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School of Social Sciences

The Impact of Connexions on the Lives of Young People

by

Rosemary Frances Phillips

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ABSTRACT

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This research uses a qualitative methodology based on ethnographic studies in three field centres in order to explore the impact of the Connexions strategy on the lives of young people. Utilising the theoretical concepts of identity and self-esteem it grounds this exploration in an understanding of young people themselves, their hopes and concerns, the aspects of their lives that are important to them, their sources of self esteem and their means of support when they experience difficulties. The Connexions strategy is based on an assumption that young people will be supported in a holistic manner through the relationship they form with their Connexions Personal Adviser who, where necessary, will cooperate with other agencies in order to meet all the young person's needs. However, I argue that Connexions' principle target, which relates to inclusion in education, employment or training, imposes a narrow agenda on practitioners which has the potential to undermine Connexions holistic credentials. I maintain that a genuinely holistic approach, in addition to responding to needs, requires an understanding of young people's perspectives on their lives, a recognition of their priorities, an acknowledgement of their existing social networks and an appreciation of the aspects of life that are important to them and which contribute to feelings of self-esteem. In addition it should respect young people's ability to determine the course of their own lives and accept that this may, or may not, include cooperation with support services. Findings in this research indicate that young people value this approach in their relationships with practitioners and that these relationships are more effectively established in environments where there are a range of practitioners affording an element of choice to the young person concerned. The research concludes that it is the practice of individual practitioners rather than government policy that determines a holistic approach and that this is more easily achieved in situations where outcomes are not monitored by specific targets.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABBREVIATIONS

A&E	Accident and Emergency
BBBS	Big Brothers Big Sisters
CPAD	Connexions Personal Adviser's Diploma
CSA	Connexions Support Adviser
CSNU	Connexions Service National Unit
DCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Families
DfEE	Department for Education and Employment
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
DSS	Department for Social Security
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
E2E	Entry to Employment
EMA	Educational Maintenance Allowance
FE	Further Education
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
HCD	Human Capital Development
IAG	Information Advice and Guidance
ICG	Institute of Career Guidance
JSA	Jobseeker's Allowance
LA	Local Authority
LFA	Labour Force Attachment
MAP	Mentoring Action Project
NDLTU	The New Deal for the Long Term Unemployed
NDPA	New Deal Personal Adviser
NDYP	The New Deal for Young People
NEET	Not in Education, Employment or Training
NMW	National Minimum Wage
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification
NYA	National Youth Agency
OAC	Oldport Advice Centre
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

PA	Personal Adviser
RAF	Royal Air Force
SEU	Social Exclusion Unit
TLC	Teenage Life Centre
YADAAS	Young Adults Drug and Alcohol Advice Service
YOT	Youth Offending Team

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introducing Connexions

1.1.1 *Connexions: The Best Start in Life for Every Young Person*

'Connexions – *the best start in life for every young person'* is the title of The Connexions Strategy Document published in February 2000 and illustrates the supreme optimism that underlay early Government rhetoric on Connexions. The initiative aimed to create a 'joined up' approach to youth policy based on partnership working and a network of personal advisers. The assumption that underlies this 'joined up' approach is that personal advisers (PAs) would work with young people in a holistic manner:

'ensuring all the needs of a young person are met in an integrated and coherent manner' (DfEE 2000 : 6.10).

However this thesis argues that, in addition to responding to needs, a genuinely holistic approach (Coles 2000) requires an understanding of young people's perspectives on their lives, a recognition of their priorities, an acknowledgement of their existing social networks and an appreciation of the aspects of life that are important to them and which contribute to feelings of self-esteem.

In this research I use ethnographic methods to achieve an understanding of young people's perspectives and to explore the role of Connexions within their lives. Such an understanding will be informed by the key concepts of identity and self esteem. In considering aspects of Connexions delivery, it is essential to establish if the aims and goals of Connexions accord with what young people value and want in their lives and the elements of their lives that are basic to their sense of self esteem. If the aims of Connexions vary widely from the aims of young people it is anticipated that this will interfere with the satisfactory achievement of the goals set by Connexions.

The concept of identity encapsulates an appreciation of how lived reality contributes to a young person's 'sense of self' and to their attempts at achieving a measure of self esteem. I plan to establish the extent to which these identities concur with the construction of young people's identities that informs Government policy on Connexions. I undertake a detailed analysis of my theoretical approach to identity and self esteem in Chapter Two and in Chapter Three I explore the ways in which the

identities of young people can be accessed empirically. In this Chapter I consider the Government's proposals for Connexions in more detail and then examine three elements that inform the Connexions initiative, namely; the learning society, social exclusion and a partnership between professionals.

As I will outline, these elements suggest a construction of an 'acceptable young person'. A prime concern is to ensure that all young people participate in education, employment or training. For those young people who experience difficulties with such participation it is envisaged that the support offered by a Connexions PA will resolve any problems and facilitate re-entry into education, employment or training. If the difficulties experienced by the young person are beyond the expertise of the PA then appropriate referral can be made to a specialist agency. Promoting participation underlies the Government approach to the reduction of social exclusion, indeed, the reduction of social exclusion was a fundamental consideration in the formulation of the Connexions initiative although Connexions was launched as a universal service.

The three elements, the learning society, social exclusion and a partnership between professionals, correspond to discourses prevalent in contemporary society. One understanding of discourse is that of ideas that become integrated into a body of knowledge and become institutionalised amongst a given group of people at a given time. Through repetition these ideas are gradually accorded the status of 'truth' and in the case of dominant discourses may inform Government policy and exercise power over people subjected to these policies. (Foucault 1988).

The three discourses that inform the Connexions strategy include a discourse that emphasises the creation of a 'learning society' and is enshrined in the mantra of the New Labour Government 'education, education, education.' This expresses the way in which the positive value attached to learning has assumed the status of a fundamental truth where learning as a panacea is uncontested. This is discussed in detail in section 1.2.1. of this chapter.

In section 1.2.2. conflicting discourses on social exclusion will be analysed in detail. These discourses range from complex analyses to the simpler approach which informs the Connexions strategy and equates social inclusion with participation in employment, education or training. Since the conception of the Connexions Strategy the term NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) has entered the vocabulary of

workers and policy makers to describe a young person whose lifestyle reflects certain indicators associated with social exclusion.

A third discourse, that is located in professional discourses also informs Connexions. Rose draws attention to:

> 'the emergence of expertise as a mode of authority and of experts as authorities (social workers, personnel managers, experts on child development, clinical psychologists, therapists' (Rose 1999:xi).

To this list can be added other professional groups that contribute to Connexions Partnerships including youth workers, career guidance specialists and the 'new profession of personal adviser' (DfEE 2000:6.23-6.26) offering a new professional qualification, the Connexions Personal Adviser's Diploma (CPAD). The former Careers Service and the Youth Service, principle contributors to Connexions delivery, each reflect this professional discourse and are considered separately in sections 1.2.3. and 1.2.4. of this chapter. The research will analyse in detail their contribution, consider the basic principles that inform the work of each professional discipline and explore areas of concurrence or conflict between different occupational approaches and the ways in which these impact on young people. The specific role of the PA, a basic tenet of the Connexions strategy, will be considered in detail in Chapter 2 providing a context for later discussions on the support networks that young people actually access for help and advice and the strategies they use to cope with any difficulties they experience.

Connexions' claim to universality will also be scrutinised in this research, particularly in relation to the Government's social exclusion agenda which has influenced the concentration of resources in support of disadvantaged young people. A consideration of the universality of the strategy will be basic to an assessment of the claim that Connexions is the best start in life for *every* young person.

I shall now examine the Government's proposals for Connexions in more detail before considering the three discourses that inform the Connexions initiative identified earlier, namely an emphasis on the value of education, the social exclusion agenda and Connexions delivery which utilises professional expertise.

1.1.2 *Connexions: Strategy and Organisation*

'The Connexions strategy for the first time brings together, across Government, existing and future policies for our youth into a single coherent strategy' (DfEE 2000:1.1).

Connexions, which includes the provision of integrated support services for all 13-19 year old young people in England, was outlined in the White Paper 'Learning to Succeed' (DfEE 1999 6.7-6.15). Additional detailed information about the Service was contained in the Social Exclusion Unit's (SEU) report Bridging the Gap: New Opportunities for 16-18 year olds not in Education, Employment or Training (SEU 1999 10.5-10.20), published a month later. The statutory basis for this provision is provided by the Learning and Skills Act 2000 (sections 114-122). The Connexions Strategy Document (DfEE 2000) outlines the elements of Connexions delivery and the principles on which this is based. There are four key themes in the Connexions strategy; a flexible curriculum; high quality post-16 provision in schools, Further Education colleges and work based learning; financial support for those in learning; and, finally, outreach, information, support and guidance which is provided by a range of different initiatives including Millennium Volunteers, the Neighbourhood Support Fund and the Connexions Service itself (DfEE 2000:4.2).

The Connexions Service is at the heart of the broader Connexions strategy and the Connexions Service National Unit (CSNU) was established as a division of the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) before being replaced in 2003 by the Supporting Children and Young People Group. It is not therefore surprising that the aims and principles of this service all relate to participation and achievement in education and training:

'The key aim of the Service will be to enable young people to participate effectively in appropriate learning ----- by raising their aspirations so that they reach their full potential' (DfEE 2000:6.2).

This aim is embodied in the targets for the service which relate to a reduction in the numbers of young people defined as NEET, a term which serves as a label for a heterogeneous group of young people.

Two fundamentals of Connexions delivery are partnership working and a PA network. There were originally 47 Connexions partnerships in England operating at local Learning and Skills Council level and these were responsible for strategic planning and allocation of funds. The partnership boards had representatives from a range of agencies concerned with the welfare of young people including careers guidance, youth services, educational services, the health service, the youth justice services, the voluntary sector and homelessness agencies. The PAs have responsibility to liaise with practitioners working for these different agencies when they consider it to be in the interests of a young person. After a series of pilot studies in 2000 the first Connexions partnerships were launched in 2001 and in April 2003 Anne Weinstock, CSNU Chief Executive, announced that the Connexions network was complete (DfES 2003a). However in September 2003 the Government published a Green Paper in response to the inquiry into the death of Victoria Climbié and the proposed changes that resulted from this consultation were defined in the 2004 Children's Act (sections 10-24) which established a duty on Local Authorities (LAs) to make arrangements to promote cooperation between agencies to improve children's wellbeing. Ensuing plans, which outlined a national framework for services to children, specified arrangements for Children's Trusts (DfES 2004a). A long awaited Green Paper considering services for young people, was eventually published in July 2005 (DfES 2005a) and, as expected, a subsequent strategy document confirmed plans to integrate the provision of these services within Children's Trusts (DfES 2006a). Three essential elements of the Connexions Service are contained in these plans namely the significance of partnership working within 'integrated youth support services', a requirement to track the progress of young people defined as NEET and delivery of high quality Information Advice and Guidance (IAG). In addition the emphasis on a relationship with a practitioner is retained but the term Connexions PA is replaced by the concept of 'lead professional'.

A consideration of the funding base for these services also provides evidence of the changes that have occurred in a relatively short time. The Connexions Service is funded centrally and, initially, this was as a supplement to Careers Service funding. In the year 1999-00 all funding went directly to the Careers Service but by 2003-04 the

provision of IAG had been subsumed into the Connexions Service and therefore there was no separate funding for a Careers Service. However, in the present plans (DfES 2006a), it is envisaged that by April 2008 all Connexions' resources will be transferred to a single grant for LAs. At the time of writing (August 2007) the progress of Connexions Partnerships towards the transition to LA provision varies and in some areas funding has been completely transferred. A document, published in April 2007, detailed guidance for LAs on targeted youth support for vulnerable teenagers with the acknowledgement that such support should reflect the local context and the views and needs of local vulnerable young people (DfES 2007b). In May 2007 research concluded that the Connexions brand should be retained due to its strong level of recognition amongst young people (DfES 2007c) and a further document published in August 2007 (DCSF 2007a) offers guidance to practitioners on the role of a lead professional who may, in certain circumstances, be a Connexions PA. In addition in July 2007, after consultations with relevant stakeholders, a document on the quality standards for IAG was published (DCSF 2007b).However, unlike the former Careers Service, the funding base of the Youth Service remains unchanged and continues to be the responsibility of LAs, administered through Children's Trusts.

Originally there were differences in the organizational structure of the 47 Connexions partnerships dependent, to some extent, on the previous organisation of Career Guidance Companies. These differences have been modified over time and, although a separate Careers Service no longer exists, IAG and cooperation with the Youth Service have remained significant aspects of Connexions delivery. At a political level concern about 'social exclusion' and the creation of the 'learning society' contribute to an ideological justification for this 'single coherent strategy' (DfES 2000). The design features of Connexions stem from an analysis of the needs of young people at risk of social exclusion. The SEU produced a series of reports drawing on research, external expertise, good practice and innovative ideas and, as indicated above, one of these reports contained proposals for a new support service for young people (SEU 1999). Despite this initial concern with socially excluded young people Connexions was launched as both a targeted and a universal service as this was 'the most civilized and dignified way of giving support to the most disadvantaged' (Malcolm Wicks MP, quoted in Watts 2001:167). Moreover, as career advice and guidance is a statutory entitlement of all young people, there was also a financial imperative to launch Connexions as a universal

service. This combination of targeted and universal provision is illustrated by what has been termed the triangle of need with three levels of need illustrated by different segments of a triangle (DfEE 2000:6.12). At the bottom are the majority of young people who it was considered would require 'general advice and support' primarily on 'educational and vocational issues'. In the middle there are a smaller percentage of young people without any long term problems but who may require 'in-depth support' during certain crucial stages of their development 'to help them to address barriers to learning'. At the apex of the triangle are the small minority of young people 'facing substantial multiple problems preventing them from engaging in learning', who require 'integrated and specialist support' (DfEE 2000:6.11). In practice former career guidance workers were termed PA Universal and worked primarily with young people at the bottom and middle of the triangle and the newly trained PAs from different professional backgrounds were termed PA Individual Support and worked primarily with young people 'facing substantial multiple problems'. In a 'vision' of Connexions in 2006 it was anticipated that this separation of roles would be replaced by PAs who possessed a range of 'core skills' (DfES 2002a). However a recommendation that PAs would be:

> 'deployed in the most appropriate setting according to their range of skills, experience and knowledge' (*ibid*:17).

meant, in effect, that former career guidance workers continued to be predominantly engaged in providing IAG.

Aspects of the Connexions strategy have been continuously monitored and evaluated and two comprehensive studies were published towards the end of 2004 illustrating different aspects of Connexions delivery. One, based on a quantitative methodology, surveyed customer satisfaction in 15 Partnerships and indicated high levels of awareness of and satisfaction with the Connexions Service (Brunwin et al 2004). However, as the sample was drawn from the records of young people who had been in contact with Connexions partnerships, the high level of awareness is not surprising. Findings indicate that the topics most frequently discussed related primarily to education, employment and training with 86% discussing jobs and careers, 74% education and 51% training and work-based learning. Other issues discussed included money and benefits (21%), feelings of stress (14%) and alcohol and drugs (13%). The second study, which

utilised a qualitative methodology, was conducted in 7 Partnerships and was based on semi-structured interviews with different workers and young people with the aim of assessing the impact of Connexions on young people 'at risk' (Hoggarth and Smith 2004). Although initial contact was made with those known to the Partnerships additional interviews were drawn from young people known to PAs, youth and community workers and other agencies working with young people and it was found that, despite their needs, over half of the young people interviewed were not receiving current support from a Connexions PA. This research considered factors that either promoted or prohibited the impact of Connexions and identified a trusting relationship as the key to successful impact. Such a relationship is established by listening to and understanding the orientation of the young person, making appropriate responses and meeting their expectations. These studies draw attention to both the universal and the targeted provision of Connexions delivery.

These two studies have implications for this research thesis which is based on field work conducted between 2003 and 2005. The findings of the quantitative study indicate that the majority of young people associate Connexions with issues related to education, employment and training illustrating a clear association with the discourse on the learning society which will be discussed in the following section. The qualitative study is concerned with the impact of Connexions on young people with complex needs and as such addresses the social exclusion agenda which is considered in section 1.2.2. Findings in this study identified a trusting relationship as fundamental to success and a significant quality in such a relationship involves understanding the orientation of the young person which, I argue, is basic to a genuine holistic approach. Such a finding has implications for the professional expertise of those working with young people and the practices of career guidance specialists and youth workers, who contribute to Connexions partnerships, are addressed in sections 1.2.3. and 1.2.4. of this chapter.

1.2 Discourses Informing the Connexions Strategy

1.2.1 *The Learning Society*

A mantra of the New Labour Government since its beginnings in 1997 has been, 'Education, education, education'. This principle is the focus of the Green Paper 'The Learning Age: a renaissance for a new Britain' (DfEE 1998a) published in February

1998. This discussion document foreshadows many subsequent educational initiatives with learning viewed as an:

> 'Investment in human capital [which] will be the foundation for success in the knowledge-based global economy of the twenty first century' (DfEE 1998a:7).

Learning is considered to be a way out of dependency and low expectations and is basic to the Government's welfare reform programme. The new culture of lifelong learning, expressed in the Green Paper, sought to encourage people of all ages to return to learning with courses through the LearnDirect scheme available free to all. Priorities for funding included help with basic skills, free full time education up to the age of eighteen and plans to involve employers in the training of young people in work through the Modern Apprenticeship scheme. Since this initial document a steady momentum has built up in plans to expand vocational education and these are fundamental to one of the four key principles of the Connexions strategy, a flexible curriculum.

The White Paper, Achieving Success (DfES 2001b) forms a foundation for the development of a coherent phase of 14-19 education and the Education Act 2002 (sections 76-96) provides the legislation for future changes to be made to the Key Stage 4 curriculum with opportunities to tailor education to the needs of individual pupils. In September 2002 GCSEs and A Levels in vocational subjects were introduced and the plans for work based learning at 14 expanded. For those with aptitude a predominantly vocational programme is envisaged with:

> 'a significant element of work-related learning from 14, followed by a Modern Apprenticeship or full time vocational study at college and then a Foundation Degree' (DfES 2001b:4.4).

The Connexions Service is integrated into these plans as a support agency for young people. It is acknowledged that such an expansion of choice in educational provision requires a system that provides adequate advice and guidance for students.

A final strategy document, Opportunity and Excellence (DfES 2002c) and a supplementary document Success for All (DfES 2002d) on reforms in the Further Education (FE) sector, give details of the curriculum and organisation of this 14-19 phase

in education. In the former document concern is expressed about the low level of 'participation' in education at the age of seventeen compared with other member countries of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) with a recognition that:

> 'too many young people have been turned off by their experiences of secondary education' (DfES 2002c:1.4).

In an attempt to counteract disaffection there are plans to celebrate success at all levels and to give recognition to achievements outside the classroom in areas such as sport, volunteering and the arts. Opportunity and Excellence detailed the terms of reference for a Working Group on 14-19 Reform which convened in January 2003 under the chairmanship of Mike Tomlinson. The final report of this working group (DfES 2004b) recommended a new 14-19 diploma which would integrate academic and vocational qualifications and allow young people to achieve the diploma at a pace appropriate to their capabilities. However, in a subsequent White Paper (DfES 2005b), the new diploma was rejected and existing qualifications retained with a proposal for fourteen new specialised vocational diplomas. Underlying these proposed changes was the acceptance of 14-19 as a single educational phase removing the assumption that formal education ends at sixteen. In November 2004 a review of the provision of FE was commissioned under the chairmanship of Sir Anthony Foster (DfES 2005c) the recommendations of which are contained in the White Paper Further Education: Raising Skills, Improving Life Chances (DfES 2006c) and supported by legislation in the 2006 Education and Inspections Act. Central to these proposals is an 'economic mission' aimed at 'delivering the skills and qualifications which individuals, employers and the economy need' (*ibid*:5). Provisions in pursuit of this aim include an expectation that every FE provider will develop certain areas of specialised excellence and a recognition of differential speeds of learning with a new entitlement to free education until the age of 25 for the completion of education and training up to Level 3. The most recent confirmation of 14-19 as a single phase is contained in a Green Paper (DfES 2007a) which proposes that, by 2013, there will be a 'new duty' for young people to participate in education or work based learning until the age of 17 with the anticipation that this will be raised to 18 at a later date. These changes will apply to the cohort of pupils entering Year 7 in

September 2008 as courses leading to the fourteen new vocational diplomas will be in place when this cohort reaches the age of 14

This analysis of educational initiatives identifies a dominant discourse on learning with education viewed as integral to an 'economic mission' providing the human capital essential for economic progress. Schuller and Field (1998) draw attention to the contrast between the concepts of social capital and human capital in relation to the learning society. They consider that human capital emphasises individual learning and achievement and the contributions made by individuals to national prosperity with no appreciation of learning as a group activity based on cooperation and the sharing of ideas. Schuller and Field argue that a learning society develops more successfully in certain types of social arrangements and base this argument on the work of Coleman. Coleman considers that high levels of human capital arise in situations when individuals can draw on:

> 'a set of resources that inhere in family relations and in community social organisations that --- can constitute an important advantage for children and adolescents in the development of their human capital' (Coleman 1994:300 in Schuller and Field 1998:226).

Coleman emphasises the importance of family background in educational achievement and, in addition to money and parental levels of education, he directs attention to relationships between parents and children where a significant factor is the amount of effort parents put into a child's learning (Coleman 1988).

Putnam also identifies aspects of social capital and defines it as:

> 'the features of social life – networks, norms and trust – that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives (Putman 1996:66).

In a later study Putnam analyses the decline of social capital in American society based on observations of the reduction in levels of engagement in community organisations, clubs and political parties in America. In this context social capital recognises the importance of social networks based on shared values which produce reciprocal

relationships between individuals and among families within networks. Putnam identifies a range of social networks which provide social capital ranging from the 'extended family' to a 'network of professional acquaintances' (Putnam 2000:21). He quotes Fischer:

> 'Social networks are important in all our lives, often for finding jobs, more often for finding a helping hand, companionship and a shoulder to cry on' (Fischer 1977 in Putnam 2000:20).

This quotation reflects two aspects of social capital, namely its bridging and its bonding potential. Bonding networks entail close ties with friends and family and provide support whereas bridging networks have weaker ties but are outward looking and include contacts from diverse social backgrounds. In reality 'many groups simultaneously bond along some social dimensions and bridge across others'. 'Bonding and bridging are not 'either-or' categories' but rather ''more or less' dimensions (*ibid*:23). I shall argue that these ideas are applicable to Connexions partnerships which construct a network of support services which provide a measure of social capital for disadvantaged young people. These networks have the bridging potential to move them into education, employment or training.

Ecclestone also has concern about the individual emphasis of human capital and argues that linking education for personal empowerment to financial incentives to participate in learning illustrates a growth in 'moral authoritarianism in the guise of liberal intentions' with the emphasis on formal qualifications indicating low expectations about human agency, risk taking and innovation (Ecclestone 1999:336). Nevertheless a tendency for young people to be 'tied in to' the 'UK discourses of the learning society' has been noted by Ball et al (2000:60) as:

> 'The political and educational normativities of the 'learning society' discourse are persuasive and seductive' *(ibid*:113).

Other research has also drawn attention to the desire of many young people to conform to conventional norms (Johnston et al 2000, Ford 1999, Ford 2000, Phillips 2001) and it is

arguable that for young people, 'going to college', can contribute to feelings of self esteem even if subsequently they do not complete a course.

The proposals for fourteen new vocational diplomas and employment based training visualise cooperation with employers (DfES 2005b). However an earlier study of employers' attitudes towards an increase in the range of post 16 qualifications indicated that employers preferred to recruit young people at the age of sixteen with at least four good GCSEs but that 90% of these young people choose to continue in education (Maguire 2001). It was also found that the labour market value of vocational qualifications was low when compared to the value given to other attributes considered desirable in new employees. Maguire concludes that, although recent policy is driven by the belief that early entry into employment is undesirable for young people and unwanted by employers, the needs of employers are not necessarily being met by an increase in levels of participation in education and training post 16.

Despite the reservations expressed here it is the aim of the Connexions strategy to encourage all young people to remain in some form of education or training after the age of 16 and where they move directly into employment there is an expectation that employers provide an element of training leading to a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) and this, by 2013, will be a statutory requirement. It is evident, from the foregoing, that participation in education and training is considered a vital ingredient in the reduction of social exclusion and I shall now consider this together with alternative discourses on social exclusion.

1.2.2 *Social Exclusion*

Commentators and researchers have drawn attention to the complex nature of social exclusion and to the fact that these complexities are reduced to a shorthand understanding of the concept in Government policy initiatives (Johnston et al 2000, MacDonald 1997, Jeffs and Smith 2002). It was noted earlier that Connexions was mooted in the SEU report, Bridging the Gap: New Opportunities for 16-18 year olds not in Education, Employment or Training (SEU 1999). An analysis of this report and earlier documents related to social exclusion, exemplifies the simplistic understanding of social exclusion that is employed by the Government. For young people social inclusion tends to be equated with participation in education, employment and training and for those not participating in this way the term NEET has been adopted. Concern for this group

remains a top priority in plans to transfer Connexions responsibilities to Children's Trusts (DfES 2006a).

The third chapter of 'Opportunity for All' (DSS 1999), which is first in a series of annual Government reports monitoring the reduction of poverty and social exclusion, examines the situation of children and young people. In this chapter concern is expressed that in the UK fewer young people between the ages of 16 and 18 are in full-time education in comparison with other industrialised nations. The lack of 'participation' of this group is equated with outcomes viewed as analogous with social exclusion:

'There are strong links between non-participation and outcomes which are costly for both the individuals and society as a whole – unemployment, benefit dependency, teenage parenthood, offending, substance misuse, homelessness and mental illness' (DSS 1999: Ch3: 57).

A similar concern with 'participation' underlies the New Labour Government's approach to welfare reform introduced in the Green Paper 'New ambitions for our country: A New Contract For Welfare'. This focuses attention on 'the importance of work' and the aim of 'helping people to move from welfare to work' (DSS 1998:23). The Social Exclusion Unit set up in 1997 and reporting directly to the Prime Minister exemplifies the government's concern with social exclusion and its rhetoric on 'social exclusion' which informs welfare policies under New Labour. This contrasts with the emphasis on a 'dependency culture' favoured by the Conservative administration (Trickey and Walker 2000). However, despite this change in emphasis, the welfare reforms of New Labour endorsed the obligations placed on the unemployed by the Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA), introduced in 1996 by the Conservatives. New Deal programmes are basic to the delivery of New Labour's welfare-to-work policies and the two principle programmes, the New Deal for Young People (NDYP) and the New Deal for Long Term Unemployed (NDLTU) include an element of compulsion with the receipt of JSA dependent on compliance with the schemes. Nevertheless, although the New Deal programmes endorsed the JSA, considerable additional money was injected into these schemes and financed by a windfall tax on privatised utilities. This additional money supported the provision of personalised advice and assistance from a New Deal Personal Adviser (NDPA) which had not been available in previous provision. Nevertheless,

although the expenditure on labour market programmes in the UK rose between 1993 and 1998 it still remained below the EU average (Daguerre 2004). In addition average out-of-work benefit in the UK was, according to 2001 statistics, amongst the lowest in the EU (Daguerre and Taylor-Gooby 2003).

The welfare provision epitomised in the New Deals represents a paradigm shift from the traditional approach of 'Old Labour' which supported voluntary welfare programmes (Daguerre 2004). In addition it is exclusively directed at the supply side of the labour market and concentrates on enhancing the 'employability' (Peck and Theodore 2000a) of jobseekers rather than the introduction of measures to stimulate a demand for labour. Programmes which seek to activate the unemployed as opposed to providing passive support through the benefit system are termed activation policies. Such policies aim to achieve:

> 'labour market integration through better access to training and employment opportunities coupled with measures to 'make work pay' (Daguerre and Taylor-Gooby 2003:626).

Whereas policies defined as 'passive' are based on the principle of entitlement to an income, activation policies in the UK include a responsibility to participate in work related activities whilst in receipt of JSA. Policies to 'make work pay' include the Working Families Tax Credit, the National Minimum Wage (NMW) and National Insurance reforms. However it is argued that, apart from the marginal effect of the NMW, these reforms place an emphasis on improving post-tax as opposed to pre-tax income and ignore increased inequalities in earnings (Dickens et al 2000). Two methods to achieve activation have been identified in programmes. One is directed at rapid entry into the labour market and termed Labour Force Attachment (LFA) and the other, which concentrates on improving qualifications and skills, is termed Human Capital Development (HCD) and is aimed at sustainable transfers to work. (Peck and Theodore 2000b). It is argued that the NDYP is closely related to US programmes and that although it has elements of both LFA and HCD approaches, the hierarchy of options privilege rapid entry into the labour market. The similarity of the UK to the US programmes, as opposed to those in the EU, is based, in part, on the flexibility and lack of regulation of

labour markets in these two countries which provides employment in low-paid, low-skilled jobs (Daguerre 2004).

Whilst Connexions can be situated within a broader policy context aimed at reducing social exclusion by increasing participation there are important differences between the Connexions and the NDYP initiatives. The most obvious difference is the target age groups, 13-19 for Connexions and 18-24 for the NDYP. Connexions involvement with the younger age group can be viewed as a preventative approach providing support for young people who are in danger of dropping out of education and therefore failing to gain the qualifications required for future employment. In addition, unlike NDYP, Connexions is a universal service with information, advice and guidance available to *all* young people. Another factor to consider is the compulsory nature of NDYP based on the removal of JSA for non-compliance and the fact that underlying this programme is a recognition that rights should be counterbalanced by responsibilities. However, for Connexions, although attendance at school prior to 16 is a compulsory right, the responsibility for attendance lies primarily with parents, carers and the school itself. Post-16 education is voluntary and the EMA provides a financial reward for participation. However, with the proposed extension of the age for compulsory education in 2013, participation in post-16 education or training will become a 'duty' with the possibility of sanctions for those who do not comply (DfES 2007a).

Another significant difference between the two initiatives is that NDYP uses predominantly Labour Force Attachment methods to achieve participation in employment, whereas Connexions is almost exclusively concerned with Human Capital Development. In addition, by 2013, if young people in the Connexions age group participate in employment there will be a mandatory requirement for this to include a training component (DfES 2007a). This difference between NDYP and Connexions is illustrated by the fact that, although both were launched within the Department for Education and Employment, since 2001 NDYP has been a programme within the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) whereas Connexions has remained within educational provision since its inception.

An apparent similarity between the initiatives is the provision of a PA. However the role of the NDPA is primarily concerned with issues related to employment and a recent study emphasised the difficulties that NDPAs experienced in making successful referrals to other services required by the most disadvantaged young people (Finn 2003).

By contrast the partnership working, which is fundamental to Connexions, acknowledges the breadth of services needed by such young people and consequently the Connexions PA is in a position to access these.

It is evident that, despite the differences between these two schemes, both NDYP and Connexions seek to reduce social exclusion by increasing participation in education, employment or training. However although the correlation between participation and outcomes associated with social exclusion is not disputed there is a tendency for the Government to translate a correlation into a causal relationship with 'indicators of social exclusion' seen as a direct result of non-participation. The fact that a causal relationship is being established is clear from the following statement on the targets of the Connexions Service (also noted by Colley and Hodkinson 2001).

'The principal targets will relate to participation and attainment in education, training or work, since it is clear from the Bridging the Gap report and other research that participation has a major impact on a young person's more general 'well-being'' (DfEE 2000:6.6).

The value of 'participation' is re-emphasised in a statement of vision for the Connexions Service in 2006 (DfES 2002a) and concern has been expressed that the use of this social exclusion paradigm could limit discussion to a debate on 'the narrow policy concerns of government' (Macdonald and Marsh 2001:388). These 'narrow policy concerns' are evident in the Connexions targets which are aimed at reducing the numbers of young people identified as NEET and I shall now examine complexities of social exclusion which are not emphasised in the Government's analysis of the concept.

Attention has been drawn to the heterogeneous nature of the groups considered to be socially excluded and to the fact that the process of social exclusion occurs in a variety of ways. The implication of this is that diverse routes into social exclusion require a range of different policy interventions to reverse the process (Baldwin et al 1997, Johnston et al 2000). Therefore, to really appreciate young people's experience of social exclusion, it is necessary to engage with their lived experiences and understand their 'survival strategies and cultures of resistance' (Jordan and Redley 1994:156). It was some of these experiences that I hoped to appreciate in my research anticipating that this understanding

may extend the vision of appropriate outcomes for Connexions beyond the narrow confines of 'participation in education, employment and training'.

These narrow confines reflect a social integrationist discourse on social exclusion (Levitas 1998) which has a central focus on integration through paid work and, for young people, a focus on education and training as the accepted route to paid work. Levitas traces different discourses on social exclusion in the development of British social policy starting with the redistributionist discourse (RED) which had an emphasis on poverty and narrowing the gap between rich and poor. This was followed by the moral underclass discourse (MUD), which informed the New Right's approach to social policy and was supported by the claim that a morally irresponsible underclass was developing in Britain (Murray 1990) who were unwilling to work and remained dependent on welfare benefits. The social integrationist discourse (SID) is associated with New Labour but also contains moral undertones. These are evident in the strong emphasis on the value of work in the 'welfare to work' policies which include moving young people and lone parents off benefit and into work and in cross cutting targets for Connexions which aim to 'reduce the under-18 conception rate by 50% by 2010' (DfES 2002b p17).

Colley and Hodkinson (2001) argue that the SEU report 'Bridging the Gap' perpetuates this moralistic interpretation of social exclusion with the causes located in the deficits of the individual rather than in social structure, a view that reflects the moral undertones of the social integrationist discourse (Levitas 1998). Commentators have drawn attention to changes in social structure that affect the situation faced by young people in a 'post-industrial' age. In addition to inequalities resulting from gender, race and class (Bates 1994, Ball et al 2000) even young people with good qualifications entering the labour market are disadvantaged compared with their own parents (Byrne 1999). Although there has been an improvement in the overall employment prospects for young people since the early 1990s much of this employment involves part-time, temporary, self-employed and casual labour with low pay and poor working conditions (Macdonald 1997, Maguire and Maguire 1997, Macdonald and Marsh 2005).

The Government's approach to the concept of social inclusion fails to reflect 'on multidimensional aspects of inequality and disadvantage' (Colley and Hodkinson 2001:342). However Silver (1994) provides such a multidimensional analysis in her consideration of a range of European perspectives on social exclusion. She draws attention to the contested nature of the concept stating that:

'Exclusion not only varies in meaning according to national and ideological contexts. -----[it is also] often conflated with the new poverty and inequality, discrimination and the underclass' (Silver 1994:539).

She continues to analyse social exclusion and its converse social inclusion according to three paradigms. 'Solidarity', based on French Republican thought, has an emphasis on social cohesion and mutual support which promotes inclusion. 'Specialisation', based on Anglo-American liberalism has an emphasis on individual freedom of choice, and it is the specialisation in the market that encourages mutual dependency. 'Monopoly', influential on the European Left, sees exclusion as the result of group monopolies which are offset by welfare measures based on principles of citizenship.

A constructive way of moderating the current Government's emphasis on participation in education, employment or training is offered by Watts (1999a). Watts identifies three approaches to social exclusion; i) the moral explanation which is analogous with the moral underclass discourse noted by Levitas; (ii) a structural explanation which views the socially excluded as victims of circumstances arising from a decline in the industrial basis of society and a growth in flexible labour markets; and iii) an approach which focuses on processes of cultural adaptation. Whilst recognising the influence of structural changes this third approach views young people as active agents. Watts considers that such an approach can be viewed as 'containing the seeds of new creative social forms' rather than as entrenching social exclusion (*ibid*:19). He argues that this approach to social exclusion has implications for the role of guidance which he defines as interventions designed to help individuals make choices related to learning and work. He considers that interventions should include feedback designed to change systems and help them adapt to individuals. He extends 'learning' to include all the informal learning and he extends employment to include the three main aspects of the informal economy: the household economy, the communal economy and the hidden economy. He suggests that the provision of a citizens' income, which is also a fundamental tenet of Silver's 'monopoly paradigm', would give greater recognition to the value of the household and communal economies and legitimise socially acceptable parts of the hidden economy thus according value to certain survival strategies utilised by disadvantaged young people (Jordan & Redley 1994, Macdonald 1994, 1996a). A citizen's income would also increase the prestige of the unpaid work of carers

(Macdonald 1996b), voluntary work and the reciprocal helping relationships between members of a group which contribute to greater social cohesion, a fundamental element of the 'solidarity' paradigm. The significance of feeling included in a community, even in one which by the Government's definition is 'socially excluded', is emphasised in the research findings of Johnston et al (2000) and highlights the fact that even in a deprived community social networks exist which render lives meaningful.

This discussion emphasises the complexities of social exclusion and indicates that policies to combat social exclusion should take into account the structural factors that contribute to disadvantage and recognise that:

> 'If social exclusion is inherent in a market-orientated flexible post-industrial capitalism, then it is impossible to eliminate it by any set of social policies directed at the excluded alone' (Byrne 1999:130).

However a consideration of the Connexions strategy indicates it is in danger of doing just this for despite its claims to be a universal service it appears to be increasingly targeted at a disadvantaged minority. There have been concerns expressed by both youth workers and career guidance practitioners about a decline in services for *all* young people

> 'The notion of career guidance as an entitlement for all young people, and the extent of the service provided to them, are at risk of being subordinated to the Government's social exclusion agenda' (Watts 2001:158).

This analysis of social exclusion, together with the earlier discussion on 'the learning society', illustrate two key discourses that inform the ideology on which the Connexions strategy is based. The third discourse, which values professional expertise, underlies the delivery of the Connexions Service and I shall now consider in more detail the contributions made by the former Careers Service and the Youth Service.

1.2.3 *Career Advice and Guidance Services*

From 1948 the Department of Employment had provided a Youth Employment Service which was under the auspices of LAs. There was no statutory requirement for this provision and certain authorities chose to opt out of this responsibility. However in 1974

the Careers Service became part of the Department of Education and the Employment and Training Act (1974) made the provision of career advice a statutory requirement for all LAs with funding provided by central Government. Between 1991 and 1995 the Careers Service was privatised with contracts awarded by Government on a local basis by a competitive tendering process and in 1993 legislation imposed a statutory obligation upon the Careers Service to provide career guidance to all young people in full time education. In effect this tended to be concentrated on providing guidance for young people as they approached the age of sixteen and usually involved individual interviews in what became known as a 'blanket interviewing process' which was monitored quantitatively by the number of personal 'action plans' produced.

From 1998 onwards there was an increasing requirement for Careers Services to focus their work on young people defined as being most in need. To some extent this 'focusing agenda' was welcomed by the Careers Service and is reflected in some of the pioneering work carried out between Spring 1995 and December 1997 by the Institute of Career Guidance's Mentoring Action Project (MAP), financed by the European Social Fund. MAP was followed in 1998 by Stepping Stones, a similar project which emphasised the value of group work. Both MAP and Stepping Stones worked with young people with multiple disadvantages who did not have access to the provision made to pupils in full-time, mainstream education. In an evaluation of MAP it was observed that:

> 'There were also strong indications during evaluation that mentoring can help to restore a professional caring dimension to careers services. This may have been eroded in recent years by factors that include overriding emphasis on the completion of action plans for 'core' clients in order to meet government imposed targets' (Ford 1999:15).

The evaluations of the MAP and Stepping Stones projects recognised the value of working on young people's own ground, the ability to enter the young person's own frame of reference and the time commitment required to build a trusting relationship. There was also a recognition of the importance of assessing young people's achievements in non-formal situations as a means of increasing self esteem and confidence although it was acknowledged that ultimately it was the 'quality of the relationship formed between mentor and mentee' which determined success (Ford 1999:30). The evaluations of these

projects indicates a holistic approach and reflects some of the principles basic to youth work. However, a code of ethical practice for members of the Institute of Career Guidance (ICG) confirms that its predominant concern is with employment, education and training:

> 'Career guidance practitioners' primary concern is for clients who seek guidance in the fields of education, training and work' (ICG 1999a).

Anticipated outcomes of career guidance include increased personal effectiveness, the realisation of potential, a greater investment in learning and skills and support for people at a disadvantage in the labour market. The principles that inform the work of career guidance professionals focus on the needs of the individual and respect for a person's right to self determination. Other basic principles include confidentiality, equality of opportunity, transparency and impartiality. Impartiality means that professional objectivity centred on the needs of the individual client must take precedence over any institutional pressure. It is this principle that is challenged by Connexions targets and also by plans to give increased responsibility for careers advice and guidance to schools themselves (DfES 2003b).

In an evaluation of the Stepping Stones project attention was given to the coordination of services to help individual young people and it is suggested that Careers Service companies can act as an 'advocate for young people to other providers' (Ford 2000:41). This foreshadows the partnership working that is basic to the Connexions Service. In 1999 an ICG Positional Statement reflects these changed ways of working:

> 'The Institute recognises that the Government's refocusing agenda for the Careers Service Companies will allow those organisations to be more creative and flexible in dealing with their various client groups than blanket interviewing and quantitative targets allowed' (ICG 1999b).

However whilst acknowledging the valuable understanding gained from recent projects for engaging with young people not in learning or work the Positional Statement also highlights certain concerns about the refocusing agenda. These include reservations about the expectation that disadvantaged young people should 'take responsibility for their

learning' especially as, for many, appropriate learning opportunities do not exist in their local area. Concern is also expressed that too narrow a targeting of resources could effect the benefits which apply equally to all young people. With the introduction of Connexions concern about the reduction of career guidance for core clients grew despite assurances from CSNU that this aspect of Connexions is vital:

'Careers Guidance is central to the work that Connexions does. It will be vital that young people continue to have access to high quality, impartial guidance if Connexions is to achieve one of its key challenges over the next few years' (Weinstock 2003).

In a further Positional Statement (ICG 2003) concern was expressed both about the reduction in the amount of qualified career guidance resource allocated to young people and also about the quality of this guidance with evidence of cases where careers advice was provided by PAs without the relevant career guidance qualification. John Downing, a president of the ICG, drew attention to the fact that the CPAD does not qualify the holder to deliver career guidance (Downing 2003). Watts (1999b) also considered that the concept of the PA risked becoming a 'guidance panacea' and that by recruiting from a range of professional backgrounds the competences sought were generic with substantial additional training required to prevent a net loss in the amount of professional career guidance available to young people.

The proposed changes in educational provision, detailed in section 1.2.1., which include the introduction of fourteen new specialised vocational diplomas (DfES 2005b) are accompanied by an acknowledgement of the importance of high quality IAG. This is confirmed by the recent education Green Paper (DfES 2007a), which contains proposals to raise the age of compulsory participation in education or work based learning. It is envisaged that from April 2008 LAs will assume overall accountability for the quality of IAG although schools and colleges may opt out if existing provision is poor. The Green Paper states that every young person should have access to 'confidential, impartial, comprehensive and accessible advice and guidance' (DfES 2007a:5.7) but this will not be delivered exclusively by guidance professionals as schools themselves are expected to make young people aware of the range of available options. Draft standards for IAG were issued for consultation in December 2006 (DfES 2006b) and a document on the quality

standards for IAG that had been agreed between key stakeholders was published in July 2007 (DCSF 2007b). In their response to the consultation document the ICG provides a definition of the term career as a 'pathway through life' which includes education, work, family and leisure activities illustrating a holistic approach to career guidance rather than the reductionist approach which the ICG considers informed the consultation document (ICG 2007a). A holistic approach is also evident in the ICG's response to the education Green Paper (DfES 2007a) where attention is drawn to the importance of professional guidance:

> 'The Government needs to ensure that **all** young people have access to a programme of client centred, impartial guidance based on the principle of equal opportunities for all' (ICG 2007b).

These concerns about the erosion of young people's right to impartial IAG reflect those expressed several years earlier both in relation to Connexions and in respect of Government plans to give schools greater responsibility for the delivery of IAG (DfES 2003b). A review of career guidance policy in fourteen OECD countries drew attention to the situation in UK schools where cooperation between schools and professional organisations is a requirement of the 1997 Education Act (OECD 2003). Although the resulting report expressed concern about the diversity in provision between schools and the level of qualification of careers teachers in schools, there is an acknowledgement that the working relationship between schools and career guidance services in the delivery of IAG is preferable to an exclusively school based system. Watts, who was a member of the OECD team, comments on the disadvantages of an exclusively school based system:

> 'It would be ironic if, at a time when the arguments for the UK's partnership model are being recognised internationally, England was to adopt the discredited school based model' (Watts 2003:2).

Although the ICG have reservations about the decline in professional career guidance delivered by Connexions the significance of a trusting relationship, which is fundamental to the role of the Connexions PA, is recognised by MAP and Stepping Stones, the visionary projects undertaken by the Careers Service. Mentoring, which will

be analysed in more detail in chapter 2, is concerned with establishing such relationships. Helen Colley, a former careers guidance professional, introduced the concept of 'engagement mentoring' which is applicable to the role of the Connexions PA. The implications of this are that mentoring is influenced by an aim to satisfy Government targets for 'participation in education, employment or training'. Colley maintains that:

> 'If the goals of mentoring are specific, pre-determined outcomes, dictated by the needs of institutions and government, rather than building on the priorities of the young people themselves, a supposedly one-to-one relationship is transformed into a triangle' (Colley 2000 :17).

Bill Law also reflects on the role of the PA in Connexions which he considers to mark a major departure for careers guidance. He utilises the concept of 'system orientation' which he originally introduced whilst researching the role of school counsellors during the 1970s (Law 1977) and suggests that a PA with high system orientation would be inclined to steer a young person towards 'normality'; equating this with 'majority' (Law 2000:35). He considers this to be an ethical issue for the ICG in that PAs who have a strong sense of self and are 'inner' directed may be prepared to resist system pressures and 'make wide-awake opt-outs from Connexions success statistics' (*ibid*:36).

It is evident from the foregoing that career guidance professionals, whilst recognising the need for a flexible mode of working with disadvantaged young people, have considerable reservations about Connexions. These relate particularly to the erosion of universal career guidance for all young people. There is also concern that a reductionist approach to the concept of 'career' accompanied by pressure to satisfy Government targets could interfere with a PA's ability to genuinely understand and respond to the needs of young people which would conflict with a holistic approach to career guidance.

As noted above, Careers Service projects with disadvantaged young people reflect certain youth work principles and it has been argued that effective career guidance resonates with 'the principles and ethics underlying youth work' (Hughes and Peck 2003). It is now relevant to consider the role played by the Youth Service in Connexions. The Youth Service, unlike the former Careers Service and despite many initial reservations, has retained a measure of autonomy in its partnership with Connexions.

1.2.4 *The Youth Service*

From the nineteenth century onwards many charitable bodies devised diverse ways of working informally with young people on a voluntary basis. However, it was not until 1939 that the State made a decisive move to take direct responsibility for a 'service of youth'. Circular 1486 issued in November 1939 and entitled The Service of Youth, gave 14 existing voluntary youth organisations the right to nominate representatives to local youth committees which would have responsibility for the development of youth provision in their area. A second circular, Circular 1516, issued in June 1940 and entitled The Challenge of Youth, was less concerned with organisation and focused more on philosophy, purpose and basic forms of delivery. At this time, although there was an emphasis on education and the building of character, a fear of copying the Youth Movements of the totalitarian regimes against which the war was being fought gave rise to concern about placing a youth movement under the sole control of central Government (Davies 1999a).

Since these beginnings a statutory Youth Service has always existed alongside voluntary sector youth organisations although the latter have their funds supplemented by grants from LAs. The 1960s might be regarded as its 'golden age' when, following the publication of the Albermarle Report in 1960, there was a considerable expansion of the Youth Service with an allocation of more money for buildings and equipment and also increased support for the voluntary sector. However although the Albermarle Report was accepted in its entirety, the diplomatic negotiations prior to its publication resulted in compromises and the dilution of any really radical proposals. The philosophy underlying the stated purpose of the Youth Service remained based on a 'commitment to individualistic educational values and aspirations' (Davies 1999a p.54) with no acknowledgement of the cultural changes taking place in an increasingly multi-racial society. A significant outcome of the Albermarle Report was a recommendation to increase the number of full time youth workers from 700 to 1300 over a five year period and in 1961 the National College for the Training of Youth Leaders was established in Leicester, a move which accentuated the rifts between full time professional workers and part-timers and volunteers.

Gradually the investment in the Youth Service of the early sixties was eroded and a survey carried out in 1972 highlighted the existence of large discrepancies in the spending by different LAs. In the same year the raising of the compulsory school leaving

age to sixteen meant that the curriculum in schools needed to be more responsive to the needs of certain young people who were reluctant to stay on in education and this influenced the infiltration of the Youth Service into schools. During the 1970s there was increasing pressure on the Youth Service to target those areas considered to be in greatest need and, within these areas, any young people regarded as potentially troublesome. Although youth organisations had always prioritised working class young people from disadvantaged backgrounds it was feared that such Government pressure threatened two basic youth work principles namely: a refusal to accept any previously assigned stigmatising labels and voluntary attendance. However, although voluntary attendance implies a service that is open to all, surveys over the last 60 years suggest a take up of under 30 per cent of the target age group.

During the 1980s the youth service remained peripheral to the plans of the Thatcher government and as such was spared a radical makeover and escaped with a decade of 'benign neglect' (Davies 1999b:13). However during this period a conference arranged by the DES agreed a statement of purpose:

'to redress all forms of inequality and to ensure equality of opportunity for all young people' (Davies 1999b:94).

This lay the foundations for issue based work that challenged different forms of oppression arising from racism, sexism and cultural differences. There was some resistance to these aims from some powerful and more conservative elements within the service itself and in an attempt to exert more central control the Conservative Government of the time effected a major reorganisation of five centrally funded Youth Service bodies. This resulted in The National Youth Bureau and The Council for Education and Training in Youth and Community Work merging in 1991 to form the National Youth Agency (NYA). Despite accusations that the NYA was an example of increased central control, the new director, Janet Paraskeva, argued that it would be able to represent the views of youth workers to Government ministers.

The pressure for the Youth Service to prioritise work with socially disadvantaged young people continued in the 1980s and 1990s with a growth in the numbers of detached youth workers and the formation in 1996 of a National Federation of Detached Youth Workers. Another growth area in youth work was that provided by the National

Association of Young People's Counselling and Advice Services, which in 1993 became
Youth Access. Consequently when New Labour formed a Government in 1997 the
situation for youth work was very different from that envisaged by Albermarle and
manifest in the large multi-purpose youth centres of the 1960s. An audit of youth service
provision in England undertaken by the new government described it as:

> 'a diverse range of opportunities – youth clubs, information centres, specialist
> projects, street based work – which is intended to support young people in their
> transition from childhood to responsible adulthood, encourage their social
> development and individual fulfilment, and help them engage fully in society.'
> (DfEE 1998b in Davies 1999b:164)

The audit highlighted the variation in Youth Service resources between different LAs
with spending per head on 13-19 year olds ranging from £18 to £292. This variation was
also evident in the ratio of workers to young people which ranged from 1:4,900 to 1:266.

This variation in provision by LAs supports a demand for a stronger legislative
base to ensure more consistent funding by LAs. A legislative base for Youth Service
provision dates back to the 1944 Education Act articles 41 and 53. These sections make it
a 'duty' of every local educational authority to secure the provision of adequate facilities
for recreation and social and physical training but there is no attempt to define the term
'adequate'. The Act maintained the delicate balance existing between the state and the
voluntary sector in that the duty of the LA is to 'secure' facilities rather than to 'provide'
them. Despite repeated attempts to strengthen the legal basis for the provision of a Youth
Service these sections of the 1944 Act remained until legislation in section 508 of the
1996 Education Act confirmed this duty. Proposals to increase funding for the youth
service in 2002 (DfES 2002e) were supported by a slight change in its legislative basis
with section 60 of the 2002 Education Act increasing the powers of intervention by the
Secretary of State if a LA failed to carry out its duty adequately. Subsequent legislation in
the Education and Inspections Act 2006 (Clause 6 section 507) supports proposals made
in the Green Paper Youth Matters (DfES 2005a) strengthening the duty of LAs to provide
'sufficient educational leisure-time activities' for the improvement of the 'wellbeing' of
young people aged 13 to 19 and for certain young people aged 20-24. This recent
legislation, which inserts section 507 into the 1996 Education Act and came into force in

January 2007, underlies proposals to provide young people with 'something to do, somewhere to go, someone to talk to' (DfES 2006a).

Despite the need for a firmer legislative basis to ensure consistent delivery of youth services by LAs there is a concern that basic youth work principles may be compromised by adhering to an agenda set by Government. The Labour Government's proposals for the partnership between the Youth Service and Connexions and those announced in plans to transform youth work (DfEE 2001, DfES 2002e) illustrate this dilemma. Initial reactions by youth workers to Connexions relate to fundamental youth work principles which reflect the holistic approach articulated in this thesis. The voluntary nature of youth work implies that young people actively choose to use the Youth Service which is based on the principle of impartiality. This means starting where the young people are, working at their pace and empowering them to make their own choices and decisions. This implies that the Youth Service does not work towards any specific outcomes (Parsons, 2000; Rayment, 2000) which conflicts with the statement that Connexions is an 'outcome-driven service' (DfEE 2000:6.6). Starting where young people are also means starting without preconceived ideas about them based on previous behaviour or stigmatising them by the use of categories such as 'school drop out' (Davis 2000) or NEET which entered the vocabulary of workers as the service developed. The principle of 'a fresh start' also has implications for the sharing of information between practitioners which is basic to Connexions partnership working. In addition there is also a fear that agency cooperation could encourage a depersonalised approach based on case management which may fail to prioritise young people's own accounts of situations and experiences (Jeffs and Smith 2002).

However, despite the reservations of youth workers, the Youth Service has become a principle partner in Connexions. In a document that considers how Connexions and the Statutory Youth Service will work together it is recognised that the cooperation of the Youth Service is essential to the success of Connexions. The 'specialist knowledge and extensive expertise and experience' of youth workers is acknowledged as is their ability to identify and engage with some of 'the most vulnerable and disaffected' young people assisted by the 'safe, trusted and informal environment' in which they work (DfES 2002f:8). This recognition of the expertise of youth workers is accompanied by a promise to 'provide funding that adds value to existing youth service activity' although this

funding is on the understanding that all Youth Service provision for 13-19 year olds contributes to 'the goals and delivery of the Connexions Service' (*ibid*:11).

Several writers expressed optimism that youth work could broaden the vision and impact of Connexions (Davies 2000, Cisse 2000, Wylie 2003a). The response of the NYA to the Green Paper, Transforming Youth Work (DfEE 2001) welcomed many of the proposals and expressed a wish to play the 'the fullest possible part in delivering effective youth work' (NYA 2001). However their response drew attention to the need to embed youth work in Connexions by broadening its remit to include the informal education traditionally provided by the Youth Service and extending this provision beyond the 13-19 age group. Concern was also expressed about proposed resources which were considered insufficient to establish this broader focus. In their response, the NYA urged the DfES to fully commit itself to promoting the 'Pledge of Entitlement' (DfEE 2001:18) and in the final strategy document, Transforming Youth Work: Resourcing Excellent Services, this request is acknowledged in its recommendation to LAs to develop the pledge (DfES 2002e:10). The first of the eight items of this pledge is that the LA should provide:

> 'a safe, warm, well equipped meeting place within reasonable distance from home, accessible to young people at times defined by young people, giving an opportunity to participate in personal and developmental activities including arts, drama, music, sport, international experience and voluntary action' (*ibid*:22).

In addition to the requirement to include informal education in the remit of a broader Connexions the NYA's response also emphasises the value of group work, the need for Connexions to adopt a code of ethical conduct to parallel that of youth workers and a concern about the lack of clarity in relation to the role of the Connexions PA. This provides evidence that the NYA is performing the role identified in 1991 by Janet Paraskeva by representing the views of youth workers to Government ministers. The final strategy document, Transforming Youth Work: Resourcing Excellent Services, responds to the issues addressed by the NYA by acknowledging the importance of a shared set of youth work values and distinctive methods of working which include group work. The principles that underpin youth work are expressed in a list of twelve youth work values which include voluntary attendance, empowerment and impartiality (DfES 2002e:20).

The more contentious aspects of the proposals relate to the monitoring of LA Youth Services. Youth Service performance measures emphasise that the Youth Service will contribute to Connexions performance indicators and additional 'Annual Youth Service Unique Targets'. These include the expectation that 25% of the target population of 13-19 year olds will be reached and that this percentage should reflect the cultural diversity of the community. Of this proportion 60% should 'undergo personal and social development which results in an accredited outcome.' There are also locally agreed targets concerning contact with young people who are not in education employment or training or considered to be 'at risk' in other ways (*ibid*:16). Such requirements suggest that, despite the acknowledgement of basic youth work principles, there is a danger that these principles could be violated by attempts to satisfy targets.

Smith (2002) delivers a robust critique of the Government's proposals for 'Transforming Youth Work'. He considers that the document confirms a 'movement towards bureaucratization, accreditation and targeting,' and that the proposals are part of a framework that relates to the Government's social exclusion agenda and illustrate 'the continuing move away from 'generic' youth work'. He predicts that this reliance on quantifiable measures to ensure funding will encourage considerable manipulation of figures on rates of participation and he fears that such an approach to youth work will prioritise 'delivery' at the expense of 'relationship' (Smith 2002:9). The value of a good relationship between young people and youth workers was emphasised in a research project conducted by the National Foundation for Educational Research. The young people questioned considered this relationship to be the fundamental feature of successful youth work. However, of those questioned, a significantly lower proportion considered that youth workers actually achieved such a relationship (Maychell et al 1996:100).

The concerns expressed by Smith may be well founded. However, youth work throughout its history has 'thrived best on enthusiasm, spontaneity, intuition and good personal relationships' (Davies 1999b:183). Good youth workers still utilise these personal qualities in their work rather than the qualities required for a professional bureaucrat. In response to Smith's critique Tom Wylie makes a staunch defence of the Government's proposals. He quotes paragraphs from Transforming Youth Work – Resourcing Excellent Services that are ignored by Smith and considers that Smith's interpretation of the document is based on an unrealistic and utopian view of what the

Youth Service can expect from Government. He concludes, with certain reservations, that:

> 'overall, the government has created a new architecture for the Youth Services in England. It is the most important document for forty years – and it is backed by substantial sums of money to enable youth work to develop' (Wylie 2003b).

Prior to the introduction of Connexions Howard Williamson had expressed concern about the emerging divide between the traditions of informal education based on dialogue, and a pragmatist concession to the targeted methodologies of the new agendas within health, training and criminal justice policy. He referred to the findings of research on five Youth Action projects in Manchester which concluded that such projects worked best when based on the principles and practices of informal education and 'where there was already a framework of generic youth work in place' (Williamson 1998:1). He considered that the responsibility of youth workers to young people goes beyond a dialogue and must engage in broader social agendas. Such engagement must be supported by arguing for the first step requirement of open access traditional youth work which is, 'a warm space, a listening ear, relevant and accurate information and so on' *(ibid*:2). It would appear that the promises contained in the Pledge (DfES 2002e) and subsequent proposals of Youth Matters: Next Steps (DfES 2006a) with the promise of 'something to do, somewhere to go, someone to talk to' are a guarantee by the Government that this generic basis will be maintained.

I shall now conclude with a summary of the ideas considered in this chapter.

1.3 Summary

In this chapter I have considered the strategy and organisation of Connexions and identified three discourses that inform this strategy namely: the learning society, social exclusion and professional expertise. The targets of Connexions, which aim to increase levels of participation in education, employment and training, exemplify the prevalence of the learning society discourse in this policy initiative. Participation is also viewed as a desirable outcome for young people experiencing multiple difficulties and in danger of social exclusion and this is applicable both to the Connexions initiative and the NDYP. However, the Connexions policy recognises that such young people may require support

in various areas of their lives and it is expected that such support will be provided through their relationship with their Connexions PA. It is assumed that these professionals will work with young people in a holistic manner ensuring all their needs are met. However, I argue that in addition to responding to needs, a genuinely holistic approach requires an understanding of young people's perspectives on their lives, a recognition of their priorities, an acknowledgement of their existing social networks and an appreciation of the aspects of life that are important to them and which contribute to feelings of self-esteem. This chapter has identified elements of a holistic approach in the professional discourses of both youth workers and career guidance professionals and in this research I plan to establish an understanding of the important aspects of young people's lives and to examine the relationships which young people themselves view as supportive. The concepts of identity and self-esteem underlie my attempt to achieve such an understanding and I discuss these in the following chapter. In a later section of the next chapter I shall consider the principles that inform mentoring practices and the relevance of these to the role of the Connexions PA as it is considered that a mentoring relationship provides support and enhances self esteem.

CHAPTER TWO: THE COMPLEXITIES OF SELF AND RELATIONSHIPS

2.1 Introduction

In this thesis I argue that, in addition to responding to needs, a genuinely holistic approach requires an understanding of young people's perspectives on their lives, a recognition of their priorities, an acknowledgement of their existing social networks and an appreciation of the aspects of life that are important to them and which contribute to feelings of self-esteem. The concepts of identity and self esteem are basic to achieving such an understanding of young people and in this research I utilise a range of theoretical approaches to self and identity to access young people's perceptions of themselves and the aspects in their lives that are important to them and provide a sense of self-worth. Self-esteem is viewed as an integral part of the self in that it is concerned with personal evaluations of the self that give rise to feelings which contribute to either a sense of self-worth and inclusion or, alternatively, personal dissatisfaction and alienation. Findings from research by Coopersmith (1967) draw attention to the importance of parents or other significant persons in a young person's life who, by providing a high self-esteem model and a relationship based on acceptance and respect, make a significant contribution to the development of positive attitudes towards the self. It is an attempt to provide such a relationship which underlies the practice of mentoring and the relationship between a young person and a mentor corresponds to the positive relationship that is envisaged between a young person and their Connexions PA, a fundamental tenet of the Connexions initiative.

In this Chapter I shall first consider the theoretical approaches utilised in this research which contribute to an appreciation of young people's understandings of themselves. I shall then analyse the concept of self-esteem as the importance of enhancing self-esteem informs the discourses of all practitioners working with young people. In section 2.3 I shall discuss the contribution that a relationship with a significant person makes to a sense of self-worth and the presence of such relationships in naturally occurring situations. I shall then examine attempts to transfer the qualities that inform these natural mentoring relationships to formal mentoring situations. Finally I shall consider the role of the Connexions PA and determine the extent to which a relationship between a Connexions PA and a young person can replicate the support gained from a natural mentoring relationship.

2.2 Issues of Self and Identity

2.2.1 *Understandings of Self*

In this section I establish an approach to the concept of identity which will provide an effective analytical tool for the understanding of young people. Theoretical approaches that attempt to clarify the essence of what a person understands as 'themselves' have used a range of terms. These include identity, subjectivity, a sense of self, the self, self-image, self-concept, self-conceptions, self-view and self-theory. In this section I utilise ideas from the disciplines of sociology, psychology and philosophy in an attempt to establish an understanding of self which corresponds to my own personal reflections on what contributes to 'being me'. This approach embraces aspects of self that arise from social influences but also includes an appreciation of people's inner worlds and experiences as these may influence feelings and behaviour which they do not fully understand but which contribute to the understanding that they have of themselves.

I shall now consider approaches to self and identity which I utilise in this study and in the following chapter I discuss the ways in which these theories facilitate access to empirical data on young people's understandings of themselves. Taylor (1989), whose ideas proved particularly valuable in my empirical research, acknowledges the influence of the wider society in the formation of self. He considers people operate with ideas about a 'good person' which guide notions of 'self' and contributes to a '"self image" which matters to them'. This in turn influences their attempt to portray themselves in a 'good light' to other people and to themselves. He considers that this need for an orientation to 'the good' is a crucial aspect of human agency (Taylor 1989:33) and that an orientation to 'a hyper good' comes closest to defining a person's identity (*ibid*:63). It necessitates attention to the aspects of lives that are meaningful, make life worth living and contribute to feelings of personal dignity and also draws attention to the ways in which people attempt to direct their lives in an effort to move closer towards these perceived 'goods' suggesting that people who are unable to achieve what they perceive as 'good' may have their lives torn apart by craving (*ibid*: 44). As the self exists in relation to a 'defining community' (*ibid*: 36) Taylor acknowledges a sense of 'belonging' as integral to identity and although he considers an orientation to a 'hyper good' provides a measure of stability to the self he also appreciates that the situations in which people live their lives constantly change and therefore a 'sense of self' can also change and develop (*ibid*:47). I translate Taylor's idea of 'a hyper good' as the aspects of young people's lives that are particularly

important to them and I also investigate areas of their lives that give rise to a sense of belonging.

The influence of the social on the development of the self is also fundamental to the theories of Mead (1934/1962). He conceptualises the self arising from social interaction and he argues that a thinking, self-conscious individual is logically impossible without a prior social group. Social interaction involves understanding how another person is likely to respond and includes the ability to 'take the attitude of another' (*ibid:*171) person in our initial actions and subsequent reactions. Mead also considers that the wider community operates as a 'generalised other' which implies that the 'self' is directed by the attitudes that prevail in that community. Mead's observations are pertinent for individuals attempting to understand themselves by expressing this as a dialogue between the 'I' and the 'me' with the 'I' as subject viewing itself as object. This awareness of the self has been viewed as the beginning of consciousness. Mead considers such an internal conversation basic to thought processes and an essential attribute of the self which is:

> 'an object to itself --- This characteristic is represented in the word 'self' which is reflexive, and indicates that which can be both subject and object' (ibid:136).

It is common for people to use the objective 'me' and the reflexive 'myself' when talking about themselves and an awareness of this can offer insights into the understanding that young people have of themselves.

An appreciation of the use of the term 'me' is recognised by James (1890) who argues that any understanding of 'me' should be extended to include possessions and relationships with significant others. He considers that an interesting aspect of the self-concept is its ability to incorporate people and objects that are not directly part of the self:

> 'The empirical self of each of us is all that he is tempted to call by the name *me*. But it is clear that between what a man calls *me* and what he simply calls *mine* the line is difficult to draw. We feel and act about certain things that are ours very much as we feel and act about ourselves' (James 1890:291).

Extending the understanding of self to include things regarded as 'mine' such as family, friends, home, clothes and even music offers another valuable insight when attempting to appreciate a young person's identity.

Things that are mine, friends, music and clothes, can indicate the membership of a definable group and Tajfel, in a study of intergroup relationships, utilises the notion of 'social identity' which he conceives of as '*part* of the individual's self-concept' (Tajfel 1978:63) which:

> 'only applies to those aspects of an individual's image of himself – positive or negative – which derive from his membership of groups that are salient to him' (*ibid*:8).

It is evident that 'social identity' will inform young people's understanding of themselves to varying extents but where membership of a particular group is important for a young person this will also contribute to a sense of belonging which I view as significant when analysing identity.

Another approach to the understanding of 'self' which is rooted in the social is provided by Hall (1996) who maintains that 'identity' is formed within discourse. This approach portrays identity in a state of flux, changing and recreating itself in response to different discourses. However the question remains as to why a person invests in some discourses rather than others. Hall considers that identity arises at the point of intersection between discourse and subjectivity. He argues that subjects are 'hailed' by certain discourses but also invest in them themselves and therefore 'suturing' (Hall 1996:6) to a particular discourse is a two sided operation. Hall acknowledges but rejects an earlier argument by Hirst namely that this view requires that the subject has the ability to perform before it has been constituted as a subject within discourse.

> 'This something which is not a subject must already have the faculties necessary to support the recognition that will constitute it as a subject' (Hirst 1979:65 in Hall 1996:7).

Craib also addresses this inconsistency in his critique of Hall's post-modern concept of identity where the 'I' is constantly recreating the 'me'. He states:

'However many times I rewrite and erase my identities, it is 'I' who does it'

(Craib 1998:7).

Craib considers that such inconsistencies result from the view that identity can be constructed within discourse without accounting for people's inner worlds and experiences. He utilises the term 'normotic' for personalities who exhibit a disinclination to entertain the subjective element in life and who rarely utilise introspection. The construction of such a personality rests on the assumption that cognition dominates people's lives, there are only ideas and these ideas originate outside the person in the social world. Craib also emphasises the importance of including experience in any discussion of identity and this includes how we experience ourselves. He conceives of experience as a dynamic process within the psyche involving the constant interaction of external and internal stimuli. Experiences are incorporated into the psyche at both a conscious and unconscious level which indicates that there are facets of identity that contribute to a sense of self but which may not be completely understood.

Whilst accepting the influence of the social in the formation of identity this research also recognises the significance of the 'inner world' and the subjective experiences which are emphasised by Craib. Day Sclater also draws attention to the importance of subjective experience by examining the paradox that identity, constructed within discourse, creates a sense of self informed by the social which cannot therefore be unique or original whereas:

'Generally individuals do not experience their own subjectivity as 'social'; rather it is more likely to be felt to be unique, individual, private, inner and personal. An adequate account of the production of self has to take this paradox into account. Accounts of subjectivity which recognise only discourse ignore all that is felt to be personal and psychological about the self' (Day Sclater 1998:87).

Recognising such a paradox is essential in this research as the aim is to access young people's own understandings of themselves and their lives and this will include an appreciation of feelings they may have about their own individuality.

All theorists concerned with the nature of the self accept that identity can change with time and many agree that some elements are more resistant to change than others

(Craib 1998, Demo and Savin-Williams 1992, Harter 1993, McFarlin and Blascovich 1981, Swann 1987). While accepting that a person's sense of self can change and incorporate different social identities Craib maintains that:

> '*My* identity always overflows, adds to, transforms the social identities that are attached to me' (Craib 1998:4).

A psychological theory based on the need for self-consistency supports a view that the self-concept is resistant to change (Lecky 1945). Epstein has argued that self-theory is resistant to modification as beliefs about the self are often acquired early in development and 'derived from emotionally significant experiences to which the individual may have little conscious access'. In addition to this people strive to maintain the stability of the theories they hold about themselves as these assist them to make sense of their worlds (Epstein 1991 quoted in Harter 1993).

The need to maintain a consistent view of oneself underlies the research by Swann (1987) which studied the relationships between interaction partners. This illustrates that people have a tendency to accept information that confirms their self-conception and pay less attention to information that does not support their own understandings of themselves even if this has negative implications. Swann also draws attention to the fact that identities are frequently jointly negotiated and people may fear that changes in self-conception might affect their relationships with significant others who expect them to honour the identities that they have negotiated together. This tendency is particularly relevant as young people strive to become accepted by their peers. This need to maintain a self-conception even if it has negative implications indicates that there is an evaluative element which contributes to a person's understanding of themselves. It is this evaluative element of the self together with basic feelings of self-worth that constitute the essence of self-esteem. The concept of self-esteem is a tool which enhances my understanding of young people and it this I shall now examine in detail.

2.2.2 Self-Esteem: An Essential Ingredient of the Self

In a recent review of the research literature on self-esteem (Emler 2001) it is observed that according to the Oxford English Dictionary this term has been in common usage in the English language for at least four hundred years. More recently it has gained

popularity amongst academics, therapists, politicians and the general public and an increase in self-esteem is frequently cited as a 'soft outcome' for projects involving disadvantaged young people. The report of MAP, the visionary project conducted by the Career's Service, considers 'that the generation – or regeneration – of self esteem is a major mentoring task' (Ford 1999:28) and the potential for the Youth Service to 'build confidence, self motivation [and] self esteem' (DfES 2002e:7) is viewed as a valuable contribution that this service can make to Connexions. This indicates that in their work with disadvantaged young people the two principle partners in Connexions acknowledge the importance of self-esteem. Nevertheless the enthusiasm for schemes that claim to enhance self-esteem far outweighs systematic attempts at evaluation and research. In 1990 the report of the California Task Force to Promote Self-Esteem and Personal and Social Responsibility viewed self-esteem as a 'social vaccine' that had the capacity to inoculate people against a range of undesirable social traits. In his comprehensive review of the research literature on self-esteem Emler comments that the popular assumption that:

'only people with low self-esteem act in ways that are harmful to themselves or others – turns out as a blanket generalisation not to be a reliable or sound basis for policy initiatives' (Emler 2001:3).

In this section I shall consider different theoretical approaches to the understanding and measurement of self-esteem and, although this has been primarily the preserve of psychologists, the essence of self-esteem is articulated by Taylor when he relates identity to an orientation to a 'hyper good' which contributes to 'our sense of ourselves as commanding respect' (Taylor 1989:15).

Rosenberg conceives of self-image as 'an attitude towards an object' and in as far as people have attitudes towards different objects one of these objects is the self. His definition of attitude in this context includes:

'facts, opinions, and values with regard to the self, as well as a favourable or unfavourable orientation toward the self' (Rosenberg 1965:5).

and it is the favourable or unfavourable orientation toward the self that is the essence of self-esteem. Coopersmith also considers self-esteem as an attitude towards the self and views it as the evaluation which the individual makes and maintains towards himself or herself. He also recognises that:

'Attitudes towards the self like other orientations and dispositions may be either conscious or unconscious' (Coopersmith 1967:7).

Until relatively recently knowledge about positive self-regard was predominantly theoretical and subsequent research still utilises earlier theoretical approaches to provide frameworks on which to base empirical studies. One of the earliest formulations of self-esteem is provided by James who considers that 'our self feeling' depends 'on what we *back* ourselves to be and do'. It is the ratio of achievements to aspirations in areas that are valued and can be expressed by the formula:

Self-esteem =   Success
                Pretensions   (James 1890:310).

Another source of self-esteem identified by James is the value accorded to the extensions of the self: 'our clothes', 'our home' and 'our family', discussed earlier, where 'what is *mine*' is viewed as integral to the self (James 1890:291). The relevance of James's analysis of self-esteem with its stress on the balance between achievements and aspirations is still acknowledged by subsequent theorists. Other early theorists relate self-esteem to relationships with others at different stages of development. Cooley (1902) and Mead (1934/1962) locate self-esteem in the social processes that are involved in the creation of the self. Cooley conceived of the 'looking-glass-self' (Cooley 1902 in Harter 1993:89) where positive or negative self-esteem results from the approval or disapproval provided by significant others and becomes incorporated in the self. Similarly Mead emphasises the significance of interaction and the process by which ideas and attitudes of key figures in a person's life are internalised.

The foregoing identifies two important ingredients of self-esteem. One is located in early relationships with significant others and this is considered to underlie general feelings of self-worth and is referred to as global self-esteem. The other, relates to the

present situation where aspirations that are valued and achieved contribute to positive feelings about the self. These ingredients are reflected in two of the most widely used scales for the measurement of self-esteem devised by Rosenberg (1965) and Coopersmith (1967). Although both treat self-esteem as an attitude towards the self, the scale compiled by Rosenberg views self-esteem primarily as feelings about the self and constructs a 'global' measure of self-worth providing what is:

> 'considered as a general judgment of personal worth and value' (Gray-Little and Hafdahl 2000:27).

whereas the scale devised by Coopersmith is cognitively based and considers self-esteem as an evaluation of the self. Here judgements are made about the self in different domains of a person's life with self-esteem defined as:

> 'the evaluation which the individual makes and customarily maintains with regard to himself; it expresses an attitude of approval or disapproval and indicates the extent to which the individual believes himself to be capable, significant, successful and worthy. In short, self-esteem is a *personal* judgement of worthiness that is expressed in the attitudes the individual holds toward himself' (Coopersmith 1967:5).

Coopersmith's research studied ten to twelve year olds. His fifty item scale measured different components and included questions related to self-esteem in four areas of life: parents, peers, school and personal interests. Although the scale considers different domains of life and is based on an evaluation of the self the findings indicate that a positive attitude towards the self is related to parents or other significant persons who have provided a high self-esteem model and a relationship based on acceptance and respect. These findings confirm the theories of Cooley and Mead discussed earlier and support the value accorded to supportive relationships in mentoring practice.

In an assessment of scales that base measurement of self-esteem on success in different domains of life, Brown (1993a) maintains that global feelings of self-worth are rooted in early childhood experiences and precede the cognitive development required to consciously evaluate successes in specific domains of life. He considers that these

feelings of self-worth, or the lack of them, are based in affective processes and illustrated by the fact that people feel varying levels of affection for themselves and he argues that a liking for oneself 'is not dependent on the belief that one possesses certain attributes' although it is accompanied by a general perception that one is good at several things (*ibid*:27). Brown concludes that specific beliefs about one's competencies should be viewed as 'consequences rather than antecedents of global self-esteem'(Brown 1993a:34).

Research by Harter (1993) investigates the two main theories of self-esteem namely, that related to success in valued domains of life (James 1890) and that related to relationships with significant others (Cooley 1902) and assesses their contribution to positive feelings about the self. In a project with young people she investigated self-esteem in five domains; scholastic competence, athletic competence, social acceptance, physical appearance and behavioural conduct. Harter's findings confirmed what James hypothesised namely that where a young person is able to discount a domain in which their competence is low they have higher self-esteem than if a domain where their competence is low is considered to be important. She also investigated four sources of potential support; parents, teachers, classmates and close friends and the findings supported Cooley's theory that views positive regard from significant others as critical to self-esteem. She concluded that:

> 'Those individuals with lowest self-esteem, therefore, are those who report both incompetence in domains of importance and absence of supportive approval of others' (Harter 1993:100).

One of the significant findings in Harter's research was the 'inextricable link between appearance and self-esteem' (*ibid:*95). This relationship was equally evident amongst the intellectually gifted and those with learning disabilities and was more significant for young women than for young men. The directionality of this link was investigated to establish whether appearance was a determining factor for self-esteem or if self-esteem influenced evaluations of appearance. The young women investigated fell into two groups and it was found that, for those whose appearance determined their sense of self-worth there was more preoccupation with appearance, lower self-esteem and more experience of depression than for the group whose feelings of self-worth preceded their judgements on their appearance.

It has been found that measurements of low self-esteem measured self-esteem as low in a relative sense. Such measurements resulted from the lack of positive views about the self rather than the presence of negative views (Baumeister 1993). This and other research findings indicate that, when practitioners seek to form a relationship with a young person, it is important for them to appreciate elements that contribute to a young person's feelings of self-esteem. Understanding these can be a delicate process requiring empathy and intuition. The need for this is demonstrated in findings on the association between violent behaviour and high but unstable self-esteem. In an interdisciplinary review of evidence on aggression, crime and violence the conventional view that low self-esteem is related to violence and anti-social behaviour is disputed. It is argued that violence is more often the result of threatened egotism resulting from 'inflated, unstable, or tentative beliefs in the self's superiority' (Baumeister et al 1996:5). The significance of maintaining a young person's self-esteem when forming a relationship is supported by a theory based on the desire for 'self enhancement' which was regarded by James as an 'elementary endowment of human nature' (James 1890 in Brown 1993b:117). Nevertheless other research challenges the self-enhancement theory by drawing attention to a drive towards 'self-consistency' which protects the self-concept from change (Demo and Savin-Williams 1992, McFarlin and Blascovich 1981, Swann 1987). Findings of Swann's research, quoted earlier, indicate that people with negative self views frequently prefer unfavourable feedback from their interactions partners as this maintains the identity jointly negotiated between them and does not threaten their relationships. However Brown (1993b) concluded that although self-consistency is an important determinant of behaviour it is not subordinate to a need for self-enhancement and frequently people with low self-esteem seek self-enhancement vicariously through association with esteemed others.

The importance of association with esteemed others is also basic to 'social identity theory' (Tajfel 1978, Tajfel & Turner 1986) which emphasises the value of perceiving the in-group positively. In research considering different levels of self-esteem between Black and White students it was concluded that:

'Current research and theory strongly suggest that significant others for personal self-esteem consist of primary groups or immediate reference groups not the wider society' (Grey-Little and Hafdahl 2000:40).

The significance of a primary group is also recognised by Leary et al (1995). This approach regards self-esteem as a barometer that monitors the degree to which a person is being included in, as opposed to excluded from, a valued group. This then motivates the person to behave in a manner that reduces the possibility of exclusion. An implication of this is that self esteem itself may be less important than the quality of our bonds with others that it reflects. (Emler 2001).

Further recognition of the significance of primary groups for self-esteem is the 'esteem enhancement' theory suggested by Kaplan (1980) which states that the adoption of deviant patterns of behaviour by young people with self rejecting attitudes will increase their feelings of self-esteem. Research findings with adolescents confirmed this theory to some extent although where the young people themselves and valued others did not consider the deviant behaviour compatible with their accepted roles self-enhancement was less likely to follow deviant behaviour.

This review of theoretical understandings and empirical research on self-esteem will inform my field research and enhance my sensitivity, as a researcher, to its complexities. The review also draws attention to the need for practitioners to be aware of the possibly fragile nature of self-esteem as they seek to form relationships with young people, and that in such situations qualities of sensitivity and empathy are required. Connexions Policy itself acknowledges the need for such personal qualities:

'Personal Advisers will be drawn from a range of backgrounds ---- They will need to adapt and develop their skills for the new Service. The key to success will be that they have the attitude and ability to engage with young people' (DfEE 2000:6.24).

The theories and research findings reviewed here also confirm the importance of a supportive relationship in creating a sense of self-worth. Coopersmith observes that:

'Some recent attempts to modify the antisocial actions of adolescents suggest that an effective, rewarding model establishes the motivation for change and provides the specific cues for desirable action patterns' (Coopersmith 1967:242).

The provision of such an 'effective, and rewarding model' is basic to mentoring and informs the relationship between a young person and a Connexions PA and it is this that I shall now consider.

2.3 Relationships with 'Significant Others'

2.3.1 *Characteristics of Mentoring*

The origin of the term mentor is based in Greek mythology. The original Mentor was the Goddess Athena who, when approached by her father Zeus, volunteered willingly to disguise herself as a man and act as a faithful friend and guide to Telemachus, eventually reuniting him with his father Ulysses and his mother Penelope. Ford relates this to the fact that a mentoring relationship will develop over time and that the mentor has 'first to earn – and then retain – the client's trust and respect' (Ford 1999:8). These characteristics of mentoring are reinforced by Hamilton and Darling who consider a mentor to be 'a wise counsellor' who is 'nurturant, challenging and experienced'. They maintain that a mentor is an unrelated adult who assumes responsibility for a younger protégé beyond the extent required by their normal social role. They acknowledge that parents frequently do many of the same things as an unrelated mentor but as parents are 'obliged by kinship' to counsel their children Hamilton and Darling reserve the term 'mentor' for an unrelated adult (Hamilton and Darling 1989:121).

Watts observes that the concept of mentoring 'is used in confusingly different ways by different American authors' (Watts 1986:4). He identifies three main elements in mentoring which are: *modelling, sponsorship* and *guidance and counselling*. He considers that role models in different areas of young people's lives provide a means by which they copy certain behaviour and test out 'who they are and who they might become'. Sponsorship implies that the mentor can utilise power and experience to further the interests of their protégés. Watts recognises that although mentors may not possess all the essential information when providing guidance and counselling they can offer help by 'pointing out pitfalls to be avoided and short-cuts to be pursued' and by being a sympathetic listener with whom a young person can test out thoughts and ideas. (*ibid*:4-5)

These three elements of mentoring are reflected in the following definition:

'--- a mentor describes an adult who plays a significant functional role in the adolescent's development by offering support at critical moments, by acting as a

teacher and guide, and offering at least some characteristics of a role model'
(Hendry et al 1992:267).

In addition to these elements one of the most valued quality of a mentor that Hendry et al identified is the ability to display 'belief in the young person' (*ibid*:262). This research and other similar projects concentrate on identifying the characteristics of mentoring by investigating the relationships that are significant in young people's lives and the qualities that define such relationships. Research findings suggest that such 'natural' mentoring takes place within a range of relationships and settings in young people's lives (Hamilton and Darling 1989, Philip and Hendry 1996) and it is this form of mentoring which I shall now consider in more detail.

2.3.2 Natural Mentoring Relationships

Mentoring theory relies to a large extent on developmental psychology and the importance this attributes to significant persons in the life of the child and adolescent. Rhodes (1994) draws attention to the growing body of literature that acknowledges the role of older adults such as neighbours, teachers and extended kin who contribute to the resilience of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. The concept of resilience is analysed by Rutter (1987) who emphasises the 'need to focus on protective mechanisms.' This stimulates enquiry into how certain people 'manage to maintain high self-esteem' in the face of adversities that would influence other people to give up and also directs attention towards what enables some people to have confidants to whom they can turn for support in moments of crisis (Rutter 1987:317). Drawing from the work of Rutter, Werner conceives of resilience as:

'an end product of buffering processes that do not eliminate risks and stress but that allow the individual to deal with them effectively' (Werner 1990:116).

In a longitudinal study of children growing up in Kauai, those who developed into 'competent, confident and caring adults' despite experiencing a range of adverse conditions in early childhood were identified as resilient (*ibid*:120). When considering these children it was found that most had established 'a close bond with at least one person who provided then with stable care' and 'appropriate attention' during the first

year of their lives. (*ibid*:123). It was also found that 'sibling care-giving' either 'as a provider or a recipient' was an important factor that protected them in otherwise stressful lives. Amongst this group of children there were 'other concerned adults, relatives and neighbours' who offered appropriate protection if a parent was indisposed and it appeared that these resilient children were particularly 'adept at actively recruiting such surrogate parents' (*ibid*:124). At school it was found that they possessed the capacity to 'make school a home away from home' and as such, school offered a refuge from the disorder of their lives and frequently a favourite teacher acted as a role model (*ibid*:126). The findings of this longitudinal study, which started in 1954 and followed the participants from childhood until adulthood, emphasise the importance of close relationships with 'significant others'. It also provides an understanding of the natural mentoring that occurs in communities and which helps to establish resilience in children reared in adverse conditions.

Studies by Hamilton and Darling (1989), Hendry et al (1992), Philip and Hendry (1996) and Philip (1997) make further contributions to the understanding of natural mentoring processes. The first two of these studies considered significant people in young people's lives and analysed characteristics of these relationships to determine the extent to which these reflected elements basic to mentoring. The other two studies develop and utilise a typology of natural mentoring styles and identify characteristics valued in these relationships.

The research by Hamilton and Darling was quantitative and conducted with students at Cornell University and based on the assumption, noted earlier, that a mentor is an unrelated adult. Using questionnaires the students identified important people in their lives and the activities which they shared with these people. By analysing these activities the categories of teacher, challenger and role model were selected as indicating qualities informing the role of mentor. Utilising these categories it was found 45% of students had at least one unrelated adult who could be viewed as a mentor. However the findings also revealed that 67% of parents, 48% of peers and 48% of siblings performed a mentoring role (Hamilton and Darling 1989:131-134). The study by Hendry et al, based on a similar methodology, reached similar conclusions namely that although some unrelated adults were perceived by young people to have mentoring characteristics most young people 'find mentoring qualities within their family and peer group' (Hendry et al 1992:268).

The research by Philip and Hendry (1996) was based on a qualitative methodology utilising focus group interviews and in depth individual interviews with a sub-sample of each group. The group interviews were based on a 'board game,' avoiding the problem of a few people dominating the discussion, and providing contextualised data about who would and who would not be asked for help in a range of imaginary dilemmas. As a result five mentoring styles were identified:

1. **Classic** – This is on a one to one basis involving an adult and a young person where the older, experienced mentor provides support, advice and challenge.

2. **Individual-team** – Here a group looks to an individual or small number of individuals for support, advice and challenge and this is often found in specialised youth work settings.

3. **Friend to friend** – This form of mentoring often provides a 'safety net' especially for young people who are mistrustful of adults.

4. **Peer group** – A form of mentoring where an ordinary friendship group takes on a mentoring role at specific times. The peer group acts as an arbiter or a resource in terms of the appropriate strategies to adopt in certain social settings.

5. **Long-term relationship mentoring with 'risk taking' adults** – This is similar to classic mentoring but it differs in that it is often a relationship between a young person and a mentor who has had a history of rebellion and challenging authority and is often known to the young person from early childhood (Philip and Hendry 1996:192-193).

In a study of natural mentoring Philip (1997) confirms this typology and argues that natural mentoring takes place within a range of relationships and settings with young people identifying several key elements as important. These include a feeling that a mentoring relationship provides a safe setting with a guarantee of confidentiality which allows sensitive issues to be explored. Such relationships are based on the essential element of trust which needs to be renegotiated at recurring intervals. It is also important that young people feel an element of control in the relationship which recognises mentoring as part of a shared agenda based on a reciprocal relationship from which both mentors and mentees benefit. The support provided by these relationships is rooted in the mentor's ability to empathise with the young person.

The findings of these four research projects indicate that mentoring occurs in a range of natural relationships and settings and the challenge is to translate natural mentoring into planned mentoring programmes. These studies illustrate that informal networks amongst family, friends and peer group provide significant others in young people's lives who frequently play a mentoring role. This indicates a need, when planning a mentoring programme, to supplement the theoretical framework based in developmental psychology by an appreciation of both the structural contexts of young people's lives and their social networks. It is also important to understand the ways in which these networks may be affected by planned mentoring programmes (Philip and Hendry 1996, 2000, Philip 2000, 2003, Colley 2003). It has been suggested that:

> 'The perspectives of young people may hold the key to implementing programmes which reach out to young people and engage with the realities that they face' (Philip 2000 :7).

This approach to implementing planned mentoring programmes reflects elements of the holistic approach which informs this research.

Although the positive relationships with individuals and groups is a factor promoting resilience and engendering feelings of self-esteem it is important that an emphasis on significant relationships and social networks does not eclipse an appreciation of other factors that contribute to resilience and a sense of self worth. Certain people, who could be described as inner motivated, are less reliant on the approval of others and sometimes gain satisfaction from creative activities choosing to withdraw from social contact in order to pursue interests from which they gain both personal fulfilment and enhanced self-esteem. Another source of resilience and self-esteem is identified by Rutter who draws attention to the importance of 'self-efficacy' that arises from 'successful task completion' and strengthens resilience by establishing a confidence in the ability to cope with future difficult situations (Rutter 1987:328). This is contrasted with 'learned helplessness' where a person is dependent on the support of others when problems arise (*ibid*:327). The themes of resilience, inner motivation and individual coping mechanisms emerge strongly in the empirical findings of this research and will be developed further in Chapter 4. I argue that it is important for practitioners to respect characteristics that inform the identities of inner motivated people and it is possible that

certain of these could provide a basis for the matching of mentor and mentee in a planned mentoring programme. I shall now consider planned programmes in more detail.

2.3.3 *Planned Mentoring Programmes*

The analysis of natural mentoring relationships suggests that an understanding of these is essential before planning any mentoring programme. However a study of the historic roots of mentoring in America illustrates that this has not been the case. Freedman traces the roots of mentoring to the tradition of Friendly Visiting in nineteenth century America. These campaigns were launched in a spirit of evangelical enthusiasm and optimism aiming to 'elevate the moral nature of the poor' (NCFCC 1887 in Freedman 1993:26) and to save young children by giving them a 'new and better outlook on life' (Richmond 1899 in Freedman 1993:26). This approach is still evident in certain aspects of modern British social policy which are based on a 'deficit' view of young people (Philip 2000, 2003, Colley and Hodkinson 2001, Colley 2003). The Friendly Visiting schemes failed primarily because working people were more inclined to turn to friends and neighbours for support than to representatives of the middle class emphasising the importance of existing social networks in the provision of natural mentoring support. Despite this earlier failure there was renewed enthusiasm for a similar form of intervention in America in the 1970s and 1980s with the launch of many planned mentoring programmes which culminated in 1989 being declared 'The Year of the Mentor.' One of the more reputable schemes, which started early in the twentieth century and which developed a level of operational consistency and professionalism, is that of the Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS) programme. This has been carefully monitored and evaluated and I shall consider these evaluations before discussing the development of mentoring in the UK.

In the BBBS programme adult volunteers are paired with young people from single parent households with a typical relationship lasting for a year and involving weekly meetings. Both volunteers and young people receive screening and training and care is taken to ensure that both the young people and their parents want a mentor. The BBBS programme is not aimed at resolving specific problems and the relationships are built on 'an approach that defines the mentor as a friend, not a teacher or a preacher' (Grossman and Tierney 1998:422). Findings from research, which utilised a control group, indicated slight improvements in academic performance, self-esteem and

relationships with parents for the young people who received mentoring, It is argued that a positive relationship with another adult may contribute to an improved relationship with a parent and that it is this which contributes to the positive outcomes (Rhodes et al 2000). However concern is expressed about the fact that over half of the relationships dissolved after a few months and in cases where relationships lasted for less than 3 months there were significant declines in self worth. It is argued that there is a possibility that these young people experience a sense of failure and rejection that may well confirm previous life experiences (Grossman and Rhodes 2002).

In the previous chapter a consideration of the provision of youth services in the UK illustrates the centrality of building relationships with young people in order to effect change in their lives and although such relationships have elements that are common to the mentoring process they have not been defined in this way. However the fervour for mentoring, which has been viewed as part of the 'American Dream', is now regularly employed as a tool in UK social policy initiatives (Philip 2003). The evaluations of the BBBS programme were based on one particular approach to mentoring where adult volunteers are matched with a young person who has sought mentoring and the researchers emphasise that the findings relate only to mentoring schemes that facilitate the types of relationships established in BBBS (Grossman and Tierney 1998). However it is suggested that the mentoring typology identified earlier can be extended to include a range of planned mentoring practices including those utilising paid practitioners and youth work mentoring (Philip et al 2004).

One scheme in the UK, which involved practitioners from the Careers Service and which has been carefully evaluated, is the Mentoring Action Project (MAP), highlighted in Chapter 1. This operated from Spring 1995 until December 1997 and was one of a limited number of initiatives aimed at extending the work of Careers Services to disengaged young people. MAP was succeeded by Stepping Stones which was part of the Youth Start schemes, a precursor to Connexions. Stepping Stones concentrated on group work to assist pupils to realise 'their abilities within the more formal environment of learning and work' (Ford 2000:3). These projects therefore operated with a 'specific goal' of re-engaging young people in education and employment. However although the evaluation considered the numbers of young people entering education, training or work and paid attention to the 'graded steps' achieved by young people the most significant aspect of evaluation was accorded to the perceptions of the mentoring process gained

from 'the observations of the young clients themselves' (Ford 1999:68). In this evaluation, feedback from young people suggests a range of qualities basic to effective mentoring. These include empathy, an ability to enter the young person's frame of reference, the provision of reliable information and knowledge of the locality, reliability and honesty which promotes trust and the ability to give genuine encouragement which develops self-esteem. It was observed that, although professional training can develop some of these attributes, such training will:

> 'be concerned with enhancing qualities that are already inherent, and helping mentors to develop in self-awareness' (*ibid*:73).

In a comprehensive review of mentoring relationships Pawson (2004) draws attention to the range of terms which are used to describe interactions in these relationships. These terms include: helping, counselling, sponsoring, role modelling, befriending, bonding, trusting, direction setting, sharing a laugh, widening horizons and building resilience. They indicate elements in a mentoring relationship which correspond to qualities which may also result from the reciprocity which characterises social networks (Putnam 2000). The following quotation stresses the bridging potential of a mentoring relationship:

> 'A common raison d'être of mentoring interventions is to overcome status barriers, using the mentor as a human bridge' (Pawson 2004:2).

By focusing on the perspectives of young people the findings of the MAP programme indicate qualities of a relationship which provides bonding capital. In addition the importance attributed to 'the provision of reliable information and knowledge of the locality' suggests that such a relationship has bridging potential.

The research by Philip et al (2004) confirms the bonding element in mentoring. This research considers three mentoring projects, two of which, a housing and an educational project, involve paid key workers and aim to reintegrate young people into the mainstream. The third, a befriending project, provides one to one befriending carried out by volunteers supported by four paid workers with additional group work organised by the paid staff and assisted by the volunteers. It was found that the planned mentoring

interventions were highly valued by many of the young people and that the status of paid worker compared to volunteer did not appear significant when considering these relationships. Key workers in the housing and educational projects had daily contact with young people and relationships needed continual negotiation with high demands on time, skill and tact, suggesting that such an intensive level of support is not feasible where mentors are volunteers. It was found that not all relationships with key workers had the attributes of a mentoring relationship although the group environment of these projects offered the potential for young people to form relationships with other workers. In those identified as mentoring relationships high value is placed on trust, control, reciprocity and shared experience. These relationships are distinguished from other relationships by their friendly nature and the 'ability to have a laugh' (*ibid*:22) and to provide the space in which young people can tell their story which for many enables them to develop strategies for coping with difficult aspects of their lives. However, despite the supportive nature of such relationships, the researchers conclude:

> Planned mentoring is not a 'magic bullet' that is capable of solving all the problems facing young people --- Structural restraints continue to exert a powerful influence on the trajectories of vulnerable young people: the influence of poverty, early childhood difficulties and inequalities in health impacted on the lives of young people in this sample. Such issues cannot be offset solely by good relationships with adults or anyone else. The development of a mentoring relationship, however, may enhance capacity to reflect on these issues and to be better able to negotiate services and support' (*ibid:* 49).

Enabling young people to cope better with difficult circumstances suggests developing resilience which does not entail reliance on either bonding or bridging capital but on a personal quality within the young person themselves.

Pawson also draws attention to the value of certain mentoring schemes for 'resilience-building' and considers this may be a more realistic aim than 'positional advance' (Pawson 2004:87). However in his analysis of a range of mentoring schemes he identifies four mechanisms that inform the mentoring process. These include those operating in the affective domain providing 'emotional support', those that offer information and advice providing 'cognitive support', those that encourage their protégés

to gain skills and qualifications and offer 'aptitudinal' support and finally those that introduce them to new networks providing 'positional support' (*ibid:*7). He identifies cases where mentors perform a combination of these roles and also accepts that there may be schemes whose objectives require a mentor to provide support in all four domains. However the vision of such a super-mentor is more realistically addressed in the concept of 'mentor rich settings' suggested by Freedman. Such settings can include a range of people such as teachers, youth workers, sports supervisors and neighbours who have the time and inclination to relate with young people. Freedman considers that the creation of such settings is a means:

> 'of moving beyond the chimera of *supermentoring,* in which a single charismatic adult is called on to be a dramatic influence, providing all the young person's need in a single relationship' (Freedman 1993:111).

Such a vision appreciates that any young person needs a range of relationships to ensure healthy development. Philip (1999) echoes these ideas in an address to the Research, Policy and Practice Forum on Mentoring in which she stresses the potential of youth work to provide mentor rich environments. She emphasises the similarity between the principles of good youth work and the principles of effective mentoring and suggests that a youth worker can perform the role of facilitator by responding to the expressed needs of young people. The concept of a mentor rich environment suggests a scenario where one person within such settings may be a Connexions PA and it is the role of the PA that I shall now consider.

2.3.4 *The Connexions Personal Adviser*

It could be argued that the Connexions strategy anticipates that the Connexions PA will provide the 'magic bullet' to solve the problems facing disadvantaged young people albeit without the time commitment and group work provided by the key workers in the research by Philip et al (2004). The role anticipated for the PA parallels Freedman's ideas of a super-mentor and envisages a person who has the skills to assist young people at key periods in their development through their involvement in schools, colleges and training providers. The PA is also expected to relate to parents and carers, to be aware of appropriate facilities for young people in the local area and to be in a position to arrange

access to specialist agencies if this is considered necessary. Also included in the PA's role is a requirement to track and monitor the progress of young people after the statutory school leaving age and engage in a process of assessment, planning and review with any young person who is considered to require intensive support (DfEE 2000:6.13-6.16).

Colley (2000) has used the term 'engagement mentoring' for the relationship between a young person and a Connexions PA and considers that what should be a one to one relationship between a young person and a mentor is transformed into a triangle by the imposition of Government targets for the outcomes of such a relationship. However in the mentoring projects researched by Philip et al, although there was an aim to reintegrate young people into the mainstream and an approach by key workers directed towards 'changing behaviour' (Philip et al 2004:48), the research concluded that these relationships were:

> 'very different from the engagement mentoring that Colley describes in that it is a relationship grounded in the negotiations between young people and mentors , highly demanding of time, skill and tact' (*ibid*:50).

Nevertheless it is claimed that a 'deficit' view of young people underlies Government policy initiatives and the Connexions strategy in particular (Philip 2000, 2003, Colley and Hodkinson 2001, Colley 2000, 2003). Such an approach locates social problems within young people themselves and fails to address the underlying deficiencies of the social structure. It is argued that the remedy to social problems is sought through an individualistic solution that is epitomised in the proposed relationship between a young person and a PA. However it is not disputed that very positive relationships between a young person and a PA are established in certain situations and the argument remains as to whether these relationships, as opposed to Government policy initiatives, are based on a 'deficit view' of young people. It is evident from research findings on MAP and other mentoring projects that many young people value the relationship with a mentor and feel that their positive strengths are being appreciated. In addition this research noted that many 'young people themselves want skills and qualifications but feel unsupported' in their efforts to attain them (Ford 1999:28) which suggests the value of a measure of 'individualistic' intervention. The findings by MAP also emphasise the importance of a

mentor's ability to enter a young person's frame of reference an ability implicit in the holistic approach which informs this research.

The reality of Connexions delivery varies from that proposed in the Strategy document. The expectation that a PA should act as a 'super-mentor' has been moderated in the light of experience as the number of PAs deployed, 8000 as opposed to the 15,000 originally proposed, was insufficient to satisfy the expectations placed on this new profession. Pressure arising from shortage of staff was compounded by increasing bureaucratic requirements for PAs to track young people after the statutory school leaving age and to record all information about young people electronically. In addition to the intensive support, that it was proposed PAs would provide for a minority of young people, Connexions PAs still retained the universal responsibility for providing careers advice and guidance for all young people. Despite these reservations there are positive outcomes that result from the relationship between a young person and a PA and PAs are regularly integrated in a variety of youth projects providing an additional resource in a 'mentor rich setting'. In this research I shall explore the contribution made by Connexions PAs in such environments but before I discuss the methods I propose to use to investigate these settings I shall summarise the ideas that are suggested in this chapter.

2.4 Summary

This research aims to explore the realities of young people's lives and to achieve an understanding of the aspects of their lives that assume significance and contribute to a measure of self-esteem. It also aims to consider the ways in which young people access support when required and their perceptions of formal support services such as Connexions. An appreciation of how young people understand themselves is basic to the achievement of these aims and the first section of this chapter analyses theories that relate to this sense of self. One important element in the self is self-esteem which reflects feelings about the self. Self-esteem is related to success in domains of life that are personally valued but in addition there is strong evidence that connects self-esteem to relationships with significant people during development. Studies of resilient children confirm the contribution that such a positive relationship in early life makes to feelings of self-worth. The presence of a significant person in the life of a young person who encourages them to achieve success in areas of life that they value underlies the concept of mentoring which is basic to the role of the Connexions PA. Whilst recognising the

relevance that theories of developmental psychology have to mentoring practice it is recommended that this should be supplemented by an appreciation of the social networks that are important in young people's lives. A review of research findings on mentoring draws attention to the potential for a mentor to provide both bonding and bridging capital for a young person. Findings also confirm that a successful relationship involves a mentor's ability to enter a young person's frame of reference which reflects the holistic approach articulated in this thesis. Findings also highlight the potential for these relationships to enhance resilience, enabling young people to cope better with their existing situation without relying on support from others.

In the next chapter I shall discuss the methods I use to establish the understanding of young people which is fundamental to this research.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Aims and Research Questions

In considering the impact of Connexions on the lives of young people it is important to establish if the aims of Connexions accord with those aspects of young people's lives that are significant to them, make their lives meaningful and contribute to a sense of self-esteem. If the aims of Connexions vary widely from the aims of young people it is anticipated that this will interfere with the satisfactory achievement of the goals set by Connexions. The concept of identity, considered in detail in the previous chapter, facilitates an understanding of the elements which assume importance and contribute meaning to young people's lives. I plan to establish the extent to which these identities concur with the understanding of young people which informs Government policy on Connexions. An additional aim of this research is to understand two aspects of the Connexions delivery that influence the way in which young people view the service, namely the validity of its claim to be a universal service and the contribution of the two principle partners: the Youth Service and the Career Guidance Services.

The research questions that aim to establish such an understanding are concerned with the aspects that render young people's lives meaningful and contribute to self esteem and their perceptions and experiences of Connexions. In addition to this, as the Connexions Service aims to provide support when young people experience difficulties the research will investigate the support networks they actually use on these occasions. The specific questions underlying this research are:

    i.   How do young people construct their identity and what things assume importance in their lives and make their lives meaningful?

    ii.   What aspects of young people's lives contribute to their self esteem?

    iii.   What are young people's hopes for the future?

    iv.   Where do young people turn for support if they have problems?

    v.   What does Connexions mean to young people?

    vi.   Is Connexions a universal service and can it be viewed as 'the best start in life for *every* young person'?

As this project aims to achieve an appreciation of young people's understanding of themselves, of their feelings, their life experiences and the aspects of their lives that are significant, a qualitative method of research is essential. In order to understand young

people's lives in the context of their surroundings I chose an ethnographic approach which combined participant observation with semi-structured interviews. This was based on three separate case studies in the Eastcombe, Oldport and Wyshire Connexions Partnership and each study afforded an opportunity to interact with groups of young people. One case study was in a lunch time drop in centre at a school in Wyshire known as the Teenage Life Centre (TLC) which was funded jointly by the school and the local primary care trust. Another study was based at the 432 youth centre in Eastcombe which provided drop in facilities for an outreach youth project. This was originally part of the New Start initiative but at the time of my research it was funded jointly by Connexions and the Youth Service. The third study was at a one-stop shop, the Oldport Advice Centre (OAC) funded by the Youth Service. Each study illustrates different aspects of Connexions delivery which I shall discuss in more detail in section 3.3.2. The field work spanned a period of two years with simultaneous involvement in the three centres. My contact with the outreach youth project continued for two years and my involvement with the students from the school for approximately the same period of time. However, although my field work at the one-stop shop was more intensive, it only lasted for nine months. Across the three sites I interviewed twenty one young people, nine of whom I interviewed on three occasions at intervals of approximately six months. I also interviewed six young people on two occasions and the remaining six only once. In addition I interviewed six practitioners working at the three case study sites. These included the manager of the OAC who was a youth worker, the project manager at the outreach youth project, three Connexions PAs and a Connexions Support Adviser (CSA). I conducted two interviews with the Connexions PA working at the school, one towards the beginning and one towards the end of my time in the school. In addition one of the young people whom I interviewed on three occasions, had gained support from the outreach youth project and subsequently worked as a youth worker at the project. During my time at the three centres I read and collected a range of materials that reflected the activities and provisions of the centres and these included viewing paintings and posters created by students at the school and collecting drawings and personal notes from young people at the outreach youth project.

The ethnographic approach is considered in detail in section 3.2 and the value of the case study in this research will be discussed in section 3.3. In view of the changes taking place both in the delivery of Connexions and in the lives of young people it was

important for the research to be longitudinal in design. The longitudinal element, considered in section 3.4, relates both to sustained involvement in the case study sites and interviews with certain young people on three separate occasions. The importance of the concepts of identity and self-esteem has been emphasised and an analysis of how these are accessed empirically is addressed in section 3.5. This is followed by a consideration of ethical issues relating to this research and a reflexive account of my experiences as a participant in the research process. I shall now consider the value of an ethnographic approach.

3.2 An Ethnographic Approach

3.2.1 *An Appreciation of Ethnography*

The nature of ethnography has not always been clearly defined and the term can overlap with others such as 'qualitative research' and 'interpretative research'. (Hammersley 1991). Atkinson et al (2001) draw attention to the existence of many different genres of ethnography and highlight the fact that ethnographic approaches have never been located solely within a positivist framework. Moreover they stress there has always been a tension between attempts to discover law-like regularities and the highlighting of the unique.

Despite these different genres ethnographic traditions share many common features. Ethnography involves immersion in the day to day life of the research setting with a commitment to studying participants' perspectives (Bryman 1988, Marshall and Rossman 1989). Such involvement is for prolonged periods and facilitates an appreciation of context so that the meanings that people give to their behaviour can be appreciated in relation to the values and practices of the research setting. Although this implies a commitment to participant observation, this is not just about watching things happen but includes 'our social capacity – as ordinary actors – to engage with our fellow men and women' and through interaction acquire a degree of understanding of them (Atkinson et al 2003:115). This recognises that both informal conversations in the research setting and formal interviews contribute to such an understanding. By engaging in conversation and interviews the participants in the setting are no longer just objects of observation but become informants and 'co-researchers' (Atkinson et al 2001 p.5).

In addition to the data gained from interviews and prolonged involvement in the case study setting Altheide and Johnson (1994) direct the attention of the ethnographer to

what is seen and directly experienced but which cannot be adequately conveyed by words. They use the term 'tacit knowledge' which acknowledges certain taken for granted elements in a situation based on an inherent understanding and empathy between the researcher and aspects of the research setting. I was aware of such experiential moments in my research and attempted to use words in field notes to describe what I had experienced but words are inadequate to capture the complete reality of the situation.

I shall now examine in more detail the value of integrating interviews with participant observation in this research project.

3.2.2 Participant Observation and Interviews

An understanding of the experiences and activities of those involved in the three case studies was based on involvement in the three centres over a prolonged period of time and this understanding was enhanced by conducting semi-structured interviews with certain of the young people attending these centres. I had come to know most of the young people I interviewed before the first interview and continued to have contact with them after the interviews. However, in the TLC the second interviews took place just before the group of young people, who I came to know well, left for GCSE study leave. Consequently in this instance the centre no longer operated as a site for the social interaction of this group although I succeeded in contacting most of these young people for final interviews. In addition much of the activity and interactions in the three centres involved young people who were not interviewed but who contributed to my appreciation of young people's perceptions of life. Participant observation can be regarded as being on a continuum from the passive observer to the active participant. My position on this continuum varied in different case studies and at different times within each case study.

It is argued by Atkinson et al (2003) that social life is both performed and narrated and as such, talk and events should not be considered as occupying 'different spheres of meaning' as they are both 'kinds of social action' and therefore observations and interviews can be integrated in 'a methodological principle of symmetry' (Atkinson et al 2003 p.98 and p.108). This principle of symmetry applied to my research asserts that both interviews and participant observation are accessing the same aspects of reality which include young people's experiences, how they construct their identity and their reasons for involvement in the different centres. However, these aspects of reality are complex and constantly changing and therefore, although some data will act as confirmation of

previous information, other data collected will be different and possibly contradictory but contribute to a wider and more complex understanding of these realities. In my research I frequently found that aspects of self that young people revealed in interviews were confirmed by my contacts with them in the centres. However, there were also equally valid aspects of themselves that had not been revealed in interviews but became evident as I came to know these young people better. Such additional understanding of these young people and, indeed, of the context in which I met them is integrated into an increasingly complex understanding of the reality of self and context.

From the foregoing it is evident that there is no value in, or indeed justification for, asserting the primacy of one data source over another. The data from participant observation and interviews are complementary although each provides different insights that are relevant to this research. During participant observation it was possible to observe and participate in the interactions between groups of young people. It was also possible to observe how they related to the workers in the centre and the use made by young people, individually or in groups, of space in these centres. In contrast the interviews were conducted in private, on a one to one basis, and provided a deeper understanding of how individual young people understood themselves, the sources they turned to for support and the meaning that Connexions had for these young people. In addition both interviews and participant observation can provide access to shared understandings about culture and experiences.

Although the interviews were based on a schedule of questions, I viewed them as 'guided conversations'. In most instances the young people talked freely about different aspects of their lives, often quite spontaneously addressing areas I had planned to explore later in the interview. The initial interview schedules for the three case study sites were similar with only minor variations. However the second and third interviews, although investigating similar key themes, were compiled individually for each young person. An example of a first interview schedule is included as Appendix 1.

In addition to the interviews with the young people I also conducted interviews with practitioners. These included Martin, the manager of OAC, who had over twenty years experience as a youth worker and Sarah, the project manager of the outreach youth project based at 432, who had experience in education and a community arts project but who, although demonstrating a strong allegiance to youth work, had no youth work qualifications. I also interviewed three Connexions PAs, two of whom, Ray and Helen,

had a background in career guidance and one, Ruth, had a teaching qualification and experience in probation and of working in a hostel for homeless young people. I met Ray and Ruth at the one-stop shop and Helen at the school. At the outreach youth project I interviewed Matt, a CSA, who had experience of youth work and working as a social work assistant. However, contrary to what I had originally been led to expect, the two Connexions PAs working at the school did not integrate with the young people in the TLC and, although I was able to conduct two very long and informative interviews with Helen, the second PA chose not to participate in my research. It is evident that the interviews with practitioners not only provide a different perspective on the reality of Connexions compared with that of the young people but that this perspective will be influenced by a variety of different professional discourses. In addition to these interviews I was also able to observe practitioners' relationships with young people in the field work settings, although this was not possible for the Connexions PAs at the school.

It has been argued here that the principle of methodological symmetry accords equal value to data from participant observation and from interviews. Earlier critiques of participant observation accepted the positive value of direct involvement but cautioned against researcher contamination of the setting and possible over involvement with a consequent loss of critical capacity. However it is now more generally accepted that a researcher is an essential part of the research situations, that objectivity is neither possible nor desirable, and that by utilising active reflexivity the part that the researcher plays in social interaction is acknowledged (Atkinson et al 2003). During my involvement in the three field centres I continually reflected on my relationships with the young people and the practitioners and also on the nature of the centres themselves and I shall consider this in section 3.7 of this chapter. The interview has also been criticised as an artificial representation of interaction based on an unequal relationship between researcher and respondent and I shall discuss the symmetry of this relationship in section 3.6.4.

I shall now consider the value of case study research and the reasons why I selected the three centres used in this study.

3.3 Case Study Research

3.3.1 Selection of Case Studies

Hammersley (1992) views the selection of cases as one stage in a research design which precedes the collection of data and evolves from the definition of a research

problem or research questions. The choice then is how many cases to investigate and how these might be selected. A case can vary from the micro to the macro, from an individual person to a complete society. Consequently the stage that involves the selection of cases may result in a decision to study a relatively large number of cases when a social survey may be more appropriate. Alternatively it may involve a decision to study a small number of cases in detail using an ethnographic approach and this is what Hammersley terms a 'case study'.

I gave considerable thought to the level at which the cases in my research should be pitched. The aim of the research is to study the impact of Connexions on the lives of young people and to establish if the aims and goals of Connexions accord with what young people value and want in their lives. Therefore it might have been appropriate to pitch the cases at the level of individual young people and contrast their experiences and the things that were important in their lives with the construction of young people that informed Connexions. However I considered it important to understand young people in the context of an environment where they interact with other young people and adult workers. I also wished to gain some insight into the operation of the Connexions Service. At the other extreme Connexions is a national scheme with forty seven partnerships in England and although there is central Government direction that affects delivery it is expected that partnerships will be responsive to local conditions. To pitch the case studies at the partnership level was not appropriate for the scale of the research I was undertaking and would not facilitate easy contact with groups of young people. I therefore decided to pitch the case studies at the level of delivery sites for Connexions within one partnership. It was at this level that I attempted to choose three sites that would enhance the generalisability of my findings.

3.3.2 Enhancing the Generalisability of Case Studies

Stake (1994) claims that there is intrinsic value in a case study which implies that cases are investigated for their own sake. However, Schofield (2000) draws attention to the fact that qualitative research involving case studies is an approach increasingly used in both evaluation and educational research and that in such areas issues of generalisability assume real importance. The traditional view of generalisation is associated with a positivist approach to the social sciences aimed at discovering law-like regularities in social behaviour. However the study of the particular is not the only

alternative to law-like generalisations and Lincoln and Guba (2000) suggest there is a continuum in relation to generalisability ranging from general law-like statements to situation-specific findings. They draw attention to the broad range of the *related*, where certain outcomes discovered in one context might hold in a similar context and this is implicit in the term 'transferability'. Another approach to generalisability in qualitative research is suggested by Yin (2003) where the aim is to generalise to a theoretical proposition rather than to a population.

My approach to the analysis of data in this research is based on what approximates to a form of grounded theory where categories arise within the research process and any theory develops from these categories (Glaser and Strauss 1967). Consequently it is not appropriate to think in terms of generalising to a theoretical proposition. Nevertheless I anticipate that my findings may be transferable to other similar contexts and although when I started this research there was only a very limited amount of research considering the impact of Connexions subsequent research does reflect some of my own findings (Philip et al 2004, Hoggarth & Smith 2004, Yates & Payne 2006). However it is the approach of Schofield (2000) which influenced my choice of case studies as I considered this offered the potential to enhance the generalisability of my findings.

Schofield suggests that to maximise the generalisability of qualitative research it is useful for researchers to generalize to three domains 'to *what is,* to *what may be,* and to *what could be*' (Schofield 2000:76). In order to maximise the fit between case study sites and *what is* in the wider society Schofield suggests two strategies, that of choosing sites on the basis of their fit with the typical situation and of focusing on the same issue in several different settings. Studying *what may be* involves an awareness of the life cycle of a situation, by studying its past history, the changes that take place over a period of time and the potential for change in the future. Generalizing to *what could be* bases selection of a site on the *outcomes* actually achieved or on special *conditions* at that site. I shall now consider the rationale underlying the selection of case studies in my research and relate this to the three domains for generalisability suggested by Schofield.

The selection of the Eastcombe, Oldport and Wyshire Connexions Partnership was based on convenience in relation to where I live. However the specific choice of case study sites within this partnership nonetheless reflects aspects of *what is* in the national delivery of Connexions. Connexions is delivered in schools in all areas and in all partnerships the Careers Service and the statutory Youth Service are principle partners.

Also in all partnerships delivery incorporates a social exclusion agenda based on estimates that 12% of young people will need integrated and specialist help (Dickinson 2001). A consideration of these aspects that are typical of Connexions nationally informed my selection of three case study sites. One case study was in the TLC, a lunchtime centre at St Peter's School in Whitminster, the second in the OAC, a one-stop shop run by the statutory Youth Service and a third in the drop in sessions of an outreach project based at the 432 youth centre in Eastcombe. The ward where this project was based is amongst the 50 most deprived wards in England and has serious problems related to drug use and homelessness. These three case studies represent features identified as typical of Connexions nationally; namely, they include a school, reflect the partnership between the Connexions and the Youth Service and highlight the social exclusion agenda.

The three case studies are situated in the three different areas of the partnership. The school is in rural Wyshire with 60% of the pupils travelling by school bus from outlying villages, the youth advice centre is situated in the unitary authority of Oldport and the outreach project is in the unitary authority of Eastcombe. This achieves a balance between rural and urban lifestyles that is typical of the partnership as a whole. The decision to select the school in rural Wyshire is based on an assessment of *what is* nationally. Both the unitary authorities have a secondary school system which includes single sex grammar schools based on selection at eleven whereas rural Wyshire has co-educational comprehensive schools which reflect more accurately secondary education nationally. However the selection of the actual comprehensive school in rural Wyshire is based on the principle of generalising to *what could be*. In a discussion with the Connexions area manager comment was made that schools were on a continuum in relation to their adaptation to, and understanding of, the aims and structure of Connexions. The school where I conducted the case study was recommended as being at the positive end of this continuum. Finally the longitudinal nature of this study allowed an understanding of *what may be*.

Finding appropriate sites that satisfied the above criteria, where Connexions was integrated into service delivery and which afforded an opportunity for me to interact with young people, involved a number of visits to different sites and several changes of plan. However once I had decided on the three case study sites negotiating access was reasonably straight forward and I shall now consider this in more detail.

3.3.3 *Negotiating Access*

At St Peter's school I originally contacted the headmaster who was agreeable to my research in principle but referred me to the deputy head. However, the deputy head had many other commitments and my contacts were primarily with Suzie, the coordinator of the TLC. The lunch time sessions in the TLC allowed me to integrate with the young people at the school in a relaxed manner and the range of tasks that Suzie asked me to do enabled me to participate as a 'helper'. However, it was the deputy head who gave permission for young people to miss a lesson in order to complete an interview with the proviso that they sought prior permission from both their form teacher and subject teacher. At the drop in sessions at 432, which were part of the outreach youth project, I contacted Sarah the project manager who was very enthusiastic about and supportive of my research. She introduced me to the young people and workers and included me in the discussions between workers that took place at the beginning and end of sessions. In this centre I helped in a range of ways and was viewed by the workers and young people as another youth worker rather than a researcher. At the OAC I contacted the manager, Bruce, who was proud of the centre and pleased for me to use it as a research site. He introduced me to range of different practitioners who worked at the centre on different days but I had no specific role to perform and felt more an observer than a participant. This centre operated very strict confidentiality procedures and I was not included in the discussions that took place between workers. There was an original misunderstanding as to the length of time that my research would take and consequently my involvement in this centre lasted for a shorter period of time.

Within these three sites decisions were also made about the young people to interview. In the TLC most of my contact was with a group of students, originally in Year 10 but who moved to Year 11 during my time at the school. It was from this group that I selected ten young people for interview and here I had full responsibility for negotiating with potential interviewees. I attempted to get a reasonably representative group of young people with an equal number of boys and girls. I also attempted to get a ratio of those intending to stay on into the sixth form that matched the 60% that was the normal ratio for the school. I was reasonably successful in achieving this but I discovered, in the course of the interviews, that there were more boys than girls who planned to move into the sixth form although, subsequently, only three of the young people interviewed actually transferred to the sixth form. In both the outreach youth project and the youth

advice centre the selection of young people to interview was made by the principle gate keepers. The resulting twenty one young people who I interviewed ranged from the relatively privileged who were successful in the educational system to the severely disadvantaged who had been excluded from school. This reflects the universal qualities of Connexions and is evidence of the success of the measures I took to enhance the generalisability of my research. The selection of young people in these centres impacted on longitudinal aspects of this research and I shall now consider this element in more detail.

3.4 A Longitudinal Study

3.4.1 Monitoring Change by Prolonged Involvement.

Two elements in this study were designed to monitor change over time; the prolonged involvement in the case study sites and the interviews with young people on three occasions over a period of time. It is this aspect of my research methodology that most strongly supports my choice of an ethnographic approach. Although the interviews facilitate an in-depth understanding of aspects of these young people's lives, regular contact with them over months reveals that continuous change is a feature of many young people's lives and this is not adequately monitored by three interviews at six or eight monthly intervals. This was particularly true of the most disadvantaged young people who used the outreach youth project and the youth advice centre. Aspects of their lives including housing, plans for getting jobs or engaging in educational courses and friendships and intimate relationships were in a constant state of flux and changed from week to week. Prolonged involvement also facilitated the understanding of the continuous changes taking place in the lives of some of the young mothers, from the initial stage of confirmation of pregnancy to their visits to the centre with a new baby. Such involvement also partially compensated for the difficulty I had in contacting certain of the young people for subsequent interviews as, with one exception, I had further contact with them in the centre following the first interview.

Several of the young people who I came to know well chose not to be involved in interviews but contact with them over a period of time is monitored in my field notes and contributes to my breadth of understanding of young people. It was also possible to monitor change in the operation of the centres themselves and to observe the fluctuation in the number of young people using the centres. This change had implications for

making contact with young people for second and third interviews and I shall now consider this problem in more detail.

3.4.2 *Attempts to Resolve Problems of Non-contact*

Problems of maintaining contact relate to the second and third interviews with certain young people. I attended the TLC on a regular basis for a year and conducted second interviews with nine of the ten young people interviewed originally before they left for GCSE study leave. One of the original interviewees had been expelled in the intervening period and personal problems made further contact unadvisable. I had contact details for these nine young people and managed to secure third interviews with seven of them. In addition I had conversations with the remaining two by telephone and in person. After the period of intensive involvement I maintained contact with Suzie, on an occasional basis. However my contact with the outreach youth project and youth advice centre continued on a regular basis after the period of more intense contact.

At the OAC several agencies cooperated in providing advice on a range of issues including health and contraception, housing, benefits, substance abuse and education, employment and training. Consequently many young people came to the centre on one occasion for a specific purpose and, although I recorded all these activities in my field notes, it was the young people who attended regularly who are represented in the interviews. At the outreach project at 432 young people came to socialise with each other and the workers and to benefit from the free hot lunch served at midday and here I also interviewed young people I knew reasonably well. However, aspects of some of these young people's lives changed regularly and consequently, in both centres, there were problems making contact six months later.

My inability to conduct subsequent interviews with some of these young people has been compensated for in certain ways. First the continuous contact with young people in the centres meant that although in some cases I did not manage to conduct subsequent interviews I did have considerable additional contact with these young people after the first interview and also workers and other young people at the centres sometimes provided news about them. A second attempt at resolving this problem in the outreach youth project was to conduct an interview at a later time with a young man who began to attend the outreach centre on a regular basis six months after the initial interviews and his long term association with the 432 youth centre facilitated subsequent contact. Finally the

non response rate of certain young people can be considered to be a significant finding in itself and I shall now address this in detail.

The problem of maintaining contact with certain young people I interviewed initially illustrates findings both about the principles on which youth work is based and about the agency of young people. An important principle of youth work is 'voluntary access' and in the two centres run by the Youth Service some young people attended regularly and others came once or twice and never reappeared. The choice to attend was entirely that of the young person and although in both centres youth workers maintained contact with some of the young people by phone there was no compulsion for them to attend. There were occasions when a youth worker had arranged to meet a young person for a specific reason but they did not keep the appointment. The workers accepted that this lack of attendance was inherent in their work and considered that choice always remained with the young person. Non-attendance illustrates young people exerting agency if only by their choice not to conform to expectations. This suggests that the aim to track young people identified as NEET, which informs both the Connexions strategy and subsequent plans under Children's Trusts, may have only limited success (Yates and Payne 2006).

The interviews explored a range of issues including experiences at school, hopes for the future, support systems used when experiencing problems and general impressions of Connexions. The concepts of identity and self-esteem, discussed in the previous chapter, contributed to the understanding that I gained of young people in this research and I shall now consider the ways in which I accessed identity empirically.

3.5 Accessing Identity Empirically

3.5.1 *Through the Interview Schedule*

I knew most of the young people before I interviewed them and I acknowledged this at the beginning of the interview and asked, 'How would *you* describe yourself as a person?' Although many of the young people hesitated and thought deeply about this they all responded in some way and in most instances the responses corresponded to certain of my observations of them during field work. The majority of these spontaneous responses indicated a desire to portray themselves as a friendly, bubbly person and this was especially notable for those experiencing difficulties in their lives. I argue that this reflects a tendency for young people to perceive themselves in terms of a prevailing

discourse on the 'bubbly teenager' which reflects the ideas of Hall (1996) on the link between discourse and identity. This discourse was also evident in some young people's responses to an enquiry concerning those they admired which indicated an attempt to integrate qualities of people they knew well into their identity (Mead 1934/1962).

The work of Taylor was instrumental in formulating some of the questions in the interview schedules. Taylor considers an orientation to 'the good' to be a crucial aspect of human agency and that such an orientation comes closest to defining a person's identity (Taylor 1989: 33). These ideas informed my exploration of the aspects of young people's lives which assumed importance and made their lives meaningful. Responses to the question 'What things in your life are most important to you' frequently developed into extensive conversations which continued in subsequent interviews. I expanded this discussion with probes that explored the importance of elements often associated with identity such as religion, style of dress, taste in music, interest in sport and the significance of family and friends and any groups with which the young people were associated. Not all these areas were relevant to all the young people but individual young people responded to certain topics with enthusiasm which illustrated that these areas contributed to their sense of self. Taylor also argues that the self exists in relation to a 'defining community' (Taylor 1989:36) and acknowledges a sense of 'belonging' as integral to identity so the interview schedules asked 'is there anywhere you feel you really belong' and also explored the sort of people with whom, and the situations in which, the young people felt comfortable or uncomfortable. The responses in these areas provided revealing insights into young people's understanding of themselves.

Feelings of self-esteem were explored through the question, 'Are there things that make you feel really good about yourself?' and this was developed with probes about things they did well and aspects of themselves that made them attractive to other people. In addition there was clear evidence that the areas of young people's lives that were important to them and informed their identity also contributed to a sense of self-worth which confirmed that self-esteem is an integral part of the self (Rosenberg 1965, Coopersmith 1967). It was these areas of their lives that many young people continued to talk about at length at various junctures in our conversations and these provided narratives for further analysis. I shall now consider in more detail how attention to narrative can reveal aspects of identity.

3.5.2 By Attention to Narrative

Narratives have been a cultural feature of societies throughout time and often take the form of stories and poetry handed down by word of mouth. All forms of narrative share the function of communicating meaning and making sense of experience. (Chase 1995). In the research situation a story may be recorded as it unfolds during participant observation or it may be elicited during a research interview (Coffey and Atkinson 1996). However in this section I shall concentrate on narratives elicited during an interview. The interviews in this research did not aim to access life histories but many of the young people used stories to make sense of certain experiences. One understanding of narrative is a story about a sequence of events with a beginning, middle and an end (Denzin 1989 in Coffey and Atkinson 1996). This was not apparent in the narratives that arose from the interviews in my research. An understanding of narrative that more accurately reflects these is provided by Josselson (1995) who considers that narrative allows individuals to be appreciated in all their complexity and recognises that although some aspects of the person will reflect cultural influences other aspects will remain unique. She argues that narratives reflect the process of 'the self in conversation with itself'. They are not factual records of experiences but 'meaning making' systems that help an individual make sense of a 'chaotic mass' of perceptions and life events and hence assist them to interpret themselves (Josselson 1995:33). This approach to narrative illustrates a direct connection between narrative and a sense of self and as young people talked at length about their friends and family it was evident from these narratives that 'what is mine' had become integrated into their understanding of themselves (James 1890).

An attempt to theorise the link made between personal narratives and subjectivity is made by Day Sclater utilising Winnicott's theory of 'transitional phenomena' (Winnicott 1971:64). Winnicott considers that these phenomena operate throughout life in relation to creative activity in such fields of music, art and religious experience. They originate in early childhood when a significant object is used to assist the transition from a state where a child is completely merged with the mother to the realisation of autonomous selfhood. Day Sclater suggests that this can be extended to include the stories people tell and therefore personal narratives operate as a manifestation of the complex interaction between the 'subjectively experienced and the objectively perceived' (Day Slater 1998: 87). There was evidence that at times there were aspects of self that were subjectively experienced and which informed a young person's identity but which they

were unable to completely understand or control (Craib 1998). These formed part of young people's narratives about themselves and included descriptions of feelings of depression, anger and a need to resist authority.

Attention has been drawn to the fact that the interview and resultant narratives are jointly produced by interviewer and interviewee (Day Sclater 1998, Chase 1995, Josselson 1995). I am aware of this as I think reflexively about the conversations I had with young people. In subsequent interviews, where schedules were devised individually for each young person, I explored issues that had emerged in previous interviews and many of these related to the areas of their lives that young people had considered to be important and which made them feel good about themselves. Also on several occasions as young people talked about themselves they referred to themselves as 'me' engaging in a dialogue between the 'I' and the 'me' (Mead 1934/1962). I tended to respond by asking 'So what is you?' and the replies provided a perceptive appreciation of how that particular young person understood himself or herself.

However not all the young people interviewed engaged in narratives to explain themselves and I have chosen to make a distinction between 'dialogue' and 'narrative'. 'Dialogue' in my definition can occur during an interview and is a two way conversation usually consisting of short statements. Some of the young people responded in this manner and did not utilise story telling although these dialogues could be viewed as contributing to an overall narrative. Nevertheless the young people who responded in this manner also made certain comments at times which revealed significant aspects of their identities Sometimes these responses showed young people positioning themselves in certain discourses and on other occasions they illustrated aspects of their lives that were particularly important to them.

In this research narrative and dialogue afford an understanding of different aspects of the identities of these young people. This includes an appreciation of the discourses in which these young people invest, significant experiences and relationships that inform a sense of self and attributes considered to be essential features of how they view themselves as a person. I shall now examine the means by which identity may be revealed during participant observation.

3.5.3 *In Participant Observation*

The previous two sections explore how identity is accessed in the relatively contrived situation of the interview as young people respond to questions and engage in narratives to explain themselves and their experiences. It is only during participant observation that it is possible to glimpse the person in a natural context relating to others, moving around and responding in different ways to different people and situations. In this situation stories are enacted and the responses, both verbal and in the form of gestures, may be observed and recorded. Taylor draws attention to the fact that the self is embodied and is not just a mind composed of memories, feelings and hopes that can be accessed through interviews and narratives. The embodiment of the self is seen in the way a person carries themselves and projects themselves in public space, whether they are '"macho" or timid, eager to please or calm and unflappable' (Taylor 1991:309).

Although most of my participant observation took place in the three case study sites, there were also occasions when I became involved in other activities and glimpsed aspects of a young person's identity. This sometimes confirmed attributes I had noted previously and at other times added a new dimension to my understanding of that young person. I attended a production of 'Grease' at the school in which four of the young people I had interviewed were involved. I was also present at a 'non-uniform' day and on another occasion studied the artworks and the photos of school trips that involved young people I knew. At 432 I went to an outside activity day, joined in the Christmas lunch and assumed the role of 'voluntary youth worker' when a group visited a pantomime. In addition I often met young people from the OAC when they were in the town shopping or walking with friends. All this enhanced my understanding of these young people but often in ways that cannot easily be expressed in words. It is to this 'fourth dimension' of understanding that I now turn.

3.5.4 *A Fourth Dimension*

I choose to refer to this way of knowing a person or of understanding a situation as 'intuition' which is a means of knowing that cannot be reduced to a rational explanation. This means of knowing is also captured in the term 'tacit knowledge', noted earlier, which acknowledges that 'words and texts are not the primary stuff of existential moments'. Tacit knowledge operates when 'action is taken that is not understood' and

'when understanding is offered without articulation' and involves meaning that lies 'between language and experience' (Altheide and Johnson 1994:492).

Similarly Taylor draws attention to aspects of the self that cannot be articulated. He stresses the significance of the 'dialogical self' and the way in which individuals share agency with others and constitute themselves as part of a 'we'. He emphasises that there are frequently ritualised elements to such interaction that flow from an understanding that is largely inarticulate (Taylor 1991:308). Understanding that is not articulated is also reflected in Josselson's use of the term 'empathy' which she considers is an essential element in understanding the other. Such knowing of another involves the creation of a 'potential space' (Winnicott 1971) in which the 'boundaries between self as knower and other as known are relaxed' and here aspects of each permeate the other which is the essence of empathy (Josselson 1995:31). Another contribution to an appreciation of this 'fourth dimension' is made by Rogers when she writes of 'poetic images' which acknowledges 'the presence of complex and irreducible images as well as concepts and data.' (Rogers 1999:82)

The foregoing are examples of ways in which the elusive and indefinable aspects of self and social interaction have been conceptualised. Tacit knowledge, empathy, poetic images and intuition all involve attempts at describing experiential knowing and all recognise there are elements of self and situation that lie beyond words. I was aware of such moments both in interviews and in participant observation and they were particularly salient in relation to young people's feelings of self-esteem: watching young people enjoying friendships, observing a young man singing and joking as he prepared a meal and noting the pride of the young mothers as they cared for their babies. Although I attempt to describe these moments it is impossible to truly convey a sense of the indescribable. This consideration of a 'fourth dimension' illustrates one limitation to understanding identity and I shall now consider additional limitations.

3.5.5 Limitations to Understanding Identity

Any attempt at accessing identity empirically will necessarily be tentative and incomplete. Limitations arise in part from the complex conceptualisation of identity that informs this research. This includes unconscious processes that may give rise to reactions and behaviour that the person themselves does not completely understand. These aspects of the self may be glimpsed in a person's personal narrative or observed in their social

interactions in different situations but any understanding will be partial. In addition to this there are aspects of most people's lives that inform their sense of self but which they choose to conceal during conversation or in interviews. Many people during interaction present a 'self' that they think will be accepted by others (Goffman 1959).

Another limitation arises from the acceptance of the multiple aspects of identity which include the different elements of the self that a person may employ in different situations and with different groups of people. Again these may be glimpsed in the stories that people tell to explain themselves, the discourses they invest in or the various portrayals of self they engage in as they relate to different people in the field centres. However, apart from occasional exceptions most of my contact with these young people was in the case study sites. I did not observe them at home or during a night out where it is possible different aspects of self would be in evidence.

A third limitation to accessing identity empirically lies in the acceptance that a sense of self changes and develops whilst acknowledging the possibility of an underlying element in the self that may change more slowly. The longitudinal aspect of this research design is an obvious advantage in this respect and in particular the continuous contact through participant observation. However this only provides limited understanding and there were certain young people I felt I knew much better than others.

Despite these limitations to the understanding of identity I consider that this research does provide a valuable insight into how these young people construct a sense of self. This study affords an appreciation of the complexity of young people that can be compared with the one dimensional construction of identity that informs Government policy on Connexions. At times this understanding included revelations of very personal aspects of lives and required a careful consideration of my ethical position and I shall now discuss this in more detail.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

3.6.1 *Anonymity*

In this project the names of the school, outreach youth project and youth advice centre have been changed, as has the name of the Connexions partnership. I planned to give the young people pseudonyms but when consulted about this the majority wanted to retain their own names. Although there are certain legal considerations arising from the Data Protection Act (1998) that support anonymity there are ethical implications where a

decision to conceal identity is made by the researcher when respondents wish to retain ownership of their stories by using their own names (Grinyer 2002). I decided to discuss the situation again with those who preferred to use their own names and all except one young man opted for a pseudonym. As this young man was determined that I use his actual name I have respected his decision.

3.6.2 Confidentiality

I tried to maintain a strict code of confidentiality which was underpinned by a commitment not to talk to any of the practitioners or other young people about things that had been said during interviews or about my impressions of young people during participant observation. The issue of contents of interviews was not problematic but there were occasions where workers talked to me about certain young people and I sometimes responded in like manner. In these situations I made every effort not to express a personal opinion about the young person but spoke in generalities. There were a few instances that I remember clearly when I felt I had broken these self imposed rules in certain respects. On one occasion workers at the outreach centre had disclosed that a certain young man, who I had talked to regularly and who had recurrent problems regarding accommodation, had actually found a flat through a local charity. The next time I saw him I asked him how the flat was going. He responded by saying, 'How do you know about my flat, have people been talking behind my back?'. The flat had been treated by me and the workers as an item of good news but this did emphasise that talk was occurring about certain young people when they were not present. There was another occasion when a young woman had spoken to me in the outreach centre about an issue where I considered there were possible implications of sexual abuse. This was obviously a different matter and I made an arrangement with the project manager to talk with her in private and expressed my concerns. I subsequently had considerable contact with this young person and I became convinced that my initial concerns were without foundation. Another ethical issue I shall now discuss is informed consent, however, as with anonymity and confidentiality, there are complexities in implementing effective measures to achieve this.

3.6.3 Informed Consent

Informed consent is based on the assumption that research participants understand the nature and implications of the research when they agree to take part and are

competent to make a decision to participate or not on the basis of that understanding. When approaching young people for interviews I explained the project to them and gave them a leaflet containing details of the research and information on issues of confidentiality and anonymity and the reasons why I proposed to tape record the conversation. However, ensuring that young people were aware of my role as researcher during participant observation was a more complicated process and varied between case study sites. In the outreach youth project the organiser introduced me to certain young people and explained the reason for my presence at the centre. Nevertheless, many young people arrived at different times during the session and not everyone knew or was interested in my reason for being there.

At the school my presence was less transparent. Initially the organiser of the TLC was reluctant to describe me as 'a researcher' on a poster advertising the centre as she considered this might discourage young people from using the centre. Although I did explain why I was at the centre to certain young people the majority came in to the centre in groups, pleased to escape from the confines of the classroom for an hour and preferring to relax with friends rather than engage in conversation with another adult. Even when I explained my research in more detail to those agreeing to be interviewed they were not particularly interested in thinking seriously about the issues I presented. The main attraction of an interview was that it enabled them to miss their least popular lesson.

In the youth advice centre I did introduce myself to certain young people and explained my reason for being there. However at the end of my fourth visit the manager of the centre said that some of the young people had expressed concern about my presence and he suggested that interviews were arranged as soon as possible and from this stage onwards my position became more transparent. This increased transparency helped me to feel more accepted, which enabled me to gain rich data from this centre.

Despite my attempts at ensuring that consent to an interview was well informed I consider that many young people happily consented for a variety of reasons. Josselson has described the idea of informed consent in narrative interviews as 'a bit oxymoronic' arguing that at the outset participants can only have a vague idea as to what they are consenting (Josselson 1996a:xii). In addition, consent to my involvement as a participant researcher depended on the consent of the main gate keeper rather than the young people themselves (Heath et al 2007). In the one situation where young people themselves

expressed some concern about my presence it was the gate keeper who effected a change in the situation to make my presence more acceptable.

In addition to this intervention by a gatekeeper, which I accepted, there were also times when I rejected assistance because I considered it breached my ethical position. In each case study there were occasions when gatekeepers attempted to persuade a young person to engage in an interview when they had reservations about the fact that the interview was to be recorded. However I insisted that the young person's right to decline must be respected. On another occasion the gatekeeper offered to give me the telephone number of a young person who I wished to contact for a second interview. However, I declined this offer as I did not have the young person's consent to this.

Another area where consent is difficult is in the interpretation of data and the fact that aspects selected for use in a report may not reflect those that assumed importance for the interviewee. This is an ethical problem to which there is no simple solution. Throughout this research I was frequently concerned about ethical issues but have chosen to take comfort in Josselson's expression of her own discomfort and her conclusion that:

'To be uncomfortable with this work, I think, protects us from going too far' (Josselson 1996b:70).

A final aspect that informs my ethical approach relates to the asymmetrical relationship between researcher and informant.

3.6.4 Researcher and Informant: An Asymmetrical Relationship

Mishler considered that the relationship between interviewer and interviewee in the traditional interview situation was unequal, with the researcher controlling the interview by posing the questions and expecting the interviewee to respond. He advocated the restructuring of the interview process to encourage respondents to 'speak in their own "voice"' and considered that by shifting the balance of power in this way respondents would be more likely to tell stories (Mishler 1986:118). However it could be argued that by consciously encouraging the telling of stories the interviewer is exercising control in a more subtle manner. This approach also ignores the fact that in any interview situation a respondent is able to subvert the process and gain control by a variety of strategies.

Finally it assumes a view of 'researcher as superior' that may not be shared by participants in the research process.

During the fieldwork and interviews I encouraged the young people to talk freely and listened to the stories they told, responding appropriately. On all occasions I was genuinely interested and often sympathetic to what they related and although this may have had an empowering effect for the young people concerned I felt that I was in fact the person who, by controlling the situation, elicited these responses. However there are two additional dimensions in this research that rendered my relationship with the young people more symmetrical. The first relates to specific ethical guidelines I adhered to when interacting with the young people and the second to my personal experience of being a researcher.

The ethical guidelines to which I adhered respected a young person's freedom to choose, or to refuse, to cooperate and included the following approaches. In the case of a young person expressing any reluctance to engage in an interview I accepted this immediately, despite the inclination of gatekeepers to use persuasion. Also, although I expressed a wish to see the young people on a second occasion, I did not take contact details until the end of the second interview. I argue that, by allowing the young people time to reflect on the first interview and agree to a second interview they are more informed about the interview process involved and thus empowered to consent or refuse to cooperate in providing their contact details for a third interview. In addition to this, when young people told stories that included very personal details I avoided asking questions that might clarify these situations. I considered they had freely told these stories and that any further questioning by me may encourage them to reveal things they might not freely choose to reveal and indeed none of this unsolicited information appears in my thesis. I also encouraged the young people to take responsibility for the tape recorder so that they could turn it off if they chose. There was also one occasion when one young woman asked for a friend to come into the interview with her. I had the choice to either, not interview her at all or, agree to her request and reluctantly I chose the latter. I feel the foregoing illustrate elements of symmetry in my relationship with the young people.

The symmetry of any relationship depends on the feelings of both parties involved. I am aware of the different aspects of my identity that came into play as I related to different young people but can only speculate on how these young people

perceived me. However as I view my feelings as one half of the symmetry equation I shall now examine my position reflexively.

3.7 The Researcher as Reflexive Participant

In all three case study sites I was very aware of feeling an outsider who wanted to belong. Having spent all my life as a practitioner working with young people as a teacher I found it very difficult to integrate the identity of researcher into my sense of self. I certainly did not subscribe to any view of 'researcher as superior' and when talking to the other practitioners was somewhat apologetic about my role. The danger of over identification with the fieldwork environments was not an issue although there were certain occasions when I felt relaxed and experienced a feeling of belonging. During fieldwork I consider I was 'intellectually poised between familiarity and strangeness,' (Coffey 1999:31) although possibly my position was more towards the strangeness end of this continuum. In addition to the feelings of insecurity arising from my role as researcher my age also placed me apart from both the young people and the majority of the practitioners. However I think this contributed to a measure of symmetry in my relationship with the young people. As my age positioned me as 'grandmother' there were occasions when certain young people adopted rather a protective attitude towards me. I was also genuinely naïve about aspects of youth culture and they were able to assert their superiority by offering detailed accounts of the differences between groups such as Skaters, Townies, Goths and Punks and by giving descriptions of different styles of music and dress. I therefore consider that the relationship I had with the young people approached symmetry although they may have experienced this differently.

Coffey considers the ethnographic self to be the outcome of complex negotiation which reflects normal human interaction. She maintains that we adopt roles and identities in the field as a means of getting on with our task but these are not 'cynical enactments of appropriate field roles' but 'are shaped by who we are at the outset'. In the enactment of these roles and relationships self is placed 'at the heart of the enterprise' (*ibid*:23, 26, 28). I shall now explore the different roles I undertook and relationships I formed in the research setting and consider how these were integrated into my sense of self.

I had no official role assigned to me in any of the settings although in each I offered to help in any way that might be appropriate. At the outreach centre and the TLC I took a reasonably active role but at the advice centre I was more observer than participant. My roles in the different centres included those of confidant, drinks maker, kitchen hand, child minder, literacy adviser and welcomer. Of these roles the three in which I invested most emotional energy were those of confidant, child minder and literacy adviser. These roles accorded with existing aspects of my identity; concerned friend, mother and teacher. This confirms Coffey's assertion that the roles and identities we adopt in the field 'are shaped by who we are at the outset' (*ibid*:28). In the interviews I frequently found I was playing the role of confidant, adviser and counsellor and there was one occasion when a young man admitted that I was the only person to whom he had spoken about certain issues that were worrying him and this contributed to a sense of inadequacy in my role as researcher.

Reflexivity has emphasised that I made a significant emotional investment in the lives of these young people. As I knew these young people better I formed an attachment to all of them and wanted to know how each one was progressing. Some of the stories they told and my experiences of some of them in the field setting made me sad and I had a sense of powerlessness due to my inability to intervene in what were at times very chaotic lives. My affection for these young people will cause me to represent them positively although I have tried to ensure this corresponds with the reality of their lives as I perceived it.

3.8 Summary

In this chapter I have described the methodology of the empirical research that underlies my aim to achieve an understanding of the relevance of Connexions in young people's lives. I argue that an ethnographical approach utilising participant observation and semi-structured interviews and based in three delivery sites for Connexions is appropriate to achieve such an understanding. I describe how the method of selecting these three case study sites attempts to enhance the generalisability of findings by reflecting aspects of Connexions delivery nationally. I also draw attention to the value of the longitudinal approach which allows an appreciation of the change taking place both in the delivery of Connexions and in the lives of young people. This is possible through prolonged engagement in the case study sites and by conducting semi-structured

interviews with young people on three different occasions at approximately six monthly intervals. A different perspective on the reality of Connexions is achieved by interviews with practitioners although it is probable that these perceptions are dependent on practitioners' previous professional experiences. The integration of data from participant observations and interviews is based on the methodological principle of symmetry which asserts that both interviews and participant observation are accessing the same aspects of reality which in this research includes young people's experiences, how they understand themselves, the things that are important in their lives and their sources of support. I describe how I access these understandings of self and context through interview schedules, by attention to narrative, in participant observation and by what I term a 'fourth dimension'.

In the next chapter I shall introduce the young people who contributed to my research by allowing them to talk about themselves and the things that are important in their lives and also by relating their interactions with me and other people in field centres. Chapter Five will explore the sources of support used by young people and highlight the role played by the centres in which the case studies were based and the qualities that young people value in the practitioners with whom they form supportive relationships and Chapter Six will examine the three discourses that inform the Connexions strategy. Although it will consider the discourse on the learning society and social exclusion from the perspective of young people themselves the discourse on professional expertise will be examined both from the perspective of young people and from that of the practitioners who contributed to this research.

CHAPTER FOUR: UNDERSTANDING YOUNG PEOPLE

4.1 Introduction

In the first chapter of this thesis I discussed elements of the Connexions strategy emphasising two fundamental features of its delivery which are partnership working and the relationship between a young person and their Connexions PA. I also highlighted three discourses which inform the strategy namely: the importance of learning, social exclusion and professional expertise. In the second chapter I considered the concepts of identity, self-esteem and mentoring which underpin my approach to gaining an appreciation of young people's understanding of themselves, the relationships which are significant in their lives and the support they receive from services such as Connexions. In the third chapter I discussed the qualitative research methodology which I used to establish this understanding and in this chapter I shall introduce the young people who contributed to my research.

I begin with their spontaneous responses to an invitation to describe themselves as a person and then consider the hopes they have for the future. Section 4.3 of this chapter reveals the aspects of young people's lives that they view as important and although career plans inform the identities of eight young people it is their relationships with friends and certain family members which are significant in the lives of all young people. An exploration of feelings of belonging confirms the importance of these relationships and also reaffirms essential aspects of some young people's identities but for others a sense of 'not belonging anywhere' suggests that feelings of social exclusion have become integrated into their sense of self. Section 4.4 considers aspects of lives that contribute to feelings of self-esteem or the lack of it. Again the importance of relationships is apparent in the pride felt in being 'a good friend or family member' and for a majority of young people certain interests and creative activities contribute to a sense of self-worth. For some young people success in the educational system contributes to feelings of self-esteem but for others this has a negative impact. Throughout this chapter the understanding that is gained about young people from interviews is supplemented by observations and conversations in the field centres both with the young people who were interviewed and other young people attending the centres.

This chapter reveals the complexity of the understanding young people have of themselves and although there are some common elements that inform their identities

each person mixes these with certain individual characteristics in a different manner. The Connexions strategy with its focus on education, employment and training is relevant to two aspects that are important in certain young people's lives namely a career and success in the educational system. However, I argue that, to understand and relate to young people it is essential to have an appreciation of other aspects of their lives that inform their understandings of themselves and contribute to feelings of self-esteem.

I shall now introduce the young people who contributed to this research and brief descriptions of all the young people are provided in Appendix 2. After introducing the young people I shall discuss the implications that the understanding I have gained has for my research as a whole.

4.2 This is Me

4.2.1 *Reflexive Understandings of Self*

In this section I shall introduce the young people who contributed to this research and consider their hopes for the future. The majority of young people responded to an initial invitation to describe themselves in terms of a dominant discourse which projects the image of a young person who is 'out going', 'friendly', 'easy going', 'bubbly', 'laid back' and 'funny'.

This is epitomized by Sid's remark:

'Easy going, easy to talk to, someone like who enjoys having fun.'

This emphasis on certain positive attributes also informed the responses of some of the young people who were experiencing problems in their lives. Sam, who I met at 432 when he was seventeen, was in bed and breakfast accommodation having been made homeless when his mother, an alcoholic, defaulted on the payment of rent. He responds:

'quite happy and bubbly no matter what the circumstances are---bit chatty really, can talk to anyone.'

Marion was twenty one when I met her at OAC. She had a twelve week old son Billy and had experienced a violent relationship with a previous partner. She describes herself:

'Normally quite bubbly and quite adventurous and happy go lucky but I've had a lot of problems to deal with, but quite bubbly.'

I also met Dave at OAC prior to his eighteenth birthday. When his parents divorced Dave lived with his father, but after a disagreement he moved into the Oldport Foyer and then into rented accommodation. On the day of the interview he was feeling depressed as he had just been evicted from another house. However he nonetheless describes himself as:

'Friendly, enthusiastic, bouncy, lively---usually'

Jack was a resilient young man who, during the half term holiday, had suffered a serious accident and lost the sight of an eye. He had returned to school on a specially devised timetable as he awaited an operation to insert a prosthetic eye. He describes himself in the following terms:

'Well I like to have a joke---somehow I always seem to cheer people up even though I don't feel like it.'

Although complications prevented Jack's operation to insert the prosthetic eye he adjusts to this disappointment in a positive manner:

'I kind of wanted to get it sorted so when I went to college nobody really knew---but everybody knows, it's part of *me* now---Everyone at college calls me by my nickname---old one eye.'

I met Colleen in the TLC when she was fifteen. She lived with her mother with whom she had a volatile relationship partly due to her mother's misuse of alcohol. She describes herself:

'Loud, bubbly, you only have to say certain things to me to make me angry---I can't really control my temper. I'm funny, I make people laugh, sometimes anyway---I reckon I'm talented, I can sing anyway.'

Colleen's talent for singing informs her hopes for the future:

'I know this is a definite, I'm going to produce a few of my songs.'

Two of the young men I interviewed had spent their teenage years in the care of the local authority. Paul had achieved a stable relationship with his foster parents whereas Simon had continuous moves between foster families and hostels. They both replied in a similar manner. Paul says:

'I'm easy to talk to, quite a happy person, not much can get me down, I'm easy going.'

It is apparent that, for the majority of young people, such qualities as being 'out going', 'friendly', 'easy going', 'bubbly', 'laid back', 'funny' and 'easy to talk to' are valued. There is also a suggestion that the creation of such a sense of self acts as a protection against the vicissitudes of life. I refer to these views of self as the 'bubbly teenager' discourse.

This discourse was reflected as young people talked about people they admired. Several of those experiencing disadvantage modeled themselves on friends and family members and admired such qualities as remaining cheerful and demonstrating an ability to survive difficult circumstances. This is epitomized as Dave talks of a friend he admires:

'One of my mates Tasha---she's quite brave, she's been through a lot of stuff recently and she always manages to pick herself up and drag herself back out again, she always seems to have a happy face on no matter what.'

This suggests that young people model themselves on those whose life experiences reflect their own with the implication that a mentor with different life experiences may have difficulty acting as a role model for a disadvantaged young person (Hendry et al 1992).

A minority of young people did not utilise the 'the bubbly teenager' discourse but their initial reflections on themselves provided a clear indication of their emergent identities. I met Maria at OAC and she describes herself simply as:

'Pregnant'

Pregnancy and motherhood defined her identity during the period I knew her. In the second interview Maria, calm and confident in her role as a mother, was accompanied by her baby Serena who slept peacefully.

Liz was also pregnant when I first met her at 432. At the age of twenty she had a stable relationship with her partner Stewart and had recently acquired the tenancy of a larger flat. Liz had experienced a 'really rough childhood' with her alcoholic father and at fifteen she made contact with Sarah, manager of the New Start project at 432, and subsequently worked as a voluntary youth worker. Liz describes herself:

> 'I think I've changed a lot over the last few years---I'm a lot more confident---and that's down to Sarah.'

Confidence in herself as a mother and a youth worker became increasingly evident during the time I knew her. She began to assume more responsibility in the centre and planned new projects with enthusiasm and imagination.

Harriet, who I met in the TLC, was very successful academically and a talented artist. At the age of fourteen she had experienced a period of depression and had gained support from a youth discussion group that she joined at her local church. Being a Christian was a fundamental aspect in Harriet's identity which informs her initial response:

> 'I like to think that I'm a nice person and I'm a Christian so I sort of hold with the values---I really don't like lying to people---I don't ever really hate anyone as such.'

My initial impression of Joe, who I also met in the TLC, was of a rather shy, awkward young man but as I knew him better I appreciated his ruthless honesty about himself. He describes himself as:

> 'A bit of a nerd over things---it's hard to explain it really, I like reading books and I don't do a lot of sports, that's why I'm a nerd.'

I had talked with Wendy on several occasions in the TLC and speaking about herself she says:

> 'I don't know---I wouldn't really describe myself as anything---there's 'townies' and 'goths' and things like that but I don't put myself in any of those groups--- Colleen, she's a 'townie'.'

However later she talks of a difficult relationship with a stepsister:

Wendy:	'I mean she tried to stop me from being *me*'
Rosemary:	So what is *you*?
Wendy:	I think I'm weird---I often put myself in that category because I--- have such a wild imagination.'

Wendy's wild imagination informed her future hopes of 'being a world famous actress'.

Samantha, who I also met in the TLC, was a tall, attractive young woman who was able to charm the boys. She craved acceptance by a group of 'popular' girls but her flirtatious behaviour alienated the very people whose acceptance she sought and consequently she felt unable to be a 'bubbly teenager'.

Samantha:	'I just feel like sometimes as a teenager you've got to be a certain person, you dress a certain way, act a certain way---I feel trapped in somebody else's body, and I just want to be *me*'.
Rosemary:	What is *you* do you think?
Samantha:	A bubbly person who just wants to have fun

I met Tania on my first day at 432 and spoke with her throughout my time there. She had left home during her final year at school and when I first knew her she was living in a hostel and dependent on benefits. Despite my regular conversations with her I did not feel I knew her well as her standard response to any enquiries about her wellbeing was 'I'm fine'. This reluctance to talk about herself is reflected in the following comment:

'I socialise and we have discussions but I won't talk about *me*'

This section has introduced some of the young people who contributed to this research and explored aspects of their self understanding. In several cases I have identified what I term the 'bubbly teenager' discourse which contributes to the self image of the majority of these young people. I argue that this is a means by which certain young people attempt to cope with difficulties although at times this is ineffective as a coping mechanism. In section 5.4. I consider individual coping mechanisms in more detail.

I shall now examine the attitudes that young people have towards the future.

4.2.2 *Contemplating the Future*

Several young people spoke of plans for future careers and this will be examined in detail in section 4.3.1. Here I shall consider the future hopes of some young people and the reluctance of others to contemplate the future. Colleen hopes to 'produce a few of my songs' and Wendy to be ' a world famous actress' and as other young people considered the future there was evidence of an element of fantasy tempered by reality. This is epitomized by Sid's response. Sid, who worked in a supermarket, came to 432 on his day off to socialise and play pool. He talks about the future:

'I wouldn't mind being a snooker professional---marriage?---Lots of money?---but then they say money can't buy you everything---so be married and have kids really.'

For other young people their future hopes reflected a wish to change their present situation. Tania, who was without permanent accommodation, says:

'I'd like to have my own place, I'd like to be happy, the same as what everyone wants really.'

The reasons why some young people were reluctant to contemplate the future are complex. Two young people, Liz and Pete, had clear plans for future careers but preferred not to consider the future in their personal lives. It appears that difficult early experiences created a reluctance to entertain positive hopes for the future for fear of disappointment.

I first met Pete in Summer 2004 when he had just left school and had started working as the kitchen assistant at 432. He had experienced difficulties at school and in Year 11 was placed on a reduced timetable. He had been upset by family breakdown and says of the future:

> 'I usually like to live day by day, I don't make a future. You just have to go like day to day until you get to the future'.

Both Maria and Liz had recently acquired their own homes and were expecting babies and were content with their present situations. Contentment with the present and a lack of confidence in the future are expressed by Liz:

> 'I haven't been this happy for ages---if I plan things ahead then they tend to go wrong so I take each day as it comes'.

However with the safe arrival of a healthy baby she expresses hopes for her son's future:

> 'I want him to have a stable family that isn't disruptive in any way. I want him to have good memories of his childhood rather than bad ones.'

All the mothers were optimistic that their children's lives would be happier than their own. There is clear evidence that for these young women an essential aspect of themselves was invested in their children.

Concern that their children should avoid their own mistakes was evident as I talked with Alison and Kim at 432. Alison, who was Sam's sister, had been 'on heroin' at the age of fourteen but 'came off it' when she moved down to Eastcombe. She was attending a group to reduce her cannabis use and said, 'if I do nothing about this, Steven will be on drugs by the time he is fourteen and I really don't want that'. Similarly Kim was insistent that Debbie's life would not reflect her own and was determined that Debbie should neither smoke at eleven nor have a baby at sixteen, both aspects of her own life.

Findings also indicate that some young people were overwhelmed by too many alternatives for the future. Simon describes a recent encounter with his Connexions PA:

'It was just, 'but you can do this,'---'yes but if you do this you can do this and this' and I did feel like jumping up and punching him---the thing that annoys me the most about him is that I get panic attacks with stress.'

Similarly Wendy, who, with help from her elder sister, had already decided on a college course, is confused by the range of options offered in a tutorial planned by a Connexions PA:

'Colleges, modern apprenticeships ooh---the things at this school that you could do---I was so confused.'

These comments by Simon and Wendy indicate a difficulty in coping with too much choice. Marion too appreciates the need to prioritise aspects of her life if she is to cope successfully in the present.

'I was really good at Art---I'm trying to get sorted, properly get sorted and I think I might take it up again---I want to get my priorities right first, that's a priority but it's the bottom of the list of priorities if you see what I mean.'

This analysis of future aspirations reveals the complexity of young people's attitudes. These indicate a mixture of fantasy and reality and also a desire for improvement in their present situations. However several young people prefer not to contemplate the future particularly in relation to personal aspects of their lives. This can indicate both contentment with the present and a lack of confidence in the future. Nevertheless there is evidence that mothers invest a part of themselves in their children's futures. Findings also suggest that young people establish their own priorities and choose to approach the future in a manner and at a speed with which they themselves can cope confirming that it is important to 'start where the young person is' an approach which informs the youth work principle of impartiality.

Two young people, Pete and Liz, who were reluctant to consider their personal futures were nevertheless clear about their plans for a career. Career ambitions are an integral element of the identities of eight young people and I shall now consider these in more detail.

4.3 Important Aspects of Young People's Lives

4.3.1 *Having a Career*

This section is based on an exploration of significant aspects of young people's lives and for eight young people these included career plans. I met five of these young people in the TLC at the end of Year 10 and maintained contact until the second term of their post 16 courses. The others I met at 432 and knew for two years. These eight young people represented a continuum from advantaged to disadvantaged and planned careers in the service sector, skilled manual work, the arts and the professions.

Three, John, Sophie and Harriet, came from relatively privileged backgrounds. All lived with both natural parents and siblings and there was evidence of financial security. John, who aimed to become a pilot, was an enthusiastic member of the air cadets, an interest encouraged by his father who had been an engineer in the Royal Air Force (RAF). He proactively sought the advice of a Connexions PA during year 10 and this influenced his decision to aim for a career in the RAF rather than the commercial sector. Our conversations revolved around flying and the important things in John's life are:

'My career really, because I want to be a pilot in the RAF and everything that I do is aimed towards that, so cadets is important, school is important.'

Flying is a significant aspect of John's identity and he feels he belongs:

'In the skies---I absolutely love it, there's nothing better in the world.'

In my final interview, John was studying in the sixth form, had been awarded a gliding scholarship and been promoted to corporal at air cadets.

Sophie's love of animals influenced her career choice. Her family owned a number of different animals and some, including a horse, were Sophie's sole responsibility. Like John she had been proactive in visiting the Connexions PA in Year 10 and this influenced her application for a course at an agricultural college. When thinking of things that are important in her life she says:

'My friends, my family, my animals definitely, I love animals.'

Sophie enjoyed socialising but managed to concentrate on study prior to her GCSE exams and was delighted when her grades were better than anticipated and she was accepted for a National Diploma in Animal Management. Talking about this she says:

> 'I've made so many new friends and everyone's interested in the same thing--- they're a lot better friends than I had at school.'

Harriet was very successful academically and hoped to become a vet. She was supported by her parents in this aim and described how together they had visited the careers library at the school but she was unaware that this was part of Connexions. Her mother's friend was a vet and she had the opportunity to work on a local farm during the lambing season. Harriet achieved excellent grades at GCSE but experienced a recurrence of depression in the sixth form. She says of her studies:

> 'I know I can do it, I mean I've got As in all the tests I've done so far and I'm working and stuff---[but] my Mum's like---'Ah, but you can do better'.

For these three young people their chosen career was an important aspect of their identity. They all had support from their families although there is a suggestion that pressure from an over-ambitious parent can undermine career ambitions and diminish self-esteem.

Wendy and Jack came from less privileged backgrounds, both had experienced family breakdown and Wendy had spent time with her mother in hostel accommodation. Both were entitled to a full Educational Maintenance Allowance and both accepted this money as a useful contribution to general household expenditure.

Wendy's 'wild imagination' and hopes of becoming a 'world famous actress' translated into a positive career choice. She enjoyed her GCSE studies in drama so an older sister had helped her complete an application form for an FE course in performing arts. Despite being confused by a tutorial presenting a range of post 16 options she eventually submitted this original application. A 'critical moment' (Thompson et al 2001) occurred at this time in Wendy's life due to a very upsetting experience with a group of friends. At this stage she feels the important things in her life are:

> 'Doing well in life---because friends, if you focus on them too much you get into

so many stupid situations.'

Consequently she decides to:

'Actually use study leave and not mess around like most people.'

Wendy gained the GCSE grades required for a National Diploma in Performing Arts at college and as she described a puppet performance which she had helped to write and produce her 'wild imagination' was evident. At this stage she is prepared to accept an alterative to 'world fame' and:

'Settle for something like theatre in education or children's theatre.'

Jack had a range of creative interests and talked with pride about his paintings and the guitar he made for a woodwork project. When I first spoke with him at the beginning of Year 11, helped by his mother, he had already found a suitable woodwork course at the local college and visited there for an open day. He denied any knowledge of Connexions and says he chose woodwork because:

'I just like building---I've just got a very good mind for putting things together.'

Meeting with him ten months later he was very enthusiastic about the college and grateful for the support given by his mother at a difficult time. He emphasised that the course was in the 'fine craft' section which accorded with Jack's identity as an 'artist'.

These five young people had clear career ambitions that were based on interests that developed over a period of time and which they pursued in Post 16 courses. However the career plans of Liz, Sid and Pete resulted from chance occurrences. Liz's career choice resulted from contact with Sarah at 432 and initially the things important in her life are:

'My home, and Stewart and my job, well I want to be able to move forward with the work I'm doing here so that's important to me.'

A few months after the birth of her son, Tom, Liz began to work at both the Monday and Wednesday drop in sessions and says:

> 'I want to have a career, I don't just want to be a Mum, I want to work my way up and learn new things.'

I often observed Liz at work, her red hair in plaits either side of a face that was always bright and alert. I admired the sensitive manner in which she listened to young people who were her contemporaries and who came from the same social environment. When Tom was a year old Liz enrolled for a Level 2 qualification in youth work. She found the course quite difficult as her own schooling had been limited but she persevered and gained this qualification.

Sid had planned to take a Sports Science course at college but did not gain adequate grades in his GCSEs. He secured permanent employment at a local supermarket and was a conscientious worker. Thinking of things he does well he says:

> 'I'm good at what I do, I'm good at my job really.'

Sid lived with both parents and his father transferred from another supermarket to the new store where Sid worked and became a 'key colleague'. Similarly Sid was a reliable employee and when there was a suggestion at 432 that he should 'call in sick' in order to attend the Christmas lunch this was totally unacceptable to him. Later he volunteered to train as a 'first aider' and contemplating the future says:

> 'If I'm still there in a couple of years time I want to do more at work like go for supervisor or even assistant manager.'

Although Pete resented his father in many ways he appreciated that, during his time on a reduced time table, his father had found him a job in the Grand Hotel where he worked as a pastry chef. The most important thing in his life is:

> 'A career really---I always liked cooking, but I didn't actually thought I'd take it up as a career. I just started in the Grand Hotel and I enjoyed it.'

Pete enrolled for a course at the local college and, despite some difficulties, persevered and gained a NVQ Level 2 as a chef. Later he secured a position at a hotel proud to be doing 'proper cooking' not just 'microwave cooking'.

For these eight young people career plans were a significant aspect of their lives that made their lives meaningful and contributed to a sense of self-esteem.. However they, like all the other young people in this study, considered their relationships with friends and family members to be very important.

4.3.2 *What is Mine: Family and Friends*

As the young people talked of *my* friends and *my* family it was evident that certain people had become an integral part of themselves. The only person who did not respond in this way was Simon who had spent his teenage years in care. Important things in his life were things that he did not have at that time. Simon was alienated from his mother who denied him access to his younger sisters. Initially he lived with his father but he had moved to London after a nervous breakdown. Despite this he says of his father:

> 'I just text him now and again and he texts me back---but if he died---it definitely would upset me knowing he wasn't there.'

The sense of an 'absent' family informed Simon's feelings about himself and it is a close relationship which he seeks as he talks of his wish for a girl friend:

> 'I think it's just to have someone there, come in after work and just cuddle up to you'.

However for Sam, who was also without permanent accommodation, the important things in his life are:

> 'Alison and Steven for sure---I don't know if I would be able to handle it without them.'

His close relationship with Alison and Steven was evident at 432 when his sister arrived with Steven to meet up with Sam. I noticed the delight on Steven's face when he saw his

uncle and I watched the gentle way Sam played with Steven, carefully making him a tiny kangaroo from plasticine.

Several other young people attributed personal survival to their friends and Harriet's comment reflects this:

'I guess my friends are the most important thing to me---I don't know how I'd survive without them.'

Similarly Tania insists ' I need my mates'. Tania initially came to 432 with her cousin which was typical of the way in which most young people learnt about the centre. Many socialised outside the centre and several of the young men knew the children, Steven and Debbie, and enjoyed playing with them. Such friendships were in evidence in all three centres. When I first visited the OAC Marion was the only person in the centre with a baby. Maria and Marion's sister Sandy, who was expecting twins, were there helping to nurse and feed Billy. Gradually more babies made their appearance and the group was often joined by Dave and other young men who took turns in nursing the babies. The atmosphere in the TLC was more frenetic and when the bell rang young people rushed in hoping to secure favourite seats for themselves and their friends. Some sat together in twos and threes and others formed larger groups. Lunch time was definitely a time for socialising with friends.

Like the other young people Colleen joined her particular group of friends in the centre. As she related details of friends, family members and the families of friends it was evident that these relationships were a defining aspect of herself. She talks about her Granddad:

'My favourite relative is my Granddad---I love him to bits---basically because he's been there for me all through my life 'cause my father was never there,'

and admires him:

'Because he's got such a big heart so he's lovely he just thinks about everybody.'

As Colleen talked affectionately about people in her life it seemed that the qualities she admired in her Granddad had become an integral part of herself.

The positive relationship that Colleen had with her Granddad compensated to some extent for the difficult relationship she had with her parents. Several other young people talked at length about relationships with family and friends that caused anxiety and unhappiness. Although this indicates the importance of these relationships it also emphasises the fact that relationships with friends and family can have a negative impact on lives. However the least complicated relationships were those between mother and baby. Without exception their children were the most important aspects of these young women's lives.

Marion says of Billy:

> 'I love him and it's taken four miscarriages to get to him---so he is a very treasured baby---I just wouldn't be here if I lost my son, if I lost my son I'd die.'

Liz describes life with Thomas as:

> 'A huge reality check---you've bought a person into the world, that is the biggest responsibility I've ever felt, it's just something I've got to take care of--- something that I've got to bring up and teach things. It's brilliant, it's such a good feeling but its also really scary.'

The importance of friends and family in young people's lives indicate 'my friends' and 'my family' as an extension of self. Material possessions can also become an extension of the self and I shall now consider this.

4.3.3 What is Mine: Material Possessions

Liz and Maria had both lived in hostel accommodation but when I spoke to them prior to the birth of their babies they were both tenants and for both a very important aspect of their lives was their home. Liz's reply indicates pride in her personal initiative:

> 'My flat, that was all done by me and that was the best achievement so far in my twenty years on the planet'.

For these two young women, their homes were a significant extension of themselves. Having a place of their own was also important for those without permanent accommodation but for these young people a home represented a void in their sense of self. As Simon and Sam contemplate a permanent home they express this need for something that 'is mine'. Simon says:

> 'If I got my own place I would like to feel---it's actually mine whereas everything before has never been mine'.

Apart from the importance of having a home only two young people referred to other material possessions when contemplating important aspects of their lives. However, although there was little spontaneous mention of material possessions, it cannot be assumed that these young people did not value material things. The importance of money was demonstrated at 432 just before Christmas 2003. Alison rushed into the centre and a phone call to the benefits agency confirmed that she was entitled to a £650 rebate. Overjoyed by this news Alison danced around the centre and when Kim came in they danced together saying, 'Now we don't have to worry about Christmas, we can buy the children all they want, presents for everyone and also for us.' Comments from the youth workers about saving or paying off debts went totally unheeded which highlights a concern for the immediate future of Christmas rather than with long term financial planning.

This section considers material possessions as an extension of the self. It is evident that 'having a home' is significant for those who have experienced temporary accommodation. For certain disadvantaged young people their understanding of themselves is informed by a lack of a home which represents a void in their sense of self and suggests feelings of social exclusion. This lack of a home contributes to feelings of not belonging and it is the importance of 'belonging' that I shall now consider.

4.3.4 Belonging

In this section I argue that aspects of young people's lives that inform their identities also engender a sense of belonging. The importance of friends and family is reflected by the fact that the majority of young people experience a sense of belonging with friends, family and at home. However six young people conveyed a sense of 'not

belonging anywhere' and this could be related to family breakdown and homelessness. I argue that this indicates a sense of social exclusion.

Four young people, Dave, Simon, Heather and Tania had no permanent accommodation and their replies of 'nowhere' to the question about where they belonged were short and uncompromising. Joe and Wendy, who had both experienced changes in living arrangements due to family breakdown, were also ambivalent about belonging. However, as they examined these feelings more carefully, both revealed additional aspects of their lives that rendered them meaningful. Joe contemplates his life:

'My freedom of speech is getting quite important to me---I'm getting quite politically minded.'

Joe's political interests were an essential aspect of his identity but as he felt unable to discuss these ideas with either his family or his friends this contributed to a sense of not belonging. Similarly Wendy's 'wild imagination' informed her sense of self and she later declared a feeling of belonging in 'Egypt' explaining that:

'[A teacher] was talking about Tutankhamen---from then on I just got totally hooked on Egypt.'

These six young people felt that they didn't really belong anywhere. Dave, Simon, Heather and Tania who were without permanent accommodation were unable to qualify these feelings. However, for Wendy and Joe 'belonging' related to a defining aspect of their identities and subsequently both were able to develop their lives in a manner which increased their sense of belonging. Wendy studied drama and made new friends at college and Joe moved into the sixth form, studied politics and also made a new friend.

For several other young people a sense of belonging also related to an aspect of their identities. John feels he 'belongs in the skies' and as Sam contemplates belonging he replies:

'On a skate board---I know it sounds sad but yea I really do like skating.'

Sam always arrived at 432 on his skateboard and sometimes told me about the difficult manœuvres he had mastered. Skating is both a social activity performed with a group of fellow skaters and also one that requires personal skills that can be practiced alone. Sam lived in bed and breakfast accommodation and was dependent on benefits but unlike Simon, Tania, Dave and Heather his talent as a skater and his friendship with people who shared this interest gave him a sense of belonging.

In addition to Sam, membership of an identifiable group was an aspect of the identity of other young people. Towards the end of my first term at the TLC I became aware of a new group emerging. The girls seemed similar in appearance as they sat applying makeup and arranging each other's hair. I found this group rather impenetrable but eventually Sophie agreed to be interviewed and she confirmed my observations. Thinking of the people she feels comfortable with she replies:

'In our school there's like two types of people---they call them the 'Geeks' who are less fashionable, they don't like follow people---[and] the 'popular people' into the fashionable clothes---the other sort of groups---I get on with them just as well I just don't feel as comfortable hanging around with them'.

Wendy was unable to express herself in terms of group membership but recognised that this was important for others saying, 'Colleen, she's a 'townie' and Colleen confirmed this identification in my conversations with her. However although some young people identified with certain groups others affirmed their individuality by criticizing such groups. Jack says:

'Townies seem to be a ruling gang---I mean white cap on backwards, track suits, it's like being in an army really---they're all on pot---they find it entertaining to aggravate people.'

Harriet and John, who by Sophie's classification were 'Geeks', were both critical of the 'popular' group. Harriet says:

'They're all in to the same clothes and everything---they'll always look the same and there's no individuality.'

Despite this rejection of certain groups Jack, Harriet and John socialised together as a group of individuals.

In this section I argue that a sense of belonging is experienced in relation to aspects of lives that young people consider important and which inform their identity. For the majority 'belonging' is experienced in their relationships with family, friends or as a member of a group. For other young people feelings of belonging are associated with essential aspects of their identity. Four young people who lacked permanent accommodation expressed feelings of not belonging anywhere. I argue that such feelings indicate a sense of social exclusion. However Sam was an exception to this as although without permanent accommodation, his talent as a skater and his membership of a group of skaters informed his identity and engendered feelings of belonging.

Things that are important in young people's lives include careers, relationships with friends and family, membership of groups and, for certain young people, interests and talents. All these elements inform their identities and are a source of self-esteem and I shall now consider this in more detail.

4.4 Self-esteem
4.4.1 *Interests, Creative Activities and Self-worth*

Here I draw attention to the interests and talents which inform the identity of many of the young people and which are also a source of self-esteem. Pride is evident as young people talk about their interests. Sam talks of his prowess at skating:

> 'I'm getting to a stage now where it's quite impressive, I can do the three sixty flips and one eighty flip body barriers, backside flips and I can do one footed nose bands.'

John of his skills as a pilot:

> 'I've done take offs, I've done landings, I've done talking on the radio, doing all the rolls and the loops'

and Sophie of her concern for animals:

'I've got a guinea pig, I rescued it from my friend---he's got a nice big hutch and he's happy now---I cut the nails, and then I took him to the vet's to be checked over'.

For five young people musical skills together with talents for composition contributed to feelings of self-worth. When I first met Pete he showed me a book about the rapper Tupac Shakur and talked about the music and lyrics he composed himself. Although his career as a chef was important he feels he 'can't live without' his music. Listening to music releases his own creativity:

'I can relate things from the music to me---I was up to like two o'clock last night just writing'.

Jack also takes pride in his musical composition:

'I've got about eight songs together now, almost put an album together---mostly like a lot of fiddly work on the guitar and base.'

Similarly Gerry was proud of his musical ability claiming 'music is my life'. I met him on my first day at 432 and I sometimes helped him in the kitchen as he was employed as kitchen worker for a short time. He always talked enthusiastically about his music and was proud of his skill as a drummer. Speaking of recent auditions he says:

'Both the bands want me to play for them, I've got to judge which one I want.'

For these three young men their musical talents enhance their self-esteem.

Although this research makes no attempt to measure self-esteem I argue that Colleen and Samantha, who were proud of their singing abilities, had self-esteem in this domain of their lives but lacked global feelings of self worth due to difficult relationships with their parents. I attended the school production of Grease. Colleen, who sang a principal role, had a very powerful voice and Samantha sang an introductory song with clarity and sweetness as she reached the high notes. However, as they talked of their

singing there was evidence of a lack of 'global' self worth. Samantha said she felt discouraged by criticism from her natural father and Colleen admits:

'It's still all to do with self confidence, I'm just lacking it badly---the only things I'm confident in is singing, because I know I can and acting because I know I can---and I'll be confident around my friends.'

She had planned to study singing at college and spoke of the need to work harder to gain the appropriate grades for a National Diploma in Performing Arts. As she found study difficult at home I suggested a local library but she replies:

'Yea---but if I got seen there it would be quite embarrassing'

She did not gain the necessary grades and it is feasible that the need to be accepted by her group of friends had taken precedence over study. Colleen started an easier course in music at college but was soon demoralized and dropped out of this half way through the first term. When I met her for a final interview she was feeling depressed, had spent a period in a hostel and had lost pride in her talent for singing.

In addition to musical ability seven young people mentioned a talent for art. For Harriet and Jack this was a serious pastime, both were taking Art for GCSE and both enjoyed painting at home. I was impressed by Harriet's art work which was displayed in a school corridor and she spoke of her membership of an art website.

Three young people I met at 432, Sam, Pete and Liz, were also proud of their artistic talents which were evident in the centre. Sam often sat with paper and pencil drawing intricate figures and futuristic space scenes. On another occasion I was sitting with Kim's daughter Debbie who was drawing pictures of me and we were joined by Liz and Pete, both keen to display their artistic skills. There was a long period of silence as Liz, Pete and Debbie sat drawing pictures of me and each other.

In addition for both Maria and Marion art had been their best subject at school. Marion, who spoke of studying art again in the future, says:

'I could go out and I could draw, all my family are really good at art.'

These findings illustrate that although different social backgrounds offer different opportunities to realise artistic talents, for these seven young people their abilities in art provide a measure of self esteem.

In this section I argue that special interests and creative activities act as a source of both pleasure and self-esteem. However Dave, Simon, Tania and Heather had neither a sense of belonging anywhere nor interests or creative pursuits that contributed to feelings of self-worth. Any positive feelings about themselves arose from their relationships with friends and family and it is the feelings of self-esteem that arise from such relationships which I shall now consider.

4.4.2 *Being a Good Friend and Family Member*

Relationships with friends and family were an important feature of all the young people's lives and 'being a good friend' was both a source of pride and a means of maintaining these essential relationships. This section draws attention to qualities of 'good friendship' and to the fact that, for some young people, just having friends is a source of self-esteem. This is evident in Colleen's remark:

'I've got loads and loads and loads of friends, I'm not boasting but I have got quite a lot of friends'.

Similarly for mothers just being a mother engendered a sense of self worth. Marion's son made her 'feel brilliant' and watching the young mothers with their babies their pride in being a mother was evident. At times they expressed anxiety about their children's welfare but just caring for their children rendered their lives meaningful. I had watched Marion gently swaying Billy backwards and forwards in her arms and, when he was peaceful, settling him carefully in his buggy. When I mention this she replies:

'Thank you, I try my best, I do try my best.'

At 432 I felt privileged to be at the centre when Liz and Stewart arrived with Thomas for his first outing since his birth. Thomas slept peacefully and both parents glowed with pride as they talked about their new son.

In addition to the feelings of self-worth engendered by having friends and being a mother many young people take pride in 'being a good friend' to others. The 'bubbly teenager' discourse portrays a person who is 'friendly', 'fun to be with', 'easy to talk to' and who can 'make people laugh' and 'cheer people up', which are all ingredients of good friendship. In addition to this several young people prided themselves on their skills as a listener. Simon, who was without permanent accommodation, says of himself:

> 'I think I'm fun, easy to get on with and a good listener, I've been told I'm a good listener'.

Marion, who, as the eldest daughter, had listened to her mother's problems and taken responsibility for her younger sister, says:

> I'm a good listener and I can give good advice---I just like to help people'.

Being a helpful person was a quality in which several young people took pride. Harriet enjoyed helping people in her role as a peer mentor and as Liz talks about herself, helping people informs her role as a youth worker:

> 'I enjoy doing this job, that makes me feel good, helping others if I can---you've got to be quite understanding and listen to people'.

Both Tania and Heather, who were without permanent accommodation and had expressed a feeling of not belonging anywhere, take pride in being helpful to others:

> Heather: 'I like doing things for other people---I put myself out to help other people.'
>
> Tania: 'I like helping my mates, I like the fact that I'm there for my mates.'

Even Joe, who often expressed negative feelings about himself, says:

> 'I like to think that I'm quite a generous, charitable person.'

These characteristics are reflected as Joe talks about his father:

> 'I sometimes admire my Dad, he hasn't got an amazing job but he's a hard worker and he never lies, works for his family, kind to everyone---a decent guy.'

Joe was intelligent but constantly berated himself for being lazy. This remark illustrates a conflict between his desire to gain a good job and the positive qualities he admired in his father but with whom he was unable to discuss politics.

Mark was rather a nervous young man who I met in the TLC. He lived with both his natural parents and enjoyed spending time with friends playing computer games and riding BMX bicycles. His initial identification of himself was as 'a very trusting friend' and this perception is reinforced as he talks of belonging:

> 'When people are having relationship troubles---I have a couple of friends who come to me and they want to talk to me.'

Mark had been disappointed by friends who had not respected his confidences and for him being a 'trusting friend' involved confidentiality. Mark's comments illustrate the reciprocity of friendship where 'being a good friend' creates a sense of belonging.

Good friendship informed my first interview with Maria. She and Dave agreed to help me with interviews but Maria requested Dave's presence for support. When Maria showed reluctance to talk about her positive characteristics Dave interrupted saying:

> 'Friendly, reliable, kind.'

Maria helped Dave in many ways during my time at the OAC. On another occasion, whilst pregnant herself, she was caring for a young child whose mother was in hospital. Similarly Marion arrived with two children in a double buggy for a second interview as she too was caring for the daughter of a neighbour who was in hospital. For these young people mutual help was an accepted feature of 'being a good friend'.

An additional feature of good friendship which was a source of pride is 'sticking up for friends and family'. Both Pete and John spoke about supporting friends who were being bullied. Pete describes his approach:

> 'Robert used to get bullied at school and I used to get mental at the people who used to bully him---I just grab them and give them a punch---because they know Robert can't fight'.

John, however, was confident and articulate and asked the permission of his friend Roger, who was being bullied, to mention this to their form tutor and they sat down together and talked with the bullies. Despite the difference in these approaches both Pete and John were proud of their interventions on behalf of a friend.

As three of the young women, Samantha, Liz and Marion, talked of standing up for friends and family there was evidence that their friends were an extension of themselves. Samantha says:

> 'If somebody's being horrible to my friends my automatic reaction is to stand up for them---I feel like if somebody's taking the 'mick' out of my friends they're taking the 'mick' out of me'.

and Liz insists:

> 'To get at me you'd have to get at something I care about most like Stewart or Thomas or very close friends.'

Marion describes in detail a fight with a girl who had been bullying her sister and which led to her expulsion from school:

> 'I just bounced her off everything---they said one more punch and I would have killed her---I just seen red, 'That's my sister,'---I would kill for any of my family---because they're my most precious people in my life and it's something I just strongly believe in, you protect your family.'

This section illustrates the pride gained from relationships with family and friends. This is significant for all young people but for those experiencing social exclusion this is their primary source of self worth. These findings also highlight qualities of good friendship'. In addition to aspects of the 'bubbly teenager' they also emphasise the values

of helping, listening, understanding, advice giving, confidentiality and 'standing up for a friend or family member'.

It is evident that the aspects of young people's lives that they regard as important are also a source of self-esteem. However only two of these are recognised by the Connexions strategy, career ambitions and educational success and it is the latter which I shall now examine.

4.4.3 *Success and Failure in the Educational System*

This section considers the extent to which self esteem is either enhanced or reduced by experiences in education. Both Sophie and Wendy were delighted to gain better results at GCSE than they had anticipated, enabling them to study for more advanced qualifications. Wendy describes how she was 'jumping around the flat for quite a while' when she received her results. This success, together with interest in their respective courses, encouraged both to achieve further success. Sophie explains this:

> 'I got my assignment back and I was the only one in the whole class who passed with a distinction---getting good grades encourages you to do more whereas at school I was just getting bad grades.'

Both Harriet and John had high aspirations and both were successful in their GCSE exams. Nevertheless Harriet did not feel that her achievements were appreciated by her mother and therefore it is possible that despite her success her self-esteem was low because she was unable to satisfy her mother's aspirations.

Sid, Pete and Liz did not achieve success in the educational system but, despite this, had clear career ambitions which contributed to feelings of self worth. Sid had enjoyed his time at school but was disappointed by a D grade in PE (Physical Education) saying:

> 'I was expected to get a B, I got a worse grade than what I expected'.

However he soon recovered from this temporary loss of self-esteem, adjusted his aspirations, took pride in his career and acknowledged this as a preferable post 16 option.

Both Pete and Liz had negative experiences at school. Pete found it difficult to concentrate and Liz, who had responsibility for a younger sister says:

'I didn't concentrate much 'cause I was always called out of class because she was playing up---[learning] wasn't my priority.'

However, both pursued careers that gave them a sense of self worth and both gained vocational qualifications in their chosen careers as a youth worker and a chef. Their self-esteem was enhanced both by the qualifications themselves and the career progress such success made possible.

There were two young people, Joe and Colleen, whose low self worth appeared to be directly linked to failure in the school examination system. Colleen's failure at GCSE made her feel that she had 'got a bit thicker' since leaving school. However Joe was reasonably successful at school but always felt he was capable of better results. He gained five good grades at GCSE including three B grades and entered the sixth form. However he is not satisfied with himself saying:

'I screwed up in English, I was hoping to get a B or an A in English but at the end of the day I'm *me* aren't I?'

Two of the young mothers, Maria and Heather, enjoyed their time at school. Heather, who had the support of a Connexions PA during her pregnancy, speaks proudly of her examination success:

'I was really surprised, I never went to school because they put me on a part-time time table and I got a B, three Cs and two Ds.'

Despite this success, when I met Heather she was living in hostel accommodation, dependent on benefits and her mother had custody of her daughter. This indicates that examination success is not, in itself, a guarantee against social exclusion.

In addition to Liz and Pete six other young people, Simon, Marion, Sam, Samantha, Tania and Dave expressed very negative feelings about their time at school

and it can be surmised that these experiences did nothing to enhance their self-esteem. Simon expresses this as the withdrawal of his entitlement to education:

'I got kicked out of school so I didn't have any choice but not to learn.'

Samantha's comment epitomizes the experiences of the others:

'I don't personally like school, actually dislike is not the word, I hate it'.

However Samantha, despite alienation from school, came from a relatively privileged background and secured employment in the bank where her mother worked. However, for the others, lack of success at school corresponds with other factors of disadvantage. All were dependent on benefits and Simon, Sam, Tania and Dave were without permanent accommodation although Marion, as a mother, was entitled to social housing.

It is evident from the foregoing that success in the educational system does contribute to feelings of self esteem although there is a suggestion that high parental expectations can undermine self esteem even for an academically successful young person. The findings indicate that pride in a subsequent career can compensate for a lack of success at school. There is, nevertheless, a clear connection between factors associated with social exclusion and negative experiences at school.

The previous sections have introduced most of the young people who contributed to this research and explored their understandings of themselves, the things that are important in their lives and the aspects of their lives that contribute to feelings of self-esteem. I shall now examine the implications of this portrayal of these young people.

4.5 Discussion

The foregoing indicates how the identity theories utilised in this research help to reveal young people's understanding of themselves and the aspects of their lives that are meaningful and which afford a measure of self-esteem. Initial descriptions of self suggest a contemporary discourse of a bubbly teenager which a majority of young people adopt and which reflects the ideas of Hall (1996) who argues that people construct their identities by investing in certain discourses. However, as young people contemplate the things that are important in their lives (Taylor 1989), it is evident that these aspects have

greater significance and define their identities. This significance is reflected in a tendency for the young people to talk at length and with enthusiasm about these particular aspects and to readily return to them in both initial and subsequent interviews. For all young people, relationships with friends and certain family members are important and indicate that 'what is mine' has become an integral part of themselves (James 1890). When thinking of people they admire most young people respond in terms of family and friends and there is evidence that they are attempting to adopt certain qualities of those they admire (Mead 1934/1962). Narratives reveal aspects of self not clearly understood (Craib 1998) and these include feelings of depression and anger, evident in Colleen's initial description of herself where her inability to control her temper has become a distinctive part of herself (p.83). The reflexive *me* (Mead 1934/1962) is used by several young people and in my conversation with Wendy this reveals her 'wild imagination' which is a defining aspect of her identity (p.86). An exploration of feelings of belonging (Taylor 1989) confirms certain aspects of identity that have already been established. For most young people a sense of belonging arises from relationships with friends and family. However, certain young people relate such feelings to other significant aspects of self, epitomised by John who feels a sense of belonging 'in the skies' (p.90) and Sam who belongs 'on a skateboard' (p.98). In addition some young people identify themselves as belonging to a particular group (Tajfel 1978). It is also pertinent that four young people without permanent accommodation feel that there is nowhere they really belong. Self-esteem is evident as young people talk about important areas of their lives which include plans for a career, relationships with friends and family, and particular interests and creative activities. This indicates that self-worth is an integral part of the self (Rosenberg 1965, Coopersmith 1967). The relationship of self-esteem to a balance between successes and aspirations (James 1890) is apparent as Sid recovers from a temporary loss of self-esteem due to disappointing exam results, adjusts his aspirations and takes pride in his career (p.107).

I have identified ways in which identity theories facilitate an understanding of the young people who contribute to this research. and I shall now discuss the analytical approach that I use to interpret this understanding and to relate it to elements in the Connexions strategy.

For all the young people in this study relationships with friends and certain family members inform their sense of self, make their lives meaningful and contribute to feelings

of self-esteem which draws attention to the concept of social capital. I adopt this concept in a manner which facilitates the analysis of the findings of this research. I utilise the concepts of bonding and bridging social capital identified by Putman but also recognise the importance of close relationships within networks which is noted by Coleman in his consideration of relationships between parents and children which facilitate learning. The pride felt in being a good friend or family member, identified in this research, emphasises the element of reciprocity in these relationships and confirms the importance of the 'mutual obligations' that are fundamental to social networks. Putman conceives of this reciprocity as inherent in the network as a whole where trust and mutual understanding generate a feeling that, 'I'll do this for you now, in the expectation that you (or somebody else) will return the favour' (Putman 2000 p.20). Whilst accepting that this is a feature of social networks I also utilise Coleman's recognition of social capital as a 'a set of resources that inhere in family relations and in community social organisations' (Coleman 1994:300 quoted in Chapter 1). I maintain that within all networks a range of relationships will be formed, some of which will be more positive than others, and I identify a close, supportive relationship by the term 'bonding relationship'. Bridging capital, another form of social capital identified by Putnam, involves weaker ties but has the potential to facilitate entry into different social groups enabling people to 'move ahead' (Putman 2000:23). I utilise the concept of bridging capital in this research in a manner which enhances the understanding of the dynamics operating in young people's lives. All young people have a perception of what, for them, constitutes 'forward movement' and this may include securing permanent accommodation, producing a healthy baby, conquering problematic drug use, gaining permanent employment or successfully completing an educational course. These movements are often assisted by contacts with others and these contacts may be made either within or outside a young person's existing social network. I argue that, in taking advantage of these contacts to achieve what they perceive as forward movement, young people are utilising bridging capital and this may, or may not, develop from a bonding relationship.

I extend this analysis beyond the informal networks of families and friends to the provisions of the Connexions Service itself. I argue that Connexions partnerships may be conceived as networks of practitioners who, in certain circumstances, supplement the social capital of disadvantaged young people by offering support in a range of areas. In addition, by enabling young people to make forward movement in important areas of their

lives, they are also providing bridging capital. Although the provision of bridging capital through learning is basic to the Connexions Strategy, it is envisaged that contact between a young person and a PA will facilitate the delivery of bridging capital. In the case of young people requiring information and advice this bridging relationship may be based on weak ties. However, it is anticipated that a small minority of young people 'facing substantial multiple problems' will require 'integrated and specialist support' (DfEE 2000:6.11) from a Connexions PA and in these cases it is envisaged that strong ties characteristic of a bonding relationship will develop. Such a relationship has bridging potential by assisting forward movement in areas of a young people's lives which are significant to them and these may include education, employment or training.

However, there is evidence that many young people possess personal qualities that enable them to be proactive in effecting forward movement in their lives and for some young people certain talents, interests and inner resources render their lives meaningful. These frequently inform a young person's identity and contribute to feelings of self-esteem and while the origin of such resources may have a social ingredient their utilisation does not necessarily depend on contact with other people. I argue therefore that, in addition to bonding and bridging capital, there is a third element in the equation which I term personal capital. Personal capital embraces positive attributes which include intelligence, creative and sporting talents, physical appearance and qualities such as independence and resilience all of which may develop from the interplay of genetic and environmental factors. Although personal capital may contribute to agency it is something more than agency. Agency implies willed action whereas personal capital relates to individual assets which may inform action but which may also be utilised as an inner resource. A quality such as resilience will contribute to personal capital and may inform action, in which case a young person can be said to be utilising agency. Alternatively, it may give a young person inner strength enabling them to accept and cope with the existing situation on their own. Cultural capital, as conceptualised by Bourdieu (1989), will, for some young people, contribute to personal capital. However personal capital is a broader concept than cultural capital and extends to include other aspects of a young person's self including positive psychological attributes. Such characteristics as resilience and independence are frequently important qualities which contribute to the survival strategies of young people experiencing disadvantage and these are not embraced by

Bourdieu's concept, although a young person's ability to utilise effectively their personal capital may be affected by the cultural capital at their disposal.

Bonding capital is evident as young people talk about the importance of their friends and certain family members and also from my observations in the three centres. It is epitomised in the mutual help that is an accepted feature of friendship for the young people I met at OAC (p.105), in the obvious pleasure of young people as they socialise with their friends in the TLC (p.95) and, at 432, in the joy shown as Sam meets his sister and nephew (p.94) and when Liz and Stewart introduce their new son Thomas (p.103). The pride felt in being a good friend and family member also highlights the significance of bonding capital and I argue that this is a means by which bonding capital is enhanced; evident in the reciprocity of friendship expressed by Mark (p.105) where being a good friend creates a sense of belonging which is a fundamental feature of bonding. Qualities that contribute to the self-esteem experienced by being good friend include those of the 'bubbly teenager' discourse which portrays a young person who is 'friendly', 'fun to be with', 'easy to talk to' and who can 'make people laugh' and 'cheer people up'. Qualities of good friendship also include: helping, listening, understanding, advice giving, confidentiality and 'standing up for a friend or family member' which all help to increase bonding capital.

For the eight young people who have clear plans for a career it is an integration of personal, bridging and bonding capital which contributes to the development of these careers. I argue that, although career development may be assisted by bridging capital, it is the personal capital of the young people themselves which is essential for success. Personal capital is present in the different talents these young people possess and in their ability to concentrate on study and gain necessary qualifications. It is also evident in Wendy's strength to detach herself from a group of friends and concentrate on study, in Jack's determination to follow his chosen career despite the loss of an eye and in Sid's reliable and conscientious attitude towards his work. I argue that, although bridging capital is provided by the educational and employment systems themselves, it is the bridging capital provided by another person which normally encourages young people to take advantage of these systems. For seven of these young people bridging capital is provided through their existing social networks. Harriet has ambitious parents, a vet who is a family friend and the opportunity to work on a local farm during the holidays. John and Sophie had utilised Connexions to gain information, but this was in relation to pre-

existing interests as John's father had worked for the RAF and encouraged his membership of air cadets and Sophie's family environment provided the opportunity for her to care for a range of different animals. Although Wendy and Jack came from less privileged backgrounds it was Jack's mother and Wendy's sister who had helped them with applications for appropriate college courses. In addition, it was the job secured by Pete's father in the hotel where he worked that influenced Pete's desire to become a chef and it is arguable that for Sid, as his father already worked in a supermarket, this influenced his choice of career. However, the experience of Liz, illustrates the value of the New Start initiative (DfEE 1997) where the project manager supplies both bonding and bridging capital enabling Liz to utilise personal capital and progress in her career. This relationship is similar to both that envisaged between a young person and a Connexions PA and those identified as mentoring relationships in the research by Philip et al (2004).

Wendy's ability to detach herself from a group of friends in order to concentrate on study can be compared with Colleen's situation. In Year 9 both had been selected for a Connexions pilot study which utilised team work to increase the self esteem of a group of students who were experiencing difficulties at home. Both had personal capital in the form of talents, Wendy in drama and Colleen in singing and both applied for a National Diploma in Performing Arts at college. However, unlike Wendy, Colleen's need for acceptance by friends took precedence over study and contributed to her failure to obtain the appropriate grades at GCSE which led to a loss in self-esteem, depression and arguably social exclusion. At this stage in her life she was unable to utilise the personal capital arising from her talent for singing. Similarly Marion's strong attachment to family led to her expulsion from school, reducing the opportunity for her to develop her artistic talents. The situations of Colleen and Marion indicate that excessive reliance on bonding capital can reduce access to the bridging capital available through education reflecting the way in which 'bonding social capital can bolster our narrower selves'(Putnam2000:23). However it is also evident that there are situations where bonding capital can make a positive contribution to success in a career. Both Wendy and Sophie made new friends at college who shared their interests and this enhanced their bonding capital in a manner conducive to success in their chosen careers.

The findings indicate that for four of the young people without permanent accommodation and dependent on benefits their sole source of self-esteem is derived

from bonding relationships with friends and family members. The one exception to this is Sam who derives personal capital and self esteem from his talent as a skateboarder. This emphasises the importance of interests and creative activities in young people's lives which provide personal capital enhancing their lives and contributing to self-esteem. In section 5.4.1 I shall discuss ways in which personal capital is used as a means of coping with difficulties without resorting to support from others. These interests and talents may translate into educational and career opportunities satisfying Connexions targets but they are frequently associated with informal education traditionally provided by the youth service and acknowledged by the emphasis on 'something to do' in a recent Government publication on youth work (DfES 2006a).

I shall now summarise the findings of this chapter.

4.6 Summary and Conclusions

This chapter confirms that things that young people consider to be important in their lives inform their identity and contribute to feelings of self-esteem. There are two aspects of their lives that certain young people regard as significant and which accord with the Connexions agenda namely: having a career and success at school. However, this research draws attention to other significant aspects of lives that are not appreciated by the Connexions strategy. I argue that a truly holistic approach to youth policy requires the acceptance of these additional aspects of young people's lives that are important to them and which enhance their self-esteem.

The aspect of life that is important for all young people is their relationships with friends and family, emphasising the significance of bonding capital. Bonding capital is enhanced by being a good friend and family member and this also contributes to self-esteem. However for four young people, who are without permanent accommodation and dependent on benefits, this is their only source of self-esteem. An exception to this is a young man in a similar situation whose life is rendered meaningful by personal capital derived in part from his talent as a skater.

The findings analysed in this chapter draw attention to the importance of bonding capital in young people's lives and indicate the role of bridging and personal capital in assisting young people to progress in a career. Personal capital is also evident in the interests, creative activities and individual qualities that inform young people's identities and contribute to feelings of self-worth. A fundamental element of the Connexions policy

is the relationship formed between a young person and their Connexions PA and it is envisaged that this relationship will provide bonding capital and also have bridging potential. In the next chapter I investigate the sources of support that young people actually access when they experience difficulties and the role played by Connexions and other support services in the three mentor rich settings in which my field research was based. I shall examine how bonding relationships develop in these settings and the manner in which these provide bridging capital to assist forward movement in different areas of young people's lives. I shall also consider ways in which young people utilise personal capital to cope with problems without resorting to support from others.

CHAPTER FIVE: COPING WITH DIFFICULTIES

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter established the importance of bonding capital in the relationships young people form with friends and certain family members. The Connexions strategy anticipates that a young person 'facing multiple problems' and requiring 'integrated and specialist support' (DfEE 2000:6.11) will form a bonding relationship with their PA and it is this relationship that can become a source of bridging capital by facilitating a young person's access to additional services and also their participation in education, employment or training. This chapter considers who young people actually confide in when they experience problems. Although the majority of young people find mentoring qualities in relationships with friends and family members, emotional problems arising from these relationships mean it is, at times, easier for them to confide in an 'outsider'.

Section 5.2 of this chapter analyses the support gained from bonding relationships with family and friends and draws attention to a range of natural mentoring types (Philip and Hendry 1996). There is evidence that the qualities valued in these relationships reflect those which inform young people's identity as 'a good friend' identified in the previous chapter.

The following section examines the role of the formal support services by considering the relationships that young people form with practitioners in the three centres that were case studies in this research. Two of these centres are financed by the youth services and therefore extend their services to young people beyond the age of nineteen, the cut off age for Connexions. The centres operate as mentor rich settings providing 'somewhere to go' and a range of people 'to talk to' (DfES 2006a) and have bridging potential. However in such a setting bonding relationships formed between practitioners and young people are based on choices made by the young people themselves. The qualities valued in these relationships reflect those that are important in bonding relationships with friends and family and include an accepting, non judgemental approach, confidentiality, the ability to listen and give good advice and an element of shared laughter (Philip et al 2004). These qualities are also evident as young people speak of significant relationships they have formed with teachers and others in the formal system. I argue that a feeling of being accepted is fundamental for the development of a

relationship of trust and implies an acceptance of a young person's identity and of the aspects of their lives that they themselves prioritise. This unconditional acceptance informs the Youth Service principle of impartiality and is fundamental to a holistic approach.

The final section of this chapter investigates the individual coping mechanisms utilised by young people which do not involve relying on other people. It draws attention to certain interests and creative activities which provide personal capital helping young people to cope when they are experiencing stressful situations. Although most of these young people also utilise support from friends, family and practitioners there are a minority who choose not to confide in others. I argue that it is essential that Connexions PAs and other practitioners recognise a young person's right to refuse help and accept their independent stance as a significant aspect of their identity. Even where advice is sought there is evidence that young people evaluate this advice and make choices as to whether to accept of reject it demonstrating the use of personal capital as agency. I maintain that making informed choices is essential for a growth in maturity and it is important that this is respected and valued by practitioners.

5.2 Informal Support Networks

In this section I utilise findings to illustrate the close relationships with friends and certain family members which provide bonding capital to support young people when they experience difficulties. I identify qualities which are valued in these relationships and argue that they reflect those which inform young people's identity as 'a good friend'. I also draw attention to the way in which these relationships reflect natural mentoring types identified by Philip and Hendry (1996).

Although some young people spoke in general terms about confiding in 'friends' others specified the actual friends they felt able to talk to. Sam says:

'If there was somebody I wanted to go to talk to it would be my sister or my mate Tony---he's my best mate pretty much'.

As the young people spoke about those in whom they felt able to confide terms such as 'like a big brother', 'my best mate', 'my close friends' reoccurred which indicate the close bonding with friends. Maria 's response draws attention to the value of listening:

'My really close friends---who like to listen to other people's opinions.'

John and Simon both preferred to confide in women. Simon found it easier to trust his women friends and felt they gave the best advice and respected confidentiality. John's response articulates the essential quality of empathy:

'[Girls are] much easier, because they relate it to themselves as well and even if it's a problem that you need advice with they'll say 'if I was in that situation', or 'when I was in that situation''.

Empathy based on mutual understanding is also evident as Colleen talks of her friendship with Jenny and describes the reciprocity that can exist in a close relationship:

'Jenny---she's had a lot of crap in her life as well---she sort of relates to me, she knows how I feel and I know how she feels---and now we're really close friends and it's just because we understand each other---now I can fall back on Jenny and Jenny can fall back on me and that's what I need.'

Reciprocity and empathy are identified as two elements that contribute to successful mentoring (Philip 1997). As young people talked of the friends in whom they felt able to confide, the qualities valued in these relationship were trust, confidentiality, empathy, reciprocity, the ability to listen and respond honestly, the ability to give good advice and also the importance of knowing a person for a length of time. These relationships with friends are evidence of 'friend to friend' mentoring, one of the five types of natural mentoring styles identified by Philip and Hendry (1996).

I was also aware of 'peer group' mentoring, another type of natural mentoring style identified by Philip and Hendry. Sandra was a young woman whom I spoke with regularly at the TLC and she had told me of her aptitude for helping people with their emotional problems. I had watched her response when Samantha was upset about problems with her boy friend and one lunch time a situation occurred that illustrates Sandra in the role of organizing mentor for a group of girls. I had set up my tape recorder in one of the small rooms in the TLC hoping to conduct an interview but at the beginning of lunch break Wendy came in to the centre in tears accompanied by Sandra and together

they went into the small room which young people used if they wished to resolve disputes. It appeared that the argument was between Wendy and Colleen. Colleen sat at the drinks bar talking about the situation to another girl Ellie. It was then Colleen's turn to be pacified by Sandra and they sat on the floor talking quietly whilst Ellie went in to the room to comfort Wendy. Soon all four were in the room with my tape recorder and when they beckoned me in they were all laughing as they recorded funny conversations. The conflict resolution had been successful and Sandra's skills as a peacemaker are evidence of her personal capital.

In addition to confiding in friends most young people felt able to speak to certain family members about difficulties. This confirms the findings of Hendry et al (1992) that most young people utilise mentoring qualities within their families and peer group. The relationships with family members conform to the 'classic' natural mentoring style identified by Philip and Hendry (1996).

Although valuing his women friends, in a later interview John admitted that he confided more in his father than anyone else. The bonding with his father is evident as he talks of someone he admires:

'He's just a great Dad, he's always there, he's everything you could want in a Dad'.

Several of the young women felt able to confide in their mothers and both Sophie and Liz referred to their mothers as being like a 'best friend' which emphasises close bonding with a parent. There is evidence of reciprocity as Sophie talks about her mother:

'I tell my Mum absolutely everything. My Mum's kind of like my best friend really, she talks to me about anything, I can tell her anything'.

Although some young people confided in one particular person, others chose different people depending on the problem they wished to discuss. Although Paul talked to his friends about most things, if he wished to talk about 'personal problems' he always talked to his 'Aunty May'. Similarly Colleen felt she could not tell her Granddad about her smoking habit and although Sid had a close relationship with his parents he admits:

'Because I don't mean that there's everything that I could go and talk to my Mum and Dad about really---I think there is always someone else that you need to talk to'.

Findings in the previous chapter indicate that, for a majority of young people, 'being a good friend and family member' is a source of self-esteem. This section has provided an insight into the benefits of being at the receiving end of good friendship. As the young people talked of friends and family members in whom they could confide similar qualities occurred. The 'bubbly teenage' discourse did not appear in this context and I argue that, although this is a significant factor in initiating bonding between young people, when a young person is experiencing difficulties it is an empathic listening stance from a friend with whom they bond which is most appreciated. Qualities identified are: 'listening', 'giving good advice', 'trust', 'confidentiality', 'reciprocity' and 'empathy', which indicates the quality of 'understanding' mentioned by the young people themselves. These findings reflect qualities that Philip (1997) found in her study of natural mentoring practices. The phrases used by young people also suggest bonding capital. These include: 'my best mate', 'my really close friends', a friend who is 'just like a big brother' and mothers who are 'like my best friend'. Findings indicate that the majority of young people felt able to confide in certain friends and family members although a minority found it difficult to confide in anyone. I shall consider this minority in more detail in section 5.4.2.

Although the majority of young people talked to certain friends and family members when they experienced difficulties, several expressed a reluctance to confide in friends due to a lack of confidentiality. In addition these difficulties frequently concerned relationships with family or friends and therefore several young people preferred to talk to someone from the formal support system. Of twenty one young people initially interviewed nineteen claimed to have confided in, or could envisage confiding in, a professional. It is important to acknowledge however, that in this respect the young people I met may not be typical of all young people as all were already utilising 'drop in' facilities which could be termed 'mentor rich settings' (Freedman 1993:111).

In the three 'mentor rich settings' which were the field centres in this research project there were practitioners who had the potential to act as mentors forming bonding relationships with young people. I shall now consider these centres and establish which

practitioners these young people felt able to relate to and the qualities that they valued when forming these bonding relationships.

5.3 Support from Formal Organisations

5.3.1 *Mentor Rich Settings*

The previous section considers bonding relationships with friends and family members and draws parallels between these and the natural mentoring typology identified by Philip and Hendry (1996). However, planned mentoring attempts to transfer the qualities of natural mentoring to a situation where mentor and mentee are matched according to certain criteria and meetings are arranged from which a bonding relationship may or may not result. Colley (2000) terms the relationship between a disadvantaged young person and a Connexions PA 'engagement mentoring,' arguing that what should be a one to one relationship is transformed into a triangle by the imposition of Government targets for the outcomes of this relationship. In addition the relationship with a PA is not based on a matching process as the young person is allocated a PA with responsibility for a particular area or organisation. I argue in this section that a 'mentor rich setting' is more conducive to replicating the qualities of natural mentoring than either planned mentoring or the allocation of a Connexions PA. In such a setting there are a range of practitioners, including Connexions PAs, but no matching process. Any bonding relationships formed between practitioners and young people are based on choices made by the young people themselves. The initial choice is whether they wish to relate to anyone at all and then a second choice involves the person, or persons, to whom they choose to relate.

In each of the three case study centres there were a range of people who could act as mentors for young people attending the centre. The TLC at St Peter's School was central to the pastoral care organisation of the school. It was open at most times during the school day, with either Suzie, the coordinator, or another worker available to listen to young people and offer help as required. There was a policy in the school that students were given permission by their teacher to go to the TLC if they were upset about a particular issue.

Although different agency workers were available at the TLC at certain times on an individual appointment basis it was at the lunch time sessions where I integrated with the young people. However, contrary to my initial expectations, neither of the Connexions PAs working at the school attended these sessions. In addition to Suzie, who

was always available to talk with young people at lunch time, there were two youth workers, Bob and Poppy, and a drugs advice worker, Peter, each present on allocated days. Whilst in the centre, either for the lunch time sessions or on my own at other times during the day, I was aware of young people from all age groups coming in to talk with Suzie or for an appointment with a counsellor or one of the other practitioners. Of the ten young people whom I interviewed, three, Colleen, Wendy and Mark, spontaneously referred to Suzie as someone they were able to talk to about difficulties. Colleen described Suzie as 'brilliant if you've got any problems' and valued the advice she received and Mark appreciated the fact that his discussions with Debbie were confidential. Colleen and Wendy had been selected to join a group of twelve young people for a Connexions pilot study during Year 9. Although neither had any subsequent contact with a Connexions PA both talked enthusiastically about the project and Wendy feels it helped her to cope with personal problems because:

> 'If there's someone like Suzie or you or someone then if I've got a problem I'll talk to you---because for several years of my life I bottled up everything and I became a depressed load of nothing---I didn't like that *me*, I prefer the *me* who can talk and get everything off her chest and then sort of go and finish off the day.'

Here Wendy recognises different aspects of her identity and values 'someone to talk to' who helps her realise the aspects of herself which enhance feelings of self worth. This indicates that a bonding relationship can assist forward movement. Having 'got things off her chest' Wendy is able to 'go and finish off the day' which includes making use of her personal capital to further her career ambitions.

Harriet, Jack and John had gained support from a counsellor arranged through the TLC. Harriet, who has 'a lot of trust issues with people [she is] close to' says:

> 'You often feel more comfortable talking to a complete stranger---I think, 'Oh I might never see this person again, they can't judge me.''

This indicates that Harriet values anonymity and a non-judgmental approach.

Paul however appreciates Poppy, a youth worker, who he knows through a local youth club:

'I come here to see my Poppy, I love Poppy, she's wicked, she's one of the adults that I'm quite fond of.'

This suggests a 'bonding' relationship that has developed over time and the description of Poppy as 'wicked' implies 'shared laughter' which was evident as I observed Poppy relating to groups of young people in the centre.

Sophie, who has a very supportive family, had not spoken to any one in the centre herself but says:

'I don't think you can really talk to teachers, they say you can talk to them but--- people in the TLC you can talk to---my friend she got pregnant and she lost her baby a few weeks ago, so she's been here quite a lot.'

The responses by Paul and Sophie indicate that certain adults in the formal support system are easier to talk to than others.

The foregoing illustrates that there are differences in young people's needs in relation to support from formal systems. Some feel able to form a bonding relationship with someone they know well but others choose the anonymity and assumed professional expertise of a counsellor. However counsellors were always seen by appointment and for a clearly defined period of time and never integrated freely with young people in these mentor rich environments. Therefore, excluding the anonymity provided by 'talking to a stranger,' the qualities valued in relationships formed in this setting include confidentiality, the provision of good advice, shared laughter, a non-judgemental attitude and a relationship that develops over time. There were, however, two young people, Joe and Samantha who did not speak to anyone in the formal support system and I shall consider this in more detail in section 5.4.2.

In addition to providing 'someone to talk to' the young people appreciated the TLC as 'somewhere to go' (DfES 2006a) which was 'a safe, warm, well equipped meeting place' (DfES 2002e). This illustrates another difference between a mentor rich environment and a planned mentoring relationship as there are different reasons that

motivate a young person to attend such a centre and one of these may be to talk with an adult with the possibility of developing a bonding relationship. These different motivations were evident as I watched and talked with young people using the TLC. Although they all came to meet friends, the warmth and comfort of a 'teacher free environment' where they could sit, relax and 'chill out' were additional incentives.

The Oldport Advice Centre, funded by the Oldport Youth Service, also provided 'somewhere to go' and a range of people 'to talk to'. It was open each weekday from 1.00pm to 5.00pm and for two hours on Saturday morning. This centre was a good example of partnership working, offering a range of services in one centre including two Connexions PAs, Ray and Ruth, who attended on separate days. Other services available at this centre included advice on benefits, housing and substance abuse, counselling by appointment, and nurses and a doctor in the Young Person's Health Clinic. The manager of the centre, Martin, was a youth worker and he and two other advice workers provided help with a range of issues and acted as sympathetic listeners for certain young people who were regular visitors to the centre. Ray, a Connexions PA with responsibility for career advice and guidance, integrated into the life of the centre and many of the young people who came to see him knew him through his work at a local school.

For the young people who attended regularly, the OAC provided both 'someone to talk to' and 'somewhere to go' where they could meet friends in warm and comfortable surroundings. Marion, who initially came to the centre to meet up with her younger sister Sandy, then resident in the adjacent Foyer, talks about the support she receives:

'I didn't really want to talk about my problems but my problems just got too much and I needed to talk to somebody so it was about confiding in somebody---but it's been really good, I'm glad I come and I'm glad I opened up and its brilliant, I love the support I get off them and I think that basically if I didn't have the support what I've had I wouldn't be where I am today. They've been brilliant, they've helped me with my housing, they've helped me with pregnancy worries, they've helped me with sister worries, problems with my family that I've needed to talk about---my Mum comes to me, they all talk to me about everything and I think, 'Who can I speak to?'---sometimes it's better if an outsider listens, because they don't criticise---I think sometimes you can open up more and not worry about

offending somebody.---Yea, it is really good that I can come somewhere where there's not family and they don't judge you.'

This extract illustrates the range of services the centre provides and also emphasises the value of confiding in someone from the formal support network who is 'an outsider'. Important aspects of Marion's identity are as a daughter, sister and mother and she prides herself on being 'a good listener'. However, in playing the role of listener to members of her family, she needs to confide in someone outside her family who is neither critical nor judgemental. This extract illustrates Marion's awareness of forward movement in securing permanent accommodation and giving birth to a healthy baby. She acknowledges the bridging capital that has contributed to this in the phrase, 'if I didn't have the support what I've had I wouldn't be where I am today'.

Maria and Dave were also regular visitors to the centre and they too appreciated having 'someone to talk to'. Dave explains how the centre has helped him in a variety of ways, adding that he values:

'The friendliness of the staff as well, just the kindness and they do care a lot about the people that come in---they've helped me with food when I haven't had any food.'

The food store was an important resource and it was usually a delay in benefits that caused a young person to request food. The store was contributed to by local organisations and individuals and on several occasions I watched someone receive a food parcel and then open a tin of fruit or a packet of cereal and eat it hungrily whilst still in the centre.

Like Marion, Maria and Dave, Simon was also a regular visitor to the centre and acknowledged both the help he had received and the fact that:

'Sometimes you need just someone to talk to---because sometimes you haven't got somebody to just unleash everything at and the staff don't mind you coming in and leashing all your stuff and get it all out.'

Examples of young people using the centre to 'unleash everything at' were not confined to Simon and I remember occasions when a young person chose the centre as a forum to express quite aggressive or racist views. On such occasions Martin dealt with the outbursts in a very calm manner, offering occasional counter arguments but appreciating that the young person needed to 'let off steam'. This attitude is reinforced by Martin's comments:

'We don't sort of condone some of the behaviour and the sort of things that young people tell us that they've done but the reality is that they've done it.'

This reflects the accepting and non-judgemental approach valued by Marion and it is this acceptance that is implicit in the principle of impartiality which involves 'starting where a young person is' which is fundamental to the holistic approach articulated in this thesis.

It was evident during my time at OAC that all the young people came to the centre for 'someone to talk to' whether this involved a one off consultation about sexual health or advice on employment or regular visits to talk to a range of practitioners. The young people who attended the centre on a regular basis related to several different workers although on certain occasions they requested to talk to one particular worker in private. This indicates the range of relationships that developed in this centre from general conversation to a close bonding relationship with one particular worker. The practitioners with whom these young people bonded were the manager Martin, a qualified youth worker, the three regular workers with qualifications in either advice work or youth work and all of whom had specialist knowledge on the benefits system and the two workers who provided advice on housing issues. The Connexions PAs were only in the centre on two days, Ray on Monday and Ruth on Thursday. Ray integrated into the life of the centre but was viewed as a person to talk to about education or employment rather than personal matters. Although his advice had the potential to assist movement into employment, education or training the relationships he formed with the young people involved loose ties rather than the strong ties characteristic of a bonding relationship. However Ruth's presence in the centre was intended to provide individual support for young people based on close bonding ties but as there were a range of workers at the centre on a daily basis with whom these young people bonded Ruth's contribution was not utilised and her visits were subsequently phased out.

Although Ruth's support was not utilised by the regular visitors to the centre, there were two young women, Stephanie and Meryl, who came to the centre on Thursday specifically to see Ruth as she was their appointed Connexions PA. Both had developed a close relationship with her and one Thursday, when Ruth was sick, Meryl came in with a problem but she was not prepared to see the Connexions PA deputizing for Ruth or anyone else in the centre. Later Ruth expressed concern about this dependence particularly in view of the fact that Meryl, who was approaching the age of twenty, would soon lose her entitlement to support from Connexions. This situation illustrates a bonding relationship that has developed over time but also emphasises the problems inherent in terminating such a relationship, illustrating that a relationship that may be viewed as 'friendship' by a young person does not have the durability of genuine friendship. It also draws attention to the age limit imposed by Connexions. Such a limit did not prevent Marion and other young people in their twenties from getting valuable support at OAC as this was run by the Youth Service which supports young people until the age of twenty five.

It is evident from the foregoing that this centre provided both 'someone to talk to' and 'somewhere to go'. For Maria the OAC was somewhere she could go to 'have a chat' and the value of having 'somewhere to go' was emphasised by Heather and Simon. Simon says:

> 'If I've got nothing to do sometimes I pop in just because I'm bored and I'm walking round---they don't mind you coming and popping in for like a quick chat--- because when you don't have any problems it's nice because they're more like friends as well as people that work with you'

References like Simon's to support workers being 'more like friends' occur in many of the comments young people make about this centre and this underlies the approach to mentoring adopted by the Big Brothers Big Sisters scheme in America where the mentor is defined 'as a friend, not a teacher or a preacher' (Grossman and Tierney 1998:422). The comments of young people using OAC reflect those identified at the TLC and emphasise the value of forming a bonding relationship with someone who is kind and caring and who listens and offers appropriate help and advice in neither a critical nor a judgmental manner. There is also an appreciation of the advantage of talking to a person

who is an 'outsider' rather than a family member or personal friend. I shall now examine the outreach youth project based at 432, and establish to what extent the features identified inform relationships formed in this third 'mentor rich setting'.

The 432 Youth Centre has been owned by Eastcombe Youth Service since the 1960s. It occupies the basement of a large building and operates on a 'coffee-bar' design supporting a range of projects. Eastcombe New Start Project was one such project and when I first made contact with the project in January 2003 it was jointly funded by Connexions and the Youth Service. The salary of Sarah, the full time project leader, was funded by Connexions and the Youth Service paid for the additional support of three youth workers. The project originally included an outreach element and drop in sessions on Mondays and Wednesdays which provided a free cooked meal. Despite the withdrawal of Connexions funding in late 2004 and the end of the outreach facility the drop in sessions continued to be funded by the Youth Service. In addition 432 continued to be listed as a Connexions sub-office with a CSA attending the 'drop in' session on Wednesday mornings. In this centre the drop in sessions also provided 'somewhere to go' and 'someone to talk to.' 'Talk' often occurred in a relaxed manner around the coffee bar where a range of topics were discussed and sometimes young people introduced their concerns into the general conversation, provoking joint discussion about possible solutions. At other times, if a young person appeared upset or wanted to talk on a one to one basis with a particular youth worker, the conversations usually took place in a quieter corner of the centre. I gradually became aware that Tania spent time talking in a confidential manner with Liz although she had declared in her first interview:

'I won't talk about *me*'

In the second interview she describes how she relates to Liz:

I talk to Liz a lot, I've learnt to trust Liz, I think she's the only person that knows literally everything about me---I've got myself in predicaments and she's give me some really good advice. I know she works down here but I feel as if we've actually built a friendship, a bond---I know I can trust her and I know she'll be able to help me out if I needed help. It's the only person I've known that I've spoke to and haven't gone back and told anybody'.

This extract describes a bonding relationship built on trust which gives help and good advice, ensures confidentiality and feels like friendship. This relationship between Tania and Liz reflects aspects of the fifth mentoring type identified by Philip and Hendry (1996) which is mentoring by a 'risk taking' adult. Liz, who was five years older than Tania, had past experience of drug use and homelessness and could empathise with Tania's situation. The value of mentors who have 'been there and done that' is also emphasised by Pawson (2004 p.91).

Liz herself considered that the progress she had made was the result of her relationship with Sarah the project leader. She describes this relationship:

'Sarah she helped us a lot---she was helping us get off drugs and getting out of naughty situations---we were living in really rough conditions at the time so, she'd cook us a meal, that'd be our one decent meal a week---we built up a relationship with her and sort of gained some trust with her---of course she's been like an anchor ever since'.

These comments identify a bonding relationship based on trust which develops over time. It also reflects the satisfaction of hunger, which was evident in the food parcels provided at OAC. Many of the young men who came to this centre looked thin and were obviously hungry and welcomed a second meal if one was left over. However, two of the young women, Tania and Alison, appeared to have eating disorders and sometimes passed their meal to one of the young men to finish.

Sid and Gerry also appreciated the support available at 432. Sid felt he could talk to the workers at the centre about any problems and Gerry feels he can confide in:

'People here, I can talk to these people because they keep it confidential and they've got good advice'

The forgoing illustrates that the drop in centre at 432 is a mentor rich environment where young people can find 'someone to talk to'. The qualities that are valued are trust, confidentiality, good advice and a friendly relationship with someone known over a period of time.

As young people talked of the things that attracted them to 432 they emphasised the importance of 'somewhere to go' where there was a friendly atmosphere and people were 'easy to talk to' and Sid and Jerry both mentioned the 'free pool'. A relaxed atmosphere is evident in Sam's remark:

'It's really cool, everyone's really nice---I get to chill out and relax'.

Although this centre did not provide the range of specialist practitioners that were available at OAC or the TLC, the youth workers promoted access to bridging capital by encouraging young people to contact other agencies when necessary. In addition a CSA was present on Wednesdays and at the beginning of my time at 432 this was Becky but after six months she was replaced by Matt. A CSA is qualified to give advice, although not guidance, on education, employment and training and Tania, Pete and other young people chose to talk to the CSAs in preference to their allotted Connexions PA. Tania did not communicate with her PA because she considered he had violated confidentiality by talking to her mother about her problems with accommodation and Pete had never talked to his PA as he preferred to consult Matt on issues connected with education and employment. This indicates that these young people are making choices about who they wish to relate to; a choice which is not dependent on the qualifications of the workers or their status within Connexions. It also suggests that meeting young people in a casual setting where they normally associate is more effective when forming a relationship. Both Becky and Matt integrated fully into the general life of the centre and when not talking on a one to one basis with a young person contributed to the general conversations and Matt regularly joined in games of pool. I watched on several occasions as Tania, Pete and others spent time in conversation with the CSA, receiving help with the preparation of CVs and the completion of application forms for jobs and courses. Tania talked regularly to Becky who suggested different college courses, several of which Tania started but then left after a very short time. Tania talks about Becky:

'I liked Becky, I got on really well with her---certain people you can hit on the nail with, certain people you can't---she was the only person that helped me out, she tried to, she put a lot of effort into it---she was sound, she was a laugh.'

Here Tania shows appreciation of the effort Becky makes on her behalf and it is possible that Tania started courses that she was unable to pursue through a wish to please Becky. Although Tania does not discuss the personal issues with Becky that she discusses with Liz it is evident that Becky is someone to whom Tania feels able to relate. Becky is attempting to provide bridging capital but at this stage in Tania's life she lacks the personal capital to persevere with the courses she begins. Her reference to Becky as 'sound' and 'a laugh' suggests that this relationship has qualities of trust, honesty and shared laughter. This case illustrates what has been termed 'engagement mentoring' (Colley 2003), where a positive relationship is transformed into a 'triangle' by the imposition of Government targets which in this case fail to be met. Whereas in her relationship with Liz, Tania gains support for issues that affect her immediate present, in her relationship with Becky the issues relate to her future. Once again this draws attention to the value of the youth work principle of impartiality which involves 'starting where the young person is' and moving at a pace appropriate for them.

The regular presence of a CSA meant it was possible for the young people to get to know them over a period of time in a relaxed environment. The value of this is confirmed in the following comment by Matt:

'With the outreach post---we've been able to build up the relationship either by just talking to them whilst they've been here or having a game of pool with them, just really the general interacting and the fact that they see me every week here.'

The aspects that young people value about this relaxed environment also reflect those of the 'bubbly teenager' discourse and include the fact that people are 'friendly', 'easy to talk to' and relationships include the crucial element of 'shared laughter'.

Basic to the relationships formed in these centres is the feeling that the practitioner is 'like a friend', listens, offers help and good advice, is caring and neither critical nor judgemental. A sense of trust underlies such relationships and this is enhanced by confidentiality and knowing a practitioner over a period of time. Listening, caring and being non-judgemental all contribute to the vital ingredient of empathy. Friendship is conveyed by the fact that relationships are relaxed and often involve shared laughter. The qualities valued in these relationships reflect those identified as important in young people's relationships with friends and family members. These include listening,

confidentiality, trust, empathy, reciprocity and giving help and good advice. Aspects of the 'bubbly teenager' which include being 'easy to talk to', 'friendly' and 'funny' reflect the importance of 'shared laughter' in relationships with practitioners (Philip et al 2004). Reciprocity is the one quality of friendship which appears to be lacking in relationships with practitioners. However, I argue that when a worker establishes a positive relationship with a young person there is always a reciprocal element. Young people show appreciation in different ways and all the practitioners in this research identified the contact with the young people themselves as the most enjoyable aspect of their work. A parallel is evident between the qualities identified here and those found in other research findings on successful mentoring relationships which include confidentiality, trust, reciprocity, empathy and the provision of good advice (Philip 1997, Ford 1999).

This section has considered the ways in which the three case study sites operate as 'mentor rich settings' and it highlights the role these centres play in fulfilling two of the aims of the current Government strategy on youth policy (DfES 2006a) by providing 'somewhere to go' and 'someone to talk to'. Certain relationships formed with practitioners in these centres have the characteristics of a bonding relationship and there is evidence of the bridging potential of such a relationship as some young people make forward movement in aspects of their lives which are important to them. As the young people talk of these relationships it is evident that they have a sense of being accepted in a manner which shows understanding of their present situation and which is not based on any preconceived ideas about them, elements basic to a holistic approach. In these centres any bonding relationships formed between practitioners and young people are based on choices made by the young people themselves and I maintain that it is this element of choice which enables natural mentoring processes to be more closely replicated in these centres.

In addition to relationships formed in these settings some young people referred to relationships with significant adults in other formal organisations. It is these relationships that I shall now consider.

5.3.2 *Other Significant Relationships within the Formal System*

In this chapter I draw attention to significant relationships formed with practitioners in other formal organisations and identify qualities valued which reinforce the findings in the previous section.

Despite the comment by Sophie that she did not think young people could 'really talk to teachers' three young people I met in the TLC talked of form tutors in whom they felt able to confide. John describes this relationship:

'My form teacher is the best teacher that I've ever had---he's really funny---I would trust him implicitly---if I was really in trouble and I needed advice quickly when I was in school I'd go to him'.

Once again the qualities of trust, giving good advice and shared humour are mentioned.

Samantha and Colleen both spoke positively about their music teachers. Colleen told of her respect for them whilst Samantha, who disliked most other things about school, says:

'My teacher involves all of us, he says, 'Right this is your good point' but tells you what's the matter and then you can build up on that---he really encourages you'.

This illustrates the capacity of teachers to encourage young people who, in many respects, are disillusioned with school. This is evidence that a positive relationship with a teacher can enhance self esteem and establish respect.

Two other young people, Pete and Simon, who had predominantly negative experiences at school, also spoke of a particular teacher who was significant in their lives. Simon had been moved between schools then eventually permanently excluded. He describes the problems he has with teachers and authority in general:

'I don't mind people asking me to do things it's the way they ask, it's like more they're telling me---that's what I found with a lot of teachers---they kind of speak down to you---I don't know I just did not like any of the teachers, they were all too strict for me really, that's why I do like the kind of staff who are a bit more laid back and treat you equal'.

However he recalled good memories of one particular form teacher and described how he stayed in at break time and sat in the classroom talking to her but when that teacher left he said, 'that's when I did start going down hill'.

Similarly Pete had difficulties with some teachers and was placed on a reduced timetable in Year 11. However, he talks of his respect for certain teachers whom he terms 'sound', which means:

> '[They] didn't listen to what other people said---just like gave their own opinion of me'.

He describes how he established a relationship with a new Science teacher who he considered to be 'sound':

> 'I first had a fight with him and started throwing chairs at him because he didn't let me out of the room---he locked the door from inside and he just picked me up and shoved me back down to the floor---I know he's not allowed to but then I had respect for him afterwards. He didn't hold it against me, we were laughing about it---he sat down with me and started talking with me---he started treating me like an adult---that's why I enjoyed Science and that's why I got a C in Science.'

This extract illustrates the formation of a relationship between a young person and a teacher by an unorthodox method. The bridging potential of this bonding relationship is evident in Pete's success in the examination system. There is also a possibility that this experience provided a measure of personal capital which enabled Pete to concentrate on his studies at college and gain the qualification that enabled him to work as a chef.

It is evident from the foregoing that a school has potential as a 'mentor rich environment'. Trust, good advice and the ability to listen are valued in these relationships together with shared laughter and a sense of being treated as an 'equal'. Pete's definition of a 'sound' teacher again confirms the importance of the principle of impartiality which emphasises starting without preconceived ideas about a young person.

As these relationships with teachers in school are optional they involve an element of choice. However, two young women recalled significant relationships with practitioners who had been allocated to them. Marion remembered fondly a family social

worker who had worked with her family since she was ten and Heather talks
affectionately about her Connexions PA whom she has known since becoming pregnant
at the age of fifteen:

> 'I've had her for three years now, I don't really know her as my personal adviser,
> she's more like a friend to me now and we can laugh and joke and we go for a cup
> of tea or coffee and have a chat.'

Once again Heather uses the phrase 'more like a friend' which involves the ability to
'laugh and joke' together and I argue that shared laughter contributes to the sense equality
valued by Simon and Pete.

This section illustrates other bonding relationships with adults who have been
significant in young people's lives. Those formed with teachers reflect the 'classic'
natural mentoring type identified by Philip and Hendry (1996) which involves a one to
one relationship between an adult and a young person. However the relationships valued
by Marion and Heather were formed with a practitioner who had been allocated to them
and illustrates that such relationships do have bonding potential.

In the final section of this chapter I shall consider ways in which certain young
people cope with difficult situations in their lives without seeking the support of another
person.

5.4 Individual Coping Mechanisms

5.4.1 *Interests and Creative Activities*

The previous sections of this chapter have established that the majority of young
people find mentoring qualities in relationships with friends and family members but also
value the formal support network. I shall now examine the means by which young people
cope on their own without recourse to the support of another person. In this sub-section I
illustrate how the personal capital provided by interests and creative activities is utilised
as a coping mechanism when young people experience difficulties. For most young
people this is used in addition to the sources of support already identified.

Creating and listening to music was mentioned by seven young people as a means
of relaxing, relieving stress and coping with other difficult emotions. Jack had a range of

interests including music, art and woodwork. He admitted that, without his interests, he would get more depressed and says that the most important are his CDs and his guitar:

> 'I love my music, I have to have my music---it's another way of me just relaxing, I just lounge round in my bedroom and just play, it's just my way of relieving stress---it's how I knock myself out at night as well, just stick a bit of heavy metal on, I fall asleep to it.'

Both Gerry and Pete used music to cheer themselves up and felt they 'couldn't live without it'. Gerry says he would miss:

> 'My music most because music is my life, my hobbies are also important, I don't know how I'd cope without them.'

Heather and Harriet both gained support from listening to music. Harriet considered it helped her to relax and concentrate and Heather says:

> 'I'm a very big fan of rap music, some of the rap stars say things in their music which is how I'm feeling---then I can express myself through the song and that makes me understand how I am feeling myself.'

Heather's use of music to help her understand her feelings suggests music can be a substitute for a supportive relationship.

Similarly both Colleen and Samantha used singing as a way of relaxing and relieving stress. Colleen describes how it helps her to cope with her anger:

> 'If I get angry---I have to go away, listen to music and then it unwinds me and just makes me like relaxed and then I'll start singing to it and then I'll just let go of everything---'cause I love singing I absolutely love it.'

This illustrates the importance of music in the lives of these young people. It enables them to cope with strong emotions such as anger, hurt feelings and anxiety and helps them to understand their feelings. Therefore besides being an important aspect of these

young people's identities and a source of self-esteem, it also provides personal capital which helps them to relax and cope with stress arising from aspects of their lives that they find difficult.

In addition to the benefits of music, two young women, Liz and Wendy, found comfort by expressing their thoughts and feelings in writing and this enabled them to cope with difficult aspects of their lives. Liz describes this:

'I have a thoughts book and everything that's happened in the day or if I'm depressed or unhappy, I write it down---because I didn't really talk to people so what I'd do I'd write it down and it wouldn't give me an answer back---I'd shut the book and it wouldn't be someone that would go and talk to somebody else about my private thoughts---when I'm angry it's like, 'Grrrrr' writing it all down and it gets it out of my system.'

For Liz and Wendy writing is a source of personal capital which provides help with problems through a form of 'talk' that does not require a listener and which ensures confidentiality.

In addition to the creative activities of music and writing three other young people spoke of relieving anger and stress through physical activity. Samantha was frequently upset by certain friends and family members and used a range of ways to cope with these feelings. In addition to singing she found that punching bags in aikido helped to relieve these feelings. Simon and Dave described similar benefits from physical activity: Dave liked running which helped him to relax and Simon describes the benefits of working out in the gym:

'One of the things I do enjoy is just working out in the gym---using the weights and that I find gets rid of my aggression, I get stressed out and just go down to the gym and pump up some weights, and get rid of it'.

The foregoing illustrates young people coping with a range of distressing feelings and experiences in constructive ways that do not require support from another person. The enjoyment, self-esteem and therapeutic benefit gained from such activities suggest there is value in providing young people with 'something to do' in addition to 'somewhere to

go' and 'someone to talk to' (DfES 2006a). However it is evident that these young people gain benefit and enjoyment from the activities themselves without the requirement that such activities should result in an 'accredited outcome' (DfES 2002e).

I shall now consider in more detail additional ways in which young people cope on their own.

5.4.2 *Coping Alone*

In this section I identify other ways in which young people attempt to cope with difficulties without recourse to support from others. I shall address two aspects of this: firstly the fact that certain young people are reluctant to confide in others at all and secondly the ability of young people to evaluate their situation independently and to determine whether to accept or reject the advice of others.

There were four young people who were reluctant to confide in others. I met two, Joe and Samantha, in the TLC and I talked with Tania and Pete at 432. Joe found it difficult to confide in anyone and felt he had talked to me more than to anyone about certain problems. However, it gradually became evident that he had inner resources that provided personal capital enabling him to cope on his own. He had expressed concern that his week was divided between staying with his father and living with his grandparents. However in our final conversation he admits a preference for a room of his own at his grandparents to living full time with his father and other members of the family:

> 'it would be crap---I'd fall out with them all because I'm very bitter tongued. Also I can't get up in the morning and I like my sleep---I like being able to go to my room and just read.'

This statement confirms Joe's identity as a 'nerd' and also indicates his ruthless honesty about himself, a quality increasingly evident as I knew him better. This contributes to the personal capital which enables him to cope alone. Independence is also evident when he speaks of Connexions. He had received some advice on post 16 options from the Connexions PA but when I asked if he would consult her again he says:

> 'I don't really like relying on other people or calling the agencies or anything.'

Like Joe, Samantha also rejected help from formal agencies. However, unlike Joe, she had regular emotional outbursts when she chose to turn to friends for support. She describes an incident which I had observed in the TLC:

> 'I don't think I could talk to people that I don't really know because they don't know what I'm like---when I was very upset once Suzie said, 'Come and talk.'--- and she kept on and on and on---I was like, 'Why don't you let people have their own privacy, if I don't want to talk about it I don't want to talk about it.'

This is an example of a young person who is mistrustful of adults using 'friend to friend' mentoring as a 'safety net' (Philip and Hendry 1996) and indicates a need for practitioners to respect the right of young people to refuse offers of support.

However despite Samantha's preference for confiding in friends her behaviour alienated some potential friends and although her use of singing and aikido were constructive ways of coping with problems she also resorted to self destructive behaviour which cannot be termed 'capital':

> 'My way of coping is getting home and crying---[and] I eat, and I eat and I eat---I keep going on a diet because I'm trying to stop myself from eating'.

As she describes this behaviour in detail it appears that Samantha is developing an eating disorder as a means of coping with her emotions.

Tania, like Joe, was reluctant to talk to anyone about her difficulties although she eventually felt able to confide in Liz. My third interview with Tania took place after she had moved into a rented flat helped by her mother who acted as guarantor. At this time she talked openly about her attempts to control her use of alcohol and drugs. She describes this experience:

> 'I was doing pills all the time---everyone was saying I was going to end up needing help in A & E and I've just proved everyone wrong---I got myself on it and I have got myself off it and yea when I stopped all the drugs and drink I get anxiety because I just stopped---my head just couldn't get used to it---and I just

> start shaking---[but] I'm getting better because I'm eating healthily, I'm
> exercising, I'm getting on with my family a bit better.'

Here Tania expresses a sense of forward movement which began when she moved into permanent accommodation assisted by her mother. This illustrates that the close bonding ties of family also have bridging potential. In this interview Tania describes herself as 'stubborn' on two occasions, an aspect of her identity that had been evident during the time I knew her. This characteristic is a form of personal capital which enables her to deal effectively with her drugs problem on her own.

Pete, like Tania and Joe, is reluctant to talk to people about his problems and usually 'bottles things up' and puts on 'a brave face' because friends 'just talk behind your back'. He had formed a relationship of trust with one particular youth worker, Ron, whom he met whilst involved in a music project at 432, and had felt able to talk to him about certain problems. However, after Ron left Pete had tried to talk to other youth workers:

> 'but they just told other people---so that those other people try to help me then and
> there's too many people at once'.

This illustrates a lack of confidentiality and also a lack of sensitivity to the fact that some young people may perceive too many offers of help as overwhelming and a violation of their privacy.

After this experience Pete decided to sort out his problems himself and finds he is able to do this when he is making music:

> 'I might be quiet then and I'm thinking how can I give my problems a solution---I
> just sort it out myself.'

The foregoing provides an insight into the reactions and coping mechanisms of four young people who are reluctant to seek support from others. The cases of three, Joe, Tania and Pete, indicate personal capital which enables them to cope alone. However Samantha's situation illustrates an individual coping mechanism which has destructive

potential. These cases also suggest a lack of sensitivity on the part of certain practitioners and a need to respect the right of young people to refuse offers of support.

The majority of young people valued the support they received from friends, family and formal organisations but they chose to cope on their own in certain situations and took pride in their independence and ability to cope. In addition several expressed a need to make a decision themselves as to whether they accepted or rejected any advice given. Making such decisions is basic to the development of self determination. This need to make informed choices is illustrated by Wendy's comment:

'If it's been good advice then yes but if I disagree with the advice then I wouldn't [accept it]. Advice on drugs, 'don't take it'---I think about it, that is good advice so I'd listen to that.'

This implies that Wendy has already made up her mind on certain issues and will accept or reject advice in accordance with these views. This may explain some of the confusion she felt when confronted with a range of post 16 options when she had already planned the course she wished to pursue. I argue that this illustrates how unsolicited information and advice can interrupt the thought processes of a young person who is thinking through a solution to a problem for themselves. Such feelings are articulated by Harriet:

'If I get it like sorted out in my head and I know what I'm going to do and then people come to me with advice then it will make me really confused and that's when I don't appreciate it.'

Several young people gave specific examples of situations where they had rejected advice from others because they did not consider it appropriate. This is exemplified by Liz who describes such a situation:

'When I first started coming down here people pleaded with me to leave my Dad's, but I just point blank refused because my sister was still there. Yea I couldn't leave her there, I couldn't risk it so a lot of people were trying to offer me help then and I was like saying, 'No I'm not going anywhere.'

This illustrates Liz as a 'sibling caregiver' which was identified by Werner (1990) as one of the major protective factors for young people experiencing stressful lives. This resilient disposition enables Liz to think for herself and evaluate options without feeling pressurized by the advice of others. She demonstrates a sense of 'self-efficacy' (Rutter 1987:327) as she talks with pride of her ability to survive despite difficult circumstances.

'I think the only way you can make yourself feel better is by doing it yourself really---I've gone through the worst side of it there's not a lot that could get to me now'.

These examples show young people utilising personal capital to make decisions and evaluate information and advice in accordance with these decisions. It also illustrates that some young people pride themselves on being someone who is not unduly influenced by the opinions of others.

In this section I draw attention to the ways in which young people utilise interests and creative abilities to cope on their own without resorting to support from others. In addition there are a minority of young people who choose not to accept support and for whom independence is an aspect of their identity which contributes to self-esteem. Although the majority of young people are prepared to confide in others and accept advice they will also reject advice which does not accord with their own definition of their situation.

I shall now summarise the conclusions from this chapter.

5.5 Summary and Conclusions

The assumption underlying the Connexions strategy is that the provision of a support service for young people will provide advice and guidance that will enhance inclusion through participation in education, employment and training and offer intensive support to a minority of young people who are experiencing multiple problems. Central to such a service is the relationship formed between a young person and their Connexions PA. The findings in this chapter illustrate that the reality is more complex. Friends and family members remain an important source of support when young people experience difficulties although the advantages of confiding in an impartial 'outsider' is also appreciated at times. Although in my research this support is only provided by a

Connexions PA in a minority of cases, these findings highlight support from youth workers and other practitioners who are important contributors to Connexions partnerships.

This chapter confirms certain findings of the previous chapter. The fact that most young people find mentoring qualities within their families and peer group emphasises the importance of the bonding capital provided by existing social networks. The qualities that inform 'being a good friend', identified in the previous chapter, are repeated by those at the receiving end of 'good friendship' and recur as young people talk of significant relationships with practitioners in formal organisations. The qualities valued by young people in these relationships include: knowing someone over a length of time, confidentiality, trust and giving help and good advice. In addition talk of shared laughter and feelings of equality occur regularly and I argue that these contribute to the feeling that the a practitioner is 'just like a friend'. In a bonding relationship young people experience a sense of being accepted based on a practitioner's ability to empathise with them by listening in a non-judgemental manner and without any preconceived ideas about them. As young people talk of practitioners with whom they bond the youth work principle of impartiality is evident and this principle is implicit in the holistic approach articulated in this thesis.

This research identifies personal capital as young people cope with difficulties on their own. It also draws attention to the fact that a minority of young people, who prefer not to confide in another person, may experience offers of support as an invasion of privacy. Even where advice is sought young people may use personal capital as agency and reject the advice given. I argue, therefore, that another essential ingredient of a holistic approach is to respect young people's ability to determine the course of their own lives and accept that this may or may not include cooperation with support services.

This chapter confirms the value of 'mentor rich' settings that provide 'somewhere to go', 'someone to talk to' and 'something to do' (DfES 2006a). I argue that, as bonding relationships formed between practitioners and young people in these environments include an element of choice, this enables characteristics of natural mentoring to be more closely replicated in these settings than in a situation where a Connexions PA is allocated to a young person.

In the next chapter I shall consider the extent to which young people's experiences accord with dominant discourses on the learning society and social exclusion. I shall also

examine professional discourses and how these determine the way in which practitioners relate to young people. I argue that an appreciation of a young person's perspective on learning and social exclusion is implicit in a holistic approach and that this will contribute to the formation of a bonding relationship with its potential to provide bridging capital.

CHAPTER SIX: DISCOURSES IN ACTION

6.1 Introduction

This chapter will explore the three dominant discourses that inform the Connexions agenda, namely the learning society, social exclusion and the value of professional expertise and consider the extent to which these discourses inform young people's understanding of themselves. In section 6.2 of this chapter I consider the extent to which the discourse on learning, which informs the Connexions strategy, accords with the views and experiences of young people. Utilising these findings I then discuss the extent to which learning, in its wider context, is valued by young people and examine the effectiveness of a key theme of the Connexions strategy which is to provide 'financial support for those in learning' (DfEE 2000:4.2).

Increasing participation in education, employment or training is the principal target of Connexions and success of the service is assessed by the reduction in the number of young people classified as NEET. In section 6.3 I shall consider the Government's discourse on social exclusion which relates to non participation in education, employment or training and examine the ways in which young people actually experience social exclusion, including a lack of permanent accommodation, benefit dependency, low earnings, casual working practices and undeclared working. In addition I shall analyse the way certain young people feel rejected by mainstream society and how this rejection informs their understanding of themselves. I shall conclude this section by discussing the adequacy of the NEET concept in the context of young people's actual experience of social exclusion

In section 6.4 the professional discourses of practitioners working in Connexions partnerships will be discussed. In the previous chapter a key finding identifies qualities which young people value in relationships with practitioners and I shall relate these qualities to the approach of practitioners working in Connexions partnerships. In Chapter 1 a relationship of trust was identified as a central aim of youth work and here I argue that such a relationship is basic to the work of all practitioners working with young people. Therefore I examine the youth work principles of impartiality, confidentiality, empowerment and voluntary access and determine the extent to which these inform the practice of both youth workers and Connexions PAs. These principles relate to the qualities already identified by young people as important in the bonding process. I argue

that the principle of impartiality, which is fundamental to a holistic approach and which involves starting where a young person is without any preconceived ideas about them, involves the acceptance of the aspects of a young person's life which are important to them and which may contribute to feelings of self-esteem.

I shall now consider the discourse on the learning society.

6.2 The Learning Society

6.2.1 *Experiences of the Educational System*

In this sub-section I utilise some of the findings of previous chapters to establish an appreciation of the ways in which young people experience the educational system and re-emphasise the qualities that contribute to positive relationships between young people and teachers and lecturers. In examining young people's experience of education there is evidence that other important aspects of their lives, namely friends, family, interests and creative activities, frequently take precedence over the requirements of formal education and at the extreme this can lead to expulsion from school.

In Chapter 4 the educational experiences of eight young people who have definite career ambitions were examined and for Harriet and John, who continued their studies in a school sixth form, these were predominantly positive. Wendy, Sophie and Jack, who pursued their career ambitions at college, found the college environment preferable to school. However Sid, who had positive experiences at school, was unsuccessful in the examination system but nevertheless had ambitions for promotion in a career in the service industry. Finally, Liz and Pete had predominantly negative experiences of school but had clear career ambitions and subsequently obtained vocational qualifications. Later in Chapter 4 success and failure in the educational system was considered in relation to feelings of self-esteem. Findings indicate that, in addition to Liz and Pete, six other young people had negative experiences at school and, of these, five were dependent on benefits and four without permanent accommodation. However Colleen, Heather and Maria all talked positively about school but at the time of my final contact with them all were dependent on benefits and Colleen and Heather were without permanent accommodation. It is evident that, despite a suggested relationship between negative experiences at school and social exclusion, this outcome cannot be predicted with certainty, whilst positive experiences do not necessarily lead to inclusion.

Chapter Five illustrates the potential for school to provide a mentor rich environment with the evidence that certain teachers play a significant role in some young people's lives. The cases of Samantha, Pete and Simon indicate that it is possible to form a bonding relationship with one particular teacher even in situations where educational experiences are predominantly negative. Qualities valued in these relationships emphasise the importance of a person who will listen, treat you as an equal' and share laughter. These sentiments are also expressed by the young people who continued their education at FE colleges, all of whom spoke of being treated 'like an adult'. The importance of this is illustrated by Sophie's comment:

'I find because they treat you more like adults and with respect people don't go against them and try and play up like they did at school. Like if for example someone at school wanted to go to the toilet and said, 'Can I go to the toilet' and the teacher said, 'No', then people they go on and they go, 'I really need to go'--- but at college you just walk out and just walk back in'.

The young people on college courses also considered that feelings of equality were enhanced by the use of first names. Jack values this saying:

'At college you're treated more like another adult and the tutors talk to you as if you're a friend and advise you and help you---if we're just talking to them we use their first names.'

This indicates that certain qualities, similar to those important in bonding relationships and identified in the previous chapter, can contribute to a positive relationship with a lecturer, encouraging a more successful learning environment.

Chapter 4 draws attention to important aspects of young people's lives and although a career and success in the educational system are acknowledged by the Connexions initiative there are other significant areas the policy does not recognise. As young people talked of their experiences of school it was evident that these other areas regularly took precedence over the aims of education expressed in the discourse on the learning society.

The importance of family informed the experiences of Liz and Marion. For Liz learning 'wasn't a priority' as at that time responsibilities for her sister were paramount and similarly Marion considered that 'problems at home' culminated in the fight in defence of her sister which led to her expulsion from school. The importance of relationships with friends was also evident amongst young people who were relatively successful in the educational system. Although Gerry had gained some GCSEs and completed a one year course in music technology the following conversation indicates that popularity with his peers was more important than school work:

Gerry:	I used to be quite a trouble maker.
Rosemary:	Did you yea, what made you do that d'you know?
Gerry:	Oh it was to get popularity I think.
Rosemary:	Really
Gerry:	It was---obviously if you were the kid that annoyed the teachers or did bad things you were [seen as] good.

Sid, Colleen and Maria talked positively about their experiences at school but did not continue in education after sixteen. They all spoke of missing school, but this related primarily to missing the contact with friends. Sid explains this:

'In our year there was about hundred and eighty students and I knew most of them and I still see some of them now but I used to see them day in day out at school now I don't really. I still see some of them but not half as many as what I used to.'

In addition to the importance of friends and family there is also evidence that other interests can conflict with the demands of school work even for those who are reasonably motivated to succeed. This is illustrated as Wendy, who likes reading and watching television, describes her difficulty in concentrating on school work:

'I can't sit down anywhere and just focus---I find it really, really hard because there's too much stuff to do---I've got loads of books at home that I haven't read yet, and I've got like TV, now we've got Sky---and I want to see my friends'.

This sub-section draws a comparison between the rhetoric of the learning society embodied in the statement 'education, education, education' and the reality of young people's experiences. For a minority formal education is a very negative experience but even in this situation there is some evidence that bonding relationships have been formed with a particular teacher. There is also an indication that, even for those with positive experiences of school, friends and family and other important aspects of lives often take precedence over the expressed aims of the educational system. However I argue that, despite certain negative experiences in formal education, this research finds no evidence that young people are alienated from the learning process itself and I shall now consider aspects of learning that young people value.

6.2.2 Valuing Learning

In this section I argue that although some young people have negative experiences at school they are not necessarily alienated from learning per se and I identify three factors which can, for certain young people, make formal learning a satisfying experience. These are the quality of the relationship between teacher and learner, which was identified in the previous section, an inherent interest in the subject matter and a practical component. An appreciation of learning beyond the confines of school is expressed by Pete:

'I don't see myself just sitting down writing---you need your own life experience don't you, that's learning. Since I left school I learnt a lot more than I did in school.'

When he studied cooking at college Pete appreciated the 'hands on experience' which did not involve 'just sitting in the classroom'. Pete's choice of course resulted from his interest in cooking and also from the fact that the course was predominantly practical which enabled him to persevere and gain a qualification.

Several other young people stressed the fact that things learnt in school were not appropriate to equip them for life. In a discussion at 432 on the topic of sexually transmitted diseases, Kim said she had never realised that chlamydia could cause infertility in women and bemoaned the fact that she been required to study French and

would have preferred better sex education, an area which interested her and was relevant to her life.

For three young people, Harriet, John and Joe, an academic education in a school sixth form provided satisfaction but Jack, Sophie and Wendy found the vocationally orientated courses they pursued at FE college preferable to school. For these young people the fact that they were pursuing a course with a practical component in an area where they had a prior interest contributed to their enjoyment of their studies. The value of this is illustrated by Sophie's comment:

'Because it's something I'm interested in I'm really working hard and I'm doing really well on this course---at college the education is down to you----if you want to learn, they won't press you, if you don't turn up for a lesson or something then that's up to you---and most people do turn up to lessons because they want to learn.'

Similarly interest and the desire for a qualification motivated Liz. She was delighted when she gained an NVQ Level 2 in Youth Work although initially she had found it difficult due to a limited education at school. I remember helping her with the meaning of certain words used in the work assignments which she was required to complete. Liz became a strong advocate of the value of learning at school and I recall a situation when a group of young people argued that they could manage without any GCSEs but Liz strongly contested this view emphasising that from her own experience things would have been much easier had she gained appropriate skills whilst at school.

Liz's support for education is based on personal experience but the appreciation of education articulated by Colleen and Tania indicates that they are 'tied in to' the 'UK discourses of the learning society' (Ball et al 2000 p.60) and their comments confirm an acceptance that formal education extends beyond the age of sixteen (DfES 2005b). Although Colleen subsequently failed to gain the appropriate GCSE grades for the college course of her choice, as she talks about her mother, pride in becoming a 'college student' is evident:

'I think she's done a brilliant job of bringing me up---because of the past I had it was horrible---you'd think that now I'd be some little rebel running round nicking cars and not worrying about college'.

Tania also appears to have thoroughly absorbed the rhetoric of the learning society. Despite negative experiences at school and an inability to sustain the concentration required for college courses she says:

'At the moment I'm getting through education so I want to get all the education I can---next year I'm eighteen so I thought there'll be a year now to try and get my career sorted out because otherwise I've got to start paying for it'.

All these young people indicate appreciation for the value of learning either based on personal experience or due to an acceptance of the educational rhetoric of the learning society. Three of these, Pete, Liz and Tania, had negative experiences at school and I shall now consider the experiences of other young people who expressed a strong dislike of school.

For Simon his dislike of school arose from the difficulty he found with the authority exerted by teachers which led to his permanent exclusion. However, he says of schoolwork:

'Maths was my favourite subject, I used to love it [and] algebra's my favourite part of Maths---I was good at school all my work wise it was just I didn't like authority.'

This suggests that Simon actually enjoys learning but other pressures in his life meant that his opportunities in formal education had been limited. Similarly Marion was permanently excluded from school but despite saying that she hated school she spoke of her talent for Art and expressed a wish to study Art again in the future. This indicates that these two young people take pride in their talents but other factors in their lives have prevented them from utilising this personal capital within the formal educational system.

Both Sam and Dave expressed a strong dislike of school, both were without permanent accommodation and in receipt of benefit. For such young people enrolment on

an Entry to Employment (E2E) course entitled them to an additional £48 a week. There was an obvious financial benefit in registering for such a course but in addition to this both Sam and Dave talked very positively about their experiences of E2E. Dave spoke enthusiastically about the different courses he had completed including ones on 'DJ'ing and driving and construction' describing them as 'more fun than school'. Sam also talks of aspects of his course:

> 'The course I'm doing now which is teaching me to improve my English, Maths and stuff is really good, I really love it, the way they teach and stuff is a lot better---they talk to you like you're an adult not a kid. They don't tell you to do it they ask you to do it sort of thing, it's a lot better---[and] there's only like seven in a group at a time and there's like two teachers'.

Sam's comment reflects qualities identified earlier which contribute to positive teacher student relationships reaffirming the value of being treated 'like an adult' with its implications of respect and equality, whilst Dave stresses the interesting content and practical orientation of courses.

In this section four young people are identified who benefit from education despite negative experiences at school. Stephen Ball et al (2000) argue that certain young people:

> 'carry with them 'learner identities' (Rees et al 1997) often severely damaged by their experiences in compulsory education. More learning is the last thing they are interested in'. (Ball et al 2000:8).

However the experiences of Liz, Pete, Sam and Dave suggest that learner identities are not static but capable of change in accordance with factors in the learning environment, namely: a relationship with the teacher that is based on a feeling of equality, a course content which has inherent interest for the young person concerned and one which also includes a practical component. I argue that the majority of young people in this research value learning per se although experiences in compulsory education prior to sixteen can be negative. The findings provide some support for Government plans to increase the

range of vocational courses and work based learning from the age of fourteen (DfES 2006c).

The young people engaged on E2E courses offered positive feedback about E2E but it is arguable that the original motivation for engaging in this was a financial one. 'Targeting financial support to those in learning' is the third key theme of the Connexions strategy (DfEE 2000:4.2) and this includes provision of the Connexions Card and the Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA). It is this that I shall now consider in more detail.

6.2.3 *Financial Support for those in Learning*

The financial incentive to engage in E2E courses is identified in the previous section but here I consider young people who continue in formal education after the age of sixteen. I argue that, for these young people, there is no evidence that this decision is influenced by financial considerations.

Both the Connexions Card and the EMA were launched in 2004 and details were distributed whilst I was conducting second interviews in the school. However despite initial enthusiasm there was no subsequent evidence of anyone applying for a Connexions Card. This lack of interest is confirmed by findings in a Connexions Customer Satisfaction Survey (Brunwin et al 2004:51).

The EMA, offering up to £30 a week to those who continue in education after the statutory leaving age, is a more successful scheme and valued as an additional source of income by those who receive it. In this study eight young people were in full time education after the age of sixteen but three of these, Harriet, John and Sophie were not entitled to EMA because their parents' income was above the maximum limit. Two, Jack and Wendy actually claimed the allowance but three others, Colleen, Joe and Pete, who qualified for EMA did not claim it for a variety of reasons.

Both Wendy and Jack had planned to pursue FE courses prior to the launch of the EMA so this had no influence on their decision to remain in education after the age of sixteen. The allowance is paid directly to young people themselves and both accepted the allowance as a welcome addition to family income. Jack paid his mother fifty pounds a month for 'rent' and used the Christmas bonus to pay for repairs to his moped. However Wendy appeared to have no control over the money herself. Her mother took

responsibility for Wendy's bank card and gave her ten pounds weekly and Wendy was initially unaware that she had received a bonus at Christmas.

Although Colleen, Joe and Pete were entitled to EMA they did not apply for it. Colleen had initially anticipated the new allowance with enthusiasm saying:

> 'Hopefully I can get an EMA, you know they give you up to thirty pounds a week if your family income isn't that good and mine isn't really that good, it's about six thousand a year.'

Colleen did not gain the GCSE grades for the National Diploma in Performing Arts but she did start an easier course at college for which she was entitled to EMA. However she did not apply because she 'didn't send off the form' and after a period in hospital for a tonsillectomy she never returned to college. Joe had a similar reason for not applying for the allowance which confirms his view of himself as a 'lazy sod'. He says.

> 'I keep meaning to get that done, its twenty pounds a week and I can't be bothered. I've had two forms, I've lost them both and I'm ashamed to go and ask for a third one. It's two forms and the Government would give me twenty pounds a week [and] I've also missed out on the bloody bonus.'

Pete's reason for not applying for EMA also initially appeared to be due to forgetfulness but in a later interview he reveals another motive saying:

> 'It means you have to go to every lesson---because you have to go to the lesson and get signed by the tutor or teacher'.

It was evident as we talked that Pete managed to cope with the course by going to some lessons but also skipping a few and in so doing he succeeded in gaining an NVQ Level 2 which enabled him to work as a chef. The rules that govern the allocation of EMA were too restrictive for Pete and he used personal capital to cope with formal education in a manner which enabled him to gain a qualification appropriate for his career as a chef.

These findings identify eight young people who had definite plans to continue with further education prior to the launch of the EMA which indicates that these plans

were not dependent on the prospect of financial support. With one exception all continued with their courses and for two the EMA was a welcome addition to family income. However the fact that three young people failed to apply for EMA despite entitlement illustrates that the factors which motivate young people to participate in education are not primarily financial.

Learning also informs the Government's approach to social inclusion which is defined as inclusion in education, employment or training, with a requirement that any employment should include an element of training. The term NEET is applied to young people who are not in education, employment or training and the main target of Connexions is to reduce the numbers of young people defined as NEET. The next section will examine this discourse on social exclusion from the perspective of the young people involved in my research.

6.3 Social Exclusion
6.3.1 'A Place of My Own'

In this section I shall consider how young people actually experience feelings of exclusion in their lives and determine the relevance of the NEET concept in establishing an understanding of these feelings. I begin with assessing how a lack of permanent accommodation contributes to a sense of social exclusion, a factor which will also be applicable to certain disadvantaged young people who participate in the NDYP initiative.

In Chapter 4 a lack of permanent accommodation was identified as a factor contributing to a sense of not belonging anywhere, and I argued that this indicates that feelings of social exclusion arising from the lack of a permanent home had become integrated into these young people's understanding of themselves. Conversely, two young women who had experienced hostel accommodation identified having a 'place of their own' as the most important thing in their lives confirming that having their own home was a defining aspect of their identity.

At the OAC and 432 finding suitable accommodation was a prime topic of concern for many of the young people using these centres and the interviews and discussions in the centres reveal the complex nature of homelessness. The reasons for a lack of permanent accommodation are as varied as the types of accommodation used on different occasions by young people, which include hostels, bed and breakfast accommodation, shared accommodation in the private sector, private rented flats, a squat,

a caravan, a tent, sleeping on a couch or the floor in a friend's house and sleeping rough. The most common reason for a lack of permanent accommodation is that the young person has either chosen to leave home after disagreements with a parent or a parent has asked them to leave. A break down in his relationship with his mother led to Simon spending his teenage years in the care of the local authority. He found it difficult to settle with any foster parents and described different experiences which varied from complete exclusion from family life and eating alone in a conservatory to an expectation that he become one of the family, calling his foster parents Mum and Dad. Simon's descriptions of life in foster care revealed a sense of exclusion from normal family life. After many failed attempts at placing Simon with foster parents he was eventually placed in emergency accommodation and he describes this as a happier experience:

'That was like a normal road which was just a house---and it was just like staff that come round to make sure you're OK---so they like helped me budget and helped me cook. They didn't treat me like a child---they didn't seem to try to have power over you---just helped you if you needed any help which I thought was really good and I never had any complaints from any of them because I was really good.'

In this accommodation Simon experiences a measure of independence and values the equality of his relationship with the staff. This again highlights a quality identified as fundamental for positive relationships between young people and practitioners. However, as this was emergency accommodation and Simon had reached the age of sixteen, he had to move out and he then experienced a succession of supported lodgings and hostels including the Oldport Foyer from which he was 'kicked out' after two months because he 'smashed up' his room. At the time I met Simon he was approaching his eighteenth birthday, living in a smaller hostel but hoping to move in to rented accommodation. Although I was unable to secure a subsequent interview it was reported by staff at OAC that he had a new girl friend and was living with her and her mother. When I visited the centre fifteen months later it transpired that Simon was still in the same accommodation and he and his girlfriend had a baby daughter. His girlfriend was working and Simon was looking after the baby and was, by all accounts, a very caring and proud father. Simon was still one of the Government's social exclusion statistics as he was not in education,

training or employment but it is feasible that at that particular stage in his life he felt a sense of belonging and inclusion with a home and a family with whom he bonded. When compared with Simon's earlier expressions of exclusion his forward movement is considerable and yet, according to Government NEET statistics, his situation is unchanged. This is evidence that inclusion based on strong bonding ties does not have validity in an analysis of exclusion which is based solely on non-participation in education, employment or training.

Tania's experience also illustrates the inadequacy of the NEET category for understanding the complexities of social exclusion. Tania left home at the age of fifteen to live with a cousin because of disagreements with her mother. At the age of sixteen she moved into a hostel from which she was later evicted and this was followed by a period where she moved between the houses of different friends followed by a spell in another hostel, a second eviction and another period where she was homeless and sleeping on other people's floors. At this stage her mother intervened with practical support, a form of bridging capital. Tania confided in me one day, when we talked at the centre, that her mother was acting as guarantor for a flat and that she had lied to the landlord saying that she was eighteen and studying law. It was after moving in to the flat with her boyfriend that Tania addressed her drugs problem. She was still dependent on benefits and defined as NEET and the forward movement made by Tania in getting a 'place of her own' and addressing her addictions was accorded no recognition by NEET statistics. Once again according to these measures Tania's situation was unchanged.

Simon and Tania's cases illustrate situations where progress is made that is not recognised in the NEET statistics. Conversely the cases of Sam, Dave and Geoff illustrate situations where young people are temporarily in education and therefore recorded as a success statistic according to the NEET criteria despite the broader circumstances of their lives. Both Sam and Dave were without permanent accommodation and dependent on benefits but they were considered as socially included by the NEET statistics as both were participating in E2E courses. I met Geoff on my first day at 432 but although I talked with him regularly he did not wish to give an interview. He had been asked to leave home by his mother during his final year at school and had gained support from workers at 432. He had been evicted from three hostels and for a time slept in a caravan owned by a youth worker but eventually acquired permanent accommodation through a local charity. At the beginning of my time at 432 Geoff had attended a course at the local college which he

gave up in the second term. However for a short spell Geoff was a success statistic in the Government's aim to reduce the number of young people defined as NEET.

These anomalies highlight the inadequacy of using NEET statistics to measure social exclusion. For these young people the lack of a 'place of my own' is a major factor contributing to a sense of social exclusion and gaining permanent accommodation represents significant forward movement. However, despite acquiring permanent accommodation, young people continue to experience difficulties as they attempt to manage on benefits or low incomes. This is another factor producing a sense of social exclusion that is not taken into account by NEET statistics and it is this that I shall now consider.

6.3.2 *Managing on Benefits and Low Incomes*

In this section I examine the problems that young people encounter as they attempt to manage on benefits and low incomes which reflects the relatively low levels of benefit and the effects of flexible, de-regulated labour markets identified in Chapter 1. I draw attention to the fact that, although most young people have experience of paid work, certain personal and structural factors make it difficult for them to gain permanent employment. I argue that feelings of social exclusion are increased by the lack of the resources viewed as basic necessities by most people in society. These experiences of social exclusion are also applicable to many young people participating in NDYP and such feelings are not addressed by the concept of NEET.

For those who acquire a 'place of my own' there are additional financial responsibilities. Although the rent is usually paid by housing benefit there are other general household bills. Marion, who has the tenancy of a council flat, describes coping on benefit with a young child:

> 'You've got your income support and your child benefit which is a hundred pound a week, then you've got to get your baby milk---you've got to buy nappies, wet wipes, you've got to buy some clothes, you've got to put your electric on the key---then you've got to have your TV license, I still haven't got that yet---and you've got to maintain [standards]---I mean cleaning products, cleaning products for yourself.'

When I suggested there was also food to buy Marion replied:

'Well that's irrelevant, if you eat you eat---your kids come first'.

Securing their own flats brought problems of debt for Geoff and Tania. Geoff was due to appear in court for non payment of water bills and Tania described herself as 'in debt up to my eyeballs'. She had arrears on her electricity bills and TV license and feared a thousand pound fine. Her problems arose partly because her entitlement to incapacity benefit, based on a diagnosis of depression, had been withdrawn when her health improved. At the time of the third interview she was receiving bridging benefit of thirty pounds a fortnight and was confused by the different information she had received which was compounded by a visit to the local Job Centre when:

'they asked me to put all my bills down on paper and I wrote it all down and she sent it off to Sheffield for some reason, even though I'm not from Sheffield.'

Tania's sense of confusion with the benefits system mirrors the experiences of other young people. For many the transition at eighteen from 'severe hardship allowance' to 'job seekers allowance' is fraught with problems. Benefits are frequently delayed and young people are forced to rely on the food available at the drop in centres and other charitable institutions. This highlights the value of the benefit advice provided at OAC where sympathetic and knowledgeable workers support young people with their financial problems.

I argue here that young people's experience of social exclusion relates to fundamental aspects of their lives. The lack of permanent accommodation was discussed in the previous section and in this section there is evidence of shortage of money for basic necessities. In addition to food there is a need for adequate facilities to wash clothes and maintain personal hygiene. Marion expresses this need when she says:

'You've got to maintain [standards]---I mean cleaning products, cleaning products for yourself.'

Maintaining an acceptable appearance is a means by which these young people can feel included in the wider society and retain a measure of self-esteem. During my time at 432 and OAC virtually all the young people I met took a pride in their appearance and clean clothes were basic to achieving this. Geoff always arrived at 432 clean shaven, his hair carefully arranged with jel and wearing clean clothes even when he was living in a caravan with no washing facilities. Several discussions took place in this centre about managing laundry and there was a suggestion that a washing machine should be provided in the centre for use by young people. Those in privately rented flats complained that kitchen equipment rarely included a washing machine and although launderettes were available they cost five pounds for one load of washing. I spoke regularly with Tania at 432 and she told of her dislike of the communal washing machines in the hostel and her plan for a washing machine in her room. Although she did not achieve this it indicates the importance that personal cleanliness plays in maintaining a level of self esteem for these young people (Harter 1993).

As the young people spoke of problems in managing on benefits they frequently expressed a desire to 'find a job'. With the exception of Tania all the young people had experience of working for short periods. However lack of qualifications and the chaotic nature of lives are not always conducive to sustained periods of employment. Geoff had a series of jobs that lasted for the two week probationary period after which he was either told that he was not suitable for the job or he left of his own accord because he disliked the people with whom he worked. Structural conditions in the labour market mean many young people find casual work for limited periods of time whilst others engage in undeclared working for relatives or friends. Both Simon and Dave talked of periods working at a cash and carry store where, despite a six month contract with a recruitment agency, there was no guarantee that their labour would be required on arrival at the store. Dave describes this experience:

> 'It's all gone a bit pear shaped really this week because the health and safety officer's going in---so I haven't really had much work---it's supposed to be five pound an hour but I haven't actually worked this week---you only get paid for the hours you work, which is a bit of a nightmare really.'

Sam also draws attention to structural conditions in the labour market as he expresses concern about his friend Tony:

> 'He's---going for a lot of agency work, which I told him he needs to get out of and get into a proper paid job like Asda---he's doing all tele sales and stuff, shitty jobs, door to door sales.'

These responses indicate the respective value placed on different jobs revealing an appreciation of the difference between 'shitty jobs' and 'a proper paid job like Asda' (Johnston et al 2000). It was evident from my conversations with young people that the Modern Apprenticeships, introduced by the Government in 2001, were not viewed as an acceptable alternative to paid work. Matt the CSA at 432 confirms this impression:

> 'If a young person's living independently, like a lot from 432, to suggest that they're going to have seventy quid a week for the next two to three years---it's not practical so they tend not to look at that as an option'.

He also confirmed that Apprenticeships in certain areas, notably construction and motor trades, were oversubscribed with insufficient employers to meet the demand.

I also became aware of the way in which the benefits system itself acts as a work disincentive for those living in hostels. The true cost of a hostel place is assessed at over £100 a week and for those young people without any income this is paid by housing benefit. However there is a threshold to earnings above which the young person is required to pay the full cost of their hostel place. Associated with this is the worry that a cessation of earnings could result in a protracted return to benefit entitlement and the possibility of a period with no income at all. Tania expressed concern about this as I helped her with a job application for a part time job in a shop. Her main concern was the number of hours she was able to work without losing housing benefit and in the event she chose not to submit this application.

Despite problems with paid work three young people spoke enthusiastically about their experiences of 'undeclared working'. Their accounts reflect findings that such jobs, 'maintain their self identity, their self respect and their incomes' (MacDonald 1994:526). Both Pete and Dave worked for their fathers whilst officially registered at school. For

Pete this work influenced his plan to train as a chef which became an important aspect of his identity. Similarly Dave talks with pride about working with his father on building sites:

> 'I used to love it I used to go out to work, come home and I'd just be black filthy and I'd just be tired and I'd just know then that I did actually do a hard day's work and I earnt my money for that day'.

Unfortunately disagreements with his father meant an end to this work and a search for independent accommodation. Another young person who talked about 'undeclared working' was Dick who visited 432 regularly. He had enrolled on the same catering course as Pete but dropped out after the first term. However he talked proudly about his work in a restaurant owned by a cousin but despite his success in this job he felt unable to list it on his CV as it was 'black working' where he had paid no tax or insurance. These three examples illustrate the potential for family members to supply bridging capital by providing employment. In Pete's case this was successful and resulted in a qualification as a chef. However for Dave and Dick their experience of undeclared working provided an introduction to a area of work which they enjoyed but which did not result in official employment.

This section establishes that feelings of exclusion are experienced by young people who are dependent on benefits and low wages. Attention is drawn to anomalies in the benefits system which, in addition to being very confusing and unreliable, also acts as a work disincentive for those living in hostels. The majority of young people have experience of paid work and want a 'proper job' but structural features of the labour market mean that most of these young people are dependent on casual or undeclared work. It is also argued that Apprenticeships are not a viable alternative for those in temporary accommodation and dependent on benefits. Findings indicate that many young people dependent on benefit find it difficult to satisfy basic needs for adequate food and the maintenance of personal hygiene, a lack of the resources that most people in society consider to be basic necessities. However, the NEET concept does not account for the sense of social exclusion that arises from inadequate financial resources.

I argue that many of these young people experience a sense of forward movement which is not recognised by the NEET concept. In addition young people feel that such

progress, which enhances their self-esteem, is not respected by society as a whole. I shall now consider sensitivities to the attitudes of others expressed by these young people which illustrate feelings of social exclusion.

6.3.3 *A Sense of Social Exclusion*

In this section I draw attention to the sensitivities that young people express in relation to the stereotypical ways in which they feel they are perceived by wider society. I argue that this suggests that a sense of social exclusion has become integrated into their feelings about themselves. I also argue that the NEET concept, which has entered the vocabulary of Government publications and Connexions workers, is a Government approved means of stereotyping young people.

Tania's situation still placed her in the NEET category despite the fact that she had made considerable personal progress. Permanent accommodation and tackling her misuse of drugs and alcohol reduced Tania's depression and meant that she no longer qualified for disability allowance. As Tania struggles to manage on a bridging allowance she describes her attempt to get money for food from the benefits agency:

'I went down there and said, 'Would you be able to help me,' and they said, 'No, you're going to have to go into the churches and get food from there in the evenings.' I've done that when I was homeless and I don't want to be sitting there full of like drunken people and smack heads---I know it all sounds a bit stuck up but---I've been there I've done that I don't want to do that again.'

This extract illustrates that Tania is conscious of the progress she has made but feels that this is not appreciated by workers at the benefits agency. Sam on the other hand deals with the attitude of other people by invoking his sense of humour in response to the people who he feels stereotype him as an unemployed lay about. He talks of the 'grumpy adults' he encounters on the street and describes these by using different voices to emphasise his point:

'People on the street who go, 'you should get a life, get a job, join the army or something'. So they give advice, 'join the army', that's a good life! That's not a life at all that's taking your life away'.

Although Sam is aware of the stereotypes applied to him by others in society this humourous approach confirms an earlier suggestion that Sam does not feel a sense of social exclusion.

Tania resents the treatment she receives and Sam copes with it by using humour. However Liz, who is in a stable relationship with her son's father and works as a youth worker still retains feelings of exclusion despite changes in her circumstances. Her comments reflect a sensitivity to the stereotype of the single mother:

> 'I think it shouldn't matter what other people think of you but I mean I get it walking down the road. I'll be walking down the road with Thomas for example and you get people look at you and they think you're just a single mother, on benefits, not doing anything with their lives and it couldn't be any further from the truth but that's how people look at you and that's the impression they give---I'm not the only person who feels that, there are a lot of people who have said to me, 'I feel like that walking down the road', it couldn't be further from the truth but that's how sometimes society can make you feel'.

It can be argued that Liz and the other young mothers she knows have internalised the contemporary discourse about the single mother and feel stigmatized by this. It has been established that, for these women, being a mother and caring for a child is an important aspect of their identity which enhances their self-esteem but the prevalent discourse on the single mother totally disregards this. Marion, who has no partner and is dependent on benefits, talks of feelings of exclusion when attending ante-natal classes:

> 'I think when you sit there when you're single and you're going to be a Mum and everybody's sitting there with partners you feel really bad.---It's not just me that's found it, I've spoke to loads of other single Mums that feel the same---you're just sat there with a friend and you know everybody else has come with their partners because you have to introduce yourself to the group and it's like, 'this is my husband, this is my wife'---and 'oh yes this me and this is my best mate Mandy and she's just come along today because I'm single basically'---but you don't want to say that d'you know what I mean'.

Marion's experience indicates that the prevalent discourse on the single mother informs her understanding of herself. This also influences the sensitivity expressed by Maria who resents the assumption that, because she is young, she is not a competent mother:

> 'I'm not really into things like mother and baby groups, I think they're patronising. I don't like people telling me because I know---just because I'm young people assume that I don't know and I do and I think one person's way of looking after a baby isn't necessarily the right way'.

Alison also expressed feelings of sensitivity when she felt a teacher was questioning her ability to care for Steven adequately. She was upset by the teacher's attitude and asked my advice when we met at 432. Steven had a rash on his body which did not irritate and Alison thought it was due to washing powder to which he was allergic. She said that she had had the same problem herself and it was just a matter of sorting out the right washing powder. Evidently Steven had told her that the teacher had looked at the rash whilst he was changing for PE which made Alison angry and she said to me, 'They're not supposed to do that are they?' I understood Alison's anger but suggested she should talk to the teacher and explain her own concern about the rash and the action she was taking to deal with it.

This section has considered aspects of the reality of young people's lives which contribute to feelings of social exclusion. These include a lack of permanent accommodation and a reliance on benefits and low incomes which mean they do not have things which the majority of people in society view as basic necessities. In addition there is evidence of a sense of social exclusion arising from an awareness of the contemporary stereotypes of unemployed young people and single mothers. The dominant discourse of social exclusion that informs Connexions targets relates to lack of inclusion in education, employment and training but this does not address any of the issues, identified in this section, which contribute to feelings of exclusion. I argue that the term NEET, which has entered the vocabulary of Connexions workers, is a Government sanctioned means of stereotyping young people that indicates a simplistic approach to understanding social exclusion.

The young people in this research project are all attempting to cope with their lives despite difficulties. All have made contact with organisations which offer support

and all value relationships with adults to whom they feel able to relate on a basis of equality. These different professionals have basic principles that inform their approach to working with young people and it is these professional discourses, first articulated in Chapter 1, that I shall now examine in the context of the three case studies.

6.4 Professional Discourses

6.4.1 *Forming a Supportive Relationship*

In the two previous sections of this chapter dominant discourses that inform the Connexions agenda have been contrasted with the manner in which they are experienced by young people themselves. In this section I shall consider a third discourse that underlies the Connexions strategy, namely that of professional expertise. The relationship between a young person and their Connexions PA is a fundamental element in Connexions delivery and the Connexions Strategy Documents envisages a 'new profession of personal adviser' (DfEE 2000:6.23-6.26) with a new professional qualification, the CPAD. In previous chapters findings have established essential qualities that young people value in relationships with practitioners. This section will utilise these findings and establish the extent to which these accord with practitioners' perspectives on the principles that guide their work. However attention should be drawn to the limitations of this analysis of practitioners perspectives as, although a range of agencies contribute to the Connexions partnerships, the findings here are based on observations in just three case study centres with interviews conducted with only seven practitioners, four of whom were involved in youth work and three who were Connexions workers. These practitioners came from the range of different professional backgrounds identified in Chapter 3. I argue that, for all practitioners working with young people, the relationship they establish with a young person is fundamental to successful outcomes as it has the potential to provide both bonding and bridging capital. However, for youth workers, building a relationship based on trust is a primary goal (Smith 2002, Maychell et al 1996). I argue therefore that the youth work principles of impartiality, confidentiality, empowerment and voluntary access have relevance for all practitioners. In considering these principles I will demonstrate that there is more variation in attitude and approach between different workers in the Youth Service than between certain youth workers and Connexions PAs.

Findings in the previous chapter emphasise qualities valued in relationships with practitioners which include knowing someone over a length of time, listening,

confidentiality, trust, caring, a non judgmental approach and giving help and good advice. There is also evidence of the importance of shared laughter which contributes to feelings of equality and friendship. As young people talk of the practitioners with whom they bond the youth work principle of impartiality is evident. Marion felt accepted by the workers at OAC who related to her in a non-judgemental manner and Pete valued teachers who made their own judgements about him and '[don't] listen to what other people [say]'. These comments confirm the value of the principle of impartiality which involves acceptance of a young person by starting where they are and working at a pace appropriate for them without any preconceived ideas about them. Acceptance implies an understanding and appreciation of important aspects which inform young people's identities and enhance their self esteem which, I argue, is fundamental to a holistic approach. The significance of this is illustrated as Martin, the manager of OAC, talks about the feedback he has from young people:

> 'One of the nicest bits of feedback we get from young people is that we accept them for who they are. Often some of the clients we work with we've got loads of history with them---but they come here and this is here and now. We don't exactly forget what's been happening before but it never gets in the way of a positive relationship now'.

However at 432 there were, at times, quite determined attempts to change attitudes and language usage which did not reflect acceptance. However this approach varied with different workers and there was a noticeable change when Liz began to take more responsibility for drop in sessions. Liz's approach indicated an acceptance and sensitivity to young people's situations which reflected the youth work principle of impartiality. It was however difficult to determine whether this resulted from the Level 2 diploma in youth work for which she was studying or from a natural empathy arising from her personal experiences.

A principle that is fundamental for all practitioners working with young people is confidentiality. This is valued highly by young people and associated with trust. For some, a lack of trust in friends influenced them to confide in someone in the formal sector. As Tania talks about her relationship with Liz she articulates the essence of what young people understand by confidentiality:

'I've learnt to trust Liz---it's the only person I've known that I've spoke to and haven't gone back and told anybody'.

However there were instances where young people considered that their confidences had not been respected by workers in the formal support system. It was accepted that workers at both 432 and OAC discussed aspects of their work in order to gain support and advice from other workers within the organisation. The outcome of such discussions resulted in the situation where Pete felt overwhelmed by several youth workers attempting to offer help. Similarly Tania, angered by a breach of confidence by her Connexions PA who had told her mother that she was making herself intentionally homeless says:

'It ain't right---they shouldn't be giving my details over to somebody else whether it is my Mum, my aunty or whatever---my details is between me and my Connexions worker.'

Despite these examples of breaches of trust, confidentiality is of paramount importance in the professional discourses of all practitioners. Confidentiality policies were prominently displayed at the OAC, in the TLC and in the Connexions section of the library at St Peter's school. In addition workers expressed concern about obtaining the consent of young people before sharing information with practitioners from other agencies or recording personal information on a data base. Liz, who had recent experience of the issues which affect young people, speaks as a youth worker about her concern that the Connexions strategy includes the practice of storing information about young people on a computer:

'If you start writing things down and putting it in a filing cabinet or on a computer you won't find anything out from anyone---no one wants their life story written down and kept in a filing cabinet, do they? Fair enough if you're talking to someone you keep it lock and key up here [Liz points to her head] you know it's confidential but if its been written down that could be jeopardized and someone could read it.'

This reveals that Liz is very aware of the importance of confidentiality and that she is punctilious in respecting confidences herself but wary of recording details that may be read by others. Sarah also expressed concern that trust may be jeopardized and confidences restricted if young people know personal details are 'being recorded or passed to other agencies'. She managed the requirement of the Connexions data base by recording her contact with a young person and ticking 'information and guidance' as an outcome which avoided revealing any specific details about a particular young person. Addressing this concern Helen, a Connexions PA and former careers guidance worker at St Peter's school, draws attention to the fact that:

> 'The information doesn't go beyond Connexions, the Government needs statistics not names'.

These comments indicate that information recorded is limited to certain categories that can be easily converted into statistics. Confirming this Martin talked of a new data base that was being introduced by the Youth Service to monitor the progress of young people which was similar to that used by Connexions, stressing that young people could opt for anonymity or a pseudonym if they chose.

Sharing information about a young person with other practitioners is a contentious aspect of the partnership working fundamental to the Connexions agenda. All workers stressed the importance of gaining the consent of the young person before passing any information about them to another agency. I was given a copy of the Connexions consent form that young people are required to sign in such a situation and although within the Youth Service consent to share information had been verbal Martin showed me the outline of a 'Permission to Share' form being prepared for use by youth workers. He emphasised that in all situations only relevant information is shared:

> 'I do mean just the relevant stuff not the whole lot'.

It is evident from the foregoing that issues of confidentiality and consent inform the professional discourses of both youth workers and Connexions workers. Information recorded is limited to certain categories that are easily convertible into statistics allowing for anonymity if this is the choice of the young person. In addition information shared

with another practitioner requires a young person's consent and will only include information that is strictly relevant. These confidentiality precautions may serve to reduce the concerns expressed by Liz that 'no one wants their life story written down and kept'.

Another quality that young people value in practitioners with whom they bond is their ability to give help and good advice. I argue that help and advice is a means by which young people who feel confused and overwhelmed by their present situations are empowered to move forward by themselves. Moreover where advice is found to be reliable and accurate the trust of a young person in a practitioner is enhanced. The principle of empowerment informs the discourses of both youth workers and Connexions PAs but is given a different interpretation by different workers.

Sarah the project manager at 432 questions the value of partnership working that informs Connexions and considers that this undermines the youth work principle of empowerment which she articulates as 'educating young people to be able to do [things] for themselves':

> 'The strength of the project has been the youth work approach---but with Connexions the role of having to intervene with young people to resolve issues with other agencies and having to resolve housing issues is very different from the way I work which is more around educating young people to be able to do that for themselves'.

However, as Helen a Connexions worker talks about career guidance, it is evident that the principle of empowerment also informs career guidance work where young people themselves are 'in the driving seat' and 'facilitating' decisions. She describes this process:

> 'It's pulling together all the different aspects of a person that you can--- helping them to be clear about their abilities, likes, dislikes, strengths, weaknesses---to help them to see what the options are---effectively they're in the driving seat and they are facilitating it.'

This illustrates two different approaches to empowerment. In Helen's account young people are given information and support with which they are empowered to make

their own decisions. However at 432 the youth workers did not have expertise in areas such as housing, benefits and careers and without accurate information young people with minimum levels of education find it extremely difficult to do things for themselves. The practice at 432 was to tell young people about the appropriate agency and encourage them to make a telephone call to arrange an appointment. In contrast at OAC, which is also financed by the Youth Service, there were a range of workers with expertise in such areas as housing and benefits and essential application forms were kept at the centre. Young people form a relationship of trust with workers who are able to give correct information on certain issues thus empowering young people in an effective manner. On several occasions I watched as a worker went to sit in a quiet corner with a young person to discuss relevant issues. The young person filled in the appropriate form themselves but asked advice from the worker when necessary and sometimes discussed with the worker the different alternatives available. I argue that the provision of accurate information that enables a young person to decide between available options is the basis of true empowerment. These findings illustrate that although the principle of empowerment informs the discourse of both youth workers and Connexions PAs, the interpretation of this principle varies. It is evident that the interpretation by youth workers at OAC has more in common with that of a career guidance specialist working for Connexions than with fellow youth workers at 432.

The final principle that I shall discuss is that of voluntary access and I argue that this contributes to the feelings of equality that are valued by young people in their relationships with practitioners. This principle informs the professional discourses of both Connexions PAs and youth workers. Voluntary access, which also operates at the TLC, is responsible for the fluctuation in numbers of young people attending all three drop in centres. Sarah at 432 expresses her concern that the principle of voluntary access could be violated by the emphasis on partnership working that informs the Connexions agenda:

> 'There's been an interesting [case] recently with a young person who has a Youth Offending Team around him, and a YADAAS worker and various other workers involved---I negotiated with the offending team worker that I didn't want to be part of a referral order, that he could choose to access me if he wanted.'

Despite such concerns about compromising the principle of voluntary access there was no conflict experienced between partnership agencies working at OAC where Youth Offending Team (YOT) and Young Adults Drug and Alcohol Advice Service (YADAAS) workers both used the centre. An element of compulsion informs meetings with a YOT worker and for Justin, living in the adjacent foyer, OAC was a convenient place to meet his worker. Justin was a frequent visitor to the centre and if he had an appointment with his YOT worker he usually came into the centre some time beforehand to talk to the workers and socialise with other young people. However, although engagement with a YADAAS worker is voluntary, once a young person has agreed to work on these issues it is viewed as a commitment and every effort is made to ensure they keep appointments with their YADAAS worker. On one occasion, when a young woman who lived in Oldport Foyer had not arrived for her appointment, Martin contacted the Foyer and the young woman arrived ten minutes later apologising for her forgetfulness. It is evident that the different rules of engagement for the different agencies using OAC are accepted both by the youth workers and the young people themselves. Nevertheless Martin does acknowledge that the voluntary nature of youth work can be frustrating at times:

> '[It] can sometimes be a bit awkward for us if we're geared up to do a particular thing with somebody and you know if they don't turn up it can be, a pain in the neck in some respects, but that's all part of the thing. You know we're starting from where they are and if where they are is that they're only ready to move at this pace then it's got to be their pace and not ours'.

This comment illustrates the integration of the principles of voluntary attendance and impartiality in a practical youth work situation.

Although young people's engagement with a Connexions PA is voluntary the compulsory nature of school attendance prior to sixteen can create a conflict between the professional discourse of teachers and that of PAs. Ruth, a Connexions Individual Support Adviser whom I met at OAC, talks of her work in a school and the conflict arising when young people in danger of permanent exclusion are referred to her by members of staff:

'I also say if you don't want to be here you don't have to be---I say that to all the young people who come because sometimes they're referred and they don't really want to come---I don't want them to be uncomfortable because they don't want to be there---The one's that were excluded where I had to give a separate sheet to the deputy head, she wasn't very keen on it first of all when I said, 'You don't have to be here if you don't want to be, you can leave it'.

This draws attention to the potential for conflict between agencies which have a principle of voluntary engagement and those where there is an element of coercion. However evidence from the case study at OAC illustrates a situation where agencies with different professional discourses work together in the same centre, with both workers and young people understanding and respecting the rules of engagement for each agency.

This section has examined principles that inform the discourses of both youth workers and Connexions PAs and has drawn attention to the parallels that exist between these principles and the qualities valued by young people in their relationships with practitioners. Although findings reveal that individual workers within a profession interpret these principles differently and apply them with varying degrees of diligence, there is evidence that there is more variation in their interpretation by different youth workers than between certain youth workers and Connexions PAs. In one centre run by the youth service there is a reluctance to engage in the partnership working which is fundamental to the Connexions agenda and a fear that this may undermine basic youth work principles. Alternatively in a different centre, also financed by the Youth Service, partnership working is embraced with enthusiasm and the manager, a youth worker, illustrates how principles informing the professional discourse of youth workers can operate effectively in a partnership situation. However again it must be emphasised that these findings are based on only two case studies in centres which have very different histories. One is a centre engaged in project work with young people and established in the 1960's whereas the other is a centre built in the 1990s and based on recent policies which favour partnership working.

Another factor, which has the potential to influence professional discourses, is the means by which agencies are assessed and the targets which they are expected to achieve and I shall now consider this in more detail.

6.4.2 Influence of targets and assessment procedures

In this section I consider the influence of assessment procedures and Government targets on the professional discourses which inform the practice of youth workers and Connexions PAs. I draw attention to former career guidance workers who attempt to maintain professional standards despite certain constraints imposed by Government requirements and also to an assessment procedure utilised in a youth project that has the potential to jeopardize the basic principle of impartiality that informs the professional discourse of youth workers. I also examine the situation of two workers who value the fact that their work is not subjected to targets. I conclude that targets and assessment procedures do have the potential to compromise certain basic principles that inform professional discourses.

As the targets of Connexions are directed at reducing the numbers of young people who are NEET I asked Helen, a Connexions PA with a background in career guidance, if these targets affected her working practices. Her reply suggests a determination that the professional principles which inform her work should not be compromised:

'No I don't think that happens because I actually think the way we were trained is so deeply entrenched about being client centred. There are some times I feel we're moving away from being client centred and that's what I find difficult, but I would always put that young person's well being and future before any targets.'

Helen's insistence that the needs of each young person should predominate over targets illustrates the case of a Connexions PA who is 'inner' directed (Law 2000:36). This approach also reflects the principle of impartiality which involves starting where the young person is and proceeding at a pace appropriate for their needs. However, despite her insistence that targets did not interfere with the professional principles by which she worked, Helen admitted that the amount of time required to maintain the information required to monitor targets restricted the time she could spend working with young people. Ray, who I met at OAC, also expresses concern about the time commitment involved in tracking young people in order to establish their NEET status:

'I feel it's not an appropriate use of personal adviser's time, I think it's a gross waste of tax payer's money and also job satisfaction, getting us to operate as call centre staff. It's fine following up those young people that we have been mainly working with who know us but for those that we haven't necessarily seen---it does seem a bit daft using our time and to be honest it's because the Government want the information that we're doing it'.

Here Ray expresses strong dissatisfaction at the way in which the Government's demand for statistics disregards the contribution he can make as a career guidance professional. He indicates that this undermines both job satisfaction and self-esteem by equating his professional expertise with that required from call centre staff.

Sarah, working in the outreach youth project at 432, is also frustrated by Connexions targets saying:

'I think setting the sort of goals that Connexions set which lead to education and training are very difficult with this group of young people---it's enough of a goal for them to be able to build a relationship of trust with an adult based on equality.'

This reaffirms the predominance of 'building a relationship of trust' that informs the professional discourse of youth workers. To measure the progress in building such a relationship a six point scale was utilised which ranged from a first meeting where names are exchanged and eye contact made to more regular meetings where a young person shares personal information and demonstrates a willingness to explore issues in depth and take responsibility for aspects of their lives. In reality this became a means of according value to a young person who was prepared to discuss their personal problems with a youth worker. Tania, who chose not to talk about herself, did not score highly on this scale as it did not value stubbornness or independence which were defining aspects of Tania's identity. I argue that this attempt to measure the progress of a relationship could violate the youth work principle of impartiality which involves accepting a young person as they are.

Sarah's concern that the goals of Connexions were inappropriate for the group of young people with whom she worked is paralleled in comments made by NDPAs in respect of the 'hardest to place' clients (Finn 2003:715). In this study NDPAs were

concerned that targets related to placement in unsubsidized jobs did not recognise the 'significant progress' some of these young people had made 'without necessarily getting a job' (*ibid*:717).

However at OAC there was no attempt to monitor progress. Whilst Martin acknowledged the difficulties that targets caused for Connexions workers he was pleased that his work at OAC was not constrained by targets and that his only requirement was to record the number of young people who used the centre and note the category of advice sought. As he talks of the advantage of the lack of targets it is evident that he has internalised the principle of impartiality which informs the professional discourse of youth workers:

> 'One of the lovely things I think about Oldport Advice here is that we are given the freedom to work with where young people are and we're able to do that'.

He showed me the annual figures based on twenty one different categories where support and advice had been sought. He drew attention to fact that many of the young people who attended regularly were identified by the category 'general support' commenting that these young people:

> 'may not have a specific burning issue at that moment, [but] are still benefitting from the service even if it is at that level of having a positive relationship with an adult or an authority figure'.

Similarly the work of Suzie, coordinator of the TLC, was not affected by targets. The TLC was jointly funded by St Peter's School and the local primary care trust with information and support provided at the centre on a range of health issues. Although this centre was governed by certain National Health Service targets Suzie told me, with a sense of relief, that she was subject to no targets whatsoever and her role was to offer support to young people as needed, a role which she performed very well.

This section has explored the influence of targets and assessment procedures on professional practice. There is evidence that Connexions PAs with a background in career guidance struggle to maintain their professional commitment to prioritise the individual needs of young people. Findings also indicate that the Government's demand for

information restricts the time they have available to work with young people. In an outreach youth project a scale which attempted to measure the development of a bonding relationship with a young person had, I argue, the potential to undermine the basic principle of impartiality which informs the professional discourse of youth workers. Two practitioners, whose work is not constrained by Government targets, valued the fact that this enabled them to support young people in the manner they considered appropriate which, for a youth worker, allowed freedom to work in accordance with the principle of impartiality which is basic to a holistic approach. Although, once again, it must be emphasised that these findings are based on limited data, there is an indication that Government targets and assessment procedures may have the potential to undermine established professional practices.

6.5 Summary and Conclusions

This chapter has considered the manner in which the discourses on learning and social exclusion which inform the Connexions agenda are actually experienced by young people. Findings indicate that the majority of young people value learning per se although for some learning at school has been a negative experience where, for a variety of reasons, they have been unable to utilise their personal capital effectively. However, for some of these young people, post 16 learning is a more positive experience which suggests that learner identities are not static. The three factors identified by this research which contribute to a positive learning experience are, a course with both an inherent interest for the young person and a practical emphasis and a relationship between a young person and a teacher which includes qualities identified as fundamental to bonding. The discourse on learning also informs the Government's discourse on social exclusion and a reduction in the numbers of young people identified as NEET is used to monitor the effectiveness of the Connexions strategy. However this chapter draws attention to the experiences of young people who are without permanent accommodation and dependent on benefits and for whom a sense of exclusion has become integrated into their understandings of themselves. This research argues that a reliance on NEET statistics to measure social exclusion does not reflect the experiences of young people. Findings also draw attention to situations where young people who feel they have made progress in their lives are still defined as NEET. This chapter emphasises how prevalent stereotypes

have become integrated into the identities of some young people and argues that the term NEET has, itself, become a Government sanctioned method of stereotyping.

An assumption of professional expertise is a third discourse that informs the partnership between professionals and the relationship between a young person and their PA, both fundamental elements of Connexions delivery. This research has emphasised the significance of a bonding relationship between a young person and a practitioner with the potential for this to provide bridging capital. Establishing such a relationship is fundamental to successful practice for all practitioners and in youth work it is a primary goal. Therefore the final section of this chapter considers the youth work principles of impartiality, confidentiality, empowerment and voluntary attendance from the perspectives of practitioners and young people themselves. Findings indicate that these principles inform the professional discourses of both youth workers and Connexions workers and suggest there is more variation in the application of these principles between different youth workers than between certain youth workers and Connexions PAs although it is acknowledged that this conclusion is based on a limited amount of data. There is also evidence that the imposition of targets and assessment procedures can lead to the violation of these basic principles. It is argued that the principle of impartiality is particularly significant and that this reflects the value that young people attach to being accepted in a non-judgemental manner and to being able to proceed at their own pace, both fundamental to a bonding relationship. Acceptance involves on appreciation of young people's actual experiences of learning, social exclusion and of the other important aspects of their lives which contribute to feelings of self-esteem. I argue that such acceptance of young people is fundamental to a holistic approach.

I shall now consider the overall conclusions of this research.

CHAPTER SEVEN: FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

7.1 Introduction

This thesis set out to explore the impact of the Connexions strategy on the lives of young people. It has grounded this exploration in an understanding of young people themselves, their hopes and concerns, the aspects of their lives that are important to them, their sources of self esteem and their means of support when they experience difficulties. I utilised the concepts of identity and self esteem to assist me in gaining this understanding and employed a qualitative research methodology to achieve this. It involved participant observation and semi-structured interviews in three case study centres which were delivery sites for the Connexions Service. My involvement in these centres over a period of two years provided an opportunity to appreciate the changes that took place in young people's lives and also to appreciate young people's perceptions of Connexions and to assess its claim to be a universal service.

In Chapter One I discussed elements of the Connexions strategy and drew attention to three discourses that inform this strategy, the learning society, social exclusion and professional expertise. In Chapter Two I presented the theoretical perspectives adopted in this thesis, analysing my approach to the concepts of identity and self-esteem and considering the principles of mentoring which inform the relationships formed between practitioners and young people. In Chapter Three I considered elements of the qualitative approach on which this research is based and discussed the value of this approach for accessing identity empirically. In Chapter Four I introduced the young people who contributed to this research and identified the relevance of my theoretical approach to establishing an understanding of these young people. I also discussed the concepts of bonding, bridging and personal capital which I utilised in my analysis of the data as it is anticipated that a relationship with a Connexions PA will provide bonding capital which has bridging potential to move young people into education, employment or training. However, the talents and personal qualities of young people are evident as they make progress in a career or deal with difficult aspects of their lives and this is expressed in the concept of personal capital. In Chapter Five I investigated the sources of support actually utilised by young people and examined the role played in this by the mentor rich settings which were the field sites for this research. In Chapter Six I assessed young people's actual experiences of the discourses on the learning society and social exclusion.

The discourse on professional expertise is relevant to two fundamental elements of Connexions delivery, partnership working and the relationship between a young person and their Connexions PA and I viewed this from the perspectives of young people and practitioners and from my own personal perspective based on observations of relationships in the centres.

Certain key findings arise from the investigations I have described. The portrayal of young people given in Chapter 4 indicates that although for certain young people education and progress in a career is an important aspect of their lives, it is the bonding capital provided by relationships with friends and family members which assumes central importance. In addition, for a majority of young people certain interests and creative activities make their lives meaningful, contribute to self-esteem and, at times of difficulty, can act as a coping mechanism. The centrality of relationships with friends and certain family members also informs self-esteem, with pride taken in qualities associated with being a good friend or family member. For those young people who have a sense of making personal progress, both in a career and in other aspects of their lives, there is evidence of both personal capital and bridging capital and findings indicate that the bridging capital is provided primarily from within their existing social networks. In Chapter 5 an investigation of the support mechanisms actually utilised by young people draws attention to the bonding capital provided by friends and family and how the qualities that inform good friendship recur in these relationships. However a majority of young people also value the relationships which they form with the practitioners whom they meet both in the case study sites and in other situations which they describe during interviews. I argue that the relationships formed with practitioners in the mentor rich settings in this study share some of the key characteristics of natural mentoring relationships, as they are bonding relationships based on choices made by young people themselves. Nevertheless an important finding is that a minority of young people choose not to confide in anyone and take pride in their independence and ability to cope alone. Others take pride in their ability to make informed decisions as to whether or not to accept the advice offered by practitioners.

Chapter 6 draws attention to young people's experiences of learning and of social exclusion and concludes that although there is an association between negative experiences at school and factors associated with social exclusion this outcome cannot be predicted with certainty and positive experiences at school do not necessarily lead to

inclusion. There is evidence that the majority of young people value learning per se despite the fact that some have had negative experiences at school and it is suggested that learner identities are not static but capable of change in response to changes in the learning environment. However I argue that the NEET statistics, used to monitor the success of Connexions, reflect neither the reality of social exclusion nor the progress that young people feel they have made in certain areas of their lives. In section 6.4 the discourse on professional expertise is examined in relation to four principles that inform youth work practice because the primary aim of youth work is to form a relationship of trust with a young person. These principles were found to inform the work of both youth workers and Connexions PAs although at times they were violated by certain practitioners. It is these findings that contribute to my argument that excessive emphasis on reducing the number of young people identified as NEET has the potential to undermine a holistic approach to working with the most vulnerable young people and that it is the approach of practitioners themselves as opposed to Government policy that determines Connexions holistic credentials.

Drawing on these findings this final chapter considers aspects of the Connexions agenda which, for someone with complex needs, aims to ensure that 'all the needs of a young person are met in an integrated and coherent manner' (DfEE 2000 : 6.10). It is envisaged that this will involve a relationship with a PA where bonding ties develop and which has the potential to provide bridging capital by facilitating the young person's participation in education, employment or training. In addition to the targeted support provided for disadvantaged young people the Connexions strategy includes universal provision for all young people. In section 7.2. I examine the experiences and perceptions that the young people who contributed to this research had of Connexions and, utilising these findings, assess the claim that Connexions is a universal service and the 'best start in life for every young person'. In section 7.3. I discuss the implications of a holistic approach and consider situations where a holistic approach is evident and also those which contravene basic principles of this approach. In section 7.4. I examine the relevance to a holistic approach of other essential elements of the Connexions strategy. These include, the relationship between a young person and a PA and partnership working which reflect the discourse on professional expertise, Connexions aim to increase participation in education, employment and training which reflects the discourse on the learning society and, finally, I discuss social exclusion.

7.2 Experiences and Perceptions of Connexions

The rhetoric contained in the title of The Connexions Strategy Document is that Connexions will provide 'the best start in life for every young person'. This is to be accomplished through the four key themes of the strategy which are: i) a flexible curriculum, ii) high quality educational provision, iii) financial support for those who remain in learning after 16 and, iv) outreach, information, advice, support and guidance which embraces the Connexions Service itself where it is anticipated that PAs will provide support for young people facilitating their participation in education, employment or training. In this section I consider the experiences and perceptions that the young people who contributed to this research have of Connexions and determine whether Connexions can be viewed as a universal service and 'the best start in life for every young person'. Some of the young people had negative experiences of the service and of the twenty one young people interviewed only four cases conformed to scenarios envisaged by the Connexions strategy. I shall now examine the experiences of these four young people in relation to the three scenarios envisaged by the triangle of need (DfEE 2000:6.12).

The triangle of need is based on the assumption that Connexions PAs work with young people at different levels according to their need. A minority of young people 'facing multiple problems' and requiring 'integrated and specialist support' occupy the apex of the triangle whereas the majority of young people are located at the base and centre of the triangle and require 'general advice and support' primarily on 'educational and vocational issues' and possibly 'in-depth' support for a short time at crucial stages (DfEE 2000:6.11). The triangle of need represents the universal provision of Connexions and such provision is illustrated in this research by the inclusion of young people with backgrounds and life experiences ranging from the relatively privileged to the severely disadvantaged. John and Sophie, who both came from relatively privileged backgrounds, were the only young people who spontaneously mentioned help they had received from Connexions. Both had proactively sought advice on their chosen careers from the Connexions PA at the school and their use of the service is an example of young people at the base of the triangle of need utilising the service to gain information and advice on education and employment.

Fig 1

The Triangle of Need
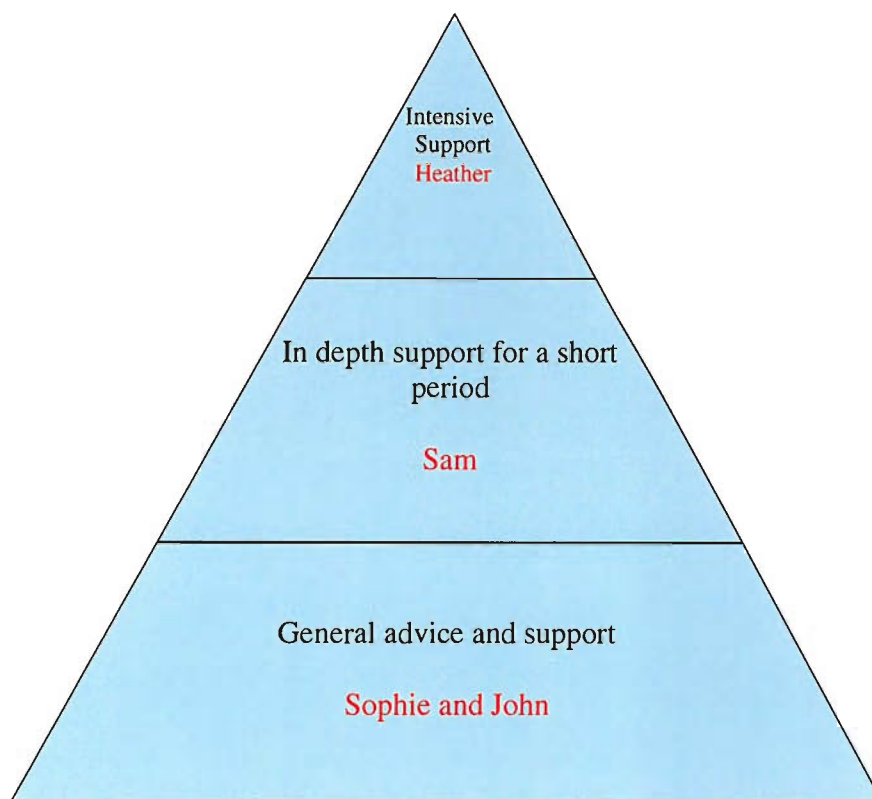
I anticipated that certain disadvantaged young people I interviewed would talk spontaneously about a Connexions PA when considering sources of support. This was not the case but when I specifically enquired about Connexions there were two young people whose use of Connexions accorded with scenarios anticipated by the strategy. Sam's situation illustrates a young person at the centre of the triangle of need who requires 'in depth' support for a short time. Despite being in temporary accommodation and dependent on benefits, Sam did not have individual support from an appointed Connexions PA and decided to visit the Connexions office after seeing an advert about Connexions on a video at a youth club. He visited the Connexions office on several occasions and received help and information on 'housing, jobs and benefit' and through Connexions enrolled for an E2E course which satisfied Connexions targets.

Heather is the fourth young person whose situation conforms to a scenario envisaged by the triangle of need. Heather met her PA when she was pregnant in her final

year at school and considered that this relationship was responsible for her success in her GCSE exams. Although subsequently she was staying in a hostel in a different area and dependent on benefits she still viewed her PA as 'a friend' that she could 'pop into the office' to see without an appointment. Heather's experience of Connexions represents a young person at the apex of the triangle who is 'facing multiple problems' and requires intensive support from a Connexions PA.

Although the experiences of these four young people accord with the original visions of Connexions delivery, this was not the case for the majority of those involved in my research and two young people spontaneously referred to a negative experience with their Connexions PA. Simon felt overwhelmed by the range of options for his future presented to him by his PA (p.89) and Tania was angry at the breach of confidentiality by her PA (p.167). There was also a tendency for young people experiencing disadvantage to establish supportive relationships with practitioners working in mentor rich settings rather than with their allocated PA. Similarly young people at 432 related to the CSA attending that centre in preference to their Connexions PA (p.130). However the fact that these young people are relating to practitioners who are either working for Connexions or for partnership agencies confirms the value of the principle of partnership working which informs the Connexions strategy.

Wendy and Colleen, whom I met in the TLC, were enthusiastic about their experience of Connexions during a pilot study in which they participated in Year 9 but disappointed that there had been no sequel. Despite the fact that both had continuing difficulties at home neither had any subsequent contact with a Connexions PA during their years at school. When I mentioned to Helen, the PA responsible for career guidance at the school, that I had received very favourable feedback on the Connexions pilot she gave a wry laugh saying, 'At that time we thought that was what Connexions was all about.' It was evident that Helen recognised that the potential for Connexions to work with groups of young people who were 'at risk of not participating effectively in education' (DfEE 2000:6.11) had not been realised.

The foregoing has examined young people's experiences of Connexions and I shall now consider some of the perceptions held about the nature of Connexions. In the TLC perceptions of Connexions were confused despite information in school assemblies and tutorials promoting the service. Although one young man claimed he had no knowledge about Connexions whatsoever, the majority of young people associated

Connexions with career advice and guidance. This perception of Connexions also informs the remarks of Dave and Maria at OAC. Although both talked positively about the PA allocated to them during their time at Oldport Foyer they both subsequently relied for support on relationships formed with workers at OAC. Dave's comment reflects the fact that they too associated Connexions with education, employment and training:

> 'It helps you find employment or training, it gets you into training, helps you look for places and helps you hone up on your IT skills like doing CVs and other little bits and pieces to help you find a job---I've got my own PA, Judy from next door---they helped me on to college courses and things, when I left school'.

These findings confirm that the targets of Connexions that relate to reducing the numbers of young people defined as NEET have transferred in to the popular understanding of Connexions. Such a concern is also reflected in the four scenarios identified in this section. Therefore I conclude that young people perceive Connexions primarily as an agency which offers advice and support on matters related to education, employment and training. This conclusion is confirmed by statistics from the quantitative research study quoted in Chapter 1 (p.7) which found that by far the largest percentage of topics discussed with a Connexions PA related to education, employment and training (Brunwin et al 2004).

The question remains as to whether Connexions operates as a universal service. The four scenarios discussed in this section were the only cases in this research where Connexions was utilised in the manner envisaged by the Connexions strategy. These four cases do illustrate the universality of Connexions but it is not possible to draw firm conclusions from such a limited number of users of the service. However, the distribution of these young people within the triangle of need corresponds with the percentages in the different sections of the triangle which was anticipated by a research study on Connexions pilots (Dickinson 2001) . The universality of Connexions is also confirmed by the fact that the majority of young people view Connexions as an agency available to all young people and responsible for the provision of information and advice on education, employment and training. However, it is essential to appreciate that, although the service is available to all young people the actual resource input related to time commitment of PAs is considerably greater for young people with complex needs who

are represented in the apex of the triangle. Therefore, I conclude that, although Connexions is a universal service for all young people it is simultaneously a targeted service with resources disproportionately directed at those with complex needs. However as only a minority of young people in this study utilised the service and as the findings indicate that bridging capital is primarily provided by existing social networks I conclude, from the evidence in this study, that Connexions certainly cannot be regarded as 'the best start in life for *every* young person'. This conclusion is also supported by research that found that, despite their needs, over half of young people interviewed were not receiving current support from a Connexions PA (Hoggarth and Smith 2004).

I shall now examine the implication that Connexions works holistically by ensuring that all the needs of a young person are met.

7.3 Understanding the Complex Realities of Young People's Lives
7.3.1 *A Holistic Approach to Youth Policy*

In this research I have considered the strategy and practice of Connexions in relation to the experiences and perceptions of young people. To reiterate, I argue that excessive emphasis on reducing the number of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) has the potential to undermine a holistic approach to working with the most vulnerable young people and that it is the approach of practitioners themselves as opposed to Government policy that determines Connexions holistic credentials. Connexions is a universal service that provides advice and guidance for all young people and intensive support from a Connexions PA is specifically envisaged for those 'facing substantial multiple problems' (DfEE 2000:6.11). In such situations it is envisaged that the PA will work holistically, appreciating the complex issues that prevent a young person from participating in education, employment or training and, if appropriate, refer them to a partnership agency. It is anticipated that the PA would end any fragmentation of services by taking responsibility

'for ensuring all the needs of a young person are met in an integrated and coherent manner.' (DfEE 2000: 6.10)

However, I argue that, in addition to responding to needs, a genuinely holistic approach requires an understanding of young people's perspectives on their lives, a

recognition of their priorities, an acknowledgement of their existing social networks and an appreciation of the aspects of life that are important to them and which contribute to feelings of self-esteem. Both Connexions' concern with meeting needs in 'an integrated and coherent manner' and the broader interpretation of a holistic approach articulated in this research conceive of a bonding relationship developing between a young person and a practitioner which may have bridging potential to assist forward movement in certain areas of their lives. However, the findings in section 5.4 which identify young people's ability to cope on their own, indicate that a holistic approach must also respect a young person's ability to determine the course of their own lives and accept that this may, or may not, include cooperation with support services. Such an approach involves an appreciation of young people's 'survival strategies and cultures of resistance' (Jordan and Redley 1994:156)

A holistic approach is implicit in the youth work principle of impartiality which involves acceptance of a young person by starting where they are without any preconceived ideas about them and moving at a pace that is appropriate for them. This will necessitate an appreciation of the complexities of their lives, a recognition of their particular priorities as the starting point and an acceptance of the possibility that an appropriate pace may involve non-cooperation. It is evident, therefore, that the practice of stereotyping a young person as NEET with the expressed purpose of achieving their participation in education, employment or training conflicts with both the principle of impartiality and a genuinely holistic approach. The findings in this research indicate that young people value the qualities of acceptance, understanding, listening and being non-judgemental in practitioners with whom they form bonding relationships and I maintain that such qualities indicate that in these instances practitioners are adopting a holistic approach. I shall now summarise situations considered in the previous chapters which indicate both the presence and lack of a holistic approach.

7.3.2 *Holistic Working in Practice*

In this sub-section I identify the cases of six young people where the longitudinal approach utilised in this study illustrates the progress that they feel they have made in certain aspects of their lives. Three of these cases indicate a holistic approach where the identities of young people are respected and support provided enabling them to make progress in a manner and at a pace appropriate for their individual circumstances. Three

other cases illustrate situations where the approach of practitioners does not accord with certain elements fundamental to a holistic approach and where the bridging capital that assists progress is provided by existing social networks. Despite personal progress the status of three of these young people is still defined as NEET. I use these six cases to illustrate my argument that it is the approach of practitioners themselves rather than the aims of the Connexions strategy which determines a holistic approach to working with young people. In these cases there is evidence that Connexions' predominant concern with the reduction of the number of young people identified as NEET can influence the approach used by practitioners and also disregard the very real progress that some young people feel they have made in their lives.

For Marion her identity as a mother took priority over all other aspects of her life. Her immediate priorities were understood by workers at OAC and she expressed the feeling that without the support she had received from the centre she, 'wouldn't be where I am today' (p.124).

Liz's situation illustrates a change occurring from a position where learning 'wasn't a priority' to one where she wanted 'to work [her] way up and learn new things.' She attributed this change to the support she received from the New Start project at 432 which initially recognised her immediate needs for food and a home but later encouraged her to train as a youth worker. This illustrates a holistic approach that operates over a period of time providing Liz with both bonding and bridging capital and enabling her to utilise her own personal capital to make progress in a career (p.93).

Following an upsetting incident with a group of friends Wendy received support from Suzie in the TLC who, by being a sympathetic listener, enabled Wendy to 'get everything off her chest' (p.122) then make her own decision to concentrate on her studies. This suggests that starting where a young person is and listening to their immediate problems may be sufficient to empower them to utilise personal capital to make their own decisions about subsequent action.

These three cases illustrate holistic working practices where the identities of young people are respected and support is given in a manner which enables them to make their own decisions and progress at their own pace. For two of these young people, Liz and Wendy, their progress includes participation in education and employment and they are not defined as NEET. However Marion's identity as a mother means her priority is to

care for her young child and although this is respected by workers at OAC the progress she feels she has made is not acknowledged by the NEET stereotype.

This research also draws attention to situations where holistic working practices are not adhered to. Simon's Connexions PA did not appreciate his inability to cope with the a range of suggestions made for his future and Simon felt overwhelmed and powerless (p.88). However it is arguable that later Simon experiences a sense of progress when he moves into permanent accommodation with his girlfriend and her mother (p.156).

Pete, like Simon, felt overwhelmed when too many youth workers tried to offer him help with a problem indicating both a lack of confidentiality and of respect for his personal needs (p.140). However Pete made progress in his career as a chef due to his own personal capital and bridging capital provided by his father.

Tania, like Pete, was also reluctant to confide in others and the six point scale used at 432 to assess the development of a relationship of trust did no value important aspects of Tania's identity (p.175), a violation of holistic practice. In addition, Tania formed a bonding relationship with Becky, a CSA whose remit from Connexions meant she encouraged Tania to enroll for educational courses at a stage when this was inappropriate (p.130). Nevertheless later Tania, supported by her mother, secured permanent accommodation which enabled her to deal effectively with her drugs problem on her own (p.139).

Simon, Pete and Tania all feel they have made progress in certain ways but in each situation their contact with formal support services indicates the lack of a holistic approach. Their progress results from a combination of personal capital and the bridging capital provided by their existing social networks. However, despite this progress, only Pete's situation is recognised as a NEET success statistic whereas according to this measure both Tania and Simon's situations are unchanged.

These six scenarios illustrate the presence and absence of holistic working practices and draw attention to the fact that all these young people feel they have made progress in their lives but only in three cases is this progress recognised by NEET statistics. All these young people utilise personal capital and for Marion, Liz and Wendy progress is assisted by relationships they form with practitioners in mentor rich settings which were not constrained by targets. However, for Pete, Simon and Tania, forward movement is assisted by bridging capital provided by their existing social networks. It is also arguable that the pressure from Connexions to achieve participation in education,

employment or training influenced Connexions workers to work at a pace that was inappropriate for Simon and Tania thus violating the principles of a holistic approach.

A holistic approach entails the acceptance of and respect for a young person's identity and a recognition of the aspects that assume priority in their lives and contribute to self-esteem. This involves listening carefully to what the young person is saying, empathising with their situation and responding in a manner which enables the young person to retain control. The importance of listening and empathising with a young person have been established as important qualities in a mentoring relationship and these qualities were valued by the young people who contributed to this research. It is such a relationship that the Connexions strategy anticipates will develop between a disadvantaged young person and their Connexions PA. The six situations considered above indicate that a relationship between a young person and a practitioner does have the potential to provide the outcomes anticipated by the Connexions strategy but there is also an indication that pressure to reduce the numbers of young people identified as NEET can jeopardise a holistic approach.

For all young people in this research, relationships with friends and certain family members contribute to their understanding of themselves and are an aspect of their lives that is of paramount importance (Taylor 1989). Likewise the relationship between a young person and their Connexions PA is central to Connexions delivery. I shall now consider to what extent this and other elements in the Connexions strategy accord with the actual experiences of young people and what significance these elements have for a holistic approach.

7.4 Fundamental Elements of the Connexions Strategy
7.4.1 *The Importance of Relationships*

This thesis argues that it is the approach of practitioners in their relationships with young people that determines holistic practice. Findings indicate that although there are many significant areas in young people's lives that inform their identities (Taylor 1989) one that is important for all young people is their relationships with friends and family members. By placing the relationship between a PA and a young person at the centre of its strategy for supporting disadvantaged young people Connexions also recognises the importance of relationships. I argue that certain phrases such as 'my best mate', 'my close friends', 'like a big brother' and mothers who are a 'best friend' illustrate the bonding

qualities of relationships with friends and family members. Similarly when young people refer to bonding relationships with practitioners there are frequent references to being 'more like a friend'.

Having friends and being a good friend contributes to young people's sense of self-esteem and this is evident in the initial descriptions that a majority of young people give of themselves as they invest in a prevalent discourse which I term the 'bubbly teenager' discourse. This projects a vision of a young person who is 'friendly', 'easy to talk to', 'bubbly', 'enthusiastic', 'easy going' and able to 'make people laugh'. In addition young people take pride in personal qualities which provide emotional support to friends and family members and by this process cement the bonding relationships which are so important in their lives. These qualities include being a good listener, able to give good advice, being helpful, understanding and generous and prepared to stand up for friends and family member. The qualities valued in the relationships that young people form with practitioners are similar to those valued in these natural mentoring relationships. In relationships with practitioners there is an emphasis on feelings of equality and shared laughter (Philip 2004). and I argue that these contribute to the feeling that the practitioner is 'more like a friend'. The importance of shared laughter has its parallel in the 'bubbly teenager' discourse and I maintain that laughter is an important ingredient in a relationship with a practitioner as it transcends barriers arising from status differences and contributes to feelings of equality. Other qualities valued in these relationships include confidentiality, knowing someone over a length of time, offering appropriate help and advice and the ability to listen in an understanding and non-judgemental manner. However the one quality that informs natural mentoring relationships which is not replicated in the formal support system is reciprocity. This indicates that although a practitioner may be viewed as 'more like a friend' in reality the relationship is not the same as genuine friendship.

One of the challenges in providing support for young people is to transfer the qualities valued in natural mentoring processes to formal mentoring relationships. The findings of this research indicate a similarity between these qualities and those appreciated in relationships formed with practitioners which suggests that in these situations the transfer has been successful. In valued relationships young people experience a sense of being listened to in a manner that is non-judgemental and this indicates acceptance of their identities and an understanding of the complexities of their

lives suggesting that the practitioner is employing a holistic approach. Such relationships provide bonding capital and as the young person feels accepted and valued by the practitioner there is a possibility that bridging capital may also assist the young person to make forward movement.

Heather's case (p.183) illustrates that the allocation of a Connexions PA can develop into a bonding relationship. However, I argue that the characteristics of natural mentoring relationships are more closely replicated in what have been termed 'mentor rich settings' (Freedman 1993:111). These are emotionally safe environments with a variety of people, offering a range of expertise, who have the time and inclination to relate to young people. This vision appreciates that, for healthy development, young people need a range of relationships, and the chance to choose between these relationships (Philip 1999). The field centres in this research provide a safe environment with a range of adults prepared to relate to young people and as such can be termed mentor rich settings. In such a setting it is young people themselves who are in the position to choose the person or persons to whom they wish to relate or to choose to relate to no one. This essential element of choice means that young people exercise agency when forming bonding relationships with practitioners with whom they empathise. The responses of the young people themselves suggest that these relationships are formed with a practitioner who feels like a friend, who will listen in an understanding and non-judgemental manner and provide appropriate help and advice, all qualities which indicate a holistic approach. I therefore argue that the element of choice made possible by a mentor rich setting is more conducive to holistic working practices than a situation where a Connexions PA is allocated to a young person.

Mentor rich environments also have the potential to include practitioners from a range of agencies and I shall now consider the contribution that partnership working, the second element basic to Connexions delivery, makes to a holistic approach.

7.4.2 Partnership Working

I have argued that mentor rich settings enhance a holistic approach as they include a range of people to whom young people can choose to relate. In addition they have the potential to include practitioners with expertise in different areas allowing young people to seek information and advice on aspects of their lives that they themselves prioritise. Cooperation between practitioners from different agencies is implicit in Connexions

emphasis on partnership working. Findings in this research indicate that one of the qualities that young people value in their relationships with practitioners is their ability to give help and good advice which is a means by which young people are empowered to move forward by themselves. Moreover where advice is found to be reliable and accurate the trust of a young person in a practitioner is enhanced and bonding strengthened.

The three mentor rich settings studied in this research had certain similarities, all operated as a safe, warm 'place to go' where young people could socialise with friends and in each setting practitioners provided 'some one to talk to' (DfES 2006a). However the number and variety of practitioners varied with each setting as did the attitude towards working in partnership with other agencies, a basic premise of Connexions. The TLC represented a partnership between the school and the local primary care trust but although it was possible for students to make appointments with a range of practitioners these professionals did not attend the lunch time drop in sessions. Youth workers were present on two days but it was Suzie, the coordinator, who acted as a sympathetic listener on a regular basis and consequently there was little evidence of partnership working in this centre. Both 432 and OAC, were run by the youth service but represented quite different approaches to partnership working. At 432 there was a reluctance to participate in the partnership working that informed Connexions and a concern that this could violate the youth work principles of confidentiality, empowerment and voluntary access. However, in OAC there was clear evidence of different agencies working in partnership and I argue that in this environment the provision of accurate information on a range of issues empowered young people to make choices between alternative courses of action. In this centre young people accepted that different rules of engagement were applicable to different agency workers, appreciating that the voluntary access relevant for youth work provision was not acceptable when meeting with a YOT worker. Martin, the manager of OAC, stresses the value of partnership working as he talks of the aspects of his work that he enjoys:

> 'The contact with young people and being aware of young people but also my work brings me into contact with staff from so many different agencies and organisations and where that partnership works and actually brings benefit to young people, that's a buzz.'

The range of issues on which help and advice is available at OAC includes, health and pregnancy, substance abuse, housing, benefit entitlement and education, employment and training. It is the young people themselves who make the decision to access information in the area appropriate to their needs and this may or may not include accessing advice on education, employment and training. The provision of appropriate help and advice on aspects of young people's lives that they themselves prioritise respects their right to determine the course of their own lives. I therefore argue that partnership working, in an appropriate context, contributes to a holistic approach.

The variety of support available in this centre reflects the range of issues that are important in young people's lives. The fact that young people frequently sought advice on education, employment and training from Ray the Connexions PA confirms that this is a significant aspect in the lives of many young people and it is this aspect of Connexions policy that I shall now examine.

7.4.3 *Participation in Education, Employment or Training*

The main aims and targets of the Connexions strategy relate to participation in education, employment or training. The findings of this research indicate that the aspects of young people's lives that are important to them also inform their identities and contribute to feelings of self-esteem and for certain young people these include plans for a career and success in the educational system. I argue that a holistic approach should recognise all aspects of a young person's life that have significance for them and that such an appreciation contributes to the creation of a bonding relationship. I do not argue that education, employment and training are irrelevant in young people's lives but that other areas may acquire greater significance and these should be recognised. Therefore, I maintain, that inclusion in employment, education or training constitutes a viable aim but should not become an exclusive aim of Connexions.

For young people who have clear career ambitions and for those who are successful in the educational system the relevance of Connexions' aims is evident. In addition, findings in this research indicate that the majority of young people do value learning per se despite negative experiences at school (6.2.2). Therefore I dispute the argument that for these young people 'more learning is the last thing they are interested in' (Ball et al 2000:8). I maintain that learner identities are not static but capable of change in accordance with factors in the learning environment. These include: a

relationship with the teacher that is based on a sense of equality, a course content which has inherent interest for the young person concerned and which also includes a practical component. Also as disadvantaged young people have difficulty managing on inadequate incomes (6.3.2) employment offers them the opportunity to acquire the basic necessities which they lack. With one exception, all the young people who were not in formal education had experience of some spells of paid work and as three young men described 'undeclared working' their pride and enjoyment was evident.

These findings suggest that participation in learning and employment resonates with the interests of young people themselves. However, I argue that, although a concern for participation is an essential ingredient of a holistic approach to make it an exclusive concern ignores other significant aspects of lives and may fail to prioritise those areas that are important to individual young people. This exclusive emphasis, which undermines Connexions holistic credentials, is demonstrated by the practice of stereotyping young people as NEET which defines a heterogeneous group by 'what they are not' (Yates and Payne 2006:338) and ignores their positive qualities.

The emphasis on participation in education, employment or training underlies the Government's discourse on social exclusion with correlations identified in research (SEU 1999) being utilised to establish a causal link between a lack of participation and other factors associated with social exclusion (DSS 1999). I shall now consider the implications of this analysis of social exclusion for a holistic approach.

7.4.4 Social Exclusion

I argue that a genuinely holistic approach has the potential to extend the vision of appropriate outcomes for Connexions beyond the narrow confines of 'participation in education, employment or training.' Findings in this research confirm that, for certain disadvantaged young people, a sense of exclusion arises from factors other than a lack of such participation. Whereas the concept of non-participation is one objective measure utilised by Government because it is associated with a range of factors which indicate social exclusion, this research has explored the subjective feelings of certain disadvantaged young people. An analysis of these feelings reveals a sense of social exclusion arising from a lack of permanent accommodation and a dependency on benefits and low incomes which, for some young people, can contribute to a sense of 'not belonging anywhere'. Young people in this situation find it difficult to satisfy basic needs

for adequate food and the maintenance of personal hygiene, as they lack the resources that most people in society consider to be basic necessities.

However one young man without permanent accommodation and dependent on benefits utilises personal capital to cope with this situation and does not appear to experience feelings of social exclusion. This illustrates that some young people have a resilience which enables them to cope in difficult situations (Rutter 1987). Nevertheless, findings also illustrate that others have internalised discourses on prevailing stereotypes which have become integrated into their understanding of themselves (6.3.3). This is particularly evident in the stereotype of the young, single mother which can inform a young person's identity even where their lifestyle does not conform to this stereotype. Such feelings reflect the influence of the moral overtones of the Government's discourse on social exclusion (Levitas 1998). Levitas has termed this approach the social integrationist discourse as it emphasises the value of integration through paid work and aims to move lone parents off benefit and into work and is reflected in the targets of Connexions.

However, a different discourse on social exclusion could remove some of the problems experienced by certain young people who contributed to this research. The 'Monopoly' paradigm (Silver 1994) influential on the European Left offsets the exclusion that results from group monopolies with welfare measures based on principles of citizenship. Such principles include the provision of a citizen's income which would avoid the complications arising from a confusing benefits system. A citizen's income is a basic right of every citizen and as such could alleviate some of the sense of exclusion resulting from benefit dependency, recognise the value of the household economy and legitimise socially acceptable areas of the hidden economy (Watts 1999a). In such a situation the 'undeclared working' for relatives of three young men in this research would be legitimate and not something they felt unable to acknowledge on a CV.

The findings of this research emphasise the importance of relationships with friends and family members in young people's lives and the fact that they provide bonding capital and contribute to feelings of self-esteem. However, for the majority of young people experiencing social exclusion, this is their sole source of self-esteem. The importance of bonding capital is illustrated as a young man, who has spent his teenage years in the care of the local authority, anticipates a relationship with a girl friend (p.94). Despite achieving this aim he is still classed as NEET as feelings of inclusion based on

strong bonding ties do not have validity in an analysis of exclusion which is based solely on non-participation in education, employment or training. However the 'Solidarity' paradigm, identified by Silver (1994) and based on French Republican thought, emphasises the importance of social cohesion and mutual support as an essential basis of inclusion. Such a discourse on social exclusion would attribute value to the importance of bonding ties.

This assessment of different approaches to social exclusion draws attention to the limitations of the social integrationist discourse which informs the targets of Connexions and which has created the NEET stereotype. This, I argue, undermines Connexions holistic credentials but it does not prevent individual practitioners from working holistically by understanding young people's actual experiences of social exclusion and responding to the needs that they themselves prioritise. This is confirmed in a study of the impact of Connexions (Hoggarth and Smith 2004) which concluded that one of the prime factors present in cases where Connexions had a positive impact was a trusting relationship between a young person and their Connexions PA. This was established by listening to and understanding the orientation of the young person, making appropriate responses and meeting their expectations, all ingredients of the holistic approach basic to the argument underlying this thesis.

I shall now summarise the overall conclusions to this research.

7.5 Conclusions

This thesis argues that excessive emphasis on reducing the number of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) has the potential to undermine a holistic approach to working with the most vulnerable young people and that it is the approach of practitioners themselves as opposed to Government policy that determines Connexions' holistic credentials. A genuinely holistic approach, in addition to responding to needs, requires an understanding of young people's perspectives on their lives, a recognition of their priorities, an acknowledgement of their existing social networks and an appreciation of the aspects of life that are important to them and which contribute to feelings of self-esteem. In addition it should respect young people's ability to determine the course of their own lives and accept that this may or may not include cooperation with support services.

This research confirms that young people value this approach in their relationships with practitioners and maintains that when seeking to establish a bonding relationship with a young person it is important for a practitioner to listen carefully, appreciate the important aspects of their lives, respect the things the young people themselves prioritise and understand the areas of their lives that contribute to feelings of self-esteem. The findings indicate that the aspects of their lives that young people consider to be important also make their lives meaningful, inform their identities and enhance their self esteem. For certain young people their future aspirations are integrated into their understandings of themselves and these are particularly evident in the cases of the eight young people who have clear career ambitions. There is also evidence that aspects of the identity of mothers are invested in the future of their children with the hope that their children will have happy lives and not repeat some of the mistakes which they feel they themselves have made. Although there are common elements that inform young people's identities each young person mixes these with certain individual characteristics in a different manner. The common elements found in this research are, relationships with friends and family, being a friendly bubbly person who remains cheerful despite difficulties, being a mother of a young child, belonging to an identifiable group, career ambitions, interests and creative activities and, for certain young people, a sense of being excluded from resources that the majority of people in society regard as basic necessities. There are also certain elements such as a concern about freedom of speech, being a Christian, a love of animals and a 'wild imagination' that inform the identities of a particular young person. In addition personal qualities such as resilience, stubbornness, a quick temper, laziness, intelligence, being an individual and having an ability to cope without recourse to support from others contribute to the way in which some young people understand themselves.

The predominant importance of relationships in young people's lives acts as a source both of self-esteem and support when experiencing problems. This research has established that the qualities that are valued in the natural mentoring relationships which young people have with friends and certain family members also inform the bonding relationships which they form with practitioners. It is these qualities that reflect the characteristics of the holistic approach that is articulated in this thesis. A holistic approach is evident as young people describe the bonding relationships they have formed with practitioners. There is however evidence to suggest that attempts to satisfy the targets set by Connexions can influence a PA to move at a pace inappropriate for a young person

and thus jeopardise the relationship. This research highlights the value of a mentor rich setting where young people can exercise choice in forming relationships at a variety of different levels with a range of practitioners who possess expertise in relevant areas. One of these practitioners could be a Connexions PA providing information, advice and guidance on education, employment and training.

This research provides certain recommendations for future policy. The findings indicate that the principles that inform the holistic approach articulated in this thesis are successful in establishing a bonding relationship between a practitioner and a young person experiencing disadvantage. Such a relationship has the potential to provide bridging capital by assisting movement into education, employment or training. Although this is applicable to PAs working both in Connexions and the NDYP this research also identifies the value of partnership working which informs the Connexions agenda. This provides Connexions PAs with access to a range of agencies which can support young people in different aspects of their lives. It also, in appropriate settings, allows young people to choose the practitioner to whom they wish to relate. The value of partnership working and a lead professional is recognised in new services provided by Children's Trusts and it is recommended that such a facility is integrated into NDYP provision to assist young people with complex needs.

A second recommendation relates to the importance that young people attach to interests and creative activities. These aspects of their lives inform their identities, contribute to feelings of self esteem and also provide a means by which they cope with difficulties in their lives without resorting to support from others. This research suggests a range of areas where facilities for young people might be extended including music, art, drama, skateboarding, gyms and it also draws attention to interests in areas such as politics, animal welfare and religion and reflects the concern to provide young people with 'something to do' expressed in a recent Government publication (DfES 2006b). Under the proposals for Children's Trusts the provision of youth facilities remain the responsibility of LAs although the legislation requiring LAs to make this provision has been strengthened (DfES 2002e). However there is a danger that in a situation of financial pressure this may be the first area where funding is reduced so this research recommends a further strengthening of legislation and funding to ensure the provision of such facilities.

Thirdly a word of warning is appropriate in relation to the recent plans for the provision of a 'learning guide' for each young person in the secondary school system with whom they should meet at least once a half term (DfES 2006d:44). The findings of this research indicate that a relationship is most effective when the young person is receptive to offers of support and can exercise choice in the person to whom they relate. This suggests that the allocation of a 'learning guide' to a young person without their prior agreement or their involvement in the choice of this guide is destined to achieve only limited success.

Finally this research provides an indication for future research. The findings draw attention to two young people who experience difficulties at school but subsequently develop clear career ambitions and are motivated to undertake further education and gain appropriate qualifications. There are also examples of young people who are recorded as a success statistic based on the NEET criteria but experience a range of other problems associated with social exclusion. These findings are supported by the arguments of Yates and Payne (2006) which are based on the Connexions Impact Study (Hogarth and Smith 2004). Yates and Payne (2006:400-401) argue that a 'NEET focused targeting strategy' can lead to a 'fire-fighting' approach with resources concentrated on 'achieving' this status rather than 'sustaining' it. My findings support this argument and suggest that research is required to examine the long term development of those who participate in education, employment and training as a result of an intervention by Connexions and also of those who over time and at their own pace develop career ambitions despite difficult experiences in the educational system.

APPENDIX 1

Example of a First Interview Schedule

I've talked to you a bit already and now I hope to get to know you better and understand how you feel about things

1. How would *you* describe yourself as a person?

2. Are there things that make you feel really good about yourself?

Possible Probes

Things that you can do really well

Things that make you attractive to other people

3. What things in your life are the most important to you?

Possible Probes:

Family?

Friends?

Music?

Sport?

Clothes?

Religion?

What things would you miss most if they disappeared?

What do you like doing most in your spare time?

Do you live in Whitminster itself?

How do you feel about living in a small town / a village / in the country?

4. Can you tell me a little (more) about your experiences at school.

Possible Probes

What are the things you enjoy about school?

Are there any things you find difficult about being at school?

5. Tell me about some of the things you hope for in the future?

Possible Probes:

In relation to school / FE

In relation to a job?

In relation to friends and relationships

6. What sort of people do you feel most comfortable being with?

Possible Probes

Are there people you feel particularly uncomfortable with?

7. Is there anywhere that you feel that you really belong?

Possible Probes:

Times when you have felt really 'at home'.

Are there any clubs or groups you belong to?

Can you describe any times when you have felt, 'I really don't belong here?

8. Are there people you feel you can talk to when you have problems?

Possible Probes

Who are they?

Are there different people you would talk to for different types of problem?

9. Are there people in school you can talk to if you have problems?

Possible Probes

TLC

Form Teacher

Year Head

Anyone else?

10. Can you tell me why you come to the TLC?

Possible probes

For individual help and advice

As a place to go in the lunch time

11. Are there any times when someone has tried to offer help or advice which you have not welcomed?

Possible Probe

Can you tell me how you felt?

12a. What does the term Connexions mean to you?

Possible Probes

Looking at this logo does this mean anything to you?*(Show the Connexions logo).*

Careers?

Help with problems?

Reasons why you wouldn't use Connexions.

Means of contacting Connexions adviser.

12b Have you used Connexions yourself?

Possible Probes

What made you contact a Connexions Personal Adviser?

What did you expect to get from Connexions?

Do you think you will use Connexions again in the future?

Thank you for telling me a little about yourself it has been really interesting.

Is there anything else you would like to add?

Is there anything you would like to ask me?

APPENDIX 2	
Young People Contributing to this Research	
Interviewees	**OAC**
Dave	Without permanent accommodation and dependent on benefits. A friend of Maria who he met in Oldport Foyer. Had enjoyed working for his father for a time and was enthusiastic about E2E courses which he had completed.
Heather	Valued her Connexions PA whom she had known since her pregnancy in Year 11. Proud of her success at GCSE but was subsequently without permanent accommodation, dependent on benefits and her mother had custody of her daughter.
Maria	Pregnant and later gave birth to Serena. Had enjoyed school and was a calm and contented mother. After time in Oldport Foyer she worked as a florist and gained a permanent tenancy of a flat. Later she again became dependent on benefits.
Marion	21 when I met her and mother of 12 week old Billy. Proud of her talent for art but expelled from school after a fight. Had permanent accommodation provided by Oldport Council and was dependent on benefits. Valued the support of workers at OAC.
Simon	Teenage years spent in foster care due to a bad relationship with his mother. Expelled from school but proud of his intelligence. Was without permanent accommodation and dependent on benefits but later lived with his girl friend, her mother and their baby.
Others	
Sandy	Sister of Marion, expecting and later gave birth to twin boys
Justin	Regular visitor to OAC. Arranged to meet his YOT worker in the centre
Meryl	Reaching the age of 20 and in process of terminating close relationship with her Connexions PA

Interviewees	TLC
Colleen	A townie, proud of her ability at singing, hoped to study singing at college but did not gain the necessary GCSEs. Lived with mother but later spent a period in a hostel and was dependent on benefits.
Harriet	Very successful academically, a talented artist and committed Christian who hoped to become a vet. Lived with both natural parents who had high expectations for her. Entered the sixth form but suffered another bout of depression.
Jack	Lost an eye in an accident during Year 11. Enjoyed art, woodwork playing the guitar and composing music. Lived with mother and her new partner, hoped to be a carpenter, studied woodwork at FE college.
Joe	Interested in politics and reading, intelligent but 'a lazy sod'. Week divided between living with his father and step-mother and maternal grandparents. Gained GCSE grades enabling him to enter the sixth form. Preferred not to seek advice about problems.
John	A member of the air cadets who hoped to become a pilot in the RAF and whose father had been an engineer in the RAF. Lived with both natural parents and gained good grades at GCSE and entered the sixth form.
Mark	Prided himself on being a 'trusting friend'. Lived with both natural parents and hoped to take a course in Computing at FE college.
Paul	Lived with foster parents and claimed to enjoy school. Hoped to enter the sixth form but was expelled before his GCSE exams.
Samantha	Was proud of her singing ability but hated everything else about school. Alienated the 'popular group' by flirting with their boy friends. Lived with mother and step father, left school at 16 for a job in a bank where her mother worked.
Sophie	Loved animals and planned to be a veterinary nurse. Lived with both natural parents. Socialised with the 'popular group' but managed to get better grades at GCSE than expected enabling her to study for a Diploma in Animal Management at FE college.

Interviewees	TLC (cont)
Wendy	Had a 'wild imagination' and hoped to be a 'world famous actress'. Lived with mother and step father. Decided to avoid friends who had upset her and concentrate on study. Gained GCSE grades required for a Diploma in Performing Arts
Others	
Sandra	Acted as organising mentor and resolved conflict between Colleen and Wendy

Interviewees	432
Gerry	A talented drummer who had completed a year's course in music at an FE college but was unemployed when I met him. Lived with his mother and her new partner.
Liz	Had a 'rough' childhood and valued the support at 432. When I met her she was 20, pregnant, living with her partner in permanent, rented accommodation and working as a voluntary, part-time youth worker. Later she gained a Level 2 qualification in youth work and eventually took full responsibility for the drop in centre at 432.
Pete	Proud of his talent at a rap musician. Placed on a reduced timetable at school but hoped to be a chef and gained a Level 2 qualification for this at FE college. Lived with his mother after the divorce of his parents. Disliked discussing his problems.
Sam	A talented skater and brother of Alison. Without permanent accommodation and dependent on benefits yet resilient with a keen sense of humour. Had accessed Connexions proactively and enrolled for E2E which included a session at 432.
Sid	Came to 432 on his day off from permanent job at supermarket. Loved all sports but did not gain GCSE grades required for course in Sports Science. Very conscientious worker who hoped for promotion. Lived with both natural parents.

Interviewees	432 (cont)
Tania	Did not 'talk about me'. Left home in Year 11 and had a range of different temporary accommodation before her mother helped her to get tenancy of a flat. Received disability benefit before dealing with drug problems on her own.
Others	
Alison	Sister of Sam and mother of Steven. Dependent on benefits and had permanent accommodation provided by Eastcombe Council.
Dick	Planned to be a chef but did not complete the Level 2 course at FE college
Geoff	Asked to leave home by his mother whilst in Year 11 at school. Had a range of temporary accommodation and was supported at 432. Left a course at FE college after a term and had occasional jobs that lasted a few weeks.
Kim	Friend of Alison and mother of Debbie. Lived with Alison for a short period.

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