someone there to supervise the other young people but there wasn't [...] I wasn't like 'you are the kids, I'm going to tell you what to do' [...] but the day we came back from the beach we decided to go back to the office to like summarise our findings and one of the support, like the youth workers [...] she's been with us on the beach and she

was like 'right what are we going to do?' and they just sort of completely rebelled against her and were like '[sigh noise] we're not listening to her, you're not in charge'. So even after she left they were like 'no we're not doing anything like' they were proper huffy about it and I was like 'oh my God!' but that was like the only day.

Naomi: So it got resolved?

Maria: No like they locked me out and everything! They were like 'we're not listening to her, you can come back in as long as she's not there!'

Jade had a similar experience at Investing in Children where she struggled to facilitate a group of young people during a focus group:

Ok I was 16 and it was very difficult at first right? I was there and I was like talking to them and I was like being kind of pally and they started like kicking the ball up to the ceiling and I was like 'can you stop?' They kept doing it and I was like [makes a face] and it was just like, they wouldn't stop! Eventually they had broken a bit and I just had to like impulsively say 'look I'm not going to get paid if you smash the ceiling! I get paid for this'. And they just stopped. [Jade]

At Scotswood Centre Nia's actions as a 'young volunteer' caused other young people to question her role:

When I first volunteered I was working with people my age, I don't think some of them realised I was a volunteer [...] they said 'and why's she allowed to go in the kitchen? And why's she allowed to do that?' They go 'she's a volunteer?' But they'd go 'but she doesn't have any training', but actually I do! [Nia]

The negotiations highlighted in these three examples demonstrate the precariousness of occupying this 'middle ground' or new 'tier' of governance and performing a role that is perhaps atypical or against the norm of adult-child relations or relations between young people within the UK. Both Jade and Nia legitimised their actions with reference to what could be understood as typically adult markers of authority: having specialist training and being paid to complete a task. Reiterating questions about the role of adults in arenas of youth participation, Maria's example of her conversation with her placement supervisor also points to the reluctance on the part of some adults to fully release control to a young person (see also Wyness,

2009) and as such again highlights the negotiations, tensions and difficulties of enacting a radical participatory epistemology.

Although this section has focused on how relationships between young people (particularly regarding questions about facilitation/leadership) are negotiated within arenas of participation, this section has also shown how these relationships are not separate from their relationships with adult staff or from broader questions about relations between adults and young people. Two points uncovered within this section need further discussion.

Firstly, there is a need for practitioners within arenas of participation to *continuously* reflect on questions about accessibility. Evidenced in the details of how young people at each organisation acquire positions of responsibility and emphasised in the conversation above between Nia and Winnie about Scotswood Centre, an arena of participation may only be 'participatory' for *some* young people; these young people may be co-producers of knowledge within these spaces whilst others may be cast as passive recipients. These organisations stressed that they were not encouraging the 'usual suspects' of youth participation into positions of responsibility (Jupp, 2007:2840), but this is not enough: they are still encouraging and prioritising *some* young people over others. These practices require careful examination as although not all (young) people may want to undertake a position of responsibility within an arena of participation, it is important that they are able to, and that a new elite is not created under the guise of 'participation' (Cooke and Kothari, 2001b).

Secondly, this section has suggested that some young people within these arenas of participation could be identified as trying to act like 'mini-adults', mimicking the actions of adults as they lead other young people. Practices which distance adults away from young people may unintentionally contribute to the maintenance (as opposed to the radical restructuring) of these power structures and relations between adults and young people, as some young people are positioned as (potentially very similar) replacements to adults within these spaces. This term

'mini-adults' is critiqued by advocates of youth participation (e.g. Lansdown, 2001) for unhelpfully reinforcing this binary between children and adults; it also sits uneasily within a participatory epistemology where each person's knowledge is understood to be valued *as they are*, regardless of age (Gibson-Graham, 2000). Bringing together these two empirical sections, the following section considers this claim.

#### **6.4.6 Mini-adults? An inadequate language?**

Together these sections have shown the difficulties for young people and staff of both describing and enacting relationships based on a radical participatory epistemology within an invited arena of participation. The lack of an accessible, adequate language to articulate these unusual adult-child relations, and their manifestations in specific relationships, led young people at each organisation to explain the way they and staff acted in familiar linear age-related terms such as references to im/maturity:

It made us grow up a lot. People are always commenting that I'm more mature than what my age is. [Kerry, Investing in Children]

Investing in Children allowed me to act mature (potentially, yes, well ahead of my time). [Jaquinda, Investing in Children, interviewed via email]

I think they [staff] just get their mind set to a young person's level and just act like a young person. I can't really explain it, they can be quite immature at times but that's a good thing coz it interacts with the young people better. [Vanessa, Investing in Children]

Even though they [staff] are all adults they still like, I don't know, *it's probably something wrong* but they still kind are like children, and I really like that because I think when you become an adult there is a lot more formalities and everyone being really rigid and stiff and I don't know whether it's because of the age range of the people that work here but they are all really just like playful, so you don't have that fear of like oh well someone is really uptight and strict about something you kind of just feel at ease, so everyone gives off natural relaxed vibes that you don't feel uptight about anything. [Pranali, Changemakers, emphasis added]

I think they [staff] treat you like adults, which is quite nice. [Esther, Changemakers]

Winnie: They [staff] act like us sometimes as well [...] Yeah like [names staff member], she'd act like a kid didn't she?

Nia: [Agrees] They're so lively and energetic!

[Nia and Winnie, Scotswood Centre]

These conversations highlight four points of interest for those seeking to spread and normalise participatory 'ways of being'/actions based on a radical participatory epistemology.

Firstly, that these young people did not usually associate adjectives like 'playful', 'relaxed', 'energetic' and 'lively' with adults they encountered in other spaces of their lives — they had no choice but to resort to using terms such as 'childlike' to describe what they were witnessing. Enacting adult-child relations in participatory ways together is, therefore, still a radical occurrence and despite the popularity of 'youth participation' within the UK it has not (yet) become normalised.

Secondly, connected to this, being given responsibility and being taken seriously (being listened to, having their opinions lead to actions) was not something these young people were used to in other spaces of their lives — therefore they interpreted their actions through a lens of im/maturity, associating these things with adulthood. They saw themselves as 'mini-adults' because they had no other model to 'measure' their behaviour against, and could not *envisage* a radical restructuring of adult-child relations that allowed them to act in this way and still fully embrace the label 'young person'.

Thirdly, interpreting the behaviour of adult staff in this way sat uncomfortably with some young people — Vanessa seemed flustered/struggled for words when she was talking about this and commented she 'can't really explain it', whilst Pranali doubted her interpretation of the Changemakers staff 'as being still like children'. The young people were looking for a new (or at least more adequate) language to describe these relations that participatory discourses have yet to provide.

Finally, whilst language is important, it is not everything. This chapter has slowly demonstrated that due to a lack of alternative descriptions it is justifiable to say

young people within these arenas of participation are acting like ‘mini-adults’. They are invited into these spaces by adults and observe and replicate their ways of being. Therefore, the potentially more significant question for practitioners within invited arenas of youth participation to consider is: who are young people learning from? Young people, *like all people*, learn from others how to act in different spaces (see Cogan and Derricott, 2014). They learn how to act as leaders, facilitators, teachers, mediators. They learn how to include and exclude, how to show respect and how to listen. If they are being ‘governed’ (guided) into becoming ‘mini-adults’, the key question is which adults are they emulating? To what extent are the styles of ‘leadership’ they are encountering, learning and putting into practice within arenas of participation reflecting the values of a radical participatory epistemology? Therefore, whilst the label ‘mini-adult’ is a wholly unhelpful term, the sentiment behind it does not have to be understood as a negative; instead it may signify that young people are learning from and emulating adults who embody a radical participatory epistemology.

## 6.5 Radical Enough?

When taking into consideration the radical nature of the participatory proposal for social transformation and the neo-liberal structural-adjustment context in which it has been co-opted, the incompatibility between the two might seem far too deep-seated to permit such a co-optation to take place. (Alejandro Leal, 2007:541)

The previous chapter highlighted how easy it is for ‘participatory’ organisations to be co-opted into the ‘project’ of neoliberalism, in many ways confirming fears about the institutionalisation and de-radicalisation of participation. However, there were also glimmers that this story was more complex, with some instances of young people beginning to think collectively about the injustices they and others faced. Articulated in the conclusion of Chapter 5, this has led to the following questions which have underwritten these pair of chapters:

How do you enact a participatory epistemology that is ‘true’ to participation’s radical roots in a society built on neoliberalism? How can adult-initiated ‘invited’ arenas of participation be spaces which challenge the position of young people in

society without being paternalistic? How can arenas of (youth) participation be *radical enough* to enact change within the culture and spaces they operate in?

Using Investing in Children as a case study, this section grapples with these more directly, highlighting the difficulties and possibilities for arenas of participation which seek to engage with the ‘radical nature of the participatory proposal for social transformation’ within the context of neoliberalism (Alejandro Leal, 2007:541).

#### **6.5.1 Tensions and difficulties: ‘adults hold all the power’**

Since its foundation, Investing in Children was aware that as a ‘radical’ organisation, set up to ‘achieve significant political change’ as they fought against a culture that they believe does not respect the human rights of children and young people, they would face difficulties (Director Liam Cairns quoted in Williamson, 2003:12).

‘Believing in something no one else did’ and facing what Cairns described as a ‘sceptical audience’, Investing in Children sought to ‘demonstrate the gains to be made from involving young people’ (Williamson, 2003:12). Despite being described as a ‘radical’ organisation, as introduced in Chapter 4, the way Investing in Children primarily sought to do this was through engaging with existing adult-led arenas of participation (through, for example, facilitating consultations, working with local councillors, conducting research projects and speaking at conferences), rather than campaigning for or creating new arenas or methods of youth participation.

Therefore, and as Williamson (2003:24) recounts in his evaluation, ‘contrary to staff hopes’, the majority of Investing in Children projects could be said to be initiated by adults.<sup>25</sup>

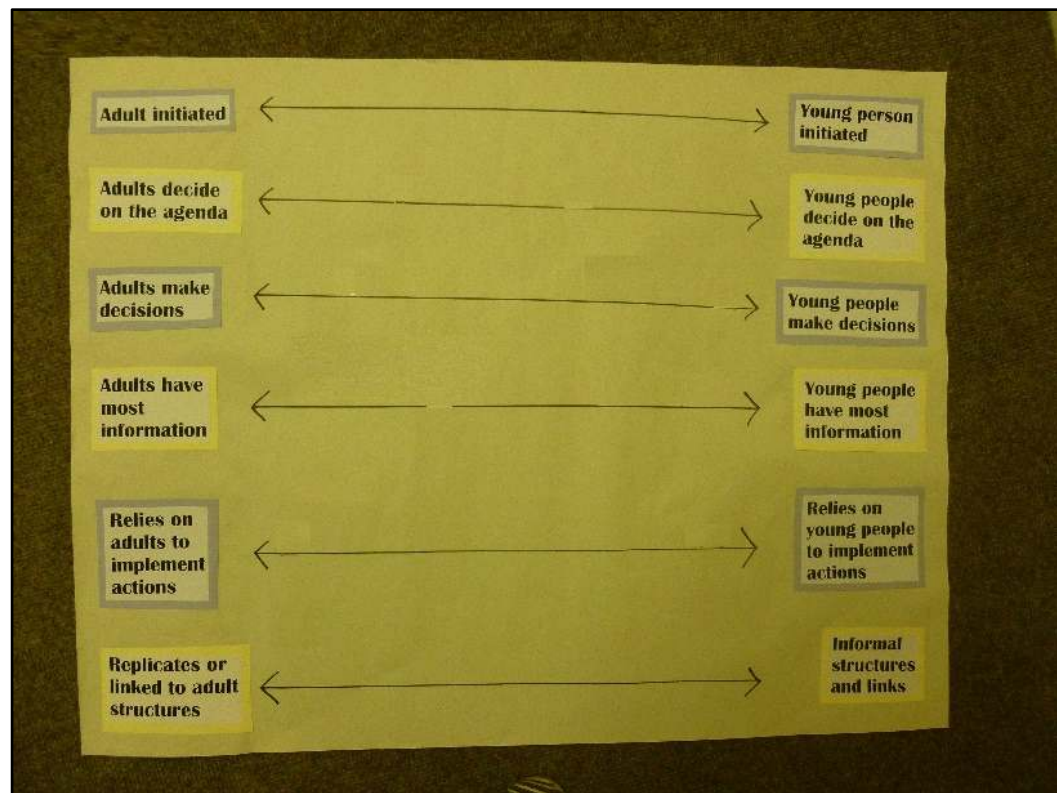
These fears were still present a decade later. They were articulated within the focus group with staff that was conducted for this research. Staff longed for their projects and the organisation as a whole to be more young-person initiated/led but as one staff member commented they needed to work with and within ‘adult’ structures as ‘that’s the way the world works!’ This tension between their hopes and the reality

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<sup>25</sup> Williamson’s (2003) found that 83% of the projects run by Investing in Children were initiated by adults.



was starkly highlighted as staff refused to put any markers on the focus group activity based on Lardner's (2001) 'clarity model of participation' introduced above (Figure 15).



**Figure 15 Focus Group Exercise 3 Investing in Children**

In this focus group staff reflected on the difficulties of trying to be a 'radical children's rights organisation' (Tallentire, 2013) within these adult structures:

Young people decide on the agenda but then the ultimate decision just goes back to the adults because they're the one who makes the decision about the funding. [Staff 2]

Adults hold all the power, and that's still despite the fact we've been doing this for 17 years. The reality is, the thing about 'relies on adults to implement actions' [referring to diagram: see Figure 15], well of course it does because they decide on the budgets, they decide on the service provision. So young people can create the agenda, come up with ideas about how to change things, improvements, but it will always rest on the adults. [Staff 1]

I think as much as we'd like your group to be 'informal structures and links' [referring to diagram: see Figure 15], actually because of the way council's set up and because of the way the County Plan is, actually it has to feed into those adult structures so as much as you can have informal stuff happening

in the meetings, at some point we go to the Children's Executive Board and we have to fit into those structures otherwise we'd never get any of the actions implemented. [Staff 3]

Because unless you become a campaigning organisation and you become a, you know, much more sort of um, confrontational organisation you'd *have* to fit into the adult structures. [Staff 1, her emphasis]

These difficulties were also referred to in some of the interviews with the young adults, for example:

It's difficult, the challenges that they [Investing in Children] face is *huge* because not all organisations agree, not all organisations want to make the change. And I think particularly within sort of the county council in particular when we were doing [Investing in Children's membership programme] and things, there was probably a pressure that they *had* to do [award] the membership rather than wanted to do the memberships and therefore, wouldn't necessarily see change at the end of it. [Kerry, her emphasis]

Three considerations arise from these comments which highlight the tensions and difficulties of trying to enact a participatory epistemology that is 'true' to participation's radical roots in a society built on neoliberalism. Firstly, they highlight the significant constraints on arenas of youth participation in the UK, such as Investing in Children, due to questions of 'funding'. Introduced in Chapter 4, all three organisations involved in this research had to grapple with the challenge of securing funders and decide the extent to which they were willing to compromise their more radical agendas to do so. At Investing in Children, the nature of these constraints shifted during the period of research. Up until 2013 Investing in Children was formally connected to Durham County Council — using their buildings and relying on council funding. Following this, Investing in Children became a Co-operative Community Interest Company, which gave them more freedom over the direction of their work but increased pressure to seek alternative funding sources. One pressure that was apparent at each organisation was that as none of them were entirely youth-led, they were all reliant on staff. Pressures of staff salaries, particularly in the 'current climate' both of 'austerity' and more broadly 'neoliberalisation' (Horton, 2016:350), have meant difficult negotiations as arenas of

participation seek to balance and align where possible their desires with those of funders (see Benson, 2014).

Secondly, the comments indicate that some staff perceive themselves to be 'realists' to the extent that they can't envisage other ways to implement the changes they want to make ('we have to fit into those structures otherwise we'd never get any of the actions implemented', 'it will always rest on the adults'). This fatalistic attitude is dangerous as restricting the style and nature of young people's participation (and even the imagining of alternative possibilities) limits the likelihood that alternative, potentially more effective, ways for advancing Investing in Children's agenda may be utilised (Kallio and Häkli, 2011b; Bäcklund *et al.*, 2014). Arenas of participation seeking to radically transform the way society interacts with young people need to constantly reflect on the extent to which they are challenging and changing the system and not simply reinforcing (and thereby legitimising) existing, inadequate spaces for youth participation. They need to be careful, as Cornwall (2004a:2) drawing on her typology of 'invited spaces' warns, not to be facades which appear radical but in fact mask and reinforce existing hierarchies of power:

The arenas with which we're concerned may appear as innovations, but are often fashioned out of existing forms through a process of institutional bricolage, using whatever is at hand and re-inscribing existing relationships, hierarchies and rules of the game.

Thirdly, these comments point to an 'othering' by staff as they align themselves with young people against the 'adults' who lead the service providers wanting to 'participate' (often this meant consult) with Investing in Children's young people or adult members of the local council. This process of othering, introduced in Chapter 4, is interesting as although to a certain extent it breaks down barriers between young people and staff as they are united around a 'common adversary' ('other' adults), it also potentially unhelpfully restricts possibilities for effective dialogue and co-production and the radical restructuring of adult-child relations. For example, mentalities such as 'adults hold all the power' unhelpfully perpetuate a distance between adults and young people and restrict the productive workings of dialogue. As Freire (1970c:71) explains:

How can I dialogue if I always project ignorance onto others and never perceive my own? How can I dialogue if I consider myself as a case apart from others — mere ‘its’ in whom I cannot recognise the ‘I’s? How can I dialogue if I consider myself a member of the in-group of ‘pure’ men, the owners of truth and knowledge, for whom all non-members are ‘these people’ or ‘the great unwashed’?

### **6.5.2 Possibilities: the ‘enemy within’**

New ways in old spaces can transform their possibilities, just as old ways in new spaces can perpetuate the status quo. (Cornwall, 2002:7).

It is widely acknowledged that there is the potential for participation to be tokenistic and for young people to feel disempowered within spaces that are, or ‘mimic’ (see Matthews and Limb, 2003:185), arenas of participation traditionally designed for adults (see for example Kallio and Häkli, 2011a for a detailed critique of the Finnish Children's Parliament working alongside adult parliamentary structures). As discussed in Chapter 2 and acknowledged above by Cornwall (2004a), there is a danger that arenas of participation such as these can legitimise existing power structures and power inequalities between adults and young people as young people appear to be given a sense of control, yet ‘controls are inevitably kept on the work/young people by the adult advisors, structures and funding’ (Shukra *et al.*, 2012:42). Shukra *et al.* (2012:42) explain that ‘whilst these tend to be motivated by a concern to be supportive, empowering and concerned for the safety of participants, there is always the potential for restrictions to feel controlling and disempowering’ (Shukra *et al.*, 2012:42).

It is important for arenas of youth participation to be mindful of these concerns and the difficult realities outlined above, however, what Shukra *et al.* (2012) fail to acknowledge is that within these spaces there is always the possibility for effects of power other than ‘power as domination’ to be enacted (Kesby, 2007). ‘Invited’, traditionally adult-led arenas of participation, such as those that young people at Investing in Children engage with, are (like I would argue *all* spaces) ‘always already permeated with the power effects of difference’ (Cornwall, 2004b:83) but these power effects are not simplistic or static. Staff at Investing in Children were acutely aware of this:

Staff 1: Where they're [projects] adult initiated, the adults set the agenda and the young people try to change that.

Staff 2: Change the direction of the thing [...] I think there are times when the adults have set the work off but then what happens to it does become dictated by what young people want. So the [names project], you've had certain things [...] the adults want to know the answers to but then the particular directions that you've gone off in have been entirely dictated by the young people so I think it fluctuates.

It was evident that young people may manipulate, reconfigure or resist the power effects operating within these spaces. This finding resonated with research conducted by Freeman *et al.* (2003:67) who found during their analysis of young people's participation in local government in New Zealand, that some young people consciously manipulated the system around them 'for their own ends' such as to advance their own (future) political careers (Williams, 2004a also writes of manipulation and resistance within arenas of participation). This potential is highlighted by Tim who recalls how when in these adult-initiated spaces of participation young people did not always participate in the ways they envisaged:

There was always a great debate 'oh teenage pregnancy is the big issue' but whenever you asked young people that I met it was like number twenty on the list. It was the one thing all the adults wanted to talk about at the time but the children were like 'actually I'm more interested in buses, libraries, schools.'

Building on this argument, more than understanding that young people who 'regretfully' find themselves in these spaces may manipulate or resist the practices of participation being enacted within them, young people's presence within these spaces can be *desirable*. Disturbing the unhelpful (and as argued in Chapter 2, misinterpreted) binary between invited and popular spaces whereby popular spaces are set up to be the 'gold standard' of 'good' and 'authentic' participation (Cornwall, 2004b; Kesby, 2007), the recollections of participants below illustrate that the

intentional presence of young people within arenas of participation that are traditionally adult-led creates a powerful opportunity to surprise, disrupt, unsettle and *potentially transform* these spaces:

I think one of the most important changes that we saw was actually attitudes in members of the local council [...] at the time the council was very made up of mostly kind of older men who were somewhat, not all, but some of who were kind of detached from understanding what young people in the community actually needed in order to be able to fully participate and it was great because on several occasions we went to county hall, we had meetings with these people where we kind of sat around and expressed our thoughts and points of view on things and um, I think that that was one of the biggest successes of the projects in a way, that it was a little bit attitude changing. [Jenn]

I do very much feel there's something really significant about young people speaking at conferences that are to do with the policy that are for young people and so forth, that's quite powerful [...] we did a conference in Durham and there was this young man who, who in many ways was kind of from a demographic that you might consider was completely susceptible to discrimination, although I don't really feel like those are the right words to say but basically he was about 13, 14 years old, he was a black young man, he was a young person and he was from I think quite a deprived background so in lots of ways he was the kind of example of someone who might quite classically be discriminated about. And I remember this quite feisty woman in the audience who was some policy maker from somewhere else in the country, because it was a country wide conference, who really kind of stood up and had a bit of a shout about something that she didn't agree with and this young man kind of responded to what she was saying and gave a very kind of eloquent, short speech about, about what he'd been doing and so forth and I did kind of remember the rest of the audience erupting in applause for what he was saying against, and what she was saying was in many ways the ethos of Investing in Children although I can't specifically remember what it was now, and I did feel like it was one of those moments where it's like a whole bunch of people in the room realising with everyone else the value of that young person and everyone else's voices. [Jenn]

I've led conferences [...] it's quite good coz normally like adults would look down on children, young people and think that they don't really do much apart from hang about on the streets and things, really like there is young people out there who do want to do something with their lives and make a bit of an impact so it's quite nice when they look at you and think 'wow you've done a lot!' [Vanessa]

Tim explains how during his time at Investing in Children in the early 2000s they were described as ‘the enemy within’ as they were part of the county council and paid by the county council yet were a group of ‘radicals’ challenging the status quo in these spaces. He recalls:

It really felt like we were doing something quite radical and also we were having an impact, we weren't just kind of radicals who were rallying against something that would never change. We did have kind of an 'in' somehow you know. It was good. [Tim]

Similarly, Jaquinda reflects that:

Whilst [names another national youth participation organisation] is a brilliant organisation, within Durham it doesn't have a lot of power (mainly due to the fact it's unsupported by the council) but anyhow. Investing in Children DOES have the power/influence to make changes based on this consultation and dialogue process, and from the pov [point of view] of a young person this in fact, makes all the difference. [Jaquinda, interviewed via email, emphasis in original]

It is clear from these comments that ‘unsettling’ these traditionally adult-led arenas of participation *at times* led to powerful changes — both in terms of immediate practical actions and slower changes of attitudes. More than opportunities for manipulation or resistance these comments have also shown that young people saw Investing in Children’s, and therefore their own, legitimised and council-supported presence within these spaces (what Tim terms as having an ‘in’) as positive and highly desirable. These are not ‘second choice’ arenas or methods of participation. They are spaces which (despite ongoing tensions) are negotiating a way to be *radical enough*, positioning themselves as the legitimised, uncomfortable, questioning and highly effective ‘enemy within’ the system, slowly yet positively transforming attitudes and actions within these spaces from the inside out.

## 6.6 Conclusions: Collective Conscientisation

The previous chapter finished by asking an important question: given the focus within a neoliberal society on the individual, does this mean that collective conscientisation is not realistic within invited arenas of participation or that the re-politicisation of ‘participation’ under neoliberalism should be passively accepted? Responding to these questions, I argue that despite the tensions and difficulties of

enacting a more radical, collectively-focused approach within an invited, institutionalised arena of participation, it is possible. Through collective practices which promoted, to varying degrees, processes of dialogue and co-production, participants at Investing in Children began to think as a collective, questioning: what inequalities are affecting *us*? How are *we* going to change them? Tim and Jenn reflected on this process of collective conscientisation:

Probably as a young person I was quite dismissive of what other young people were entitled to. I did pretty well at school and I thought I guess my view was that that earned me the right to respect and that kind of stuff, being involved I think made me think again about actually 'these guys in my class who maybe I don't like, maybe I don't get on with, but do they have to be well behaved and bright to *earn* this or do they have rights as people? [Tim, his emphasis]

I think that when I was working with Investing in Children one of the things that I really got an understanding of was how important it is for young people to kind of champion young people and say you know 'this young person however little knowledge they have and whatever their background and so forth has an opinion and it's an opinion, everyone has a right to be heard' [...] I think I even have a very strong sense how it is important for young people to have a voice and be listened to and not to be kind of dismissed as a lesser opinion. [Jenn]

Unlike several of the participants at Changemakers discussed in the previous chapter, participants who had been involved at Investing in Children appeared to have a stronger sense that a collective injustice was being committed against young people. Analysis of this awareness will be developed in the following chapter as some participants, now they are no longer 'young people' but in their twenties and thirties, begin to question: who is my new collective? Where am I currently experiencing injustice in other spaces of my life?

Despite these hope-filled observations, like the chapter before, this chapter has shown that it is unhelpful (and almost impossible) to separate arenas of participation into a binary between those that promote neoliberal governance and those that attempt to connect with participation's more collectively-orientated, radical roots. Issues of funding, legitimacy, practicalities and the emergence of new tiers of governance muddy any such distinctions. Continuing this thesis' theme of



unsettling binaries, this chapter has also reinvigorated debates about the associated divide between 'invited' and 'popular' spaces. Interrogating the work of Cornwall (2002); (2004b), amongst others, this chapter has recast 'invited spaces' as potentially *desirable* spaces for (slowly) bringing about effective social transformation.

This chapter, centred on the case study of Investing in Children, has also explored the theme of co-production and its effect on relations and relationships. Investing in Children is certainly identifiable as one of Raby's (2014:86) 'thoughtful initiatives' that attempt to promote 'collective concerns, diversity and challenge inequalities', however, as critiques of their Agenda Days show, Investing in Children has not merely been held up as an example of best practice. Rather it has been used as a case study to explore the challenges of applying a participatory epistemology in practice. This became particularly apparent when analysing how relations (and specific relationships) were both enacted and explained between staff and young people. Both staff and young people struggled to articulate these 'unusual' relations, at times falling back on unhelpful discourses about age im/maturity. One hope, therefore, is that building out from this research a new language will be proposed or reappropriated to address this inadequacy. This could be informed by/more fully embrace Freire's theorisations of teacher-students, student-teachers. This tension has also shown that despite the popularity of 'participation' within the UK, there is much work to be done before 'equal' relations between adults and young people, built on respect and interdependence become normalised.

The concept of co-production, as applied to a radical participatory epistemology, has been explicitly shown in this chapter to be complicated. With the notable exception of Cahill (2007a), literature concerning co-production often leaves the process ill-defined as the actual mechanics of it are left unexplained. Building on observations in Chapter 5, in this chapter I have proposed the notion of *silent presences*. I contend that reflecting upon and naming these will promote greater transparency within arenas of participation.

The complicity of co-production has been made particularly evident through an analysis of arenas of *youth* participation. It has been argued that the workings of co-production in practice cannot be divorced from deep-rooted understandings of relations between adults and children and young people within UK society and existing ideas within the sector of ‘youth participation’ about how best to bring about the restructuring of these relations. Fears about tokenism and power have dominated this sector and potentially limited the radical potential of the process of co-production. Within this chapter I have also illuminated further questions about equality and how it is best enacted in practice between adults and young people. This chapter has therefore simultaneously offered ‘hope’ and ‘caution’ to those who want to (re)claim participation as a radical concept.

Finally, one theme weaved throughout this chapter is that of speed: trying to bring about change through invited, institutionalised arenas of participation is a *slow* process. Changing actions and attitudes through dialogue, which in this chapter it has been argued needs to be understood as ‘more than voice’ — as an active, interdependent, relational process — takes time and high levels of effort. At times, the message of participation appears to be ‘falling on deaf ears’ with some organisations not willing to enter into dialogue with young people, preferring consultation as a way to complete a ‘tickbox’ exercise. This theme carries into the next chapter which will follow these participants as they ‘transition’ to adulthood, critically examining what ‘travels’ with them from their experiences within these arenas of participation, and how what they learnt in these spaces is slowly disseminated into the spaces of their everyday lives.

## Chapter 7. Beyond the Arena of Participation: Sustaining, Transferring, Transforming

### 7.1 Introduction

#### 7.1.1 A difficult but important question

Using Changemakers and Investing in Children as case studies, the previous two chapters examined practices within an arena of participation. They focused on how relations between adults and young people were enacted within these spaces, and the extent to which these spaces were individualising or promoted ideas of co-production and the collective. Extending these themes, this penultimate chapter considers what happens *beyond* these arenas, considering the third research question of this thesis:

How is the knowledge and resources created within these arenas of youth participation transferred, over time, to other spaces of people's lives?

Introduced in Chapter 1 and explored through the literature presented in Chapter 2, this thesis is premised on an argument that it is important (and even essential) to know which elements of people's experiences within arenas of participation are transferred to other spaces of their lives. However, as acknowledged in Chapter 3 which discusses the methodologies used in this research, in practice this is a difficult task. Participants had left the organisations involved in this research between 6 months and 12 years previously. During their time at these organisations, and since, they will have had multiple, varying experiences and encountered both discourses that compliment and contradict what they learnt at these organisations. These were all 'present', in conscious and subconscious ways, in the space of the interview, affecting how they interpreted their past experiences at these organisations. Furthermore, due to the limitations of the methodologies used (as well as the realms of possibility and the limits of self-knowledge) this research could only analyse the elements of these experiences which participants could remember and articulate. As comments from three participants below indicate, amongst several participants there was an awareness that their self-identifications were partial and

ongoing. For some, as will be suggested in the final chapter of this thesis, it was perhaps too soon to consider and articulate substantially the impact these experiences had on other spaces of their lives.

I think it affects you in ways that you don't even really realise as well [...] you don't really realise the little things that have changed, so I think you don't even think 'oh it's done this, it's done that', it's affected things that I've not even noticed. [Lexi, Changemakers, age 24, 18 months since involvement]

I think going to Changemakers has definitely changed me, like I dunno, I can't say 'oh I definitely made this decision in my life because I went to Changemakers' [...] anything you do really does sort of change you as a person, you like see things from a different point of view. [Maria, Changemakers, age 21, 3 years since involvement]

I think their [Investing in Children's] influence — even on my course (English is very opinion based) is hard to pin point exactly all in one go, more something you kind of notice and reflect upon as each thing you do surprises you. [Jaquinda, Investing in Children, age 20, 2 years since involvement, interviewed via email]

Nevertheless, pursuing this question, although difficult, is important. The reasons for this have been presented throughout this thesis. To recap, they include, firstly, an understanding that all spaces are porous. Bodies, objects, atmospheres and ideas move back and forward between spaces (see Massey, 2005; Cahill, 2007c; Baillie Smith *et al.*, 2013). Therefore, whilst arenas of participation may be *different* from other spaces of people's lives, they cannot be completely *separate*. Arenas of participation are both 'press[ed] in on' (Kesby, 2005:2056) and 'push-out-on' (Jones and SPEECH, 2001:5) other spaces of people's lives, as knowledge and resources are transferred between spaces. As Askins and Pain (2011) warn, however, the extent to which these arenas of participation push-out-on other spaces should not be uncritically assumed, but varies between each arena and therefore, as undertaken in this chapter, requires careful critical examination.

Secondly, in the previous chapter participation and its associated practices were presented as having the potential to radically challenge and transform existing relations, systems and structures that perpetuate inequalities, such as the unequal relations between adults and young people in the UK. If young people's lives and

these relations are to be transformed, organisations that promote a radical participatory epistemology should want to be more than ‘isolated islands of empowerment’ (Kesby *et al.*, 2007:24). They need these discourses of radical participation to proactively affect and infiltrate other spaces until these new relations eventually become normalised.

Finally, connected to this, is the question of empowerment. As discussed and critiqued in Chapter 2, empowerment, like power, is not a commodity that can be carried from space to space nor is it a one-off experience that leads in a linear fashion to a stable state of enlightenment. Rather, it is an effect that needs to be constantly re-performed to, in Kesby’s language, appear ‘stable’ (Kesby, 2005:2040; Kesby *et al.*, 2007). For this research, this stabilisation would look like the ability for people to act in ways that make them feel empowered (for example, make them feel their voice is of worth, should be respected and their rights matter) in multiple spaces over a sustained period of time. It is virtually impossible for people, particularly the young people considered empirically in this thesis, to spend their entire lives within an arena of participation that may proactively teach and encourage this performance of empowerment. Therefore, *if* empowerment is considered a desirable ‘outcome’ of following a participatory epistemology (see critiques in Cahill, 2007c; Kesby, 2007) then it is important to:

identify which resources have been successfully redeployed, normalised, and distanced beyond the participatory arena, enabling agents to repeatedly mobilise them to effect their empowerment elsewhere. (Kesby, 2007:2825)

### **7.1.2 Examples and definitions**

In this research, these ‘resources’ (or as expressed in the research question *knowledge and resources*) which may be (re)performed, for example could include, the recollection of particular learnt ‘truths’ encountered at these organisations about oneself and others, which may prompt particular actions. These truths, for example, may be newly-developed beliefs about the rights of children and young people, or of young people’s position within society. As identified in the first section of this chapter, relationships which encourage empowered thoughts and actions,

such as potentially those between staff members and young people, can also be one of these resources. They may also be practical tools such as participatory techniques or self-reflection tools which encourage/assist the practical outworkings of these beliefs/truths.

Akin to findings within other studies looking at the (shorter term) impacts of young people being involved in arenas of participation, which are outlined in Chapter 2 (e.g. Kirby and Bryson, 2002; Neary and A'Drake, 2006), some participants identified skills they acquired through their time at these organisations (e.g. presentation skills, project management experience). They gave examples of how these have been reused in other spaces of their lives. These significant reflections were relayed to the organisations involved in this research through dissemination presentations and project reports. This chapter, however, reflecting the wider focus of this thesis, predominately analyses (re)performances of knowledge and resources which can more overtly be understood as related to a participatory epistemology and/or the related concept of empowerment.

As acknowledged above, to produce an appearance of stability these resources must be (re)performed in different spaces over time. This term '(re)performance' was introduced in Chapter 1. To recall, it is bracketed to acknowledge that any enactment or performance in the participants everyday lives which is identified as connected to their past experiences at these organisations (such as using participatory practices in their workplace or continuing to advocate for the human rights of children and young people) is not an identical replica of what has gone before, but may be a connected yet distinct performance, being performed within new spatial and temporal moments.

This chapter considers how (and if) the knowledge and resources created within these arenas of participation are (re)performed in other spaces of people's lives. This question is considered through the context of participants' transitions to adulthood. As introduced in Chapter 1, youth transitions are a particularly interesting context through which to answer this question. Scholars have identified

transitions to adulthood as a potentially particularly turbulent time in people's lives (e.g. Furlong *et al.*, 2003; Jeffrey and McDowell, 2004; Settersten Jr. and Ray, 2010). Neoliberal preoccupations with individualism and self-sufficiency, which as evidenced in Chapter 5 can mould experiences of participation, are often analysed and critiqued by scholars as key discourses also shaping understandings of transitions to adulthood (see Punch, 2002; Jeffrey, 2010). This makes an examination of how ideas about neoliberal participation are transferred and (re)performed particularly interesting. Furthermore, each of the organisations involved in this research were concerned with issues about injustices facing *young people*. These (diversely experienced, multiple) periods of transitions to adulthood encompass the movement of the participants in this research, now aged 18–30, from being considered young people (or legally, children) in the UK to being adults. Are these past encounters with issues of injustice still relevant now they are no longer young people themselves?

This chapter begins by considering this period of transitions and its significance to this research, examining how continued relationships with staff members, both real and imagined, became a resource repositioned to assist with participants' transitions to adulthood. In doing this I develop the themes of individualisation and adult-child relations explored in the previous two chapters. The second section responds directly to the concerns of Kesby (2007) and others (e.g. Jones and SPEECH, 2001) about the need to identify tactics which contribute to these sustained (re)performances of empowerment outside of arenas of participation. Three tactics used by participants are considered and critiqued. The final section engages with geographies of activism, looking specifically at the spaces, scales and ways in which the knowledge and resources encountered at these organisations are (re)performed.

## **7.2 Transitions to Adulthood**

The purpose of this thesis is not to consider *in detail* the diverse experiences of young people as they 'transition' to adulthood. This has been done comprehensively elsewhere by both sociologists (e.g. through the 10 year long 'Inventing Adulthood'

study of the lives and transitions of young people in the UK, see Henderson *et al.*, 2007) and geographers (e.g. Valentine, 2003; Hopkins, 2006; Valentine and Skelton, 2007; Worth, 2009). Nevertheless, this period of transitions provides the *context* for both the participant's recollections of these past experiences and the narratives of their present (re)performances in their everyday lives.

This research is one response to the call from Hopkins and Pain (2007:290), who advocate the benefits of creating diverse relational geographies of age, for more work 'excavating pathways and experiences over the lifecourse'. As introduced in Chapter 1, examining and contextualising these experiences of participation across the lifecourse is also an intentional move to reinvigorate examinations of time within the subdiscipline of children geographies. Temporality holds a somewhat uncomfortable position within Children's Geographies. This evolved out of developments within the 'new social studies of childhood'. As scholars became (overly) concerned with portraying children and young people as political 'beings' in their own right, whose lives and political actions are (rightly) of worth studying in and for the 'here and now' (e.g. Matthews and Limb, 1999; Weller, 2007; Skelton, 2010), 'less attention' has been given to other temporalities such as the role of the past and the future (Kallio, 2016:13). Qvortrup (2004:269) feels this focus on the here and now may have gone 'too far' as it fails to account for the realities of growing up (see also Horton and Kraftl, 2006). With notable exceptions such as Horton and Kraftl (2006) and Worth (2009), there appears to be a reluctance by some to re-engage with concepts of time for fears this may be seen as re-theorising children and young people as becomings (see also Gallacher and Gallagher, 2008:511 who reframed children and young people as 'emergent becomings'). This chapter proactively engages with this notion of becoming, drawing on theorisations of time as always necessarily permeated by the presence of the past and potential futures (e.g. May and Thrift, 2003; Worth, 2009), to explore the ways in which experiences at these organisations may be (re)performed later in life in other spaces.



As the period of youth transitions provides the context through which the question of ‘what travels beyond the arena of participation?’ can be asked and understood, a brief review is needed of the literature considering youth transitions in the UK. This review focuses on how transitions have been theorised as individualised — a construction that compliments that of the ‘good’ neoliberal subject considered in Chapter 5. Two empirical sections follow. The first examines how relationships between participants and adult staff remained important during these transitions to adulthood. As such it contributes to the growing literature within the field of youth transitions that documents the ways in which transitions might be considered relational and not just individualised (e.g. Archer *et al.*, 2007; Biggart and Walther, 2016). The second section continues the exploration of the complicated relationship and false binary between neoliberal and radical participation. I use examples from the more ‘radical’ Investing in Children to demonstrate how experiences there were curated by participants to help construct ‘good’ neoliberal futures. This section also speaks back to the subdiscipline of Children’s Geographies, arguing that it is important to frame all experiences against a backdrop of temporality and becoming.

### **7.2.1 Defined and theorised**

The term ‘youth transitions’ is often used by scholars to describe the process through which young people move from childhood to adulthood. Where childhood ends and adulthood begins is not easy to define (Valentine, 2003). With the absence of a singular rite-of-passage to adulthood within the Global North, the period of ‘youth’ sits between the two: a liminal stage offering a ‘sociological bridge’ between the ‘widening poles’ of childhood and adulthood (James and Prout, 1997; Barry, 2010:124). Globally the period of youth is notoriously difficult to define, for statistical purposes the United Nations (c. 2009) defines youth as aged 15–24, however, this definition varies significantly between countries: for example Day and Evans (2015) note that the Zambian government define youth as 18–35. This variation is further illustrated by the varying definitions of a ‘young person’ between

the three organisations involved in this research.<sup>26</sup> This has caused difficulties for stating when youth transitions begin and end, with some scholars being reluctant to definitively associate any age with this period (e.g. Roberts, 2003). Following Barry (2010), within this thesis transitions to adulthood in the UK are understood to occur predominately in the period of late teens and early twenties, as this is the time when many people simultaneously acquire greater rights and responsibilities associated with being an adult yet experience some form of discrimination, either socially, legally or economically based on their age. Therefore, broadly speaking, in the time between their involvement with the organisation and being interviewed for this research, the overwhelming majority of participants had experienced and/or were experiencing this period of transitions to adulthood.

The terms ‘youth transitions’ and ‘transitions to adulthood’ are used in this thesis with caution. The term *transitions* dominates literatures describing this movement from the socially (and legally, politically) constructed categories of childhood and adulthood. *Transitions*, alongside other journeying metaphors such as ‘pathways’ (Settersten Jr. and Ray, 2010), ‘lanes’ (Bynner *et al.*, 2002) or ‘tracks’ (Jones, 2002), unhelpfully reproduces notions of a linear movement between these categories (and as Roberts, 2011, argues, such analyses can exclude those he terms the ‘missing middle’ whose experiences do not fall neatly into these trajectories). In an era where the notion of a stable adult identity has been eroded (see Lee, 2001) and adulthood as an ‘endpoint’ has become ‘increasingly difficult to identify’ it must be considered if the term transition is still appropriate (Jeffrey, 2010; Furlong *et al.*, 2011:362). Informed by the work of Gallacher and Gallagher (2008) and Worth (2009), I prefer to think of this movement through a lifecourse approach, which recognises that ‘rather than follow fixed and predictable life stages, we live dynamic and varied lifecourses which have themselves, different situated meanings’ (Hopkins and Pain, 2007:290). Nevertheless, despite acknowledging its critique, the term

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<sup>26</sup> Changemakers defines a young person as 16–25; Investing in Children as up to 18 unless a young person is in care in which it is up to 21; Scotswood Centre considers anyone under 18 to be a young person although this boundary is fluid.

'transitions' remains in use within Children's Geographies (e.g. Worth, 2009). It was also the term used to describe this period by my participants, therefore, for want of a better word, 'transitions' is used in this review and subsequent analysis to refer to the movements between the socially constructed periods called childhood and adulthood.

It has become commonplace to state that transitions are no longer linear (if they ever truly were), but are complex, multiple, fragmented and even cyclical processes, with young people navigating a range of transitions taking place at different times and at varying paces (Jones, 2002; Stephen and Squires, 2003; Furlong *et al.*, 2011). Jeffrey and McDowell (2004:131) reflect that 'the transition to adulthood is perhaps more complex and contested than in any previous era'. Social, economic and political changes such as the collapse of the traditional labour market in post-industrial Britain (McDowell, 2003), the multiplication of higher education institutes and changes in opportunities for women in both education and the workplace (Thomson *et al.*, 2003) have altered the nature and timing of transitions from those of previous generations. The global financial crisis has fragmented these transitions further, in many places leading to a rise in youth unemployment and a loss in youth services (see Scarpetta *et al.*, 2010; Choudhry *et al.*, 2012; McDowell, 2012). Traditional transition 'markers', such as leaving home, getting a job, having a child and being eligible to vote, occur at different times and may now not be one-off transitions with some experiencing 'yo-yo' transitions (Biggart and Walther, 2016:42). For example a 16 year old who was eligible to vote in the Scottish Referendum in 2014 became ineligible to vote in the 2015 general election (the experiences of these Scottish 16 year olds are explored in Duckett, 2015; see also Mills and Duckett, 2016), whilst recent trends indicate people are returning home to live with parents or remaining at home for longer, despite some potentially being financially independent and even having children of their own (see Holdsworth and Morgan, 2005; Berrington *et al.*, 2009). Nayak (2006:826) labels these occurrences as evidence of increasingly 'elongated' transitions, whereby 'networks of kinship and

family continue to offer stability in uncertain times' (see also Nayak, 2003; Arnett, 2004; Helve and Bynner, 2007).

The works of 'late modern theorists'<sup>27</sup> Ulrich Beck (1992) and Anthony Giddens (1991) have often been applied (and critiqued) by both sociologists (e.g. Henderson *et al.*, 2007) and geographers (e.g. Valentine, 2003; Patiniotis and Holdsworth, 2005; Worth, 2009) to help understand modern day youth transitions. Beck proposes that we are currently in a period of historical transformation, where changes to labour markets and the nuclear family, and the decline in importance of traditional structures (e.g. school/church) mean that individuals are moving away from 'normal biographies' where they follow pre-existing life plans, to 'do it yourself biographies' in which individuals have greater choice and responsibility over their own life paths (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002:3). This brings with it an increased exposure to risk. In reference to youth transitions this means that changes to traditional education and working patterns make it increasingly important that young people have the skills to negotiate the levels of risk associated with the multiple choices available to them. They also have to deal with any associated guilt/consequences of making the 'wrong' choice (such as investing in a degree that does not result in graduate employment) (Higgins and Nairn, 2006; Worth, 2009).

Giddens (1991:32) advocates that in this new, more flexible labour market 'the self becomes a reflexive project', whereby we all have the choice to decide who we want to be and become. He writes of 'fateful moments' when an individual 'stands at crossroads' and assesses the risk and then makes a conscious decision to pursue a path, which is perhaps different from their normal practice (Giddens, 1991:113). Drawing on Giddens' theorisation, Thomson *et al.* (2002) examine young people's transition narratives, analysing the relationship between conscious fateful moments and unconscious 'critical moments'.

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<sup>27</sup> The term 'late modern theorists' is commonly used within the Social Sciences to encompass theorists from multiple disciplines who explore the ways societies and individuals are responding to recent social, political and economic changes.

Although widely used, the application of Beck and Giddens' theorisations within youth transitions studies are not without critique. Both contain echoes of the 'good' neoliberal subject, discussed in Chapter 5, as transitions are depicted as carried out by young people who are 'autonomous, self-reliant, responsible and able to personally negotiate risk and the marketplace without relying on state support' (see Khoja-Moolji, 2014; Raby, 2014:80). Too much emphasis is said to be placed on the role of the individual within these theorisations; critics claim that the influence of structural forces, such as access to education, mobility, public policies and class norms as well as the geographically-situated nature of youth transitions, has been overlooked (see Thomson *et al.*, 2002; Hörschelmann and Schäfer, 2005; Christie, 2007). Critiquing this focus on the individual, several scholars have examined how transitions are experienced differently depending on a variety of indicators of social difference such as class, gender, sexuality and (dis)ability (see Thomson and Taylor, 2005; Hopkins, 2006; Valentine and Skelton, 2007; Winterton and Irwin, 2012). Building on this work opposing overly individualised depictions of transitions to adulthood, the following section contributes to geographical literature documenting the relational dynamics of youth transitions.

### **7.2.2 Relational transitions: imagined support**

In Chapter 6 it was shown that participants perceived relations between young people and adult staff at each of the three organisations to be different from those they experienced with adults in other spaces of their lives such as at school, home or at other youth organisations. Analysis of specific relationships between particular staff members and participants revealed some participants thought of themselves as 'colleagues', 'friends' and/or valued as (almost) equal members of these organisations. This section examines how these relationships evolved when the

participants were no longer involved as young people at the organisations and were undergoing transitions to adulthood.<sup>28</sup>

This research is not alone in considering the relational dynamics of transitions to adulthood and opposing Beck and Giddens' overly individualised theorisation. Attention has been paid to the role of parents in young people's 'yo-yo' transitions (e.g. Valentine, 2003; Biggart and Walther, 2016). Patiniotis and Holdsworth (2005) and Christie (2007) have considered the impact of parents' own experiences and views on higher education in young people's transitions to university. Patiniotis and Holdsworth (2005) also analyse the role of peers in this transition, as do Archer *et al.* (2007). In analysing the multiple transitions of Bolivian young people living in rural areas, Punch (2002:130) proposes 'negotiated interdependence' as a useful concept through which to explore the interplay between structural, personal and familial factors affecting experiences of transitions.

Unprompted within their interviews, in strikingly similar sentiments, three participants from Changemakers said that they believed staff would 'help' them in their transitions to (adult) employment, despite the fact they had left the organisation:

You can always feel like you can come back and they will *help* you in some way in terms of any opportunities that they have with them or any other organisations and, yeah, they definitely are a little hub, a little base of support. [Holly, Changemakers, age 23, 2 years since involvement, emphasis added]

I think they're the kind of staff you could easily email and ring up and they'd quite happily stop what they're doing and chat on the phone and *help* you. [Sarah, Changemakers, age 24, 3 years since involvement, emphasis added]

Even if the worst comes to the worst you have a major issue, you could any day still come back to Changemakers and go like 'I am really sorry, I have got issues' and they would genuinely still *help* you, even if you have finished with

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<sup>28</sup> 'As young people' here acknowledges that some participants remained involved within their respective organisations after the age of 18. Levels of involvement ranged from regular or sporadic volunteering to paid full-time, part-time and temporary employees. As acknowledged in Chapter 8, these experiences are not directly analysed within this thesis.

them, they'd still keep in touch with you. [Pranali, Changemakers, age 21, 1.5 years since involvement, emphasis added]

The culture cultivated at Changemakers that their staff were caring, dependable in times of trouble and valued young people so highly they would 'stop what they are doing' to help, was evidently sustained in the minds of these participants long after their formal involvement with the organisation had ended. Both Sarah and Pranali's comments ('*I think* they're the kind of staff'; '*if* the worst comes to the worst') implies these are imagined and as yet untested beliefs. Changemakers had become an *imagined* potential place of refuge and support, a 'constant' as these participants navigated complex transitions to employment/adulthood. They echo a brief reflection made in Mills (2015) in her examination of the relationship between youth volunteering and employment, using archival evidence from the Jewish Lads Brigade and Club in post-war Manchester. Writing to Jewish Lads Brigade youth worker Stanley Rowe in 1979, 2 years after they last met, 'Smokey Joe', a young person at the time, reflects that even though Stanley may not remember him, 'you sort of remain timeless and against your image I catalogue my own change and milestones' (Mills, 2015:9). Without elaborating further, Mills comments that, 'here we see an example of the role that youth workers — certainly in this case — had in providing a reference point from which to map out (youth) transitions and events in one's lifecourse'. Both the examples from this research and Mills' indicate that youth workers/staff at youth organisations play a role in some young people's transitions to adulthood (see also Walker, 2011). They also highlight how whilst youth workers may continue to provide *practical* support for young people after they have formally left their care, they also provide support in more abstract, imagined, less documented yet still comforting ways.

### **7.2.3 Relational transitions: 'friendships' as a resource**

He became a friend rather than just 'the Worker' [...] I can always give him a text if I need anything or I want to know something, still, and I have always got his number and he is always sort of just right on the phone back to you so he is a top fellow. [Mike, Investing in Children, age 20, 3 years since involvement]

Several participants did call on staff for practical support. Over half of participants from Investing in Children and Changemakers mentioned that they were still in contact with staff; others wished they were ('I'd love to be in touch so much more'). As established in Chapter 6, often staff were described as 'friends'. For some these 'friendships' continued after they left the organisations. Although there were notable exceptions where participants and staff described continuing traditional two-way mutual friendships, the majority of these 'friendships' could, from my observations and analysis, more accurately be described as continued *useful* relationships or connections. Using the language of social capital theory, 'friendships', such as described by Mike above, became potential resources that if mobilised could be used as a form of social capital to assist the participants in their transition to adulthood (Bassani, 2007).

Some participants maintained their connections with staff through being 'friends' on Facebook. Facebook provides one way to sustain connections regardless of geographical location. Using Putnam's (2000) explanations of social capital, Ellison *et al.* (2007) propose that Facebook friendships are a resource that can potentially be mobilised into 'bridging social capital', defined as loose but potentially 'useful' connections that may help young people 'get ahead' (see also Holland *et al.*, 2007). Daniel described his 'friendships' with staff from Investing in Children via Facebook as a very loose form of friendship: '[we're] friends on Facebook but that's it'. Shirley, who had moved away from County Durham and therefore could not easily maintain in person what she described as the 'close friendships' she had developed with staff members at Investing in Children. She valued highly the maintenance of these via Facebook. Shirley is considering going into youth work and therefore may potentially draw on these Facebook friends for advice in the future.

Some participants directly experienced the benefits of extending their relationships with staff. Carly attended Investing in Children from ages 13–15, being involved in their group for disabled young people. Now 21, Carly owns her own business. She explained that when she was 19, due to her disability, she struggled to find a work placement that she needed as part of her college course. She contacted a staff



member she had kept in touch with who arranged for her to do the placement at Investing in Children. Carly's maintained connection with Investing in Children had become a valuable resource which she could mobilise in her time of need into a form of social capital, assisting in her transition from higher education into employment.

Staff from Changemakers also assisted Esther's transition into employment, however, unlike Carly, the staff member had contacted *her* about an opportunity:

For me it was really what they did for me *after* my time at Changemakers which was really important, because they didn't *have* to contact me and say 'oh, there is this [job opportunity]', they could have said it to one of the current changemakers [...] it was really lovely that [names staff member] thought 'ah well, I know Esther would be good at this' [...] they are really good with Changemakers *contacts*, which is really hard for a young person to get that *leg in*. [Esther, Changemakers, age 21, 2.5 years since involvement, her emphasis]

Once presented with the opportunity, Esther mobilised this relationship as a resource to assist with her employment transitions. She explained that this job opportunity led to other job offers as her reputation spread and she 'became known'. Esther reflects that, 'I think that's what you need, you need a nice reputation' to begin to develop a career. Aware that getting into the arts sector was difficult, especially for 'a young person [... as it is] all about who you know', Esther believes the thoughtfulness of this Changemakers staff member helping her to get that 'leg in' to the arts sector directly impacted the trajectory of her career.

This section has shown that participants' extended relationships (which some participants termed 'friendships') with staff were being used as resources to assist in their current (or imagined future) transitions to adulthood. Whilst taken together the last two sections have contributed to emerging literature emphasising the importance of others in youth transitions, the accounts of these transitions were still individualistic. These (predominately one-way) 'friendships' were dislocated from the spaces of co-production and the collective outlined in Chapter 6 and recast as friendships which were a potential or actual resource for participants *as individuals*. Transitions were not undertaken as a cohesive 'cohort' of young people, nor were

the adults in these accounts co-producers in these transitions — they were repositioned as a resource to be utilised. Deliberately using these friendships as resources could be described as the mark of a ‘good neoliberal subject’: participants were drawing rationally on resources available to them, without leaning on the support of the state, to secure their economic futures (Khoja-Moolji, 2014). Some of these examples come from Investing in Children, the organisation offered in Chapter 6 as an example of more radically orientated participation which stood, to a certain extent, in opposition to a neoliberal agenda. The following section considers this tension, arguing for a conceptualisation of past experiences as dynamic, having the ability to shift as they are (re)performed and utilised in different spatio-temporal moments.

#### **7.2.4 Curating neoliberal futures**

As participants underwent transitions towards adulthood, several *curated*, — by which I mean moulded, presented and polished — their past experiences to help them during these processes:

What’s important now is my CV [...] my work with Investing in Children helped me get in [to the police] because on the interview days they ask you: ‘name a time when you have had to deal with conflict? or someone being aggressive’, and I used an example from work that I have done with Investing in Children. [Mike, Investing in Children, age 20, 3 years since involvement]

It had such an impact on my future which at the time I couldn’t of predicted [...] Investing in Children featured heavily in my personal statement. [Jaquinda, Investing in Children, age 20, 2 years since involvement]

Vanessa, whose co-authoring of a book chapter with a staff member from Investing in Children was analysed in Chapter 6, drew on this past achievement in a mock job interview. She recalls how at the time of writing the chapter she ‘didn’t even think anything of it, I just wrote it like I would a report’ but then a few years later used it to market herself within the interview space.

In considering how the knowledge and resources created within these arenas is transferred to other spaces of people’s lives, these comments show that they do not remain static but evolve as they are (re)performed in different moments across the

lifecourse. The past is not fixed but is ‘always moving on — being constantly re-experienced and reconsidered — as we experience the newness of the present’ (Worth 2009, 1055). These past experiences were consciously curated by participants into what Holdsworth (2017:1) terms ‘practices of distinction’, which would assist their employment transitions by enabling them to ‘stand out from the crowd’. As Holdsworth (2017:3) argues, this ‘fetishizing of experiences’ is about individual advancement; it is ‘emblematic of individualisation’ arising from a society driven by a neoliberal agenda.

This finding once again complicates any binary between radical participation and the co-opting of participation for a neoliberal agenda. None of the participants from Investing in Children (presented in Chapter 6 as predominately advocating radical participation) recalled becoming involved as a way to deliberately enhance their ‘CV’ or future job prospects (see similar findings in Holdsworth and Quinn, 2012). Involvement was fuelled by a mixture of passion (Kerry, now 28, explained she got involved at age 15 ‘because I loved it, I had no idea that young people were entitled to have their own rights, as soon as I got the opportunity to think about it I was like ‘yeah this was right, let’s champion it’) and convenience. Participants reported becoming involved to improve their lives and those of other young people, but also because it facilitated friendships, alleviated boredom and provided extra pocket money. As established in Chapter 4, staff at Investing in Children were also very clear that their organisation did not exist to advance a neoliberal agenda or support the shaping of *future* subjects. Yet whilst the neoliberal accumulation of ‘useful’ experiences did not dominate the thoughts of many participants who attended Investing in Children at the time (‘I didn’t even think anything of it’; ‘it had such an impact on my future which at the time I couldn’t of predicted’), when directly encountering the need to stand out from the crowd during competitive employment transitions they did not hesitate to co-opt these experiences for their individual advancement. In this way, although unintended by staff, neoliberal values can be understood to be one form of knowledge that transfers and is (re)performed outwith arenas of youth participation.

This tension also highlights the need for a theorisation of time which recognises young people as more than simply political beings in the 'here and now' — a phrase used by Qvortrup (2004:269) to describe this academic turn. As acknowledged earlier in this chapter, seeing young people as political beings in the here and now, and not just citizens-in-waiting, was timely and important. However, it does not account for the fluidity of the experiences of participants described above. Writing about youth transitions and drawing on the work of Elizabeth Grosz, Worth's (2009) theorisation of time 'as becoming' provides a helpful lens through which to understand these experiences. For Worth (2009:1055), time is more than linear chronology, 'time can be difference, time can be past, present and future at once'. Present moments are infiltrated with multiple potential futures, although Worth admits structural constraints means that not *all* futures are possible for *all* young people. These futures are not set, they are 'becoming', meaning they are constantly evolving and instable but are always present (see also May and Thrift, 2003:23 who describe time as the 'constant melding of past, present and future'). Applying this theorisation to the experiences of Mike at Investing in Children, it becomes clear his time there was a melding of his present and his future. At Investing in Children Mike worked on projects to ensure the voices of young people were heard in the NHS and that their experiences at the GP surgeries were inclusive of their rights and needs. His actions were political, contributing to evidencing that young people can act political in their everyday lives and are not just future political subjects (e.g. Kallio and Häkli, 2013). But his time there should also be recognised for its significance in making his potential future career with the police force possible: by providing him with experiences to draw on in the interview space, his time at Investing in Children assisted his negotiations of complex employment transitions.

Reconceptualising these experiences alongside a more fluid theorisation of time therefore helps illuminate their complexity and the 'rich seams of understanding', which Hopkins and Pain (2007:291) argue will be revealed through greater attention to time and the lifecourse within geographical studies. This section has also shown the unpredictability of how knowledge and resources learnt within these

organisations is repositioned alongside other discourses; despite the intentions of staff at Investing in Children, the participatory experiences of young people have been co-opted to curate futures which reflect more neoliberal agendas. This finding indicates that despite the organisations involved in this research adopting different *approaches* to participation, as analysed in Chapter 4, the outworkings of these approaches were not noticeably distinct. Participation may be a polyvalent term in that it can be attached to quite different systems of meanings but, as will continue to become clear throughout this chapter, this research has not found these variations to produce *substantially* different effects (Cook *et al.*, 2013:757).<sup>29</sup>

Considered together, this section has shown how both participants' continued relationships with staff and their ability to curate their past experiences have become resources which have utility beyond the arenas of participation, assisting them in complex transitions towards adulthood. Examining what other forms of knowledge or resources travelled from experiences within these organisations, the following section considers if and how participants transferred and sustained the ways of thinking and acting in 'empowered' ways that they encountered at these organisations, in other spaces of their lives.

### **7.3 Sustaining (Individual) Empowerment**

#### **7.3.1 Thinking and acting in 'empowered' ways**

Thinking and acting in ways that can be described as 'empowered' was identified by some participants as an important resource that they transferred from their experiences within these arenas of youth participation, over time, to other spaces of their lives. As acknowledged in the introduction to this chapter, thinking and acting in empowered ways may look different from space to space and vary from person to person — it is a performed effect. Participants were not asked directly in the interviews about empowerment, instead they were asked questions about how they

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<sup>29</sup> Although, as discussed in Chapter 8, there was a tendency for those who were involved with Investing in Children to frame their experiences within broader issues of injustices facing young people (illustrated through moments of collective conscientisation) more frequently than participants who had engaged with Changemakers.

felt and acted whilst they were at the organisations and what, if any, impact their time at these organisations had on their lives now. Some participants directly talked about empowerment when answering these questions. For example Kate, interviewed via email, said she 'felt very empowered whilst working with Investing in Children', whilst Pranali reflected that:

I think a lot of people felt really empowered after it [the Changemakers INSPIRE Residential] and I remember when I came back a lot of people were like 'you have changed, not in a bad way as in you just seem really excited about life, you seem that you want to do things, you want to go places, you wanna like push forwards'. [Pranali, Changemakers, age 21, 1.5 years since involvement]

For Pranali, thinking and acting in empowered ways was connected to a personal desire to 'do things [...] go places', presumably that previously she would not have thought of doing/going. Others did not directly use the language of empowerment but their attitudes and actions align with broad definitions of empowerment which identify it as 'the process of becoming stronger and more confident especially in controlling one's life and claiming one's rights' (Oxford Dictionaries, 2017). In *this context* thinking in empowered ways can be identified in the expression of (often newfound) confidence that they and their voices are of worth, that their voices should be respected and they can change things in their life they are not happy with:

It [Changemakers] really made me realise what I was worth [Pete, Changemakers, age 26, 6 months since involvement]

It's quite nice that they [Changemakers staff] believe in you, so it makes you believe in yourself a bit more [Esther, Changemakers, age 21, 2.5 years since involvement]

I think it's just great to know despite who you are, you can go and change something [Kyle, Changemakers, age 23, 1 year since involvement]

Working there [Investing in Children] gave me confidence that my opinion was valid, worth paying for and listening to [Jaquinda, Investing in Children, age 20, 2 years since involvement]

Just learnt to be m'self, nobody else [Shirley, Investing in Children, age 22, 2 years since involvement]

Knowing I can like talk to anyone if I tried [Carly, Investing in Children, age 21, 5 years since involvement]

You don't have to just be quiet or things, you can always speak up and make yourself more aware of what happens. [Nia, Scotswood Centre, age 18, involvement ongoing]

Participants offered these comments when asked what impact their time at these organisations had on their lives *now*, indicating that for several participants they continued to feel and think in these ways that can be described as 'empowered' after they had left these organisations. However, their time at these organisations is not the only space in their lives where they may have been encouraged to think and act in these ways. It is important to acknowledge that multiple other potential experiences may have contributed (consciously or unconsciously) to these expressions of empowerment within the interview space.

This section considers the question set out in the introduction to this chapter: how are these empowered thoughts and actions *sustained* over time? Like Vaughan (2014:185), whose work on the participation of young people in Papua New Guinea was introduced in Chapter 2, I ask if and how critical thinking, developed through reflection and individual conscientisation can be transformed into 'critical actions'? This section also considers if, as Kesby (2005:2052) argues, 'successful, sustainable empowerment outflanks existing frameworks by constituting, deploying, and normalizing new powers', what tactics can be deployed to assist in normalising these participants' performances of empowerment?

This section focuses on thinking and acting in empowered ways as something experienced by the individual, arising out of processes of individual conscientisation such as that identified in Chapter 5 (see also Kindon, 2012 who reflects that one productive ways to understand empowerment is as an outworking of the process of conscientisation). To recap, individual conscientisation was identified as when an individual considers inequalities which are affecting them and how they are going to change them, without necessarily relating this to their position within a wider collective experiencing injustice. In response to Kesby's call, set out in the introduction of this chapter, to identify tactics which support the (re)performances of empowerment in other spaces of people's lives, three practical tactics used by

participants to sustain these empowered thoughts and actions they encountered at these organisations are identified and critiqued within this section. This section also considers what happens when empowerment is not sustained — reflecting on the extent to which for some participants this is due to the pressures of complex and fragmented transitions to adulthood.

### **7.3.2 Returning to arenas of participation**

The most obvious way for participants to sustain their ability to think and act in these empowered ways would be to continue attending the organisations. Writing about a women's HIV/AIDS participatory project in Edinburgh, Rose (1997a) states (but does not elaborate on the reasons why) that some participants felt the need to return to the project each day in order to sustain their performances of empowerment in other spaces of their lives. Although desired by some participants, such as Lexi who wished she could 'do it [the Changemakers Experience Programme] again' as 'you should be able to have that sort of boost every year', repeating past experiences is impossible and returning regularly to these organisations was often highly impractical as several participants had relocated due to employment or further studies, or as they were no longer 'young people' did not qualify for the services of the organisation. Kesby (2005) also comments (but does not expound on) that this type of continued contact may lead (in his view unhelpfully) to project dependency.

The organisations involved in this research tried to maintain some form of contact with young people after they had left. Changemakers sent a regular newsletter to everyone who had attended one of their courses, they also personally encouraged past changemakers to take up opportunities to volunteer on subsequent cohorts. Participants such as Pranali found this continuity encouraging, speaking about the past changemakers who volunteered on her cohort she said:

I think just seeing how happy and empowered a lot of people were [after Changemakers] was helpful in the fact that it doesn't just cut off once it finishes [...] not in a bad way [it is a] bit like a cult, you could say once you are a changemaker it literally means you are a changemaker, I don't think you ever stop. [Pranali, Changemakers, age 21, 1.5 years since involvement]



As discussed in Chapter 5, although Pranali's choice of the word 'cult' was not favoured by Changemakers' staff, the sentiment matches those described by staff who explained they wanted to create a 'movement' whereby past changemakers stayed connected with the organisation assisting in the production and maintenance of the organisation's culture. Scotswood Centre and Investing in Children had no such formal mechanisms, however, several staff maintained contact with young people after they had left, finding them employment opportunities within the organisation where possible. Recognising its importance, during the dissemination of this research staff at Investing in Children commented that continued support and contact for young people who had left the organisation was one area they hoped to review.

Participants generally spoke positively about the forms of continued contact available from the organisations but acknowledged they were 'not the same' as what they had experienced before. Maria described the experience of returning as a volunteer with Changemakers as:

Different [...] it was long and tiring, like when you're a participant its long and tiring as well but you don't know what's 'round the corner and you're like really excited [...] it was weird [...] I felt like they were expecting me to like be amazing and I was like 'I don't really know what you want me to say!' [Maria, Changemakers, age 21, 3 years since involvement]

For Maria, returning as a leader on the residential made her doubt herself, it was a draining experience that did not contribute to sustaining (re)performances of empowerment in other spaces of her life.

For Holly, as for many other participants, returning regularly to the physical space of the organisation was not practical. However, she found encouragement in recalling her past experiences:

I am going to bring all of this [what I learnt on the Changemakers Experience Programme] into what I am going to do next, and I think sort of as maybe being 20 years old, I am going right, I am going to now have to contact big organisations and say like 'I have got some money and do you want to work with us?', and I had to go to meetings with them and I had to do like a meeting at the library where I ran it and there was like twenty

representatives from big organisations [... so now] I just have to think well, / *have done that before* and I have had all those opportunities with Changemakers, why can't I just get in touch with these people and say 'right, would you like to be involved with this? Or could I do this with you?' [... I have learnt to] not be afraid, right just go out there and create opportunities for yourself, I don't think I would have realised that could have been possible before being involved with Changemakers. [Holly, Changemakers, age 24, 3 years since involvement, emphasis added]

Akin to the comfort found in the imagined, available, ongoing support recalled earlier in this chapter, through the process of recollection — remembering what she has achieved before — in an abstract way Holly could 're-enter' the arena of participation and draw encouragement to enable her to continue to act in empowered ways elsewhere.

### **7.3.3 Participatory peer groups**

When considering (albeit too briefly) tactics to sustain (re)performances of empowerment, Kesby (2005:2058) makes passing reference to the support that participatory peer groups<sup>30</sup> can show each other during a participatory project, however, he comments that it is difficult to sustain these support networks over time if the organisation does not provide 'periodic facilitation and material support' (see also Bell, 2003). Writing about the experiences of young people on an outward bounds course, Cushing (1999) argues that finding a way to sustain the connections made between young people on the course was *key* if the 'transformation' they experienced was to extend into their everyday lives. Her participants explained that they found it difficult to 'hold on' to their 'changed way of being' once they returned from the course as they 'missed the support and pressure of the group to 'be' in their transformed way as well as missing the group cultural norm of risk taking' (Cushing, 1999:28). Pranali described her participatory peer group as like a 'mini-family', they tried to sustain their support and encouragement with each other after they had left the organisation:

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<sup>30</sup> The term '*participatory peer group*', as used in this thesis, is distinct from the term 'peer group' as the people within the group may not necessarily be the same age but rather are linked through their collective participatory experience.

We still speak today, we still know what each other are doing [...] I'd probably say we were like we are like a mini-family [...During the Changemakers Experience Programme we] had a really good supportive group and everyone was really understanding and everyone knew what you were aiming for and that the reason that you are here is that you really want to go further. And even outside of it I know that with my cohort we kept in touch and if any of us were ever worried about doing anything we'd meet up, if we weren't sure we'd give each other phone calls just to say 'look, do you want to talk about it, how do we figure this out?' and a lot of times it was just having that reassurance of someone going 'I believe in you I know you can do this' was more than enough, and I think its carried on with a lot of us, seeing where a lot of us have gone now has meant that we've progressed because I know one of the other people in my cohort, Susanna she was really nervous about going to uni and leaving home and stuff like that, it wasn't very far, but she's moved out now and she's living in halls and she is loving it, she is really enjoying it but she had that initial fear of going and leaving and flying the nest as you say, and she's really loving it and the fact that you can see that everyone else is doing their own thing but without it they kind of might not have had that extra push and might have been a little bit more worried to do something but now they're like grabbing it with both hands and going 'I can do this or whatever, I won't be phased by it. [Pranali, Changemakers, age 21, 1.5 years since involvement]

Pranali's narrative was not representative of those recounted by other participants. Many others had remained friends to varying degrees with those they had met during their time at these organisations but did not *identify* a connection in the way Pranali did between these friendships and their ability to encourage each other to continue to think and act in empowered ways. Of course, as noted throughout this chapter, it is possible that impacts/connections may be present but not identified and/or articulated by participants. Nevertheless, even if Pranali's experience with her participatory peer group is exceptional rather than representative, it provides a powerful insight into the radical potential of such groups and their ability to support the transformation of empowered ways of thinking into actions (e.g. the participatory peer group was one factor in contributing to Susanna's decision to confidently go to university and leave home). Therefore, whilst facilitating participatory peer groups after young people have left their organisation may be arguably beyond their remit, if staff at organisations that work with young people are serious about encouraging empowered thoughts and actions, such as those

outlined at the start of this section, they need to consider this as one way to support their (re)performance beyond their walls.

#### **7.3.4 Participatory tools**

Some participants drew on participatory tools they had encountered at the organisations to help them sustain their ability to act in empowered ways in other spaces of their lives. Within literature, it is well established that participatory tools (e.g. participatory diagramming techniques or practices that encourage cycles of reflection and actions) are ‘contextually sensitive’, therefore transporting them into other spaces is not always straightforward (see Alexander *et al.*, 2007:119). This contextual sensitivity is also noted by Jones and SPEECH (2001), whose work with women in southern India is introduced in Chapter 2. They monitored community members’ attempts to reuse participatory drawing-based techniques, such as visual analysis, that they had learnt as part of SPEECH’s participatory approach to development, in other spaces of their lives.

As participants were not asked directly if they reused participatory tools, the following section offers reflections from participants for whom this has predominately been ‘successful’/‘useful’. Therefore, there is the potential that other participants tried, perhaps with less ‘success’, to reuse these tools but did not recall these incidents, or as Esther more generally reflected, some of the tools encountered at these organisations became so embedded in their ways of being that it was difficult to notice when you were (re)performing them:

In some places [...] I think I was very conscious that I was doing the Changemakers values and I was using the speech skills and using the people skills I have learnt, *and then sometimes I just don’t think I thought about it*, I think it was a thing, they do some things so many times that you even forget about it and you just do it really. (Esther, Changemakers, age 21, 2.5 years since left organisation, emphasis added)

As examined in detail in Chapter 5, as part of their participatory epistemology Changemakers staff encouraged a cycle of critical reflection and action. Described by Kindon *et al.* (2007c:13) as an ‘inherent’ feature of a participatory epistemology, this cycle could also be labelled a key tool used by those advocating participation. The

term 'tool' is used here (as opposed to the more specific term technique) to acknowledge that this cycle can be performed using a variety of techniques, as discussed below. It is also a term used by one of the participants, Pete, who described the collective set of specific techniques he had learnt at Changemakers as a 'toolkit you had in your back pocket', he said, 'just knowing I could draw on these skills really helped' in his transitions to adulthood.

Changemakers deployed the cycle at two scales: as an organisation one of their aims was to help young people reflect and act upon perceived injustices they thought young people as a whole were experiencing, however, as introduced in Chapter 4 and critiqued in Chapter 5 they also promoted self-reflection, understanding this as an 'empowering' process through which an individual reflects on their life and makes changes to any parts they are not satisfied with. This was encouraged using a variety of techniques, such as their monthly 'coaching' sessions and the structured self-reflection questions used at the end of each day of the residential which staff hoped would become a practice that would be sustained in the everyday spaces of the young people's lives.

For some participants being able to repeat techniques they learnt at Changemakers reduced their 'stress' levels, which they believed enabled them to make more empowered, confident choices. For example, Pete went through a period of unemployment and depression after he finished the Changemakers Experience Programme. He said he drew on the 'mindfulness techniques' he had been taught at Changemakers to 'overcome' these 'dark personal times'. Pete said the combination of having 'one-to-one coaching sessions and kind of reflecting on the work that I'd already done [helped] pull myself out of that ceiling of despondency' and enabled him to (re)perform the empowered way of thinking about himself that he developed at Changemakers, it 'really made me realise what I was worth'.

Similarly, Lexi (re)performed some of the self-reflection techniques whilst trying to make decisions about employment:

[I have] learnt some tools that would help from there on, so like when a situation is a bit stressful what do you do? Or how do you do things on your own without having to rely on someone? I think if that one-to-one coaching or whatever had been more about me relying on the coach then I wouldn't have come away with any skills I would have just had someone to help us in that situation whereas you kind of learn the skills to do things yourself which is really nice and has come in useful when I'd finished my masters and was a bit stressed then about what I was doing next and all the rest of it, it was like 'well just think about it in a sensible way, or whatever'. (Lexi, Changemakers, age 24, 18 months since involvement)

In contrast to Pranali who depended on the continued support of her participatory peer group, for Lexi, *not* being dependant on someone but being able to (re)perform the self-reflection techniques she had learnt at Changemakers on her own enabled her to sustain the feelings of control and self-belief she had felt whilst there. This difference may relate to how Pranali and Lexi understood Changemakers' approach to participation, and which aspects of their time there they found most impactful. For Pranali, being part of a cohort of other young people was central to her positive experience. She narrated her personal experiences in amongst those of others ('I think a lot of people felt really empowered after it, and I remember when I came home [...]'). Participation was a collective experience, therefore her continued engagement with her participatory peer group was key to continuing her feelings of empowerment. In contrast, Lexi's experience was more individualised. Lexi finished the programme personally 'transformed', she describes herself as:

A much more confident person, I'm really much more positive. I think it's even had an impact on mental health things, even though that's not one of the aims, but I think by thinking about positive attitude and self-coaching it's like had that sort of effect as well. (Lexi, Changemakers, age 24, 18 months since involvement)

Through Changemakers' passive, individualising coaching style, critiqued in Chapter 5 as an outworking of neoliberalism, Lexi equated her transformation and her ability to act in ways that could be identified as empowered with her ability to be self-reliant.

Taken together, these sections have identified three tactics used by participants to sustain the (individual) 'empowered' thoughts or actions participants identified as

(at least partially) being developed at these organisations. Indicating a topic for further enquiry, this section has suggested that different tactics might be applied more readily by some participants depending on their experiences of participation at the organisation. These tactics should not be considered mutually exclusive (or indeed exhaustive!). Some participants deployed multiple tactics. For example, Pete, introduced above, reused the self-reflection techniques he had learnt at Changemakers to sustain the feelings of worth he felt there, however, he also continued to have a relationship with Changemakers staff via informal coaching sessions and personal contact. Furthermore, like Holly, he drew strength from recalling the ‘work that I’d already done’, whilst he also found security in ‘just knowing’ that he had been taught skills that he could draw on if needed.

Through analysing the tactics used in *this context*, broader questions have also been raised in this section about the role of organisations advocating a participatory epistemology in facilitating and encouraging sustained (re)performances of these empowered thoughts and actions, after people have left their organisation.

### **7.3.5 Not sustained: periods of dormancy**

Contributing to literature disrupting the often uncritically accepted ‘emancipatory narrative’ of participation (e.g. Nolas, 2007:1; Vaughan, 2014), this section considers two barriers to the (re)performance of empowerment. This work compliments that of Vaughan (2014:185), mentioned above, who found that young people involved in a participatory research project in Papua New Guinea had difficulties translating the ‘critical consciousness’ they developed within this project into ‘critical actions’ in other spaces of their lives. Similarly, Jones and SPEECH (2001) found whilst documenting the ways women in southern India were able to enact their empowerment in their everyday lives that these (re)performances were limited by prevailing, complex cultural and political discourses about the role of women in Indian society. This section extends these observations by considering the temporal, as opposed to only spatial, dynamics which affect (re)performances of empowerment. Situated within the context of transitions to adulthood, two empirical examples are used to show how the interplay between personal and

structural factors can impact the ability to (re)perform or enact empowerment in other spaces of people's lives.

Daniel was 17 when he completed Changemakers' 6-month programme. Now aged 20, Daniel recalled that after the 'uplifting experience' he had on their residential the 'momentum tailed off' as he returned to daily life:

We did all this like planning and throwing around of ideas on the last couple of days at INSPIRE and then it kind of jugged and stumbled around at the beginning and then it was the kind of process of building up momentum again and getting once more interested in it again. [Daniel, Changemakers, age 20, 3 years since involvement]

For Daniel, the intensity of the experience on the residential, epitomised by the actions of 'planning and throwing around ideas', was not sustained when he was no longer in this space, performing these tasks. Spatial factors certainly may have contributed to this loss of momentum; as argued in Cushing (1999) in relation to young people coming back from 'transformatory' outdoor camps, returning into spaces governed by familiar routines and normalised social relations can stifle newfound identifies and beliefs (see also Bell, 2003). Daniel was no longer surrounded by his participatory peer group, who had been central to the powerful emotions he felt on the residential.

Reflecting on the impact his time at Changemakers has on his current life, temporal factors can also be seen to play a part in why the sense of empowerment, or in Daniel's words, 'feeling really kind of excited and really like pumped up about the [community empowerment] projects', was not sustained. Daniel applied for Changemakers when he was 17, he was at college and his course required him to complete a set number of hours volunteering and doing extracurricular activities. He described his motivation for applying as 'killing two birds with one stone' — a 'way to build skills' and complete his course requirements. Whilst Daniel appreciated the space within the programme to reflect and develop a 5-year plan, he had already decided before applying for Changemakers that he wanted to go to university and become an interior designer. Daniel was confident in his stable imagined future. This contrasts that of participants such as Pete, introduced in the previous section,



whose time at Changemakers came when he was 'standing at a crossroads' making a conscious decision to pursue a different path (Giddens, 1991:113). Pete was undergoing a difficult period of unemployment and questioning the purpose and worth of his degree. As such he was looking for and readily welcomed the radical potential of participation to transform the way he understood his life. Showing the interplay between personal and structural factors, Daniel's contrasting stability in his present environment at home and college and in his imagined future may have (subconsciously) impacted his willingness to engage with and embed the epistemologies of empowerment and participation he encountered at Changemakers. In contrast to other participants, Daniel did not recognise a need to be empowered, supported or to reconsider his position within society. Furthermore, at the time of our interview Daniel was a couple of months into a university course studying interior design; unlike Pete he had not (yet) needed to draw on the participatory tools he had been taught at Changemakers, as his life had proceeded as he imagined. Unlike the research conducted by Jones and SPEECH (2001) which compares households who had actively engaged with their participatory intervention against those who had not, both Pete and Daniel had invested large amounts of time and energy in Changemakers. The interplay between personal choice and their structurally-mediated experience of transitions meant they responded differently to how they transferred what they had learnt into the everyday spaces of their lives.

Daniel spoke warmly of his time at Changemakers, his experience could be summarised using a phrase in Cushing (1999:28) to describe the experiences of some young people returning from an outward bounds course: it was 'something they cherished but did not really use to transform their approach to life'. Due to the methodological approach to recruitment deployed within this research, discussed in Chapter 3, it was difficult to engage with young people for whom their time at one of these organisations had not been important to them in some ways or had little or no impact on their lives since. However, Daniel's experience indicates this would be a valuable area for further research, particularly examining the interplay between

personal and structural factors, considering how a person's present temporal circumstances affects their willingness to engage and embed participatory epistemologies.

The temporal dynamics of Daniel's experiences as a young person, and then of his transitions to adulthood had impacted his personal desire to sustain the feelings he had felt. For other participants, structural factors more overtly limited their (re)performances of empowerment. Now aged 20, Sam was involved with Investing in Children from the ages of 14–17. Describing himself as 'shy', he explained that taking part in Investing in Children's Agenda Days slowly made him more confident, able to believe that his voice was important and worth hearing. It was a gradual process as at first Sam 'had to be paired up so I could write and the other would do the talking'. However, he says he had 'just started coming out of my shell' when aged 17 he became a father, left college and started work; in his words he 'went shy again'. Sam was unable to stay involved with Investing in Children due to these relatively sudden life changes, instigating complicated 'fast track' transitions to adulthood (Jones, 2002:4). Financial barriers also limited his engagement as 'because of the recession the money they paid wasn't enough having to get buses to Durham' to make his involvement viable. Sam quickly became both socially and geographically disconnected from the space where he had slowly begun to transform and the staff who he described as 'almost like a second family'. This involuntary disconnection, interrupting his slowly evolving, but in his eyes not yet complete, process towards greater confidence and self-belief, left Sam feeling unable to (re)perform and therefore stabilise his performance of empowerment in other areas of his life. 3 years later, Sam reflects he is 'slowly getting there now', by which he means he is becoming more confident in the worth of his voice again, but still lacks the financial resources to engage with other similar participatory organisations. Sam's experience was not unique. Sharon's life currently centres on caring for her young daughter and nan. Sharon shared how after her experiences at Investing in Children, which ended 2 years ago, she hoped one day to start her own

participatory youth organisation but her ability to do this was limited by her newfound responsibilities of adulthood.

It is more productive to think of Sam and Sharon's empowerment as *dormant* rather than ended. I argue in this thesis that empowerment is not a binary state of being where you either are or are not empowered. Instead, the ability to act in empowered ways can fluctuate between spaces and different temporal moments. It is also not uniform; acting in empowered ways may look very different for different people and in different spaces. Sam's ability to feel empowered in the way he felt at Investing in Children and Sharon's ability to enact her empowerment to pursue her desire to start a participatory youth organisation is temporarily restrained and limited due, predominately, to structural barriers brought on by their particular positionality within the lifecourse. Their narratives are waiting for a change in social/financial circumstances and/or, as will be explored in the following section, potentially for a renewed moment of conscientisation to spur them into action and cause them to rejuvenate and curate their past experiences in the newness of their present spaces. As argued in Maynard (2017) in relation to *dormant activisms*, thinking about the temporalities of empowerment and participation in this way, and its connections to the lifecourse, highlights the need for further explorations into the structural barriers that trigger/contribute to periods of dormancy and/or limit the translation of critical thinking into critical actions.

#### **7.4 Activists and Evangelists: New Spaces, New Collectives?**

In contrast to Chapter 5, Chapter 6 considered more radical, collectively-orientated expressions of participation, identifying in some participants moments of collective conscientisation. These moments of collective conscientisation involved the realisation that they, as young people in the UK, were experiencing social and political inequality. This newfound awareness led several participants to seek to challenge and change this. This section focuses on how elements of these moments of collective conscientisation were transferred to other spaces of the participants' lives.

Identified first are the variety of spaces these ideas are transferred into. Questions of scale and the impact of complex youth transitions are considered as these ideas are seen to become embedded in smaller, more intimate spaces. The use of the word 'embedded' (also examined in Maynard, 2017) follows the Collins English Dictionary (2012) definition as to (deeply and firmly) fix or retain a thought or idea in the mind. Secondly, and connected to this, is the wider discussion of how these moments of collective conscientisation evolve, questioning: to what extent do participants continue in their activism *for young people*, or do they, now they are adults, question who is my new collective? Where am I *currently* experiencing injustice in my life? This section concludes by discussing the actions of participants who have become 'evangelists' for radical participation. It reflects on the appropriateness of these actions in relation to broader definitions of a participatory epistemology.

#### **7.4.1 Spaces of activism**

As introduced in Chapter 1, epistemologies of participation and activism have a long and shared history, with several scholars addressing the connections between participation, activism and children and young people (e.g. Bosco, 2010; Harris *et al.*, 2010; Shukra *et al.*, 2012; Nolas *et al.*, 2016). The definition of activism and what it means to be an activist is contested (see Abrahams, 1992; Bobel, 2007). The Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary & Thesaurus (2017) defines an activist as 'a person who believes strongly in political or social change and takes part in activities such as public protests to try to make this happen'. With roots in the work of feminist scholars in the 1990s (e.g. Abrahams, 1992; Staeheli, 1994; Staeheli and Cope, 1994), activism within current geographical studies is increasingly identified as more than the engagement in 'the grandiose, the iconic, and the unquestionably *meaning-ful*' events and encounters, such as public protests that immediately spring to mind (Horton and Kraftl, 2009:14; see also Askins, 2014; Pain, 2014; Pottinger, 2016; Staeheli, Ehrkamp *et al.* 2012). Akin to studies within Children's Geographies that seek to identify political actions in the everyday (e.g. Kallio, 2012; Kallio and Häkli, 2013), these scholars draw a broader definition of activism to encompass

smaller, more intimate actions that, although often hidden or ‘largely invisible’, seek to bring about political and/or social change through actions undertaken in their daily lives (Pain, 2014:127). Contributing to this growing field, the activism identified within this section resonates with Horton and Kraftl’s (2009:21) ‘implicit activism’s; they are ‘activisms which are politicised, affirmative and potentially transformative, but which are modest, quotidian, and proceed with little fanfare’. Identifying these small scale, everyday actions which seek to bring about social and political change for children and young people as a form of activism usefully facilitates a conceptual lens through which to understand and theorise the actions undertaken by participants as connected to the broader calls for social and political change advocated by the organisations.

To be an activist you must advocate for a cause. Two separate yet interconnected causes are identified in this section for which participants were advocating. Several participants continued to advocate for greater equality and inclusion of children and young people within UK society, continuing the activist work of the organisations they used to be a part of. Alongside this, some participants also became advocates for radical participation — understanding participation as an effective tool through which to challenge injustices and potentially transform relations within society. As mentioned previously in this chapter, each organisation encouraged some of their young people, as they became too old to engage with their activities, to volunteer or consider employment options within the organisation. Although the experiences of these participants are of interest and have been analysed at points throughout this thesis, as this section is concerned with how knowledge travels and is (re)performed *beyond* the arena of participation, it does not focus on these experiences.

Considered instead is how knowledge from these organisations travelled and transferred into three spaces: university, work and home.

#### **7.4.2 University: convenient and ‘useful’ (re)performances**

Participants such as Nia and Jade were attending university at the time of being interviewed. Nia, who attended Scotswood Centre as a young volunteer, explains

the connection between her time at the centre, which included her involvement with protest rallies, and her current university dissertation:

I wanted to get involved in campaigning against the cuts in Newcastle as at the time we had faced severe austerity measures in the city as well as the local area starting a new process of regeneration which affected the way services in the area were conducted thanks to less space available. Also, there was a few more personal issues at home, my Dad had just lost his job with the local authority due to his department being dissolved. So, I felt like I needed to do my bit and stand up for what I believe in. In terms of university, I haven't really campaigned or spoke about government cuts other than in my dissertation where I'll be trying to find out if it has really had any impact in the way youth provision is delivered in the city. [Nia, Scotswood Centre, age 18, 5 years since involvement as a young person, although continued involvement as a young volunteer]

Nia's narrative illuminates some of the intertwined reasons why people, at different moments in their lives, may be more or less motivated to become involved in different forms of activism. Whilst she attended Scotswood Centre, Nia was encouraged by staff to speak at protest rallies, but her actions were also fueled by another motivation: the loss of her father's job. Now a few years later, she is distanced from both the presence of the centre staff who facilitated the opportunities for her involvement at the rallies, and the immediacy of her father's employment situation. Nia has reconfigured her activism in the new space of the university, transferring and channeling her continued frustration at the austerity cuts into a space she has readily available: her university dissertation research.

Similarly, Jade, who left Investing in Children 5 years previously, envisages using her dissertation as a space of activism. Recalling how she felt listened to at Investing in Children, Jade hopes to draw on personal experiences to use her dissertation to create a space to listen to young people's narratives after violence. Undergoing a form of 'writing-as-activism' (e.g. Mama, 2000; Jacobi, 2003), these participants are using the spaces conveniently available to them to continue to advocate for issues they had encountered at their respective youth participation organisations. They are repositioning and (re)performing their past experiences in the 'newness of the present' (Worth 2009, 1055).

Beyond the space of her dissertation, Jade transferred the knowledge she has encountered about participation into other aspects of her life, seeing a participatory approach as a productive way to restructure power relations within her university society. She explained in detail how she reuses participatory techniques she learnt at Investing in Children to facilitate focus groups with her university's Feminist Society. Relayed in Chapter 6, Jade had some very difficult experiences as a young person facilitating focus groups, however, as she transferred these techniques to other spaces she drew on these past experiences:

You've got all sorts of different types of people and you're trying to manage them. Really rude to each other some of them, clucking whilst other people talking. From like Investing in Children I learnt a few tricks. It was mad! We were in a big circle and someone was trying to talk, and some people thought it was too facile, because there was loads of snob, elitisms, fascist crap [...] if other people are talking when other people, when this person is trying to talk if you look round the room, look at them but you smile like, but don't make out like you've got a problem with them talking, just smile. [It] stops, just completely stops! Or if you're talking about a *really* difficult subject, something really embarrassing and nobody wants to come forth with it, only if you're willing, you say the most embarrassing thing that's happened to you, you make the lamest jokes and then no one feels they could possibly sound worse than you, and then they start talking! Like Investing in Children just really taught me how to manage groups, especially focus groups or young people. [Jade, Investing in Children, age 24, 5 years since involvement, her emphasis]

In this extract Jade is very focused on technique, *how* to elicit information from people. It is like a performance that she has seen and is now imitating ('smile at rude participants', 'tell an embarrassing story to prompt discussion'). Akin to the 'useful' co-opting of participation outlined at the start of this chapter as participants curated their past experiences to enhance their CVs, the participatory techniques Jade learnt at Investing in Children are useful to her for managing relations within her society. However, her description also indicates a level of understanding and commitment to a radical participatory epistemology. In telling embarrassing stories so that 'no one feels they could possibly sound worse than you' Jade is emphasising that despite being the facilitator she is not in an aloof position of authority and is actively trying to facilitate comfortable, accessible co-exploration and co-production. In later

discussions her commitment ‘to the philosophy of participation (not just its innovative techniques)’ was made explicit (Kesby, 2007:2814). Jade explained that she used unstructured focus groups as she felt they helped ensure ‘vulnerable people’ were able to participate, counteracted potential power imbalances and were an ethical way to co-produce information, explaining ‘this way I don't feel I am mining them and leaving them. This way I'm having a conversation with them!’ Jade did more than co-opt participation and its appealing techniques. She *embedded* the radical participatory epistemology she had encountered at Investing in Children into her life at university: through her everyday actions of managing focus groups within the Feminist Society she was implicitly presenting participation as a productive way to renegotiate unhelpful power dynamics. Her example shows how, for some participants, both the practical tools *and* the philosophies they encountered as young people transferred into practical, embedded actions in other spaces of their lives.

#### **7.4.3 Work: the nature and scales of activism**

Jenn and Tim, both now aged 30, 12 years on from their involvement with Investing in Children, transferred their experiences campaigning for the human rights of children and young people into their spaces of work. Tim's time at Investing in Children slowly transformed the way he thought about the people around him:

Before I was involved I suppose I was quite self-centred, I'd be interested in what I can get out of things and if I was facing some kind of injustice I'd be bothered but I wasn't particularly caring for those around me. Probably because if I didn't like somebody, and there was a lot of people I had to go to school with that I didn't like, I certainly wouldn't have been interested in trying to change society for them for the better. Whereas Investing in Children kind of opened or changed my view on that to see the people around me more as citizens with rights because they were *people* rather than because of something they achieved or what kind of person they were. [Tim, Investing in Children, age 30, 12 years since involvement]

Now a journalist, Tim cautiously, *gently*, approached his editor about a ‘role for children and young people in influencing what the press prints’, believing they should have a say in this process. Tim's request was unsuccessful as he acknowledged his newspaper ‘is not going to be willing to offer editorial control to



anybody apart from their editor'. Recognising the role of the pre-existing discourses that govern this space, Tim reflects that this is 'a shame but inevitable given the way the organisation's set up' (see also Kesby, 2007; Jeffrey and Staeheli, 2014).

Reminiscent of the 'self-conscious, self-doubtful, hesitant' activisms which go on with 'not too much fuss' described in Horton and Kraftl (2009), despite this Tim continues to, through subtle and at times gentle small actions, to 'try carry what I learnt with Investing in Children into the work I do'.

Jenn, who works in the film industry, explained how her experiences of participation at Investing in Children consciously affect her working practices:

I'm much more conscious as an adult of giving young people that I meet the same opportunity as adults to be included in decisions that affect them [...] I try to be very conscious of making sure that if a young person is being asked to do something that they understand why and have the opportunity to kind of voice any concerns that they have, instead of simply me saying 'ok you do this'. (Jenn, Investing in Children, age 30, 12 years since involvement)

Through her daily working patterns, Jenn is enacting a radical participatory epistemology that seeks to challenge and transform unjust relations. Jenn's working practices may be small in scale but they are still impactful (see also Pottinger, 2017). They are a form of the 'quiet politics' outlined in Askins (2014:353,354), demonstrating how 'new social relations are built in/through everyday places'. Like the women resisting domestic violence in Pain (2014:127), these small scale activisms have the potential to become 'part of creating progressive change for a wider group or society'.

Jenn also recalled an incident when a friend was praising the devices placed outside shops that emit a high-pitched sound to discourage young people from loitering. She questioned him on this way of thinking and said:

Because of my experiences with Investing in Children I have the confidence to say to people who are making those kind of comments that what they are saying is shocking and unfair and those kind of technologies are just preventing young people from taking part and being included in their wider community. (Jenn, Investing in Children, age 30, 12 years since involvement)

Jenn and Tim's narratives highlight how small scale, embedded activisms can vary in nature. As the emerging field of Gentle Geographies attests, at times injustices might be challenged *gently* (see Sellick, 2014; Finn and Jeffries, 2015; Pottinger, 2017). However, as shown through Jenn's rebuke of her friend, small scale activisms can also be bold and confrontational (see Maynard, 2017). These activisms were embedded in the everyday, however, they were also *entwined* with, by which I mean intimately enmeshed and not easily separated from, other scales (Askins, 2014, Pain, 2014, see also Pain and Staeheli, 2014 and Staeheli, Marshall et al., 2016 for broader discussions about scale through their examinations of intimacy-geopolitics). Intimate spaces are shown here to be used to challenge broader societal discourses which perpetuate the exclusion and marginalisation of young people within UK society.

#### **7.4.4 Home: parenting as (slow) activism**

The home also has the potential to become a 'site of resistance' (hooks, 2001:382) and activism for Tim and Jenn as they ponder future parenting strategies (see also Broad *et al.*, 2008; Naples, 2014). Tim, already a parent, hopes to raise his son to know 'he is not just an adult in waiting, he has opinions that are valid and rights that are important'. Similarly, Jenn, considering becoming a parent and anticipating a childhood different to hers, imagines:

When I become like a parent I will have a different way of dealing with my own children when I grow up to how I otherwise would have [...] when I was a young person there were lots of things that I said that adults tend to say 'don't be silly' or 'that doesn't matter'. I found that adults had quite an easy way of dismissing my opinions or almost like suggesting that I didn't have enough life experience to have an opinion whereas now I kind of feel that was wrong of them in some ways. (Jenn, Investing in Children, age 30, 12 years since involvement)

These intentions highlight how, at times, activism and transformation can be *slow*. Parenting in ways that respect the human rights of children and young people is not a one-off event; it takes years of practice and failure, years of small, momentary choices to stop, listen, respect and act. As acknowledged throughout this thesis, transforming adult-child relations into relations based on respect and rights is a

long-term, ongoing commitment. Transformation here is therefore comprised of the accumulation of small actions, such as daily parenting decisions, which deviate from discourses that perpetuate a hierarchical binary between adults and children and young people.

#### **7.4.5 Activism and time: becoming *more than***

These examples illustrate some of the spaces that knowledge and resources encountered in arenas of participation have been transferred into. The activism in these everyday spaces is so deeply embedded in daily actions and attitudes that, if studied separately, they may be difficult to detect. Such small scale acts undoubtedly 'count' as activism in their own right (see Martin *et al.*, 2007). Whilst they 'might seed something bigger [...] this is not the only reason they count' (Pottinger, 2017:7). In her study of 'seed savers' (individuals who cultivate fruits and vegetables and then select and save seeds to provide future generations of plants for themselves and others), Pottinger (2017) argues that small scale activism is a powerful action in and of themselves. In *this* research, however, participants self-identified the actions narrated above as *connected* to their past experiences (as acknowledged in the introduction to this chapter they may, of course, have also been affected by other influences and past experiences outwith these organisations and influences unknowable/articulable by participants). Contextualising these actions alongside participants' past experiences at these organisations and their position in the lifecourse (e.g. as 30-year-olds contemplating the dynamics of parenthood, or as university students) makes these small scale activism easier to identify and their significance becomes even more apparent. They are *more than* university dissertation research, or conversations with friends and colleagues, or well-meant future intentions about parenting. They are part of the continued, slow challenging of unjust relations as they nudge 'established patterns of control and authority' (Staeheli *et al.*, 2012:630).

Further to this, the accounts narrated throughout this section were situated in amongst those of fragmented, socially and economically strained transitions towards adulthood. This positionality may offer one answer to why larger scale,

more grandiose accounts of activism have been notably absent in these narratives: why Tim approached his editor but did not challenge the rejection of his request, why Jenn changed her working practices but did not boycott her place of work over their practices towards young people and, as discussed in the following section, women. The participants' lives were stretched: concentrating on parenting young children, passing degrees, establishing themselves in early stage careers. The activism of their youth is therefore *currently* repositioned in spaces which are (somewhat) convenient and comfortable, being enacted on scales which resulted in lower personal risk.

#### **7.4.6 New collectives**

For some participants, transferring their past experiences into their present lives resulted in new moments of conscientisation (Freire, 1970b). This was most clearly evidenced in this statement made by Jenn:

But actually beyond that concept of looking at young people and discrimination what it [being involved at Investing in Children] does is it influences your perception of discrimination as a complete thing. So I'm actually quite conscious as well, particularly working in the film industry which is a *hugely* male dominated industry, I'm much more conscious perhaps now more as a woman than a young person of ways in which I experience discrimination and how I can challenge that. Yeah I kind of think it [Investing in Children] goes beyond what it is as well [...] I was reading some statistics recently about people who work in other departments in film and Oscar nominations oh and it's just completely shocking what percentage are men and I kind of see how that has continued even now I think that when I was working with Investing in Children one of the things that I really got an understanding of was how important it is for young people to kind of champion young people and say you know 'this young person, however little knowledge they have and whatever their background and so forth, has an opinion and it's an opinion, everyone has a right to be heard'. And I'm often telling young female runners in the film industry that they have a voice to be heard and that they need to kind of continue and that it doesn't matter whether they feel like their opportunities are limited, they need to keep going with that. But also I think there's a huge value in 'young people championing young people' as there is in 'women championing women' to kind of say 'no look actually *her* credentials are better than *his*, why are you employing him! It doesn't make sense. (Jenn, Investing in Children, age 30, 12 years since involvement, her emphasis)

Jenn now identifies herself as part of a new collective experiencing injustices: women. Whilst this awareness will undoubtedly be influenced by other discourses Jenn has encountered over the last 12 years, she identifies her time at Investing in Children as important *and connected* to how she responds to this current injustice. Jenn's new moment(s) of conscientisation illustrate the fluid, temporal qualities of 'being an activist', whose 'messy, complex and multiple identities' are 'always in the process of becoming' (Chatterton and Pickerill, 2010,479). Her conscientisation here as a woman is entwined with conscientisation as a young person. This has led to Jenn transferring and reappropriating the practices of encouraging young people to make use of their voices she encountered at Investing in Children as she tells a female runner they too have a voice to be heard.

Kerry, now working within local government, also engages with a new collective on issues of injustice through her work with the gypsy traveller community:

I promote the gypsy and traveller culture within Sheffield and try to encourage the County Council to celebrate it rather than sort of shun upon it. And obviously that's what Investing in Children's all about but for young people. I don't think I could do this job that I'm in now without having the experience from there because the passion that I had with the young people, now transferred it over for having the passion for gypsy traveller community. (Kerry, Investing in Children, age 27, 8 years since involvement)

As our interview unfolds, Kerry nuances her statement about her transference of passion. She identifies how her understanding about children and young people, which developed at Investing in Children, was entangled with her positionality as a young person at the time. She explains how as this knowledge has been reapplied to the gypsy traveller community it has changed. In her words, she has 'evolved'. Kerry still believes it is important to include the voices of marginalised people, but this knowledge she learnt at Investing in Children is being (re)performed in light of her current spatial-temporal positionality. No longer a young person employed by Investing in Children with minimal responsibility over the long-term outcomes of a situation, Kerry is now employed by the council and, she muses, must consider health and safety requirements and funding limitations when advocating for the voices of the marginalised to be heard and acted upon. Reflecting on when she first

began this job she says she was ‘really, really, really passionate’ and all ‘young person, young person, young person’ but now, in her words, she has ‘grown up a little bit’ and ‘can see things from both sides’. By this Kerry means she considers decisions from both the perspective of a young person demanding her rights and as an adult trying to respect these within the constraints of her workplace.

Kerry’s connection between age and passion is reminiscent of linear, hierarchical representations of young people as idealistic, passionate but ultimately less rational than adults (Arneil, 2002; Devlin, 2006). It contradicts the message Investing in Children is trying to portray about human rights, young people and age, set out in Chapter 4, whereby young people are equal rights holders whose capabilities should not be measured *in comparison to* adults (see Investing in Children, 2015b). Kerry’s reflections about her ‘evolution’, therefore, invite questions about the extent or longevity of her conscientisation (in the form desired and envisaged by Investing in Children). Knowledge is shown to be instable, unpredictable and fluid (see also Sullivan, 2001), evolving as it is repositioned and reconsidered in different spaces and times throughout the lifecourse (see also Jeffrey and Staeheli, 2014).

This transfer and evolution of passion and knowledge is potentially more than a question of age and Kerry’s current position in the lifecourse: it may also be connected to a loss in self-interest. When at Investing in Children Kerry was a *young person* campaigning for the rights of *young people*, but she has never been a gypsy traveller. Unlike Jenn whose new collective developed out of a new moment of conscientisation where she considered injustices *she* was currently facing, Kerry transferred her passion onto a cause of which she is an outsider. As geographers engage further with studies of emotions and activism (e.g. Askins, 2009; Brown and Pickerill, 2009), this distinction, and in Kerry’s case *movement* from being an insider in a cause to being an outsider, warrants consideration.

#### **7.4.7 Participatory evangelists: a step too far?**

The debate about the effects of participation needs therefore to contemplate at least two moments/spaces of social interaction: one in which an external agency with authority among a community facilitates the

empowered performances of participants; and one in which exparticipants attempt, using the modest powers of persuasion, negotiation, seduction, inducement, and manipulation, to recruit other nonparticipants into helping distanciate the resources and forms of self-governance that effected empowerment within participatory space. (Kesby, 2007:2825)

Throughout this section, examples have been presented which show how some participants became advocates for radical participation, seeing it as an effective tool through which to challenge injustices and potentially transform relations within society. Several of these participants demonstrated their support through practical actions, for example Kerry, introduced above, uses a version of Investing in Children's Agenda Days in her workplace to help her hear the voices of marginalised gypsy travellers. Contemplating the second of Kesby's (2007:2825) 'moments/spaces of social interaction', this section considers how some participants took these actions a step further. Continuing the use of religious terminology as a mechanism through which to interpret and critique participation (e.g. Francis, 2001; Henkel and Stirrat, 2001), this section identifies how some participants became what I term *participatory evangelists*, proactively telling others about the merits of participation. Commonly used in reference to religion, an evangelist is defined as a zealous advocate of a particular cause. Evangelism is the (usually oral) practice of giving other people information about a particular doctrine or set of beliefs with the intention that they will change their actions to become more like yours (Oxford Dictionaries, 2015b). It is evoked here to highlight the zealous and oral nature of some participants' commitment to a radical participatory epistemology.

Lexi described her 'conversion' to a radical participatory epistemology as subtle and cumulative, saying 'you don't really realise the little things that have changed'. She admired how 'young person-led' she perceived Changemakers to be, and valued that 'no one ever told you what to do' but instead you 'created rules together as a group'. Identifying these techniques as stemming from Changemakers' foundations within a participatory epistemology, after completing the programme Lexi began to believe in the importance of her voice, realising that 'people might wanna hear what

I have to say'. One of the things she wanted to say was about the value of this new way of being she had encountered at Changemakers:

[It affects] the way you behave towards people as well or the way you talk to people. And then also talking about the things you do, to other people, I'm hoping that it has had an effect on them. So my friends always laugh about 'oh Lexi's coming out with hippy stuff again'. And I'm like 'it's not hippy stuff! It makes sense when you think about it!' and I think about it with my friends and stuff as well, so hopefully it's had an effect on them as well. (Lexi, Changemakers, age 24. 1.5 years since involvement)

Lexi hoped that narrating her 'transformational' experience at Changemakers would affect her friends. One possible reading of this quotation could detect a slight frustration (albeit light humoured) felt by Lexi's friends as she recounts them saying 'oh Lexi's coming out with hippy stuff again'. Dismissing her words easily, perhaps this is something they have frequently heard her say yet do not completely understand as they have had no *practical* experience of participation themselves.

Jenn felt that Investing in Children had 'instilled' something in her. She wanted to 'continue with the values' that she had 'learnt' there. As examined above, Jenn embedded a participatory epistemology into her daily life, affecting her interactions at work. Jenn also felt she had a responsibility to not only demonstrate, but tell others about both the value of participation and the human rights of children and young people she had learnt about at Investing in Children:

I do feel that anyone who's involved in Investing in Children has the opportunity to pass on that message a little bit, I just think it's really important I suppose, it's like yeah very important that we do that. (Jenn, Investing in Children, age 30, 12 years since involvement)

Jenn, whose narrative has been told throughout this chapter, not only adopted what could be called a radical, participatory way of being, she proactively passed on Investing in Children's message, using her 'modest powers of persuasion' to 'recruit' others (Kesby, 2007:2825). She explained to both her friend who made discriminatory comments against young people and the young female runners whose voices were being silenced in her workplace, *why* she felt and acted in this way.



Lexi and Jenn were not asked directly whilst being interviewed if they told others about what they had learnt at these organisations; these reflections were offered organically as they considered on what they had been doing since leaving the organisations. Hidden from the gaze of the researcher, other participants, and indeed the many others who engaged with these three organisations or organisations that similarly advocate a radical participatory epistemology, may also be participatory evangelists. The outcome of Lexi and Jenn's conversations with their friends and colleagues are not known; nor are the outcomes of other, potentially multiple, conversations about participation. But, as explored in the conclusion below, potentially they could be cumulatively contributing to a slow normalisation of radical participation as a new basis for relations within society.

Despite this, an, admittedly more theoretical than practical, tension is present. Throughout this thesis radical participation has been presented as an epistemology which should be learnt experientially (Chambers, 1992). The organisations involved in this research did not orally teach young people about participation, but, particularly at Investing in Children, immersed their young people in a culture that sought, despite challenges, to enact radical participation and restructure adult-child relations. Therefore, the coupling of the words 'participatory' and 'evangelism' should be read as both an acknowledgement of the fervour of some participants but also as a critique. Spreading a doctrine of participation based on oral instruction is at odds with the image of radical participation characterised by an attitude of humility, promoting co-discovery, listening, co-production, experimentation and difference.

## **7.5 Conclusions: Slow Transformations**

Through the context of participants' transitions to adulthood, this chapter has focused on the third research question of this thesis, considering how the knowledge and resources created within these arenas of participation travel to other spaces of people's lives. Before reflecting on the notion of slow transformations, three contributions made within this chapter to wider geographic knowledge and practice are worth highlighting.

Firstly, this chapter exposes the instability of knowledge as it is transferred across time and space. Participants were shown to have some agency over how this knowledge is transferred, deliberately curating it to assist them in competitive employment transitions. This observation, and its accompanying presentation of the motivations for participants' involvement with these organisations, contributes more broadly to unsettling recent (over)emphasis in the studies of youth and P/politics of the 'here and now'. Young people's experiences at organisations such as those involved in this research were shown to be simultaneously important in the moment whilst *also* (at times unconsciously) playing a significant role in making their potential futures possible/imaginable.

Secondly, this chapter responded directly to concerns raised in Kesby (2007) about the need to identify tactics which contribute to the (re)performance of empowerment outside of arenas of participation. Through examining three tactics and their limitations it became evident that if organisations that promote participation are serious about being more than 'isolated islands of empowerment', they must consider what mechanisms they can put in place to support young people after they leave to either remain connected to participatory peer groups or the organisation itself.

Thirdly, this chapter made a valuable contribution to geographies of activism. Empirically, it has added to the growing documentation of small scale, everyday geographies of activisms, whilst reflecting on their varying natures. By examining these actions through a temporal lens, however, it has also extended geographical understanding in this area. Not presenting these actions in isolation, this chapter has both analysed these present day, small scale actions as intimately entwined with participants' past experiences at these organisations and, through contextualising them across the lifecourse, has considered how this positionality has impacted the spaces and scales at which they are enacted. This has allowed for a broader, richer understanding of these everyday activisms. Additionally, through theorising extended periods where (re)performances of empowerment are limited as periods of *dormancy*, a new arena for research has emerged as greater attention is needed

to investigate the (interconnected) structural and personal barriers that limit some (re)performances of empowerment and/or activist actions.

Significantly, this chapter has also offered an unexpected answer to one part of this thesis' first research question, examining the extent to which it is possible for youth participation to be a tool for the radical transformation of adult-child relations when enacted within a neoliberal context. As argued in Chapter 1, the transformation of adult-child relations in the UK into those based more substantially on respect and rights is highly unlikely to occur overnight. Instead transformation may be realised slowly, as the culmination of multiple small actions, performed with increasing frequency in a variety of spaces encourages the normalisation of new ways of doing relations. Such a transformation of adult-child relations would be radical to the extent it would demand changes in all spaces of society. This chapter has shown how through an analysis of embedded, small scale actions in everyday spaces, participants were seen to be committed to challenging, dismantling and transforming existing relations, systems and structures that promote and perpetuate inequality. Several had become conscious and unconscious advocates and evangelists for the transformation of relations between adults and young people. As reflected throughout this thesis, this research only documents the impacts of engaging with three organisations in the UK that promote youth participation influenced by a radical participatory epistemology. It also can only analyse the impacts that participants in this research could identify and articulate. Therefore, the prevalence of instances where those previously involved in participatory youth organisations continue, in other spaces and through varying means, to destabilise dominant discourses that perpetuate a hierarchical relationship between adults and children and young people, may be significantly greater than observed within this research.

This finding was unexpected to the extent that the organisations involved in this research did not foresee that the young people they previously engaged with could be/become the harbingers of their longed for, transformed adult-child relations. As outlined in Chapter 4, they believed one of the ways this transformation would be

achieved was through changing the mindset of adults they encountered through their work. Nevertheless, this research has found that as young people embed the attitudes and actions they had encountered as young people into their lives as adults, they themselves become an effective tool through which to *slowly* bring about this radical transformation.

## **Chapter 8. Conclusions: Unsettling Binaries**

### **8.1 Introduction**

This thesis began with a question: has participation lost its radical agenda, becoming too distanced from its radical, grassroots origins? This question was posed in Percy-Smith (2010), who was concerned that youth participation in the UK has been co-opted as part of the 'project' of neoliberalism. Building on the work of others (particularly Masschelein and Quaghebeur, 2005; Alejandro Leal, 2007; Raby, 2014), this research examined tensions between radical and neoliberal youth participation. Through analysing the practices of three organisations that seek to work in participatory ways with young people, this thesis has unsettled the binary construction that youth participation at organisations such as these is either being driven by a neoliberal or radical agenda.

This is not the only binary that has been unsettled within this thesis. This final chapter considers the role participatory practices, such as those identified in previous chapters, play in unsettling the hierarchical binary between adults and children and young people. It also highlights other binaries that have been contested within this research, such as the hierarchical division between popular and invited spaces of participation. I argue how through examining the complexities of youth participation in practice, this research has identified connections rather than divisions between individual and collective processes of conscientisation, large and small activisms and fast and slow transformations. Within this chapter I also demonstrate how this thesis has disrupted assumptions surrounding empowerment, arguing how a temporal understanding of processes of empowerment moves theoretical understandings beyond a binary state whereby people are either empowered or not empowered. Furthermore, I contend that considering temporal dynamics unsettles binary divisions in which young people are considered either beings or becomings.

Alongside revealing how this research has unsettled established binaries, within this chapter I also seek to answer the research questions proposed in Chapter 1:

1. To what extent is it possible for youth participation to be a tool for transformation, particularly of adult-child relations, when enacted within a neoliberal context?
2. In what ways might processes of conscientisation take place within an invited arena of youth participation?
3. How are the knowledge and resources created within these arenas of youth participation transferred, over time, to other spaces of people's lives?

The answers to these questions are naturally intertwined. This chapter begins by addressing each of these questions directly, highlighting the key and original contributions this thesis has made to geographical studies through seeking to answer these questions. Drawing together these findings leads me on to reflect on how, despite the entangled and complex motivations and practices highlighted in this research, *spaces of possibility* are also present. These are spaces where alternative possible ways of being and doing, which disrupt and challenge the dominance of neoliberal and capitalist agendas, are imagined and enacted. In amongst the hopefulness of this section, I narrate the struggles faced by Changemakers as they operate within a climate of neoliberalism and austerity. This chapter concludes by suggesting both areas for further academic research and practice-based recommendations for those working within arenas of youth participation.

## **8.2 Transformations: Through and Within Intergenerational Spaces**

*To what extent is it possible for youth participation to be a tool for transformation, particularly of adult-child relations, when enacted within a neoliberal context?*

When considering the extent to which it is possible for youth participation to be a tool for transformation it is essential, as Tisdall (2013) notes, to question who/what is being transformed and why. These questions were considered in depth in Chapter 4 in relation to the three organisations involved in this research. Hart (2008) suggests three (interconnected) transformations that may be occurring through

processes of youth participation: (a) transformation for those involved, for example through developing skills and extending networks, (b) transformation of relations between young people and adults and (c) transformations as a result of the activities associated with the youth participation — which in the case of this research centres on transformations around how young people (and their rights) are respected within UK society. This section addresses the first two of these transformations.

Considered first are the ways in which this research found youth participation to be a tool for personal transformation of young people. Secondly this section demonstrates the contribution of this thesis to the growing body of work examining intergenerational spaces (e.g. Vanderbeck and Worth, 2015a) and specifically adult-child relations within spaces of youth participation (e.g. Mannion, 2007; Wyness, 2009; Jupp Kina, 2012). This section highlights the complexities of performing adult-child relations *within* arenas of participation. To avoid repetition, broader reflections about the sustainability of individual transformations and the transformation of adult-child relations *beyond* the arena of participation are addressed in Section 8.4 which considers the contribution this thesis has made to questions of temporality.

*Detailing* the personal transformations of young people as a result of their involvement within arenas of youth participation has not been the primary aim of this thesis, although many examples were given throughout Chapters 5, 6 and 7. As acknowledged in Chapter 2, personal transformation is often the focus of evaluations of participatory initiatives with young people (e.g. Neary and A'Drake, 2006; Artswork, 2011). Recording personal transformations offers valuable insight for organisations, and as discussed towards the end of this chapter, is to a certain extent essential for organisations looking to secure funding within the current climate. Nevertheless, there is a danger that when undue weight is given to them, the second and third types of transformation, as identified above, may be overlooked/sidelined not just in the *evaluation* of such initiatives but within the initiatives themselves. Evaluations that *prioritise* personal transformation also potentially perpetuate and reinforce the idea that young people's participation is

not a right but is primarily about the development or ‘improvement’ of young people, training them to become good neoliberal subjects.

Nevertheless, agreeing with findings in ‘grey’ literature (e.g. Kirby and Bryson, 2002), this research has found youth participation to be a tool for personal transformation of young people. Accounts of personal transformation featured heavily within participant interviews and were entwined with accounts of other types of transformations. Highlighting the continued contrast between arenas of youth participation and other spaces of young people’s lives, participants described how they were ‘transformed’, ‘completely changed’ and had ‘their eyes opened’ within these spaces. They recalled a wide range of ways being involved in these organisations had changed them as individuals, with many highlighting the skills they had developed through their time there. Due to the focus of this thesis, it was not possible to analyse these all in-depth. Narratives of personal transformation were drawn upon in Chapter 7 to explore how participants reported that their experiences within arenas of youth participation encouraged them personally to think and act in empowered ways. In thinking about how youth participation may be a tool for personal transformation, Chapter 7 also reflected on the role of staff in young people’s transitions to adulthood. It argued that these relationships may be a *resource* used to (re)direct employment transitions.

In considering the extent to which it is possible for youth participation to be a tool for personal transformation, this project paid particular attention to the neoliberal context within which youth participation in the UK is operating. In doing so this thesis unsettles the unhelpful and overly simplistic binary in which spaces of youth participation are categorised as being driven by either a **neoliberal/radical agenda agenda**. Within this binary those promoting a neoliberal agenda are presented as predominately concerned with ‘improving’ young people whilst organisations driven by a radical participatory agenda are presented as potentially more ‘authentic’ expressions of participation, (only) concerned with social transformation. Instead, within this thesis I have argued that practices within arenas of youth participation are often motivated and driven, both consciously and unconsciously, by an



*entanglement* of these agendas. It is therefore vital that arenas of youth participation, even those such as Investing in Children who publicly distance their work from overtly neoliberal agendas, reflect regularly on their practices. I propose that organisations continuously reflect on what type of personal transformation is being encouraged within these spaces, considering to what extent their practices are encouraging young people to be/become critical thinkers.

This thesis concentrated on the second of Hart's (2008) transformations: that youth participation may contribute to the transformation of adult-child relations. In considering this, both the enactment of adult-child relations *within* arenas of youth participation and the transformation of relations *beyond* these arenas have been discussed. As acknowledged above, the latter is explored in Section 8.4 of this conclusion. I have argued that arenas of youth participation which advocate a radical participatory epistemology have the *potential* to be spaces through which adult-child relations within the UK are 'transformed'. Acknowledging their diverse forms and aims, by their definition organisations that are concerned with *youth* participation should be seeking to contest the hierarchical binary between **adults/children**, which is prevalent in many aspects of UK society. Through empirical research, I observed that contesting this binary started from within: organisations attempted to model their proposed reconfigured adult-child relations with the hope that their internal practices and ways of being will 'push-out-on' other spaces. In observing this movement, it was also identified that adult-child relations within these arenas are also 'press[ed] in on' by other discourses such as neoliberalism. This was made clear through an analysis of how young people are, to varying extents, governed within these spaces (albeit at times unconsciously) into being independent/individually-minded.

Whilst these observations are perhaps unsurprising and have been made by others more broadly in relation to participatory spaces (e.g. Kesby, 1999; Jones and SPEECH, 2001; Mosse, 2001), where this thesis makes an original contribution is through unveiling the complexities surrounding *the way* this hierarchical binary has been contested and reappropriated within these arenas of youth participation.

Adult-child relations within these spaces were found in practice to be complicated by misunderstandings surrounding both youth participation and radical participation. Echoing critiques made of the work of Chambers (1997) in relation to participatory development, there was a lingering preoccupation in the organisations involved in this research with the importance of ‘redistributing’ power from adults to children and young people. This potentially reflects a broader fixation with the notion of shifting the ‘balance of power’ evident within both youth participation practices and Children’s Geographies (e.g. Morrow and Richards, 1996; Matthews, 2001b; Driscoll, 2012). As argued in Chapter 2, this is based on an overly simplistic understanding of power as a commodity (see also Gallagher, 2008). Whilst externally some of the organisations involved in this research advocated for dialogue between adults and young people, it was observed that their internal practices often focused on *reducing* the voices and decision-making power of adults rather than promoting co-production — a cornerstone of a radical participatory epistemology. As critiqued in Chapter 5, tropes such as that young people are ‘experts in their own lives’ were used to justify these practices. This perpetuates the questionable notion that youth participatory organisations in which adult staff are seen to ‘do less’ are ‘more’ participatory. These concerns also resulted in spaces being (mis)labelled as ‘adult-free’ or ‘children’s spaces’, failing to acknowledge the powerful *silent presence* of adults as co-constructors of these spaces. In identifying these presences, I argue that these spaces should always be theorised as *intergenerational spaces*. Tensions about how to perform adult-child relations within spaces of radical youth participation were further exposed through an analysis of language used to describe relations, presented in Chapter 6. Although as outlined later in this chapter further research is needed, this preliminary analysis showed that young people identified a slight disconnect between the rhetoric and the practice of equality within these spaces. Therefore, this research has found that, whilst organisations may be outwardly challenging the *hierarchical* nature of the adult-child binary, in distancing adults from participatory practices their internal practices may be (unwittingly) reinforcing the division between these groups.

This thesis has shown that arenas of youth participation advocating a radical participatory epistemology have the potential to be spaces which model new ways of doing adult-child relations, however, it has also suggested that performances of these relations are not necessarily as radical as they may first appear. Certainly, they should not be accepted uncritically but understood as entangled in a complex web of neoliberal and radical agendas and pre-existing ideas about what youth participation is and should look like. Acknowledging that even when the influence of adults is not obvious, all arenas of youth participation are intergenerational spaces is one way to begin to open up the question of what radically transformed relations between adults and children and young people, based on notions of equality and co-production, could look like. These tensions and entanglements are returned to throughout this conclusion.

### 8.3 Conscientisation Within Invited Spaces: Desirable, Spatial, Relational

*In what ways might processes of conscientisation take place within an invited arena of youth participation?*

In answering this second research question, this section brings together three claims made implicitly throughout the latter chapters of this thesis. It begins by contending that invited spaces are *desirable* spaces of youth participation. Following this, I argue that conscientisation should be understood as both a *spatial* and *relational* process.

The empirical research conducted for this thesis took place within three organisations which can be described as *invited* arenas of youth participation. As set out in Chapter 2, this term was developed through the work of Cornwall (2004a); (2004b) who sought to distinguish between spaces of participation that were instigated organically by those who were experiencing some form of marginalisation (popular spaces) and spaces into which these people are *invited* (often by those in 'greater' positions of power) to participate in. The unsettling of this binary between **popular spaces/invited spaces**, in which popular spaces are set up as the 'gold standard' of participation, began in Chapter 2 which argued that Cornwall's distinctions are often misinterpreted and overly simplified. Cornwall's work contains

many often overlooked caveats which themselves disrupt this binary (see Cornwall, 2002). Drawing from empirical research, observations made in Chapter 6 concurred with those offered in Freeman *et al.* (2003) and Williams (2004a), that invited spaces are not one dimensional, where the only effects of power at work are restrictive. Instead this chapter showed how those who are considered marginalised (in the case of this research, young people) may resist, reconfigure or manipulate the effects of power operating within invited spaces (see also Kesby *et al.*, 2007). Furthering this argument, I have contended that young people's presence within these spaces can also be intentional and desirable. Drawing particularly on reflections made by the young adult participants (not just by staff), it was evident that these are and should not be depicted as 'second choice' arenas of participation. The opportunity to challenge and change adult-led structures 'from within' was understood by some as a powerful, *deliberate* tactic to disrupt these spaces and, they hoped, potentially (slowly) transform the way young people are viewed and respected by adults in the UK. In seeking to reframe invited spaces, I do not wish to diminish the radical potential of popular spaces of participation. Instead it is my intention that through examining invited spaces, it has become evident that the perpetuation of this binary (even just within academia) is unhelpful. Its continuance distracts from the valuable and potentially transformative work occurring in and through *both* types of spaces of participation.

This research was concerned with the ways in which processes of conscientisation took place within these invited spaces. Two 'types' of conscientisation were identified: **individual conscientisation/collective conscientisation**. This distinction arose out of an analysis of the extent to which participants situated their personal experiences of injustice within broader understandings of injustices facing young people as a collective. Forming part of the original contribution made within this thesis, it is the intention that by beginning to separate and define these processes within this thesis, others will be encouraged to use and develop more specific definitions when writing about processes of conscientisation. Whilst this distinction has been useful, what is being proposed here is not a binary. Participants did not

either experience individual or collective moments of conscientisation; rather the extent to which they related their personal circumstances to those of a broader collective shifted in different spatial-temporal circumstances. It is therefore useful to understand conscientisation as a *spatial* process: it does not take place in a vacuum but is influenced by time, space and, as seen through the focus in Chapter 7 on transitions to adulthood, individual experiences of the lifecourse. Developing an understanding of conscientisation as a spatial process, it was observed within Chapters 5 and 6 that those who attended Investing in Children tended to frame their experiences there within broader issues of injustice facing young people more frequently than those who attended Changemakers. This suggests that the prevalence of a type of conscientisation may be linked to how organisations understand participation as either predominately a collective or individual process. It is important to state, however, that what was observed through these case studies was only a tendency. As noted in the conclusion of Chapter 5, processes of collective conscientisation still occurred within some participants who attended arenas of participation which promoted more individual (and individualising) processes of reflection. Additionally, as argued above, there was no binary between these two case studies (Investing in Children: radical participation / Changemakers: neoliberal participation). Practices of participation at all the organisations involved in this research were seen to oscillate between promoting both individual and collective and radical and neoliberal concerns.

Connected to the conclusions drawn in the first section of this chapter about arenas of youth participation being intergenerational spaces, it is also useful to understand conscientisation as a *relational* process. None of the case studies drawn upon in this research fully reflected Freire's (1970c) vision of relationships within conscientisation, of teacher-students and student-teachers (see also Freire, 1970b). As argued above it was found that staff influenced these processes either as silent presences or, as discussed in Chapter 5, through at times overtly offering guidance to young people. Processes of conscientisation within youth participation have been shown to not simplistically occur as young people become aware of the particular

causes being championed by these organisations, but are governed/influenced by relationships and interactions with those who had invited them into these arenas. This research, therefore, has raised important questions to be asked within *all* invited spaces of participation: what are the aims (both stated and underlying) of those who are inviting others into these spaces? Which forms of conscientisation are being encouraged and fostered within these spaces (and which are not)?

These understandings of conscientisation as both a spatial and relational process informed the discussions in Chapter 7 about how these processes occur outwith these arenas of participation. For some these processes evolved as they considered which injustices they were currently facing in the newness of the present spaces of their lives. Following Worth's (2009) theorisations of time as becoming, these 'new' processes of conscientisation can be understood as entangled with and connected to previous processes of conscientisation. These questions of time (and space) are considered further in this next section which examines the ways in which knowledge and resources created within arenas of youth participation are transferred to other spaces of people's lives.

#### **8.4 Transferring Knowledge, Unsettling Binaries, Identifying Impact**

*How are the knowledge and resources created within these arenas of youth participation transferred, over time, to other spaces of people's lives?*

In answering this final research question, this section highlights four binaries which have been unsettled by the focus on temporality within this thesis. This section also establishes the key contributions this thesis has made to geographies of activism, before identifying the questions raised by this research about the process of identifying impact.

The focus in this project on questions of time, specifically how knowledge and resources encountered within arenas of participation are transferred and (re)performed over time, primarily arose out of two concerns. Firstly, from its conception this PhD as a collaboration with Investing in Children has been driven by practice-based concerns. Reflected in conversations during the early stages of

fieldwork with practitioners at multiple ‘participatory’ organisations in the North East of England, as outlined in Chapters 3 and 4, in these austere times there is a need for youth organisations to increasingly be able to demonstrate the short- *and longer-term* impact of their work. Secondly, as presented in Chapters 2 and 7, this focus developed as a direct response to calls made by Kesby (2005; 2007) about the pressing need to identify what travels from participatory spaces into other spaces of people’s lives (see also Jones and SPEECH, 2001; Cornwall, 2004b; Vaughan, 2014).

This thesis did not analyse how *all* the forms of knowledge and resources reported by participants to have been created within these arenas of youth participation were transferred to other spaces. Instead as acknowledged in Chapter 7, it focused on those overtly connected to a participatory epistemology and/or the related concept of empowerment. The term (re)performance was initially used in the writing of this thesis to denote my a priori theoretical stance that as knowledge and resources are transferred over time to different spaces, the ways in which they are reused can never identically replicate what had gone before as they are performed in different spatial-temporal moments. After conducting the empirical research, however, it became clear that some participants themselves were aware that the ways in which they (re)performed the knowledge and resources had ‘evolved’ as they encountered different discourses and importantly as they reconsidered what they had experienced as young people from their new position in the lifecourse as (young) adults. Knowledge in particular was seen to be instable, curated in different ways at different times by participants to assist in competitive transitions to adulthood. This finding contributes to unsettling the unhelpful binary in which young people (and their lives) are theorised as either **being/becoming** (see Lee, 2001; Gallacher and Gallagher, 2008; Uprichard, 2008 whose work also challenges this binary). In relation to this research this binary is seen through the ways in which young people’s involvement in participation and P/politics is often conceptualised in literature as either primarily ‘about’ their preparation for adulthood or their presence as political actors in the ‘here and now’. Complicating this, this research found that experiences as young people were both important to them at the time

whilst simultaneously (both consciously and unconsciously) making their multiple futures possible/imaginable. This suggests a need for greater attention to be paid to the multiple, dynamic temporalities of participation, P/politics and childhood (see Maynard, 2017).

In considering *how* knowledge was (re)performed, specifically knowledge relating to thinking and acting in ‘empowered’ ways as encountered within these arenas of youth participation, three tactics were identified that helped sustain these performances. These were: (a) the ability to return, both physically and mentally, to arenas of participation, (b) maintaining (intentional) contact with participatory peer groups and (c) recalling and reusing participatory tools. In identifying these three tactics this research has raised broader questions about the role and responsibility of organisations that aim to ‘empower’ young people, specifically as these young people age and ‘move on’ from these organisations. This is discussed at the end of this chapter when considering practice-based recommendations for those working within arenas of youth participation. This research also concluded that at times an interplay between personal and structural barriers limited how knowledge and resources were transferred and (re)performed. This thesis, supporting observations made in Jones and SPEECH (2001); Kesby (2005); Kesby *et al.* (2007), contends that empowerment should not be understood as a binary state where you are either **empowered/not empowered**, as the ability to think or act in empowered ways may fluctuate between different times and spaces, and, as shown empirically, may be intimately connected to positionality in the lifecourse. Therefore, the concept of *dormancy* was proposed as a useful way to conceptualise times of more limited or seemingly absent (re)performances.

In Chapter 7 the transfer of knowledge and resources into three spaces (university, work and home) were specifically examined. Through analysing the *ways* in which these were transferred and embedded in these spaces, incidences of small scale activism were identified as several participants were shown to be continuing to advocate for both greater equality and respect for young people in UK society and/or for the benefits of following a participatory epistemology. This thesis adds to



a growing body of geographic literature documenting small scale activisms (e.g. Staeheli and Cope, 1994; Horton and Kraftl, 2009; Pain, 2014; Pottinger, 2017). It has also extended this work by examining these actions through a temporal lens.

Unsettling any binary between **large/small scale activisms**, small scale activisms are presented as entwined with past (potentially larger scale) performances of activisms experienced at these participatory youth organisations. Following the work of Askins (2014); and Pain and Staeheli (2014), these small scale activisms are also theorised as intimately connected with other, larger scales as they collectively work towards challenging broader societal discourses which perpetuate the exclusion and marginalisation of young people within UK society.

Highlighted in the conclusion to Chapter 7 one of the key findings of this research, related both to this and the first research question, concerns the pace of transformation as either **slow/fast**. Knowledge created within arenas of youth participation has been shown to be *slowly* transferred to other spaces. This research has found that those previously involved as young people in organisations promoting youth participation had (unexpectedly and often unconsciously) become an effective tool through which to spread the organisation's wider political messages, either through actively telling others or by embedding and acting out these 'ways of being' in their lives. This process takes time. Each of these often small scale, everyday actions, performed in a wide variety of spaces, cumulatively contributes to the slow yet potentially radical transformation of adult-child relations in the UK, as new ways of 'doing' relations are encountered and witnessed by multiple people and therefore potentially become normalised.

Finally, in considering this research question, further questions have been raised about the process of identifying impact. Acknowledged throughout this thesis, this research was only able to reflect on the (re)performances of knowledge and resources that participants could both identify and articulate. The number and variety of (re)performances evolving out of these past experiences may be significantly more prevalent than has been identified in this research. Additionally, participant interviews ranged between 6 months and 12 years since they had left

these youth organisations. Participants at both ends of this scale were able to identify the impact their time at these organisations had on their current lives: the accounts of both 'Pete' who had only left Changemakers 6 months previously, and 'Jenn' who left Investing in Children 12 years ago were both drawn upon extensively in Chapter 7. Nevertheless, some participants questioned if it was 'too soon' after these experiences to fully identify and articulate how they had affected other spaces of their lives:

I think it has had an impact on your life. It's one of those things where you can't really measure impact at the time, you don't really know, and even now I know it has but I don't know how much it has as it's still quite fresh [...] I think some of them [impacts] as well might not come out till later on a little bit if that makes sense. [Sarah, Changemakers, age 24, 3 years since involvement]

This concern is considered in the final section of this chapter, which suggests areas for further academic research, practice-based recommendations for those working within arenas of youth participation and concludes by considering the merits for this research topic of a systematic longitudinal study. Prior to this, I reflect on the spaces of possibility offered through this research.

## **8.5 Spaces of Possibility, Narratives of Struggle**

This research has argued that the motivations and practices within youth participation organisations, such as those involved in this research, are complex, with radical and neoliberal agendas becoming entangled. Yet despite the complexities and difficulties, the findings of this research outlined above have also indicated that these organisations offer spaces of possibility: spaces in which 'seemingly sedimented institutions such as neoliberalism and capitalism' are challenged and disrupted as alternative ways of being and doing are imagined and enacted (Cameron and Hicks, 2014:56). This research stands alongside that of other geographers who seek to identify and open up 'a crack in the here and now' (Anderson, 2006:705) and are committed 'to action and struggle to create other worlds outside of capitalism and neoliberalism' (Cretney, 2017:6, see Pickerill and Chatterton, 2006; Lawson, 2007; Chatterton et al., 2010, see also Holloway, 2010

who argues that radical societal change will be brought about through the creation, expansion and multiplication of these cracks). Arenas of youth participation, such as those in this research, have been shown to be spaces where adult-child relations are being reimagined and potentially transformed. Spaces where co-production is being practiced, offering the possibility to unsettle the emphasis within neoliberalism on *independence*. These spaces of possibility, which potentially challenge dominant discourses, are also present outwith the arena of participation. They are instigated slowly through individual (re)performances of ‘ways of being’ that promote interdependence, equality and co-production.

A politics of hope neither avoids nor denies struggle or grief and is instead attuned to cultivating and illuminating space and practices for the possibilities of life and politics beyond capitalism. (Cretney, 2017:6)

This research has contributed towards this illumination, nevertheless, as Cretney reminds us this politics coexists alongside narratives of struggle. With this in mind, I now acknowledge a key moment of struggle in this research process. To do so I return to writing in the first person, remembering that whilst the central purpose of this conclusion is to present the key findings of this thesis, it also marks the end of a process that has framed my life over the last 5 and a half years. Therefore, as argued in Chapter 3, as I am ‘an essential part of the living texture of the research process’, my voice and emotions cannot and should not be absent from it (Weeks, 2009:6; see also Hadfield-Hill and Horton, 2014).

Returning from maternity leave in early 2015 I arranged to meet with staff at the three organisations involved in this research to, in the spirit of the participatory ethos driving this research reflected upon in Chapter 3, together create a plan for completing any outstanding interviews and disseminating the research in a form that was useful for each organisation. Therefore, it was filled with optimism and anticipation for the months ahead that I arranged to meet with Changemakers staff. I was excited that I was about to embark on what I, as discussed in the conclusion of Chapter 3, at the time (narrow-mindedly) believed to be the ‘really useful’, practical part of this PhD process. After this meeting, sitting on the train back to Durham I

scrawled the words in my field diary 'capitalism wins', reflecting that 'my story (the PhD) no longer has a happy ending, the shine and optimism has been taken off' [Field notes, March 2015]. Changemakers, as I knew it, was no more. It was merging with another organisation, staff were undergoing a process of restructure and redundancy, there were no immediate plans to continue the Changemakers Experience Programme, there would be no more cohorts of changemakers, no more INSPIRE Residentials.

In amongst my grief for the staff, I was also angry and frustrated: my research had come 'too late' for Changemakers. As stated above, this research had highlighted the need for continued support from participatory organisations for young people as they 'move on' and undergo complex transitions towards adulthood. Detailed in Chapter 7, participants from Changemakers (interviewed before news of the merger) had detailed their ongoing reliance on Changemakers staff, either for one-to-one coaching sessions, 'friendship' or for signposting them to employment opportunities. Through the restructure and changes in services offered this support based was to be eroded. They would now need to rely more extensively on the more abstract process of recollecting past experiences as a source to support their (re)performances of the empowered ways of thinking and acting they had encountered at Changemakers.

The staff graciously agreed to let me conduct a final focus group with them, as a space to reflect on the impacts on the changes to their organisation. Here they explained Changemakers' struggles to secure funding, how particularly in these austere times limited funding sources were, despite protests from within the youth sector (e.g. House of Commons Education Committee, 2011; McGhee, 2015), often being directed towards targeted interventions (National Youth Agency and Network of Regional Youth Work Units England, 2014). Unwilling to compromise their beliefs that *all* young people in the UK were experiencing a form of marginalisation by being overlooked as valuable leaders within society, and therefore should be able to access their programme, staff explained they had found it difficult to secure sustainable funding. Staff also recalled the difficulties of financing a programme

whose benefits (as established in this research) may be difficult to articulate and may take years to fully emerge in this current climate obsessed with measuring impact (see Thomas, 2011).

Although it was too late to produce the report we had intended, detailing the multiple and varying impacts participants had attributed to being involved in Changemakers, together we agreed this learning needed to be captured in some form; hence the production of the Changemakers legacy report (Appendix E). Entitled 'After Changemakers' this report was circulated to the participants in this research, past changemakers and staff as well as the communications team at the organisation which Changemakers was now a part of. Drawing from the findings presented in Chapter 7, this report concluded with a message of hope, reminding of the spaces of possibility amongst the struggle:

Although the Changemakers' programme no longer operates in its previous form, this report has shown that the spirit of the Changemakers' movement lives on through the lives of the changemakers, and their family, friends and colleagues who are inspired by the change they have seen within them (see Appendix E)

This echoed the comment made by a staff member in this final focus group:

I think what the young people say 'once a changemaker always a changemaker' I don't think they'll ever forget that. I'd probably say they wouldn't forget the programme and what they've learnt, [it's] embedded in their brains, because we're a cult!

Despite being able to still 'produce' something for Changemakers, a 'sense of failure' has hung over this part of the research (Rose, 1997b:305). Laments echoed in my head for months: 'if only I had been able to demonstrate the impact of their work quicker...' 'If only I had taken less maternity leave...'. These worries were not grounded in reality (and certainly they contain an inflated sense of the value this work could have had to the organisation), nevertheless they illuminate further the observations made in Chapter 3 about the deep sense of responsibility attached to conducting research *with* organisations. In sharing my experiences, and the emotions associated with this time, I hope others will be encouraged to continue to

recognise disappointment and failure as valid parts of the research process. I concur with Horton (2008:364) who writes, 'I have always found it helpful to read, even if only in the margins of such work, gestures towards imperfections, disappointments and angsts in/of others' research'. Such glimpses disrupt the reproduction of 'idealised encounter[s]' between researchers and those being researched, which are so often inaccurate, misleading and discouraging (McDowell, 1992:409).

## **8.6 Further Research**

Like all theses grounded in empirical, qualitative research, what has been presented and argued in these eight chapters is just one of many theses that could have been written. As acknowledged in Chapters 1 and 3, this research and the resulting thesis has been driven by a combination of personal, academic and organisation-driven interests. As a form of grounded research, it has also been directed by what both staff at the organisations and the participants identified as significant. Within their interviews, participants spoke at length about their individual experiences of transitions to adulthood, the skills they learnt and reused from their experiences at these organisations and their relationships with other young people whilst there. They reflected on the value of being paid to do participatory work<sup>31</sup> and how these organisations 'widened their horizons' as they encountered 'new' places and met people who were 'different' to them (see Appendix E). In another thesis greater space may have been given to these interesting and potentially significant topics. Where possible, as outlined in Chapter 3, relevant information outwith this thesis has been disseminated to the three organisations.

The empirical material, as presented in this thesis, has highlighted areas for further productive academic research. Five are suggested below. Firstly, I offer two fruitful ways in which the 'outskirts' of this project could be developed for those interested in youth participation and/or youth transitions, before finally suggesting three

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<sup>31</sup> See briefing note 'Getting paid – young people's views' within the project report available at [http://investinginchildren.weebly.com/uploads/5/2/3/4/52347457/looking\\_back\\_project\\_pack\\_iic.pdf](http://investinginchildren.weebly.com/uploads/5/2/3/4/52347457/looking_back_project_pack_iic.pdf)

concepts presented in this thesis that could be utilised for those engaging with the critiques and debates around participation and/or related aspects of geographical inquiries:

- **The insights of those who disengaged with arenas of participation.** As acknowledged in Chapter 3, this research predominately (but not exclusively) interacted with those for whom their experiences with these organisations had been in some way ‘meaningful’. Although methodologically challenging, greater interaction with those who had either disengaged with these organisations whilst they were young people (as opposed to having to ‘move on’ due to age) or for whom the experience with these organisations could be identified as having been ‘less’ significant, would allow for further and potentially more in-depth analysis into the relationship between the type and length of participatory engagement and the impact it has, than has been possible in this research.
- **The transition of young people to staff members.** 15 of the 28 participants interviewed had returned in some capacity over the years to either volunteer or work for the organisation they had been involved with as a young person. This ranged from 1 participant who was in full-time employment for the organisation at the time of the interview, to those on temporary contracts or who returned as occasional volunteers. Those who have experienced the transition from young person to staff member and the associated changes in types of engagement and levels of responsibility would provide an interesting subgroup to conduct further research with into how understandings of participatory epistemologies evolve and are transferred over time and space.
- **Intergenerational spaces.** This thesis has argued that arenas of youth participation that advocate a radical participatory epistemology should be understood as intergenerational spaces. This focus on relationality emerged *during* the research process and therefore was not built into the research design, explaining why the voices and perspectives of adult staff in this

research were at times only partial. To build on these findings, further research is needed which fully encompasses the voices of *all* those involved in these spaces. Paying closer attention to discourses of age through retheorising spaces traditionally considered ‘children’s spaces’ as intergenerational spaces, as this research has, may also prove insightful for other spheres of Children’s Geographies (e.g. the geographies of play).

- **Silent presences.** Theorising all participatory spaces as intergenerational spaces developed out of the observation that these spaces are affected by the *silent presences* of adults. Beyond considering age, this notion of silent presences could provide a transferable, useful lens through which to articulate other discourses pressing-in-on arenas of participation (e.g. gender, race, historical legacies, societal expectations).
- **Dormancy.** One of the findings of this research is that some young people struggle to sustain the ability to think and/or act in the empowered ways they were encouraged in at these organisations. A combination of personal and structural factors was identified as significant in this, with more focused research needed to further identify and understand the interplay between these factors. The concept of dormancy, which was proposed to account for the observed temporal dynamics of this process, is not limited to its use within this thesis in relation to youth transitions. It could be transferred to understandings about activism/participation across the lifecourse more broadly — considering other moments in the lifecourse in which certain ideas are constrained and lie dormant. It can also be applied to fields of study (e.g. geographies of migration, or the geographies of religion) which explore how knowledge and resources are transferred and (re)performed between spaces dominated by a variety of contrasting and/or potentially constraining discourses.

## 8.7 Practice Recommendations

From its conception as a collaborative project with Investing in Children, together we have been interested in how this research should impact practice. As outlined



above, its findings came perhaps too late for Changemakers. Nevertheless, although grounded in these three organisations, some of the observations made within this thesis offer insight more broadly to others working within arenas of youth participation in the UK. These include:

- **Questions of accessibility.** Chapter 6 reflected on tiers of governance within arenas of youth participation. Examining the practices at Investing in Children indicated that even organisations that advocate a radical participatory epistemology and co-production need to *continuously* reflect on questions of accessibility — asking themselves ‘are we participatory for *all* young people?’
- **Care around language.** The language used to describe relations/relationships between young people and adults who seek to work with them in participatory ways was analysed in Chapter 6. Terms such as ‘friends’, ‘colleagues’ and ‘equals’ were shown at times to be unhelpful for young people struggling to understand the ‘different’ form of adult-child relations they were experiencing at these organisations. This has highlighted the care needed by adults working in these environments, firstly to reflect on the type of adult-child relations they are trying to foster, and secondly to describe these in appropriate and helpful ways to young people. To avoid further ‘othering’ and to continue unsettling the binary between adults and children and young people, care also needs to be taken around the language used to describe adults who do not yet understand participation as a basis for relations.
- **Moving on.** In Chapter 7 three tactics were identified by participants to encourage their sustained (re)performances of thinking and acting in empowered ways, as fostered within these organisations. Maintaining contact and (either imagined or actual) supportive relationships with individual staff members, the organisations more broadly or with participatory peer groups was shown to be important in encouraging these (re)performances. Therefore, organisations that are serious about

















































‘empowering’ young people need to review how they manage the process of young people moving on from their organisations — considering if greater ‘after care’ needs to be implemented to help them sustain these (re)performances.

This thesis closes with a final reflection relating to both further academic research and practice. This project has been interested in time, specifically transformations over time, which I have argued in this research context have been shown to be slow, yet potentially significant. Changing the foundations of adult-child relations in the UK is unlikely to happen overnight, but as seen through this research, changes are occurring. As a *PhD* thesis, conducted within a comparatively short timescale and on a limited budget this research only captured one snapshot moment of these transformations. The limitations of this have been discussed in Chapters 3, 7 and in this final chapter, which acknowledged that for some participants reflecting on these experiences only a few years after they occurred may be too soon for the extent of their impact both for them as individuals and on society to be evident. But when is the ‘best’ time to measure impact? After 1 year? 3 years? 10 years? Whilst this research has produced in-depth and valuable insights from participants’ (single) reflections from a variety of these standpoints, this research topic would undoubtedly benefit from a **systematic longitudinal study**. This could, for example, follow a cohort of young people throughout their engagement with participatory youth organisations, contacting them at potentially yearly intervals (or if this induced research fatigue or was not economically viable, every 3 or 5 years) to reflect on its impact on their lives.









As seen from the experience of Changemakers, as well as the interest in this research expressed by a range of organisations, this topic is not just of academic interest. Within this current financial and political climate, youth organisations increasingly need to prove their worth (House of Commons Education Committee, 2011; Thomas, 2011). Despite the constraints, at times, put on these organisations by neoliberal agendas discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, this thesis has shown the impact for individuals of being involved in youth organisations that advocate a

participatory epistemology to be wide-ranging and at times unexpected. Therefore, although it is important for organisations such as those involved in this research not to get distracted from their main aim of challenging injustices experienced by young people, to continue to do this in the long term they also need to invest, where possible, in systematic longitudinal studies, potentially developing (non-prescriptive) internal monitoring and evaluation frameworks that can capture the long-term impact of their work.

## Appendix A Clarity Model of Participation – based on model by Lardner, 2001 (Creative Commons, 2011)









Adult initiated	  		 		  	Young person initiated
Adults decide on the agenda			 		    	Young people decide on the agenda
Adults make decisions		 			    	Young people make decisions
Adults have most information		 	  			Young people have most information
Relies on adults to implement actions			 	 	  	Relies on young people to implement actions
Replicates or linked to adult structures	  	 			 	Informal structures and links



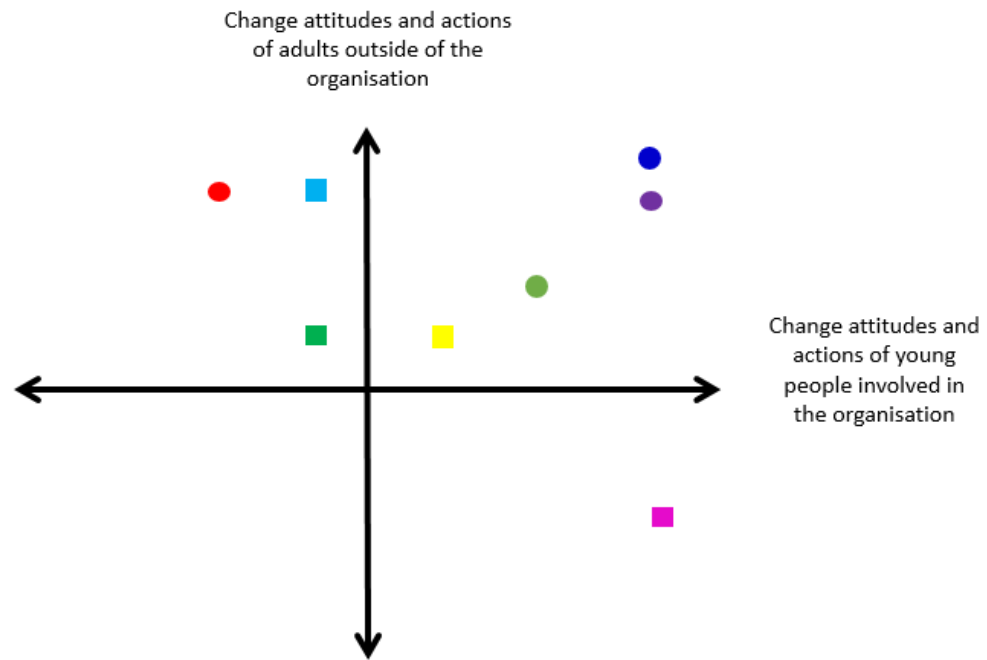
Key			
Changemakers		Investing in Children	
Anonymous 1		Anonymous 2	
		Youth Almighty	
		Anonymous 3	
		Scotswood Centre	
		Anonymous 4	

## Appendix B Matrix of Participation – based on model by Davies, 2009 (Creative Commons, 2011)

	Individual complaints or feedback	Surveys and consultations	One off events or annual participation events	Participation projects- often using arts or media	Peer-led activities e.g. training, research and evaluation	Youth forum, youth grant making	Young people involved in governance
Youth initiated-shared decisions with adults							
Youth initiated and directed				   	 	  	
Adult initiated – shared decision with youth		 					
Young people are consulted and kept informed							
Young people are assigned tasks and activities							


Key			
Changemakers 	Investing in Children 	Youth Almighty Project 	Scotswood Centre 
Anonymous 1 	Anonymous 2 	Anonymous 3 	Anonymous 4 

## Appendix C Organisation Motivation Model



Key			
Changemakers	Investing in Children	Youth Almighty Project	Scotswood Centre
Anonymous 1	Anonymous 2	Anonymous 3	Anonymous 4


## Appendix D Youth Almighty Project Poster



**Durham**  
University

# Youth Almighty

Reflections from young people



E·S·R·C  
ECONOMIC  
& SOCIAL  
RESEARCH  
COUNCIL

**A safe place to be:**

- 'It's somewhere for us kids to go'
- 'It keeps everyone off the streets'
- 'When everyone was like drinking on the streets and that, we could have just went and do that but we came here instead and it kept us out of bother'
- 'It makes you not do bad things and stuff on the street, it takes your mind off everything'
- 'Going there encourages you not to drink and do drugs'
- 'It helps us coz if we're around about on the streets and there's n'ut to do and we want something to entertain us so we might end up doing something daft'

**With staff who care:**

- 'If you've got any problems of anything you just talk to the youth workers'
- 'They will help you with your problems'
- 'They give you advice and help you through things'
- 'They're your friends really'
- 'I'm closer to these than teachers at school'
- 'She's like a second mam'
- 'They know how to have a laugh, but they know how to help us, they know the boundaries as well like'
- 'They try their best to help us, get the best out of everything'

**Where your voice matters:**

- 'Everyone here gets to have their own say in what we do'
- 'They try and make us more independent with what we're doing'
- 'It's good...we organise where we want to go'
- 'We help organise trips...they trust us'
- 'We've got experiences of organising now so when we're older we've got a bit of an advantage'

These are the voices of 14 young people who attend Youth Almighty and took part in focus groups conducted by PhD candidate Naomi Maynard as part of an ESRC-funded research project  
For further information email: [n.p.maynard@durham.ac.uk](mailto:n.p.maynard@durham.ac.uk)

## Appendix E Changemakers Legacy Report



### AFTER CHANGEMAKERS



#### THE PROJECT

This report is part of the 'Looking back' project, a collaborative piece of research between Durham University and four organisations across the North East of England that engage young people.

All four of these organisations believe that young people are valuable citizens, rights holders, people of worth now, not just in the future and that this rhetoric is yet to be fully realised within society.

11 'changemakers' were interviewed for this project. These interviews took place between 6 months and 3 years after they had completed the Changemakers program.

Due to Changemakers' merger with The Foyer Federation the program is no longer operating in its previous form; therefore this report focuses on the legacy of this program, as the Changemakers' movement lives on within the lives of the changemakers.



#### MORE THAN A PROGRAM – A PHILOSOPHY

Although there were slight variations across 'cohorts', the changemakers involved in this project had each completed a program that typically involved a residential trip to learn about leadership and values supplemented by further 'skills days' in subsequent months, alongside being paid to lead on a project to support the development of youth engagement within an organisation.

This program was underpinned by the Changemakers' philosophy – that young people, just like adults, are capable of being leaders but that this leadership potential needs 'unlocking' and highlighting within society. This philosophy was based on collaboration and respect between adults and young people. The changemakers interviewed for this project explained that the staff would not just give young people 'the answers', but created an informal, supportive, encouraging and reflective environment for young people to explore their own values and beliefs and take responsibility for their choices and actions.

This environment, which some changemakers said was very different from those created at other places they'd experienced as a young person such as school, formed the foundations for the Changemakers' legacy - characterised in this report as: **a new ways of being, a new direction in life, and a new way of seeing others, culminating in a new attitude.**



### MORE THAN SKILLS – A NEW WAY OF BEING

Throughout the program the changemakers learnt practical skills such as team work, public speaking and time management that they used both during the program and afterwards as they continued with education and/or employment.

However the philosophy behind the program, the experience of working within a host organisation and the one to one coaching sessions between the changemakers and staff/volunteers, also taught the changemakers more abstract skills including:

- Self-reliance
- Self-belief
- The importance of goal setting
- The value of having values

Some of the changemakers felt that these new ways of being would have a lasting effect on their lives.



### WHAT THE CHANGEMAKERS SAID:

'I think the lessons and stuff that you learn within it, I think that you will keep forever. And I think the little lessons that I have learnt in it and articulating myself and speaking to people and having just genuine self-belief in yourself, it's really good because I don't think you'd get it from anywhere else'

'I think if that one to one coaching had been more about me relying on the coach then I wouldn't have come away with any skills, I would have just had someone to help us in that situation, whereas you kind of learn the skills to do things yourself which is really nice and has come in useful'

'It just makes you a happier person because you find it makes you feel really good so once you have done the Changemakers programme and it's finished and you feel good and you feel like you have got beliefs so you kind of leave with this extra aura or halo of feelings really, like empowered and able to do things'



### MORE THAN A JOB – A NEW DIRECTION IN LIFE

For the majority of the changemakers interviewed the program influenced their future employment choices:

Several reported **direct** impacts as they:

- Continued to volunteer or work for their host organisation after the program had ended
- Used connections they had made during the program, either through their host organisation, the Changemakers staff or other changemakers, to gain subsequent employment
- Were challenged by Changemakers' desire to improve the lives of young people, and therefore worked with young people either through the education or arts sectors
- Used the techniques learnt during the 'skills days' at job interviews. They could also draw upon their experiences to provide examples of when they had taken responsibility, led a team or worked with young people

The changemakers also reported more **indirect** impacts:

- Although some changemakers found it 'a bit weird at first', the reflective space built into the program gave them time to stop and think about their skills and values and how these could influence the direction of their career

- The supportive, positive and reflective environment of the program encouraged the changemakers to think about what type of job would make them happy as opposed to necessarily wealthy—as one staff member reflected:

**'What kind of society do you want to live in when you have slightly more money and unhappier people?'**

Some of the changemakers said this focus on happiness gave them the courage to pursue multiple or freelance jobs instead of traditionally 'stable' and more lucrative careers.

- Several changemakers said the program had 'widened their horizons'. One explained that it gave her more confidence to apply for jobs, she said:

'Because you feel good about yourself you think actually somebody else might think or consider me for a job, so I kind of applied for things which I might not have done before...

I think without Changemakers I probably would have aimed a lot less, and I wouldn't have thought that actually if I decide I want to travel abroad and make films in a different country I could, but now I am like actually if I want to do that I will be able to find a way to get there'

Whilst these indirect impacts are harder for organisations such as Changemakers to quantify, they are still very valuable. As one changemaker explained, being in a job that made her happy and gave her a sense of purpose made her feel more settled in the other areas of her life.

#### MORE THAN A TEAM – A NEW WAY OF SEEING OTHERS

'Once you are a changemaker it literally means you are a changemaker, I don't think you ever stop'

The Changemaker 'cohorts' were made up of young people aged 16-25 from a variety of backgrounds and experiences. They worked together on tasks at the residential and on the skills days.

- The majority of changemakers explained that being part of this diverse group was a beneficial experience allowing for peer to peer learning and mutual support.
- However some of the changemakers found it difficult to organise such a varied group to complete tasks or initially felt uncomfortable with the atypical levels of sharing between the changemakers at the residential.
- Several changemakers spoke of the lasting and supportive friendships they had made on the program; one changemaker explained how the continued supportive atmosphere within her cohort after the program had ended, fostered an environment which encouraged what she called 'progression' and risk taking in life.
- Importantly, meeting people from different walks of life led several changemakers to develop new ways of thinking about other people both during the program and after.

#### WHAT THE CHANGEMAKERS SAID:

'I was 21 when I did it, and was one of the oldest on the cohort and there were a lot of people who were a lot younger than me and it was really nice to kind of use your own experiences to work with the younger people and then for them to kind of show you new things as well and there was a lot of exciting peer learning that went on'

'You had a variety of people at different stages of their life doing totally different things, but [that meant] you got to see things from someone else's perspective'

'I was very much with different people from different regions, meeting a lot of new people, people with disabilities and things, things that I hadn't really come into contact before and it kind of opened my mind, realised everyone's the same and treat them the same which was really cool'

'I think it taught me to be a bit more understanding of people, like when I went to the residential I was so cynical, I was just 'what is this? where am I?' but I think now when I, if I start something new or go somewhere I don't know I'm like ok let's give it a chance'

'Obviously you were a little bit wary at the start but once you kind of resolve that it's kind of that trust thing, encouraging to trust people and not just judge a book by its cover. I think that's one of the things I learnt'

## A NEW ATTITUDE

'It really made me realise what I was worth'

'I'm just a lot more confident in standing up for what I believe in'

'I'm a much more confident person, I'm really much more positive'

'A lot of the kind of darker, personal times I've had this year I really think I was more able to overcome them'

'I think it's just to know despite who you are, you can go and change something'

'Realising it was ok to have an opinion and even though you're young, that is was alright and you had the same chance as everybody else'

'I aim much higher than I would have done if I hadn't done the program'

'It makes you believe in yourself a bit more'

Listening to the voices of the changemakers above, and throughout this report, it has been clear that for several changemakers the experience has led them to have a new attitude: a new way of being and of seeing life. Whilst this optimism and positivity was heightened whilst on the program (particularly on the residential), for many of the changemakers interviewed the desire to create and seize opportunities, to take control and responsibility for their life, to reflect on how they see themselves and others and to pursue goals that made them happy, continued long after their formal involvement with Changemakers had finished.



*Have you been involved with Changemakers? Do the findings of this report resonate with you? I'd love your feedback – please contact Naomi Maynard on [n.p.maynard@durham.ac.uk](mailto:n.p.maynard@durham.ac.uk). This report was produced as part of the 'Looking Back' project and is one of several project outputs; follow the project on [@ParticipationNE](#)*

## THE CHANGEMAKERS SPIRIT LIVES ON

Although the Changemakers' program no longer operates in its previous form, this report has shown that the spirit of the Changemakers' movement lives on through the lives of the changemakers, and their family, friends and colleagues who are inspired by the change they have seen within them.

However the challenge issued by Changemakers is still there: there is still a need to unlock and highlight the leadership potential of young people within society. The Changemakers program offered young people this opportunity. As one changemaker explained:

'I think ultimately what I thought was so great about it when I did it is that it was a chance that I didn't think anyone would allow us to have. So it was chance to be a young person, create some leadership experience, learn some leadership skills, be in an organisation, be paid for it... It just felt a little bit too good to be true! Like all of these things that I just didn't think people wanted to give young people or opportunities that didn't exist for young people.'

**Will you give others a chance to unlock their potential?**



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