

**CREATING NEW KNOWING**  
**THE CASE OF MULTI-AGENCY TEAMS IN A NORTH-WEST ENGLAND**  
**LOCAL AUTHORITY'S CHILDREN'S SERVICES**

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**Declaration**

**This thesis results entirely from my own work and has not been offered previously  
for any other degree or diploma**

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

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## Abbreviations used through the thesis

Abbreviation	Full description		Explanation (where appropriate)
ATL	Area Team Leader		n/a
CAF	Common Assessment Framework		CAF process is a 'request for services' offered to a child/young person presenting 'a need', with the purpose of supporting earlier intervention. Professionals from across the broad range of services might complete it. It uses a common language for assessment purposes thereby giving a more consistent view.
CPD	Continuing Professional Development		Method by which people maintain and update their professional knowledge and skills
CWDC	Children's Workforce Development Council		Created to provide support across the breadth of the Children's workforce following the introduction of the 'Every Child Matters' green paper. Funding was withdrawn in April, 2012 and their work has been distributed across the Department for Education and the Children's Improvement Board
C&YP	Children and Young People		n/a
DfE	Department for Education		Current department responsible for issues affecting people in England up to the age of 19 in UK. Formed in 2010 to replace DCSF
DfEE	Department of Education and Employment		Government department 1985-2001 responsible for education and employment. Replaced by DfES
DfES	Department for Education and Schools		Government department 2001-2007 responsible for education systems and children's services in England
DCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Families		Government department 2007-2010 responsible for issues affecting people to the age of 19y in England
DHSS	Department of Health and Social Security		Government department 1968-1988. Split into Departments of Health and Social Security (latterly Department of Works and Pensions)
DoE	Department of Education		Government department pre-1985. Replaced by DfEE



<b>DoH</b>	Department of Health	Government department since 1998 responsible for government policy in England for health matters and for the National Health Service
<b>ECM</b>	'Every Child Matters'	Green paper implemented after the 2003 Laming Review into the death of Victoria Climbié
<b>PCSO</b>	Police Community Support officer	Since September 2002, a civilian member of police staff employed as a uniformed non-warranted officer by the police force in England and Wales
<b>SLT</b>	Situated Learning Theory	Suggests that learning is unintentional and situated within activity, context and culture (see Chapter 3)
<b>TAC</b>	Team Around the Child	TAC is "a multi-disciplinary team of practitioners established on a case-by-case basis to support a child, young person or family" (DfE website)

## Publications and Refereed Academic Outputs directly related to this research field

Date	Title	Nature of Output
forthcoming	<b>Black, K.</b> & Warhurst, R. 'More than pictures: visual methodologies' in HRD research'. In Tosey, P. and Saunders, M. (eds.) <i>Methodologies in HRD Research</i> , Edward-Elgar.	Book chapter
forthcoming	Warhurst, R. & <b>Black, K.</b> 'Using photo-elicitation interviewing in HRD research', with Tosey, P. and Saunders, M. (eds.) <i>Methodologies in HRD Research</i> , Edward-Elgar.	Book chapter
June 2013	<i>Learning with, from and about others in multi-agency teams: Expanding perspectives of doing and being.</i> 14th International Conference on Human Resource Development Research and Practice across Europe [Universities Forum for HRD] at Brighton <b>Shortlisted for 'Alan Moon Award for best paper'</b>	Conference Paper [Refereed] - Proceedings
May 2012	<i>"Building new knowing? The case of multi-agency working within Children's Services in England"</i> [ISBN: 978-998-96090-3-7]. 13th International Conference on Human Resource Development Research and Practice across Europe [Universities Forum for HRD] at Universidade Lusíada de Famalicão, Portugal	Conference Paper [Refereed] - Proceedings
September 2011	<i>"Remembering and Forgetting: Continuities and Change in approaches to Integrated Working in England under New Labour and the Coalition"</i> . European Conference for Educational Research, Berlin	Conference Paper [Refereed]

## Knowledge transfer grants secured relating to this research field

Date	Funder and research title
2013-2014	<b>HEIF-KT Project (£15K)</b> Multi-agency working within Cheshire Fire Service Evaluates the nature and effectiveness of multi-agency partnerships, with specific emphasis upon provision for the elderly
2009-2010 and 2010-2011	<b>HEIF-KT CPD Project (£15K)</b> The project delivered high profile training needs within the wider Children's workforce based on current agendas: <i>Integrated Workforce Development for Children's Services: Common Core, Championing Children and Induction Values.</i>

## Abstract

This research examines the learning stimulated through professionals/practitioners working inter-professionally, as multi-agency teams, within Children's Services.

Collaborative and inter-professional working have witnessed much attention in recent years. As such hybrid organisational forms become the norm across the sectors, this empirical research typifies the broader challenges facing contemporary organisations across the developed economies.

Within the public sector, particularly health and social care, these 'best-practice' configurations have been prevalent for some decades; the 2003 Laming report extended this across the Children's Workforce. However, despite the espoused benefits of this approach, success has wavered. Indeed, a growing corpus of both research and inquiries evidence the failings, accentuating the need for new learning within these teams.

This research examines the creation of new *knowing-in-practice* within the multi-agency teams of a case-study North-West England local authority's Children's Services. By contrast to previous research that has demonstrated *how* learning might occur, this research is focused upon *what* this learning actually *is*. Juxtaposing governments' techno-rational approaches to knowledge acquisition, the research uses situated learning theory to better understand these professionals'/practitioners' learning. This lens asserts that learning does not only constitute what one needs to 'know', but also what one needs to 'be'.

A qualitative and largely inductive approach was adopted, with data generated through photo-elicitation interviews undertaken with 25 purposively selected professionals/practitioners from across the authority's Area Teams.

The findings indicate a number of different 'tales' told by the participants. Despite variations in participants' perceptions, it was generally accepted that multi-agency working was vital in the current socio-economic climate. They emphasised the importance of structures, and of the Team Leaders, in engendering and sustaining learning. However, the significance of agentic influences, especially individuals' commitment to informally develop their 'relational-expertise', were also accentuated. Evidence presented indicated how these professionals/practitioners had experienced significant 'identity-work', developing a distinctive multi-agency team identity alongside their existing professional/practitioner identity.

The research fills an important gap in the literature, providing empirical evidence of relationships and learning within multi-agency teams. It refines and extends perceptions of learning through its examination of a context more typically associated with conflict and tension, difference and change rather than those that stressing constancy of practice. This extends understanding of workplace learning across boundaries.

## Chapter 1 Introduction to the research

*“When you work with others you build your knowledge. There are times when we go wrong, we’re human beings. It’s being able to share that and learn from it together. When we’re standing shoulder to shoulder, that’s where the real knowledge is, its not having to know it myself. Of course we’re always going to hit those boundaries and you don’t know what those barriers are until you hit them. It’s finding ways around them” (Social Care participant)*

This Social Care professional’s remarks encapsulate the essence of this study, which seeks to examine the learning and creation of new ‘*knowing-in-practice*’ of Children’s Services professionals/practitioners<sup>1</sup> as they work together collaboratively as multi-agency teams.

This chapter serves a number of purposes for the reader, explicating the background and rationale for the research from an academic, organisational and personal perspective. It details the evolution of the research aim and questions that subsequently guide the research. It also provides a conceptual analysis of the terminologies and details of pre-suppositions and assumptions made. The chapter concludes by outlining the structure of the thesis.

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<sup>1</sup> This term will be used throughout to refer to the various professional groups and practitioner groups and agencies that comprise the Children’s Services workforce, as defined by *Children’s Act* (2004).

## 1.1 The research problem

Amidst increased economic turbulence, austerity and workplace complexity, the past decade has witnessed a significant paradigm shift in the working-forms of organisations within the private, public and not-for-profit sectors across Western Europe. This has been characterised by a move away from relying upon rational scientific approaches to problem-solving the ever more complex ‘wicked’ problems facing the contemporary workplace (Entwistle, 2010), to recognising the importance of sharing ideas through partnerships and collaborations. It is intended that such hybrid forms will offer alternative approaches to problem-solving these ill-structured, ever-evolving and resistant situated issues, thereby enhancing organisational efficiencies and effectiveness beyond that which might be achievable through any single domain of expertise working alone (Evering, 2012). Indeed, as Spretnak’s (2011) *“Relational Reality”* documents, it is ‘anti-relational’ thinking that has engendered many of the crises that we face today, especially within education and healthcare.

This research is sited within one such public sector collaboration: the multi-agency teams of a North-West England local authority’s Children’s Services department. Since 2003, a policy model of integrated working across service provision for children and young people (C&YP) has required professionals/practitioners from across the breadth of the workforce, including teachers and professionals in health, social work and the criminal justice system, to assimilate into one multi-professional and multi-agency department.

Public sector integration is not a new phenomenon for UK policymakers, having been a central policy concern for some decades especially within health and social care. This is exemplified, for example, in the 1976 *Fit for the Future* (DHSS, 1976) through to the non-interventionist 1989 Thatcherite Children's Act (*Children's Act*, 1989). However, the past two decades have witnessed increasing rhetoric around this (Norwich et al., 2008) with the co-ordination of different agencies and professionals in state-managed children's welfare becoming the hallmark of New Labour's policymaking (Newman, 2001; Brown & White, 2006).

Since 2003, in response to a number of heavily publicised service failures, notably the death of Victoria Climbié (Laming, 2003), the government in England and Wales has accelerated measures to secure a stronger commitment to integrated working practices and improved information sharing between the distinctive professional/practitioner groups and agencies comprising Children's Services (DfES, 2003; DfES, 2004; DCSF, 2007; *Children, Families and School Act*, 2010). Originating with the 'Every Child Matters' agenda (ECM) (DfES, 2003) this contemporary policy objective has responded to the widely accepted suppositions that collaboration would prevent children tragically "falling through the cracks between the different services" (DfES, 2003, p.5; see also Laming, 2003; O'Brien et al., 2003; Bichard, 2004; Barrett et al., 2005; Percy-Smith 2005; Atkinson et al., 2007; DoE, 2009; Hammick et al., 2009; Ateah et al., 2012; Crawford, 2012). It was argued that their care and protection required shared understanding and the application of collective intelligence rather than a single agency response.

The arising legislation required Local Authorities in England to “bring about .... root-and-branch reform ... transformational change” (House of Commons Education and Skills Committee, 2005, p.8, 11), replacing their previously fragmented silo-based systems with a multi-agency model of ‘Integrated Children’s Services’ under the leadership of a Director of Children’s Services. To stimulate this multi-agency working it was intended that the professionals/practitioners concerned would do more than just their ‘own’ professional activities within a shared context. Rather they should reconfigure, reconceptualise and integrate their different knowledges and practices, creating a new multi-agency knowledge (Edwards, 2005, 2007; Cameron et al., 2009) and thereby, a ‘new professional’ (DEMOS, 2007). A full examination of this policy context and its subsequent amendments lies beyond the constraints of this thesis. Detailed reviews of this policy context can be found in, for example, Black and Hulme (2011), Cheminais (2009), Knowles (2009), Ball (2008) and Hoyles (2008), with Oliver et al. (2010) documenting the key milestones up to the change of government in May 2010. Since this time, the prior aspirations of the Labour Government have been upheld, at least at the macro-level. However, it is recognised that at local level practice the structures have seen demise. As Ennals (2010) suggests, ‘*Every Child Matters*’ is “now about as current as the Wurzels are to pop music” (n.p). The agenda itself, and its associated terms, have all but vanished from government vocabulary (for example, Puffett, 2010; Shepherd, 2010) with cuts in public sector funding, and other policy decisions, especially commissioning (Farnsworth, 2012), seemingly contradictory to its precepts.

### **1.1.1 The need for learning**

Significantly, these changes to these professionals'/practitioners' ways of working have highlighted the need for new learning within these new multi-agency communities as they seek to change what they *do*, what they *think* and *say*, and the way that they *relate* to others (Kemmis, 2009, p.463). Indeed, the importance of innovation, and of the organisational and lifelong learning of these professionals/practitioners, was advocated in the promotion of these new working formations. However, true to tradition the government adopted a conventional, techno-rational approach to engendering this learning. It was envisioned that the necessary learning would be achieved through the provision of a portfolio of training opportunities, the formalisation of joint organisational procedures, and the establishment of joint performance and accountability targets. This would be supported through shared IT systems and other processes and artefacts such as the '*Common Assessment Framework*' (CAF) and '*Team Around the Child*' (TAC) (see CWDC, 2005/2010). Consequently, government focus has been upon ascribing 'role requirements', explicit skills, artefacts and 'best-practice' process models, supported by individual off-the-job training and 'how-to' guides (for example, DfES, 2003, p.92; DfES, 2007; Cheminais, 2008, 2009; Walker, 2008).

Accordingly, policy has assumed what Bereiter (2002) describes as a "folk theory perspective" of learning, seeing "the human mind [as] ... a container to be filled with certain materials" through deliberative and planned intervention (Sfard, 1998, p.5; see also Freire's, 1970 "banking mode" of learning). It has presumed that the



knowledge for multi-agency working can be acquired individually, taken out of context, classified, transferred, exchanged and/or shared and applied to action in a controllable way, thereby enabling individuals to be able to understand and/or function in practice (for example, Weick & Roberts, 1993; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Davenport & Prusak 1998; Cook & Seely Brown, 1999; Probst et al., 2000; Schneider, 2007). Therefore, through these measures it was inferred that change could be essentially instigated as an administrative process (Fischer, 2003), devoid of values (Hajer, 2003) or emotion (Wagenaar & Cook, 2003). There has been a general failing to acknowledge the importance of socio-emotional, organisational and cultural factors (Hager, 2004, p.204), the complex relational aspects of collaborative working, and importantly, the skills needed to learn and work across professional boundaries. Perhaps most importantly, policy-makers failed to consult with the professionals/practitioners themselves. Disempowering them has created local level tensions between statutory obligations and professional judgment (Easton et al., 2011). Consequently, the realities of multi-agency practice are very different to the ideals portrayed. Ten years on, there is limited evidence within Children's Services to support its worth (Oliver et al., 2010). Indeed, an increasing corpus of empirical research evidences its failings (for example, Salmon, 2004; Sloper, 2004; Warmington, et al., 2004; Anning et al., 2005; Frost 2005; Edwards, 2005a, 2005b, 2007; Brown & White, 2006; Frost & Lloyd, 2006; Barnes, 2008; Smith & Anderson, 2008; Brandon et al., 2010; Rose, 2011). As Table 1.1 illustrates, in identifying the challenges facing the multi-agency workforce, there is a clear mismatch between the linearity of policy discourse and the realities of the "swampy lowlands" of practice (Schön, 1983).

Challenges presented by multi-agency working		Key research
Structural	Differences in agency structures and boundaries	Scriven 1995; Miller et al., 2001; Markwell, 2009
	Conflicting workloads and priorities	Harker et al., 2004; Sloper, 2004; Atkinson et al., 2005; Frost & Robinson, 2007; Moran et al., 2007
	Roles and responsibilities	Sloper, 2004; Atkinson et al., 2005; Rose, 2009; Oliver et al., 2010
	Inflexible structures	Webb & Vulliamy, 2001; Milbourne et al., 2003
	Conflicting aims, objectives and expectations	Bloxham, 1996; Easen, 1998; Anning et al., 2006; Frost & Robinson, 2007; Moran et al., 2007; Warin, 2007; Rose, 2009
	Ethical issues: confidentiality and information-sharing protocols; leading to withholding of information and conflicts between the professionals	Webb & Vulliamy, 2001; Farmakopoulou, 2002; Darlington et al., 2004
	Lack of cross-agenda planning & communication at management level	Dyson et al., 1998; Bloxham, 1996; Anning, 2001
	Limited relationship between integrated practices and outcome	McCallin, 2001; Glasby & Dickenson, 2008
	No framework or one model of practice was provided, engendering considerable geographical and contextual variations	Frost, 2005; Hawker, 2005; DCSF, 2007b; Dyson et al., 2007; Cameron et al., 2009; Armitage et al., 2009; Lewis et al., 2010
	Multiple barriers to communication	Sloper, 2004; Townsley et al., 2003; Atkinson et al., 2005; Frost et al., 2005; Barnes, 2008
Resource	Fiscal issues: financial uncertainties and differing pay scales	Van Eyk & Baum, 2002; Cameron & Lart ,2003; Johnson et al., 2003; Sammons et al., 2003; Wilkin et al., 2003; Sloper, 2004; Atkinson et al., 2005; Tidsell et al., 2005; Barnes, 2008
	Staffing arrangements and time investment	Normington & Kyriacou, 1994
	Lack of appropriate training	Magrab et al., 1997;
	Differing working conditions	
	Lack of recognition of time, skills and energies required to establish necessary relationships	Milbourne, 2005; Robinson & Cottrell, 2005
	Increased workloads and pressure	Atkinson et al., 2001
Socio-psychological	Lack of shared understanding and lack of internal cohesion	Dyson et al., 1998; Ehrle et al., 2004; Collett, 2010
	Differing, often conflicting, models of belief & practice	Birchall & Hallett, 1995; Webb & Vulliamy, 2001; Milbourne et al., 2003; Bagley, et al., 2004; Frost et al., 2005; Horwath & Morrison, 2007
	Problems in reconciling changing role and/or identity	Abbott et al., 2005b; Darlington et al., 2004; Collett, 2010
	Loss of professionals' identity	Anning et al., 2006
	Harbouring a narrow view that <i>they</i> are the experts	Freeman et al., 2002; Healey, 2004
	Territorialism and “tribalism” due to professions' differentiated values & attitudes	Headrick et al., 1998; Miller et al., 2001; Atkinson et al., 2002; Healey, 2004; Robinson et al., 2008; Rose, 2009; Collett, 2010
	Psychoanalytical needs attributable to the complex socio-psychological dimensions of organisational and cultural change	Applebaum et al., 2000
Cultural	Lack of shared language	Darlington et al., 2004; Healey, 2004
	Cultural differences: 'Integration managers' do not facilitate breaking down the barriers	Coxon, 2005; Coles et al., 2004; Wasoff et al., 2004; Cameron & Lart, 2003; Van Eyk & Baum, 2002

**Table 1.1:** Key challenges to multi-agency working

Source: Developed from Black (2008) based upon Atkinson et al. (2002) and Sloper (2004)

## 1.2 Research aim and questions

It has been suggested that many of the problems facing these multi-agency professionals/practitioners stem from the reliance upon formal, de-contextualised training to meet their learning needs. By contrast, it is asserted that the development of a new multi-agency practice is determined not by imposed structures, training and acquisition of 'required' competencies, but through learning which is both non-formal and implicit to their work processes and relationships. Specifically, the research considers how the learning required to respond to the new challenges facing these multi-agency teams requires not simply replicative learning but an expansive learning. This requires proactive and collective responsibility, shared values and visions, openness, mutual trust and respect (Bolam et al., 2005), as well as a willingness on behalf of the learner to restructure their thinking.

However, collaboration between professionals of different disciplines is complex, involving inter-organisational, inter-professional and inter-personal facets. These multi-agency teams are idiosyncratic structures, characterised by a diverse membership of over 60 separate professions across thirteen different sectors of the workforce (DCSF, 2008a). This presents an assemblage of disparate beliefs and values (Dougherty, 1992; Carlile, 2004), and a workforce beset by the historical legacies of professionalism (Schön, 1983; Currie et al., 2010) as well as the more recent scars of ever-changing policy rhetoric. Therefore, it might be questioned as to why these professionals/practitioners would have any motivation to share and

integrate their knowledge, indeed why they might want to radically change their ways of working and 'being' (Oborn & Dawson, 2010).

This research builds upon existing research work as it seeks to better understand the meaning that Children's Services' professionals/practitioners are taking from their experiences of working within multi-agency teams. Attention is upon *how*, and indeed *if*, this new working configuration is stimulating a new way of 'doing' and 'being'. Specifically, it aims to examine if a new multi-agency '*knowing-in-practice*' has been created within the multi-agency teams of a North-West England local authority. Herein, *knowing* is understood to comprise these professionals'/practitioners' reified knowledge, discourse, practice and identity (Wenger, 1998).

Three research questions are proposed to guide the inquiry, in order to respond to this over-riding research aim. These arise from previous understandings held by the researcher both of the context and of the questions raised through existing literature and empirical studies.

1. How do these professionals/practitioners understand multi-agency working?
2. Is there evidence of learning occurring through these professionals/practitioners working together?
3. How has this learning shaped these professionals'/practitioners' 'work-related identities'?

To examine these, empirical data was generated using a qualitative, and largely inductive case-study approach. This is discussed and evaluated in Chapter 3. The research is informed by literature from within Sociology, Organisational Behaviour, Management, Health and Social Care and Education. Specific focus is upon the multi-agency context outlined above; however, other contexts are also drawn upon as/where required.

### **1.3 The empirical context**

To date, consideration of relationships and learning within multi-agency practice contexts remains underdeveloped within the literature (Collins & McCray, 2012). Indeed, how integration between groups with differing goals and perspectives might be achieved remains under-researched both theoretically and empirically (Hartley & Bennington, 2006; Glasby & Dickinson, 2008; Oborn & Dawson, 2010). Therefore, as Reeves (2010) concludes, there is still a need for significant empirical work to progress and inform the “under-theorised” field of inter-professionalism.

A significant contribution to understanding multi-agency learning within Children’s Services has been presented by a large-scale ESRC/TLRP-funded project (2004-2007), “Learning in and for Inter-agency working” (LIW), directed by Daniels and Edwards and their teams (see for example Daniels & Warmington, 2007; Warmington et al. 2004). This work drew upon Engeström’s (1987, 1999, 2001) notions of expanded practice and Victor and Boynton’s (1998) forms of work to examine the development of professional learning in multi-agency settings that were promoting the social

inclusion of 'at-risk children'. Their findings demonstrated the importance of a number of key factors determining the degree of professional learning that developed, notably: issues around co-location and co-working, management structures, changing professional identities, divisions of labour and professional expertise. However, little insight was offered into exactly *what* was being learned by these professionals (Fuller & Unwin, 2003; Boreham & Morgan, 2004; Edwards, 2005) as forms the focus of this research. Moreover, it can be argued that Engeström's work presents limitations in its application to the multi-agency context of Children's Services. Critiques of Engeström's theorising, notably by Langemeyer (for example Langemeyer & Nissan, 2004; Langemeyer & Roth, 2006), have highlighted both the complex nature of his model, which requires consideration of multiple parameters (tools, rules, divisions-of-labour), yet the concurrent presentation of social processes within a rational/normative world. For example, in discussing Engeström's change laboratory workshops, Langemeyer and Roth (2006) highlight the unproblematic assumption that is made of the existence of a neutral third person perspective (p.31), also the apparent reification of the activity system from the wider systems in which they exist and function. Likewise, others have observed how the model fails to adequately account for the issues of power that may be operating, and the role of agency upon the interactions (Young, 2001; Fuller & Unwin, 2004). Thereby, as Young (2001) and Avis (2009) note, the suggestion is that working together will be motivated by, and enabled because of, a commitment to essentially the same end object, 'the child'. Any problems that ensue are therefore the result of a lack of agreement over the means to achieve that goal. However, in reality, these professionals/practitioners may have very different aims

and be committed to fundamentally different goals. Indeed, as Fenwick (2012a, 2012b) concludes, there is little empirical evidence of how this transformational change would really work in everyday practice. Finally, and perhaps most notably with regards to the specific context of this research, Engeström's model lacks recognition of the acculturation of these professionals-practitioners, by nature of policy requirements for 'Safeguarding', into social care's practices.

Actor-Network theory (ANT), devised by Callon and Law (1982) and developed by Latour (1992, 2004, 2008), has also seen fairly extensive application within multi-agency contexts in recent years. Much of this work has originated with Tara Fenwick and her contemporaries within PROpel at the University of Stirling (for example, Fenwick 2008, 2010a, 2010b). For example, through their work in emergency health-related care they have identified multiple enactments between the human and non-human actors within day-by-day and momentary activities. Therefore, as 'approved'/'best practice' processes move between contexts, so they lose what gave them shape. This suggests that conventional 'approved' decision-making processes may be flawed, placing lives at risk. These authors call for new ways of thinking and learning to enable professionals to best respond in unique, changing and unpredictable contexts (Essington, 2011).

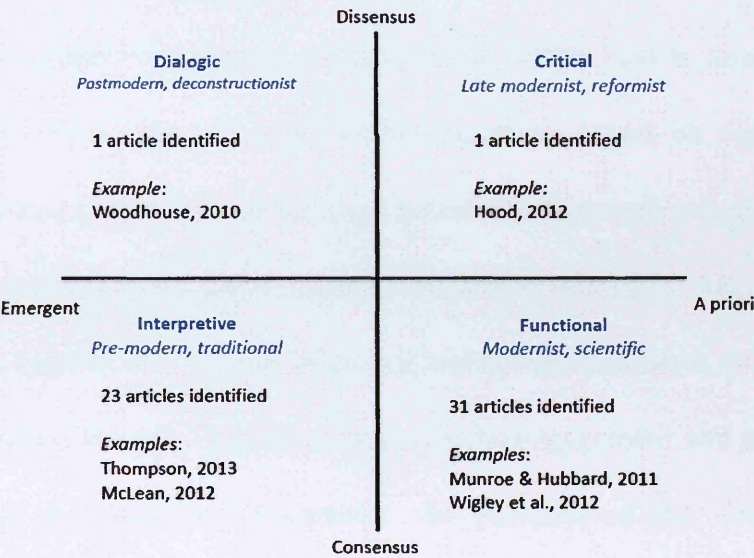
A further, and growing, body of research considers the applicability of social network analysis (SNA) to understanding the changing relations between professionals' knowledge and practice. This lens understands how actors (which may be

individuals, groups of individuals, organisations etc.) are linked by sets of 'edges', in a particular relationship such as collaboration. The value of this lens for use in considering collaborative working across Health/Children's Services arguably lies in its reflection of the less stable configurations and the "knowledge ties" (Hakkarainen et al., 2004) that characterise such teams. Currie et al. (2010) draw upon this in their work with the 'Cleft Lip and Palate Network': a team characterised by intra-professional conflict. Their findings draw attention to the need to consider network processes and to existing practices in engendering change. A failure to consider these aspects threatens the intensification of institutional influences, notably professional hierarchies. This lens is not adopted in this research because, whilst it could arguably reflect the less stable configurations and the "knowledge ties" (Hakkarainen et al., 2004) that characterise some multi-agency teams, it does not exhibit the routines and the different knowledge cultures of the different participating experts. Furthermore, these networks suggest that the professionals are using others resources to meet their goals (Nardi et al., 2002) rather than working together towards mutually agreed outcomes (Edwards, 2010).

In addition to the under-examination of relationships and learning within multi-agency/inter-professional teams, Reeves (2010) also reports the paucity of qualitative research that has been undertaken within this context, especially that informed by sociological perspectives (p.218). Indeed, a simplistic review through EBSCOHost for academic articles containing the key words "multi-agency" AND "Children's Services" AND "England" over the publication period January, 2010-May,



2013 (includes ‘EarlyCite’) identified, as indicated in Figure 1.1, the dominant functionalist stance that has been adopted in studying this field. Of the 85 articles returned, 56 were empirical in nature, 31 of which were undertaken from this functionalist perspective. These typically adopted a survey-based questionnaire approach. It is acknowledged that this comprises a very narrow sample and simplistic review. However, these findings mirror other previous, more detailed, systematic reviews undertaken (for example, Atkinson et al., 2007; Baxter, 2011).



**Figure 1.1:** Discourses of empirical multi-agency studies 2010-2013 (classifications based upon Deetz, 1996)

### 1.4 Conceptual framework

The research takes a largely inductive approach to better understand the new *knowing* created within these Children’s Services’ multi-agency teams. This approach recognises the importance of theoretical interpretation, but opts to delay this engagement until after the research participants’ meanings are identified.

Thereby, the lens adopted has been influenced by themes emerging from the data (Silverman, 2009, p.120).

An exploration of the existing theorising identified that conceptions of professional learning within this evolving context lends itself to interpretation from numerous discourses. This eclectic assemblage include: complexity theory (Pycroft & Gough, 2010); change theory (Pateli & Philippidou, 2011; Glasby, 2006); reflective practice (Schön, 1984); workplace learning (Lee et al., 2004); organisational learning (Fish et al., 2008); knowledge management (Gabbay et al., 2003; Peel & Rowley, 2010); activity systems theory (Daniels et al., 2004). However, as will be explained, the research is anchored upon one of the most prominent approaches to participatory learning: Lave and Wenger's (1991) situated learning theory (SLT). This framework recognises the importance of social, relational and cultural processes to understand that learning arises through a process of active social engagement and participation situated within a 'community-of-practice'. In the case of this research, this 'community-of-practice' comprises the "situated recurrent activities" integral to multi-agency working (Orlikowski, 2002, p.253). This perspective is paradigmatically converse to conventional, individual understandings of learning where the mind is a receptacle of knowledge that exists as well-defined, abstractable bodies that can be transferred, unchanged between contexts. By contrast, SLT asserts how learning takes place within the "web of relations between people, artefacts and activities" (Gherardi, 2006, p.2), and involves moving towards full participation in, and thereby developing shared understandings of, a community's social and cultural practices.

Moreover, participation within a 'community-of-practice' "shapes not only what we do, but who we are and how we interpret what we do" (Wenger, 1998, p.4). Therefore, learning changes the individual (their identity). This inherently changes their form of participation, the relationship between the participants and, reciprocally, changes the practice.

As will be discussed in Chapter 2, this lens has not yet been systematically applied to empirical work on multi-agency working, nor specifically utilised in considering the creation of new *knowing* in interdisciplinary collaborative contexts. However, it is asserted that SLT has the capacity to offer unique and valuable fresh insights into understanding the reflexive action, learning and knowledge-creation that is required within the complex social setting of Children's Services. In doing so, and in responding to some of Lave and Wenger's critics (for example, Fuller & Unwin, 2004; Fuller et al., 2005), this research extends understanding of learning beyond those accounts of SLT that typically stress the regularity of practice and social cohesion (Edwards, 2005; Fuller, 2007; Gherardi, 2009a). This is discussed further below (1.5).

In extending this understanding, the research draws upon four supporting frameworks that can be readily assimilated with Lave and Wenger's theorising. Firstly, whilst Lave and Wenger's work tends to conflate the individual and the social, Billett (2004) examines the implications of individuals' ability to shape their own norms and to endorse communal norms. Secondly, from a structural perspective, an adaptation of Fuller and Unwin's (2004) under-used 'restrictive-expansive

participation continuum' identifies barriers to, and enablers of, learning, notably: the macro- and micro-level context and culture. This also reminds us of the complementary value of formal 'off-the-job' learning, as presented by central and local government-instigated training, for developing a new multi-agency *knowing*. Thirdly, Orlikowski's (2002) discussions of the interplay between knowledge and *knowing-in-practice* are employed, concepts that are not cogently differentiated by Lave and Wenger. Fourthly, as indicated above, SLT centralises 'identity'. However, Lave and Wenger's critics have suggested that they offer only a very limited account of how agency influences this identity (re-)creation (for example, Mutch, 2003; Billett, 2004b; Hodgkinson & Hodgkinson, 2004; Handley et al., 2006) or of how, in practice, members *actually* develop their identities (Fox, 2000). A further body of theorising, from within the critical management studies tradition, seeks to resolve this. Adopting a more humanistic stance, Alvesson and Willmott (2002) suggest that "becoming who one is" is "achieved rather than given", a process known as 'identity-work' (p.620). Through this individuals are actively "engaged in forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening and revising" their sense of self-hood in relation to others to achieve a degree of existential security (Giddens, 1991, p.5; see also Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). Whilst SLT theorising suggests that discourse may act to limit the narrative reconstruction of the self, by contrast other research evidence suggests that when new discourses can be accessed through for example, engagement in a new community-of-practice, then these new discourses are appropriated and used in 'identity-work' to (re-)construct a desired narrative identity (Thomas & Davies, 2005; McDonald et al., 2008). Some might argue that the fast-paced change facing these Children's Services' professionals would be unfavourable

for workplace learning. However, as will be shown through this research, a coherent assimilation can be made between an examination of the expansive learning that occurs, and of the interplay between contextual affordances and individuals' engagement. This will enable Lave and Wenger's SLT to be strengthened for application to this multi-agency context.

## **1.5 Significance of this research**

It is anticipated that this research offers theoretical, methodological and practical contributions to this field.

As has been examined above, a growing corpus of literature has examined how learning might take place between these multi-agency professionals (for example, Warmington et al., 2004; Warmington & Leadbetter, 2010). Evaluations have also been made of pedagogies that consider the interface between collaborative learning and practice (for example, Meyer & Lees, 2012). However, to date, there is little understanding of '*what*' learning and new knowledge is being (co-)created through these new practice configurations, or how learning and its inherent relationship with identity, is influenced and determined by the organisational structures presented within such workplace configurations as multi-agency working (Roberts, 2006; MacPherson & Clark, 2009).

From a **theoretical perspective**, the contribution of this research lies in the lens through which multi-agency working is viewed. As reported above, previous work within this field has typically taken a functionalist approach. These works have typically been highly descriptive and, in making the assumption that collaboration is a desirable state, they have taken an organisational perspective to front-line practice (for example, Roaf, 2002; Hudson et al., 2003). As Horwath and Morrison (2007) observe, few studies locate collaboration within the wider realm of power structures and socio-political processes, or upon the more subjective views of individual's/group's collaborative worlds (p.58; see also Reeves, 2010). In efforts to redress this, whilst the research has again taken a front-line viewpoint, as will be discussed in Chapter 3 it has adopted a subjectivist and, to an extent, critical perspective. This focuses upon the socially and historically situated, and understands the self as a multiple, fragmented and discursive accomplishment that is in a continuous state of 'becoming' rather than being fixed or stable. Aligning with this position, the research employs Lave and Wenger's (1991) situated learning theory as the lens through which to examine these multi-agency professionals/practitioners' learning. As has been discussed above, by examining learning within this context that, akin to many contemporary workplaces, is more typically associated with conflict and tension, difference and change, dispersed and differing levels of participation, it refines and extends perceptions of learning beyond those accounts of SLT that typically stress the regularity of practice and social cohesion. This inherently extends understanding of workplace learning across professional boundaries.

boundary-crossing roles have become characteristic of many contemporary organisations, the identity implications of this have not been well examined within the existing literatures, either theoretically or empirically (Ellis & Ybema, 2010 p.283). This research helps to resolve this, contributing to informing the development of inter-disciplinary perspectives of policy-into-practice for integrated working. These perspectives might be subsequently engaged with in future comparative studies.

Given the high profile nature of the failings that have persisted even since this policy imposition, including for example, the death of Baby Peter in Haringey in 2007 (DoE, 2009) and of Khyra Ishaq, in Birmingham in 2008 (Radford, 2010), there is a need at a **practical level**, to generate an enhanced empirical understanding of this learning in order to help these professionals/practitioners better address the complex needs of children and families. It also has significance at the micro-level in helping the local authority itself to confirm the value of persistence with the specific multi-agency format they have adopted in light of the current financial situation facing them. The research is also anticipated to be of value to the professionals/practitioners that have participated with the research through offering them an opportunity to reflect upon their practice and its meanings. Through its contribution to the corpus of knowledge it also offers value to training providers and academics charged with developing programmes to develop 'new professionals' and leaders who are charged with embracing the 'sticky' problems facing them within a more integrated 'holistic' system (Alban-Metcalf & Alimo-Metcalf, 2010).

Moreover, this work has relevance beyond these Children's Services' professionals and practitioners. As inter-professional working configurations become increasingly common across public, private and not-for-profit, education and voluntary sectors in the Western world, there is a need to better understand the extent to which these hybrid organisational forms help solve the complex problems that lie "off the edge of history", having no known solutions (Giddens, pers. comm. 20/11/2012).

Finally, from a **methodological perspective**, this research employs the, as yet under-utilised, tool of photo-elicitation interviewing. As it will be demonstrated through this thesis, this approach has the benefits of generating a far richer data than might have been secured through traditional qualitative approaches alone.

## **1.6 Personal significance of this study**

The researcher has sustained an interest in multi-agency working for a number of years, arising initially through having been a qualified secondary teacher, although leaving the profession in 2003. This interest was rekindled in 2007/2008 when, working in a University's School of Education, she undertook a small-scale positivist research project to consider the *'Implications of secondary teachers' professional identities for the management of the Every Child Matters agenda'* (Black, 2008). This context has been an ongoing theme of two small-scale research awards and two Knowledge Transfer grants achieved by the researcher since 2010. Now working within a Business School she has been actively involved in working with both private and public sector organisations whose structures are increasingly based upon



collaborative configurations. These motivations are divulged at the outset in recognition of their influence upon the research.

## **1.7 A note on terminologies**

It is important to ensure coherence for the reader. However, this is a challenge given the complex nature of the research context. This complexity lies particularly with the different ‘languages’, terms and applications that are used interchangeably by different professionals, agencies, scholars and government departments. Therefore, in the interests of clarity, it is relevant and worthwhile, at this stage to explain the key terms used within this thesis.

### **1.7.1 *‘Multi-agency’ working***

Significant conceptual confusion, a “muddy terminological quagmire”, surrounds the use of the term ‘multi-agency’ with a diversity of terms having been used, in what appears to be an arbitrary fashion, within both government documentation and supporting literatures (Lloyd et al., 2001, p.3). Such terms as inter-professional, inter-agency, multi-professional, multi-agency trans-professional, integrated, joined-up, joint and partnership persist (Leathard, 1994, 2003a, 2003b) and have been used interchangeably, sometimes synonymously, sometimes with differing meaning (Integrated Care Network, 2004; Sloper, 2004; Percy-Smith, 2005; O’Halloran et al., 2006; Soan, 2006; Atkinson et al., 2007).

Initial government documentation typically used the terms “multi-agency” and “multi-disciplinary” teams to describe these configurations of professionals (DfES, 2004). However, the original *Every Child Matters* green paper used, within three pages, five different phrases to mean ‘multi-agency’, citing also the development of “universal services” (p.5) and “integration ... through multi-disciplinary teams” (DfES, 2003, p.51). Later documentation, such as DCSF (2007a) typically refers to “inter-professional” working. Furthermore, the government’s website offers guidance for both “integrated working” and at least three models for “multi-agency” and “inter-agency” working (<http://www.ecm.gov.uk>, latterly <http://www.education.gov.uk/>). In providing some form of coherence, the CWDC typically uses the terms ‘integration’ when relating to the model of working, ‘multi-agency’ as a tool of integrated working, and ‘collaboration’ when discussing the process by which these were implemented (CWDC, 2008a, 2008b). For example, in their *Common Core of Skills and Knowledge*, they observed that

*“As multi-agency working becomes more widely practiced, it is increasingly referred to as integrated working. This can be defined as the effective joint working of all individuals involved in working with children, young people and families, supported by the provision of tools and processes, in which the child is placed at the centre”* (CWDC, 2010, p.18).

However, they continue to suggest that ‘multi-agency’ subsumes a number of different working models, including multi-agency panels, fully integrated services, multi-agency teams, locality teams and ‘*Team around the Child*’ (TAC) (CWDC, 2010, para. 5.3).

The academic literature affords little lucidity to this terminological confusion. Exacerbated by contributions from across such fields as psychology, sociology, health care, education and management, each of which is characterised by their own and disparate epistemological stances and ontological assumptions, different researchers have adopted different terms and categorisations. Consequentially, whilst these working practices within Children's Services have been extensively researched over the past 10-years, the literature remains diffuse and under-developed (Warmington et al., 2004; Frost 2005, p.7). These different terminologies are presented in Table 1.2. Consequentially, it might be asserted that "all these words have come to mean something and nothing" (Pirrie et al., 1998), with Leathard (2003a) shrewdly concluding that, "what everyone is really talking about is learning and working together" (p.5).

This research adopts the following terms. It considers 'inter-professional collaboration' to act as an umbrella term, covering what, in the reality of practice, comprises a range of processes and associated surrogate concepts involving professionals working across disciplines (Petri, 2010). 'Multi-agency' is employed as the main term to align both with the key government literature, and especially with the terminology used by the case context. However, other terms are used interchangeably within this thesis, where appropriate.

Key researcher(s)	Terms used	Definition
Atkinson et al. (2002)	Multi-agency working	More than one agency working and acting together, drawing on pooled resources or pooled budgets.
Stracker (2008)	Inter-	Describes formal partnerships of agencies that retain their distinctive identities, thereby suggesting only the exchange and recombination of professional concepts and methods
	Multi-	Implies a blurring of professional boundaries.
Percy-Smith (2005)	Joint-working'	Professionals from more than one agency working together directly as one team.
	Collaboration	Agencies working together in a wide variety of different ways to pursue a common goal while also pursuing their own organisational goals.
	Integration	Agencies working together within a single organisational structure
	Multi-disciplinary	Staff of different professions, background and training working together
	Multi-agency	Where services are being provided by more than one agency team, but they are drawing upon one single budget and pooled resources ( <i>Subsumes 'joint' and 'multi-disciplinary'</i> )
Kennedy et al. (2001)	Intra-organisational Joint working	Referring clients / users to other agencies Two or more organisations involved in providing a specific service. Arrangements may be voluntary or statutory, formal or informal, and may or may not involve a financial relationship.
	Multi-agency activity	Includes the whole spectrum of inter-agency relationships in the organisation and delivery of services (subsumes 'joint' and 'inter-organisational' working above)
	Joint working	Identify three categories: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Multi-disciplinary</i>: Among individuals working within a single agency.</li> <li>• <i>Inter-disciplinary</i>: Individual professionals from different agencies separately assess the needs of child and family and meet to discuss findings and set goals.</li> <li>• <i>Transdisciplinary</i>: Different agencies work together jointly, sharing aims, information, tasks and responsibilities.</li> </ul>
Harker et al. (2004)	Interprofessional collaboration	Instances of collaborative, cooperative, practice between different professional disciplines at both strategic and operational levels
Leathard (2003a, 2003b)	Inter-professional work	Interaction between all of the professionals as they aim to achieve one shared goal
Warmington et al. (2004)	Integration	Formation of one organisation from all of the original component parts
	Interagency working	More than one agency working together in a planned and formal way, rather than simply through informal networking. May be at strategic or operational level.
	Multi-agency working	More than one agency working with a client but not necessarily jointly. Prompted by joint planning or simply a form of replication, resulting from a lack of proper interagency co-ordination.
	Joined up	Deliberately conceptualised and co-ordinated planning, which takes account of multiple policies and varying agency practices.
	Integration	The ultimate model of multi-agency activity
	Co-configuration	Distinctive interpretation of interagency working where professionals aim to form tight communities of practice or teams. Expertise is distributed between professionals who may not share professional backgrounds, common values or location.
	Trans-professional	When one professional (group) takes on a role that is normally outside of their usual scope of practice but for which they do have the necessary base of expertise. Creates a blurring/overlapping of professional boundaries
	Multiprofessional	Individuals from different professions working in parallel to provide care
	Inter-professional	Individuals working towards a shared goal which cannot be achieved without interdependency on their complimentary skills

**Table 1.2:** Different terminologies used  
Based upon Atkinson et al. (2007) and Percy-Smith (2005)

### 1.7.2 'Learning' and 'knowing'

As will be discussed in Chapter 2, the concept of learning, broadly understood as the modification of behaviour due to the incorporation of new experiences and/or information (based upon Davenport & Prusak, 1998), may be considered from a number of approaches. Differing epistemological and ontological perspectives underpin each of these. This has consequence for defining the concepts of *knowing* and *knowing-in-practice*. The researcher's theoretical perspective, her individual psychological perspective of learning, underpins the definitions of these concepts within this research: specifically,

- Learning, and thereby knowledge, is not something *external* that we acquire *individually*, but something that *arises* informally through our *participation* in day-to-day social activities *with* others;
- Knowledge does not belong to an individual but is the conversations of which they are a part (McDermott, 1999) and is important both for developing expertise and for developing a sense-of-self;
- We cannot articulate everything that we do, not least because we are often unaware that we are doing it. Thereby, knowledge cannot be merely acquired and transferred to other contexts.

Based upon this perspective, this research understands that the construction of knowledge, which is imbued with an historical and cultural legacy, is an interpretative outcome based upon the inter-psychological processes of individuals' acting within a social context (Billett, 2001a) and constructing an identity in relation to these. This emphasises the importance of thinking *and* acting rather than merely

the internal cognitive processes, and accentuates the centrality of ‘the actor’ acting within his/her social world. Instead of offering fixed structures, this *knowing-in-practice* is depicted as an active and reciprocal process, in which individuals purposively and reflexively appraise, negotiate and transform their on-going goal-directed activity, also that of others, and the context in which this activity is constituted (Rogoff, 1995). Therefore, it is located at the intersection of agency and determinism.

This definition of *knowing-in-practice* is unmistakably distinct from definitions that indicate objective types, or domains, of knowledge such as those that typify, for example, academic disciplines. Therefore, it is this understanding of *knowing* that underpins this study, that is used to understand how members of multi-agency teams within a Children’s Services department co-create *knowing* through their day-to-day multi-agency-focused practices.

### **1.7.3 ‘Practice’**

Orlikowski (2002) defines ‘practice’ as “recurrent, materially bounded and situated social action engaged by members of a community” (p.256). It is the internalised knowledge, or practical know-how (Bourdieu, 1980/1990), encompassing the assumptions, norms, methods, activities and tools that characterise a particular task/work. This incorporates both the implicit [also termed: tacit (Polanyi, 1967) or embodied (Nonaka, 1994)] and explicit knowledge of this domain (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995); also the values embedded within these activities and tools.

Thereby 'practice' encompasses the standard situations that professionals face in their day-to-day work within their workplace, framed spatially and temporally.

#### **1.7.4 'Discourse'**

'Discourse' has amassed a diversity of definitions indicative of its complex history and differing applications (Mills, 2004, p.5). This research adopts a post-structuralist interpretation. This does not place importance upon the utterances or texts (language) themselves, as in the representational-linguistic turn, but rather upon the rules and structures that created them and in its determining effect upon how individuals think and express themselves. Therefore 'discourse' can be considered as a "tool" for constructing "selfhood" (Reedy, 2009, p.117) in which meaning is not fixed but is the site of constant contestation.

### **1.8 Overview of this research thesis**

Robson (2002) observes how research is typically 'untidy'. To aid coherence, tracing the evolution of this work, its theoretical underpinnings, methodological approach and strategy, through to its analysis and interpretation of the findings, this thesis is structured as follows.

This chapter, **Chapter 1**, has provided the background to this research, contextualising it in terms of the research subject, within recent public service reform and within the conceptual framework. It has progressed to offer a rationale

for the research, specifically the significance of learning for multi-agency working and the interactions between learning and identity. This has enabled the formulation of the research aim and questions. The key terms have been defined to ensure clarity and mutual understanding.

The theoretical foundations for the research are established in **Chapter 2**. This comprises a review and critical evaluation of the academic literatures of workplace learning and identity. Particular emphasis is upon Lave and Wenger's (1991) 'situated learning theory' although other supporting literature, notably the concepts of 'expansive learning' (Engeström, 1987, 2001; Fuller & Unwin, 2003, 2004; Gherardi, 2006) and identity, are also examined. The intention is to establish the extant knowledge in these fields as a tool for understanding the research context.

Providing a detailed account of the research philosophy and principles, **Chapter 3** explains and defends the selection of the largely interpretivist methodological approach adopted to examine the research questions. The research design, strategy and methods of data generation are overviewed, offering photo-elicitation interviewing as a distinctive approach to data generation. This approach was designed to provide space for the professionals/practitioners to reflect upon their practice and for the researcher to *hear* the different stories and voices involved within these multi-agency teams. The validity and reliability of the research, and measures undertaken to reduce error, are critically reviewed and the alignment with the ontological stance of the research explicated. The concerns and implications of



being an 'outsider' researcher are discussed and the ethical implications of this research are considered. Finally the methods of data analysis are documented.

**Chapters 4-6** present the data and its analysis. These illustrate the patterns observable within the data generated to better understand the creation of this new *knowing*, specifically these professionals' ways of 'doing' and 'being'. The interpretative modes principally examine: how these professionals/practitioners are making sense of their multi-agency practice; their learning through participation in a multi-agency team; and 'being' a multi-agency professional. Short vignettes encapsulate the distinct 'tales' told by the professionals/practitioners (Reedy, 2009). These form the empirical basis of the analysis.

The penultimate chapter, **Chapter 7**, interprets the 'tales' and the supporting findings and insights offered, situating these within the existing literatures. Combining SLT with post-structural perspectives of identity provides a unique approach to understanding the relationships and learning between these multi-agency professionals. This presents interpretations based upon the interplay between knowledge and *knowing* in engendering expansive learning and draws attention to the identity-work being undertaken by the professionals/practitioners. It also examines how this is restricted or assisted by the context, structures and/or individual agency.

Finally, **Chapter 8** returns to the research questions stated at the outset. It draws together, summarises and makes concluding remarks to clarify how the findings support the research questions and aim. The implications of this research for understanding these multi-agency professionals' ways of 'doing' and 'being' are reviewed. An evaluation of the methodology and methods adopted is undertaken, with the limitations of the research reviewed and acknowledged to inform future research. Whilst the research has offered only an exploratory insight into one case-study authority it contributes to wider scholarship and offers a basis for further, more detailed examination. The findings also contribute to the knowledge of the local authority itself, offering further understanding of these multi-agency teams. This is perhaps especially valuable in the current financial situation where the authority's processes are under close scrutiny. Finally, in demonstrating the value of visual approaches, the research calls for their increased use in developing understanding of harder-to-access phenomena.

## **1.9 Chapter summary**

This chapter has provided the background to the research, outlining the broad field of study before introducing the research problem and derived research aim and questions. It has provided a brief overview of the policy imperatives that have instigated and shaped the multi-agency working in England's Children's Services with focus upon the identified challenges that this workforce faces as they seek new learning as multi-agency professionals/practitioners. Consideration has been made of both the theoretical and organisational/practical purpose and value of the

research as well as the personal. It has offered clarification of the key concepts and terminological used within the research as a means of orientating and contextualising the study. A synopsis of the thesis structure is presented.

## Chapter 2 Theoretical framework: Learning, knowledge and *knowing*

### 2.1 Introduction

In Chapter 1 it was asserted that the process of engendering effective multi-agency working requires new learning. These professionals/practitioners must give up their past practices and, as they engage with one-another, so they must integrate the knowledge of each of the groups involved to develop previously unknown solutions to the problems facing them in their work (Evering, 2012). Yet to date, there is little understanding of *what* learning and new knowledge is being (co-)created through these new practice configurations. Neither is there recognition of how learning is influenced and determined by the organisational structures presented within such workplace configurations as multi-agency working (Roberts, 2006; MacPherson & Clark, 2009).

The intention of this chapter is to locate this research study within the wider theoretical framework of learning, knowledge and *knowing*. This will develop a conceptual understanding of the learning engendered and *knowing* created by these Children's Services professionals/practitioners in the context of their day-to-day work practices; also the factors that limit its formation. An examination is made of the complex and 'messy' literatures of learning that have emanated from such diverse academic and practitioner fields as anthropology, sociology, psychology and education, to consider the different ontological and epistemological perspectives upon learning and knowledge. Indeed, it is this multitude of differing perspectives, and the difficulties that arise from these, that have discouraged empirical

researchers from studying the interface between them. The field remains therefore theory-heavy and evidence-weak (see for example, Godemann, 2008).

This chapter is structured as follows. Initial focus is upon the differing conceptualisation of learning and knowledge within the literature. This examines the ontological and epistemological perspectives, specifically the tensions between what Sfard (1998) terms her two distinct metaphors of learning: learning as 'acquisition' and as 'participation'. Their value for considering learning in the multi-agency context is critically evaluated. Subsequent consideration is made of what has been termed the third metaphor, 'learning as expansion' (Engeström, 1987, 2010; Gherardi, 2006). Attention then shifts to examine the focal theory: Lave and Wenger's (1991) situated learning (SLT). The dominant characteristics of SLT are overviewed before examining the appropriateness of this lens for considering learning within this multi-agency context. Specific consideration is made of how this lens aids understanding of the nature of learning within multi-agency practice, also of the human/non-human interactions and relationships through which this learning occurs. The work of their contemporaries is also considered in order to offer a broader perspective of understanding that accounts for some of the gaps within Lave and Wenger's theorising, notably how agency and structure influence this learning. Emphasis is also upon 'identity' theorising which is not well-examined or explained by SLT.

## 2.2 Learning and knowledge as complex terms

The terms 'learning' and 'knowledge' are used comprehensively across a broad literature. Yet, as Fenwick (2010c) observes, there is a "problematic assumption that 'learning' is a single object, self-evident and mutually understood" (p.80). Learning has been approached from a number of different perspectives, each differing with respect to their ontological and epistemological assumptions: that is, 'what exists' (ontology) and 'how we come to know about what exists' (epistemology) (Barab et al., 1999, p.71). Consequently, learning can be recognised as a multi-dimensional "complex and confusing arena" (Dixon et al., 1997, p.59). The most common of these approaches are summarised in Table 2.1. However, as will be seen through this chapter, distinguishing a clear definition of both 'learning' and 'knowledge' can be problematic and complex. Davenport and Prusak's (1998) definition of learning provides a point of departure: "a fluid mix of framed experiences, values, contextual information and expert insight that provides a framework for evaluating and incorporating new experiences and information" (p.5). This chapter now progresses to examine these multiple domains of learning and knowledge, with the intention of providing an overview of the various traditions (schools) that have emerged, and the overlaps and disconnections between them.

Approach to learning	Explanation	Key theorists
<b>Cognitivism</b>	An objectivist approach that emphasises individual cognitive structures. Internalises information in a form that will be available for later use. Separates mind and world	Bruner (1990); Gagne et al. (1992)
<b>Constructivism</b>	Emphasises the re-organisation of an individual's mental structures in sense-making an objective reality. The process of assimilation enables an individual to 'fit' an experience into an existing conceptual structure. Separates mind and world	Piaget (1926)
<b>Behaviourism</b>	An objectivist approach that considers individual actions and decisions – ie. behaviours. What is learned comes from interactions with the environment rather than from ideas existing independent of personal experience	Pavlov (1928); Thorndike (1905); Skinner (1953)
<b>Socio-culturalism (socio-constructivism)</b>	A relativist approach that places importance upon the interactions between social, cultural and relational aspects of learning. Thereby, knowledge is a shared experience developed through interactions amongst individuals	Vygotsky (1978)
<b>Situativity</b>	A relativist approach that places importance upon individuals' direct perceptions of, and interdependences with, phenomena, actions and events with which they interact. Mind and world are not separated, with the learner being a part of an entire system into which they gain membership. Knowledge exists in the evolving relationships within the system	Lave & Wenger (1991); Greeno (1998)

**Table 2.1: The dominant perspectives on learning**

## 2.3 Ontological perspectives of learning

An ontological perspective of learning draws attention to what learning is and what it means for someone, or something, to be learning. Two distinct approaches have been identified. The first sees learning as an act that engenders a product or outcome, demonstrated by a change in behaviour, knowledge, skills and attitude (Knowles et al., 1998, p.10). It implies that learning is reified, given a “thingness” (Wenger, 1998, p.58) with physical characteristics. This approach substantiates the Cartesian dualism that separates mind from the world, mental from material and subject from object. However, it is premised upon two potentially problematic assumptions:

- i. that learning products are stable over time;
- ii. that learning is consistent between all learners.

The contrasting approach presents learning as a process of participation in specific historically and culturally situated practices and relationships. Therefore, learning is both evolving and developmental, as a “continuous reciprocal interaction” (Bandura, 1977, p.vii), but also unique and personal (see for example, Vygotsky, 1978; Bruner, 1990). This approach also understands that learning changes an individual’s way of ‘being’ – their identity. Therefore, learning involves a new way of relating to the world, to others and to self. This new way of ‘being’ may in itself also influence ‘becoming’ in others and may change the context.



## 2.4 Epistemological perspectives of learning

These two dominant ontological perspectives to learning give rise to two dominant epistemological distinctions in understanding learning. Sfard (1998) refers to these as the two metaphors of learning<sup>2</sup>: learning as ‘acquisition’ and learning as ‘participation’. Other theorists, notably Eraut (2000), Argyris and Schön (1974/1978) and Ryle (1949/2002) offer similar two-fold distinctions, however this thesis primarily draws upon Sfard’s work. A comparison of these two approaches is made in what follows and is summarised in Table 2.2.

### 2.4.1 *Learning as acquisition*

Learning as ‘acquisition’, also referred to as the ‘commoditisation perspective’ (Sambrook, 2001), has dominated learning theories, especially within the workplace. As Table 2.2 indicates, the dominant focus of this approach has been upon ‘knowing that’ (Ryle, 1949/2002) - acquiring and managing a ‘propositional’ knowledge. The aim of this is to better understand how this knowledge, as an ‘object’, might be better created, applied, actively processed and incorporated with existing information. It also considers how such knowledge can be stored, transferred and retrieved for use as/when required within organisational settings in order to secure improved competitive advantage or to enhance public service delivery (for example, Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Allee, 1997; Davenport & Prusak, 1998; Davenport & Crossan et al., 1999; Probst et al., 2000).

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<sup>2</sup> Beckett & Hager (2002) and Hager (2004) refer to these two perspectives as ‘paradigms’ of learning.

Learning as acquisition		Learning as participation
Possession	<i>Epistemological underpinning (how we come to know about what exists)</i>	Practice
Commodity: possession can be gained; formulaic techniques that can be abstracted and transferred; assumed generalisable		Aspect of activity/action in which it is situated
Reality exists externally to the learner	<i>Ontological underpinning (what exists?)</i>	Reality exists through the interpretations of individuals and society
Knowledge is external to the individual		Knowing is socially situated in the context within which it was created
Taxonomic perspective classifying the different types and characteristics of knowledge (Tsoukas, 1996)	<i>Traditions</i>	Situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991)
Implicit and explicit knowledge (Polanyi, 1967)		Activity theory and knotworking (Engeström, 1987; 2001)
“Externalization” of tacit knowledge (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995)		Actor Network theory (Latour, 2007; Bleakley, 2012)
		Tension Triangle (Illeris, 2004)
		Social Network Analysis (Nadel, 1957)
Propositional knowledge	<i>Knowledge form</i>	Practical (procedural) knowledge
‘Knowing that’ (eg. cappuccino is a type of coffee)		‘Knowing how’ (eg. how to make a cappuccino)
Managing knowledge for sharing/transfer and use within and between contexts	<i>Focus</i>	Learning as an increase in effective performance within context
Learning is required for action	<i>Relationship to action</i>	Learning as a part of action
Individual	<i>Unit of analysis</i>	Relational between the individual and society/community
Separates mind and the world. Knower is independent of the environment &/or what is known	<i>Dualism perspective</i>	Reciprocity of mind and world
Individual improvement	<i>Purpose of learning?</i>	Community building
Individual learning by the recipient	<i>Who learns?</i>	Peripheral participant (apprentice); Learning as a shared experience
Facilitator, teacher	<i>Who teaches?</i>	Expert participant (old-timer)
Possessing / having acquired	<i>End result of learning</i>	Belonging
Learning as the destination		Learning as a journey
Piaget, (1926); Kohler (2008); Gagne (1985)	<i>Example key theorists</i>	Lave & Wenger (1991); Wenger (1998); Gherardi, 2006; Billett (2001a, 2001b, 2002, 2004a, 2004b)

**Table 2.2:** Comparing the two dominant metaphors of learning

However, this perspective on learning is fraught with difficulties and has, in consequence, been a topic of much debate amongst researchers for many years (for example, Schoenfeld, 1999; Ancori et al., 2000; Haskell, 2001; Gherardi, 2006; Hodgkinson, 2007; Varenne, 2009; Swart, 2011). The aspect experiencing greatest debate, which is to date characterised by limited empirical evidence to refute or attest it, is the extent to which practice knowledge can be made explicit and thus documented effectively (for example, Polanyi, 1962; Tsoukas, 1996, 2002; Wenger, 1998; Cook & Brown, 1999; Brown and Duguid, 2000a, 2000b; Gourlay, 2002). Other key questions raised by its critics include: do process artefacts influence practice?; can knowledge itself be transferred to practice?; and to what extent do rules steer human action? Polanyi (1962) asserts that whilst rules held in knowledge can be observed, they differ from the requirements of practice. He goes on to observe how rules are subsidiary to knowledge created through actual practice and do not in themselves make for skillful performance. Accordingly, if rules/procedures do not exist then this does not prevent effective performance from occurring. Argyris and Schön (1974) drew upon this understanding to identify, what they term “espoused theory” and “theory-in-use”: that is the gap between what is said *versus* the realities of practice. Brown and Duguid (1991) later encapsulated this as “canonical” and “non-canonical” practices.

It is these positivistic understandings, which assert pure technical knowledge as the best and only valid basis for policy development, that underpin much Government policy, informing the discourse of ‘new public management’ both in the UK and

further afield (McAdam & Reid, 2000; Yanow, 2003). Indeed, as examined in Chapter 1, this approach characterises the requirements for multi-agency working in Children's Services. Government focus has been upon the acquisition of knowledge offered through individualised training and guidance. This is exemplified in such process artefacts as flowcharts and 'best practice' guidelines, which act as a means to communicating, instructing and thus assuring, that specific personnel undertake specific practices in a specific way to provide precise, optimum solutions (Yanow, 1996; Alvesson & Kärreman, 2001).

Godemann (2008), amongst others, highlights how collaborative learning required by these multi-agency professionals/practitioners cannot be engendered through this rational 'scientific' perspective alone. An approach focusing upon individual training abstracted and transferred to the worksite or 'exchanged' with others, fails to recognise the integral relational aspects of learning, and arguably situates learning as a separate construct to collaboration (Lin & Beyerlein, 2006, p.70). Therefore, this offers only a part of what counts in practice. In drawing upon the work of Polanyi, Gherardi (1999) observes how the "creation and recreation of knowledge is not located in the heads of individuals, but is social and public" (p.114). Therefore, whilst some individual, de-contextualised knowledge 'acquisition' *may* be necessary to engender these multi-agency working practices, to 'know' is not enough (see also Lave & Wenger, 1991). This acquisition approach also fails to accommodate the evolutionary needs of this complex and rapidly evolving workplace. Indeed, there is limited evidence of these ascribed 'recipes' benefitting practice or outcomes for

children and families (Oliver et al., 2010). Moreover, Hodgson and Cicmil (2007) assert that “blind faith in these universal ‘techniques’, ‘authorised’ bodies of knowledge and abstract principles” is resulting in a loss of reflexive action and embedded wisdom, which is critical to effective practice (p.445).

Yet, if these “practices” are viewed through a situated practice lens then attention shifts to ‘doing-in-situation’ (Gherardi, 2009). Thereby, local practice knowledge, specific to the context, rather than the acquisition of technical knowledge, is considered fundamental to the development of workplace competence. Acknowledging the importance of relationships and human/non-human interactions, this approach can be equated with Sfard’s (1998) second learning metaphor: ‘participation’.

#### **2.4.2 *Learning as participation***

Underpinned by social and ecological perspectives, Sfard’s participatory approach suggests, as shown in Table 2.2, that learning is intrinsic to human activity and can be better understood as a process of meaningful participation in ongoing social and cultural practices, with which it is mutually constituent (Illich, 1971; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Brown & Duguid, 1991; Nicolini et al., 2003; Orlikowski, 2002, p.250; Barab & Roth, 2006; Hager et al., 2012; Nicolini, 2013). Therefore, learning is not an individual process of knowledge-acquisition. By contrast, this approach recognises the importance of relations between individuals and/or groups, to suggest that social meaning is a fluid and evolving, “collective accomplishment ...”, continuously (re)constructed through negotiation within the “web of relations between people,

artefacts and activities” (Gherardi, 2006, p.2). Through this, practices, tools and identity are learned, and thus individuals shape and transform themselves and their environment. So, there is no ‘one’ knowledge, what is known, *knowing*, is expressed in an individual’s ability to competently participate within a context to which they become increasingly encultured (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Therefore, we can “only know that which has become the subject of our practice” (Nicolini et al., 2003, p.8), with this *knowing* interpreted agentially/subjectively based upon personal experience, biographies and beliefs/value, and the ‘affordances’ of the context (Gibson, 1977). Over the past few decades an extensive and diverse body of theorising has developed, founded upon what has come to be termed these practice-based approaches (Gherardi, 2006; Nicolini, 2013). This has initiated a significant shift in emphasis towards *knowing*, or ‘knowing how’ (Ryle, 1949/2002) and has elevated the “conception of the workplace as a [key] learning environment” (Billett, 2004b, p.312).

#### **2.4.3 The third metaphor: Learning as expansion**

More recently, a third metaphor, ‘learning as expansion’, has been recognised, notably by Engeström (for example, 1987, 2001) and Gherardi (2006); also Fuller and Unwin (2003, 2004) in their work on learning within multi-organisational settings. Based in earlier work by Mezirow (1990), Argyris and Schön (1978) and Bateson (1972), these more recent accounts have derived divergent understandings, offering differing units of analysis. Whilst a detailed review of this theorising lies beyond the constraints of this chapter, this can be found in Engeström (2010). In synthesising

this theorising, it can be asserted that expansive (or transformative) learning occurs when problematic situations or tensions exist that cannot be resolved on the basis of existing understanding. This necessitates learners to collaboratively reflect upon and challenge existing assumptions and established norms. Engendering a more 'productive' learning than Sfard's metaphors, this enables a reframing from practices understood as problematic to those that are more effective. Associated tools and symbols are developed alongside. Therefore, expansive learning involves an ongoing epistemological and ontological change - a change to the way of *knowing* and the process of thinking and doing. This changes the learners' possibilities, expectations and behaviours, and transforms the social environments within which they learn (Wenger, 1998, p.4). However, Engeström's approach itself may be perceived as too radical for the case of multi-agency working, thereby emphasising the value of Gherardi's (2006) and Fuller and Unwin's (2004) work. These explain how the internal tensions between the opposing, yet knowledgeable forces of the different professions within the community, will stimulate the expansion of perspectives, spawning collective, innovative development, and encouraging them to think and act in new ways (Gherardi, 2006, p.34). This offers a means by which, through working together they can learn new practices that do not, as yet, exist (Edwards, 2007; Frost & Robinson, 2007; Cameron et al., 2009). This may be seen as key to the development of these multi-agency professionals/practitioners (Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2004b, p.21). Therefore, an understanding of the reciprocal interaction and the co-evolution of meaning within these multi-agency communities requires recognition of how workplace contestation and dilemmas might be used fruitfully, perhaps encouraged, to engender new *knowing* (Contu & Wilmott, 2003; Fuller,

2007). This requires managers to refrain from protecting their teams from these dilemmas but to assist them in reflecting upon them for advancement of new knowledge.

## **2.5 Learning situated in work**

To this point, the chapter has provided a brief overview of the diverse literatures of learning, principally the two distinct metaphors of learning as ‘acquisition’ and as ‘participation’ (Sfard, 1998). In doing this, it has asserted that the governments’ acquisitional approach to learning is only a part of what counts in practice. Effective learning for multi-agency working requires an explicit focus upon the relational aspects of learning and the specifics of the cultural situation. This has emphasised the importance of participatory, practice-based approaches to learning. The chapter now progresses to consider the focal theory, one of the most prominent approaches to participatory learning: Lave and Wenger’s (1991) situated learning theory (SLT). It is within this framework that the research findings are grounded.

The situated learning lens is not without its critics (for example, Tripp, 1993, Anderson et al., 1997; Fuller, 2004; Fuller et al., 2005; Thorpe & Kubiak, 2005; Evans et al., 2006) and it offers only a ‘slice of the world’. However, this chapter will argue that it offers an “influential contribution” (Fuller, 2007, p.17) to understanding learning, the remodeling of these professionals’ practice and the creation of *knowing* within the changing temporal-relational contexts of multi-agency working. In this context, knowledge is largely tacit. It is socially created in, distributed and

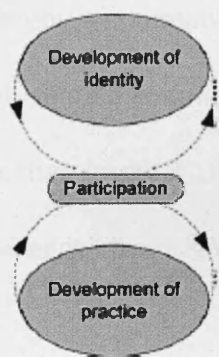


embedded within, the process of work (McPherson & Clark, 2009; Eraut, 2011; Fuller & Unwin, 2011; Hager, 2011; Nicolini, 2013). Whilst this lens is typically associated with stable and harmonious contexts, it will be asserted that it has the capacity to offer unique and valuable fresh insights into understanding the reflexive action, learning and innovation in practice that is required within the complex and conflictual social setting of Children's Services.

## **2.6 Learning as a situated phenomenon: Situated learning theory**

Situated learning theory adopts a realist ontological perspective to offer a radical critique of individualist cognitivist theories. It understands learning as a situated practice-based phenomenon (Hislop, 2013). So, rather than being viewed as 'bundles' of information existing in the "heads of individuals" (Hanks, 1991, p.131), learning and knowledge arise as an inseparable process of engagement and co-participation within a community-of-practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998; Billett, 2004). Thereby, learning is understood to be socially/relationally created. It is situated and sustained through the activities of the community-of-practice and emphasises the importance of objects in mediating learning (Gherardi, 2000; Handley et al., 2007). This accentuates the integration of both 'the known', which is conceptualised as an enacted social practice of *knowing* (as the 'doing' rather than 'product') and 'the knower'. As Blackler (1995) observes, this focus upon *knowing* rather than knowledge means that "the distinction ... assumed between knowledge and learning is avoided" (p.1038). Significantly this approach highlights the importance of "learning as identity formation" (Dent & Whitehead, 2001, p.11).

Thus learning is understood as a process of “competently participating” in a community (Brown & Duguid, 1991; Lave & Wenger, 1991), with Gherardi and Nicolini (2003) observing how “learning is not conceived as a way of knowing in the world but as a way of being in the world” (p.207). Concurrently, identity itself “shapes what the person comes to know” (Billett & Somerville, 2004, p.315). Consequently, as Figure 2.1 illustrates, learning, practice and identity are “inseparable” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p.115) and cannot be understood as “separate entities” (Kondo, 1990, p.12).



**Figure 2.1:** Core components of situated learning theory  
Source: Handley et al. (2007, p.75)

From this it is deduced that learning requires both the suspension of one’s established identity, and a willingness to reconstruct the self in relation to others (Wenger, 2000; Sawyer, 2009). It is this ‘enactment’, that provides structure and meaning to what we do (Wenger, 1998, p.47; see also Billett, 2004; Gherardi, 2009a, 2009b) that is considered to be the object of study rather than knowledge itself (for example, Lave & Wenger, 1991; Blackler, 1995; Cook & Brown, 1999; Brown & Duguid, 2000a; Newell et al., 2002; Orlikowski, 2002). Therefore, as Billett (2007b) notes, there is a need to better understand professional learning in terms of this

process of an individual's ambition to secure a 'sense-of-self' within the community-of-practice.

Yet the term community-of-practice has undergone endless re-interpretations since its initial conceptualisation (see Kimble, 2006 for a detailed review). This has resulted in its overuse, being used often mistakenly as a surrogate for SLT (Amin & Thomas, 2006, 2008), with a resultant over-emphasis upon 'community' rather than the activity that comprises the practice (Gherardi, 2009b). This research draws upon its original conceptualisation. Thereby a community-of-practice can be understood to comprise a group of people who share a common passion for something they do, and learn how to do it better as they interact (Wenger, 1998). It is an "intrinsic condition for the existence of knowledge" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p.98).

Lave and Wenger's (1991) theorising has played a central role in contemporary workplace learning studies, in emphasising the importance of context, practices and relationships (Billett, 2002; Fuller & Unwin, 2004), and the significance of informal learning within the workplace (Evans et al., 2006; Saunders 2006). However, it has not yet been systematically applied to empirical studies of knowledge creation within multi-agency working. Whilst the ESRC-MATch project (for example, Robinson & Cottrell, 2005) does draw upon this lens within their work, they use activity theory to explore knowledge-sharing and making amongst multi-agency professionals. Lathlean and LeMay (2002) apply SLT to explore inter-agency working, but their work provides little more than a recount of the communities-of-practice

framework itself. Moreover, situated learning is almost exclusively examined within conventional communities-of-practice characterised by mutuality, shared objectives/goals, social cohesion, stability and continuity rather than change (Brown et al., 1989; Edwards, 2005; Fuller, 2007; Gherardi, 2009). The exception is MacPherson & Clark (2009). To the contrary, as noted in Chapter 1, this research extends understanding of learning beyond these typical accounts of SLT. It examines learning within a context, akin to many contemporary workplaces, that is more typically associated with conflict and tension, discord, difference and change, dispersed and differing levels of participation. Such factors will inevitably influence the learning process, most notably, willingness and/or ability to participate and depth of identification (Amin & Roberts, 2008). This accentuates the need to understand the relationships and mechanisms through which situated learning occurs (Jones, 2006), and places emphasis upon practice and objects rather than the community itself (Gherardi, 2009; Macpherson & Clark, 2009).

However, individuals will inevitably hold membership of more than one community. Wenger (1998, p.132, *op cit.*) refers to this as “duality”. These “constellations of membership” (*ibid*) expose individuals to different ways of ‘being’ as they bring with them experience and ‘expertise’ from elsewhere. Therefore, identity is continuously evolving and being reworked. It is situationally renegotiated as individuals seek to achieve, or “craft” (Kondo, 1990), a sense of coherence across the multiple identities they develop through multiple participations (Giddens, 1991). This is typically achieved through membership of a new community. Accordingly, Wenger (2009)

suggests that learning can be viewed as a journey through different landscapes of practices, with individuals' identities being (re-)created as a personal reflection of these landscapes. In the context of this research, the community-of-practice is understood to be the "situated recurrent activities" integral to multi-agency working (Orlikowski, 2002, p.253). Yet these Children's Services professionals/practitioners will inevitably hold membership of, and be actively participating in, at least their own professional community and the multi-agency community. Additionally, it is recognised, that for some professionals/practitioners, especially those outside of the core team, their multi-agency community membership is transient. These "constellations" will inevitably affect the nature and degree of learning that is engendered both by individuals and the community.

### **2.6.1 Central concepts of situated learning**

Focus now turns to consider the central concepts of situated learning theory (SLT).

#### **2.6.1.1 Knowledge and practice inseparability**

As has been discussed above, practice and its inseparability from learning are central to SLT. Whilst Lave and Wenger are not explicit in their explanation of what this 'practice' *is*, their work draws attention to how the individual is embedded in a network of human and non-human interactions (Strati, 2007), comprising the "practitioners, their practices, the artefacts of that practice and the social organisation and political economy of the community-of-practice" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p.2). Therefore, learning is an important *part* of action, rather than, as

cognitive learning theories suggest, a requirement *for* action. Accordingly, this emphasises the mutually constitutive relationship of knowledge and *knowing*, asserting that the development of meaning requires both competent participation (developing implicit practical *knowing*) *and* the reification of this *knowing-in-practice* (as explicit codified knowledge) (Wenger, 1998; Orlikowski, 2002, p.250; Eraut, 2011, p.181, 183). However, Lave and Wenger, and indeed many social-practice theorists, fail to elaborate upon this relationship to illustrate its significance in the reality of day-to-day activity. This is addressed by Orlikowski (2002) through her model of '*knowing-in-practice*'.

Embedded within the field of sociology, notably drawing upon the works of Giddens (1984), Orlikowski's model, similarly to Cook and Brown's (1999) "generative dance", draws attention to the significant distinction between 'knowing that' (knowledge) and 'knowing how' an action is performed (*knowing*). She places foremost importance upon *knowing*, approaching knowledge in terms of this (ie. knowledge is constructed through action) even if the 'do-er' is unable to communicate how, specifically, they are undertaking the action. Significantly she observes the importance of 'boundary spanning', and of 'operationalised knowledge' for enabling successful action across these boundaries. Based upon these assumptions, she draws upon empirical evidence to identify five major practices, and activities comprising these practices. She then offers illustrations of how *knowing* is constituted within practice (p.257). These are illustrated in Table 2.3. For example, in the 'practice of identity sharing' she identifies the activities of: socialisation, using

common orientations to work, identification with the organisation and engaging in shared training. The *knowing*, she asserts, constitutes the employees “knowing the organisation” (p.257). Thereby, information that is used is always based within the collection of activities that comprise practice and as such, with only factual known information (knowledge), understanding and progress will be limited.

Practice	Activities comprising the practice	Knowing constituted in the practice
Sharing identity	Engaging in common training and socialisation. Using common orientation to do development work. Identifying with the organisation	Knowing the organisation
Interacting face-to-face	Gaining trust, respect, credibility and commitment. Sharing information. Building and sustaining social networks	Knowing the players in the game
Aligning effort	Using common models, methods and metrics. Contacting for expertise regularly	Knowing how to co-ordinate across time and space
Learning by doing	Investing in individual development. Mentoring employees in their careers. Rewarding not punishing effort	Knowing how to develop capabilities
Supporting participation	Globally distributing product development work. Involving participants in project decisions. Initiating and supporting overseas assignments	Knowing how to innovate

**Table 2.3:** Repertoires of practice, activities and knowing  
Source: Orlikowski (2002, p.257)

This framework offers significant value in aiding understanding of the relationship and interactions between knowledge, *knowing*, practice and context that is omitted

from Lave and Wenger's SLT work. However, it must be acknowledged that the empirical evidence supporting it is very limited in extent. Although Orlikowski presents empirical evidence to illustrate her work, this is relatively superficial in nature, undoubtedly consequential of the inherent difficulties of capturing a *knowing* that is deeply embedded within practice, or of capturing phenomena characteristic of it.

#### *2.6.1.2 Distributed cognition*

SLT recognises that that knowledge within a community-of-practice is distributed in nature: a collective situated cognition, or "distributed cognition" (Hager, 1996), spread among interacting individuals embedded in co-ordinated social practice. These "collective minds" of individuals' specialised knowledge bases (Weick & Roberts, 1993) are synergistic in nature, offering far more than the individuals' knowledge summed (Lam, 2000, p.491; Hakkarainen et al., 2004, p.214). Consequently, this potentially offers new insights that were not held previously by any one individual, engendering new collective capabilities and knowledge (see for example, Carlile, 2002, 2004; Cacciatori, 2008). Significantly, this shows that rather than expertise being determined by what access individuals have to inanimate resources, it is 'who you know' that significantly governs 'what you come to know', (Granovetter, 1973; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Brown & Duguid, 1991, 2000; Orr, 1996; Gherardi & Nicolini, 2002; Nardi et al., 2002; Engeström, 2008). Indeed, extensive evidence indicates how informal relations are far more valuable than formalised hierarchical structures of established procedures.



The effectiveness of this distributed knowledge in stimulating joint problem solving is however mediated by individuals' ability and willingness to actively engage in it. Firstly, it requires these professionals/practitioners to have a shared background understanding and a common code, or frame-of-reference, for how their separate bodies of knowledge relate to the task in-hand and to one another. Secondly, this co-operation is typically mediated by the degree of trust between the individuals involved (Lee, 1997), both in terms of an individual acknowledging knowledge 'lack' and/or another individual accepting the request (Argyris, 1982; Argyris & Schön, 1996).

#### *2.6.1.3 Legitimate peripheral participation: Issues of agency and power*

Central to Lave and Wenger's theorising is the process of legitimate peripheral participation (LPP), which explains how through an ongoing relationship, newcomers become members of a community-of-practice. Illustrated through their apprenticeship model, they suggest that over time the newcomer learner moves from a position on the periphery of practice in a trajectory towards "full practice expertise" at the core of the community (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p.29). This is achieved not only through learning the specific knowledge and skills of the community but involves enculturation into its social and cultural practice; that is, learning how to 'be' within the community – evidencing the emergence of a new identity. As learning changes the individual (their identity), so their form of participation also changes, altering the relationship between the participants (Rogoff, 1995) but also, reciprocally, changing the practice itself. Effective learning is

therefore brought about through the relations of 'newcomers' with 'old-timers', the experts.

This inherently introduces the axiological perspectives underpinning learning, notably issues of power and access to the way that learning and knowing are legitimised (Saunders, 2006). Significantly, participation in practice depends upon two key 'affordances' (Gibson, 1977): firstly that the learner engages with the practice(s) of the community and, secondly that the community accepts (legitimises) them as learners and allows them access to the practice. In the case of the multi-agency community, the legitimacy of these professionals'/practitioners' participation is structurally determined through policy guidelines and imposed structural arrangements. In reality, the opportunities to learn through participatory processes depend upon the opportunities offered to these professionals/practitioners, and upon their decision to take up these opportunities. Whilst Lave and Wenger acknowledge these elements they do not examine them in detail.

Considering the first of these, the learners' engagement with the practice, raises the debate over structure and agency. The tensions between these have been well examined, although SLT is often criticised for tending to conflate agency with structure and thereby failing to fully examine the implications of individuals' abilities to shape their own norms and to endorse communal norms (Billett, 2004b; Lindkvist, 2005; Fuller, 2007; Eraut, 2011; Kakavelakis & Edwards, 2012). SLT assumes that the context created will generate effective practice and learning, overlooking the

unpredictable nature of individual experience (Thorpe & Kubiak, 2005) and motivation to use new understandings. Billett (2004b) addresses this through his notion of 'individual intentionality', how "individuals decide how they participate in and what they construe and learn from the experience" (p.316), to suggest that workplace learning involves a regulated, often contested, interaction between the social practice *and* the individual (*ibid*) (see also Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; Dreier, 1999; Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2004; Illeris, 2004). These works also support views of the 'double hermeneutic': that "social forces not only 'trickle-down' from social institutions to individuals' lives but also 'percolate up' to modify existing patterns" (Mayer & Tuma, 1987, p.3-4).

Therefore, the community and its structures do not, alone, mediate participation and the creation and transformation of knowledge and *knowing*. Individual agency also plays an important role, notably in recognising how, indeed 'if', individuals perceive the participation identifies with their "figured world" (Holland & Lachiotte, 2007), serving their purposes and their personal trajectories. Yet, informed by Giddens' (1984) structuration theorising, Hodkinson et al. (2007) assert that "people are subjected to structures even as they take agentic actions" (p.418), and therefore emphasise the misconception of 'pure' agency. Nevertheless, there are many reasons why an individual might choose not to participate. Specifically, in this context, this reticence may be fostered through what might constitute a resultant explicit acceptance of the surrender of their professional distinctiveness. Inherently, such hesitancy will shape their learning, expertise and their subsequent ability to

manipulate practices. Accordingly, Knorr-Cetina (1997, 1999) refers to what she terms, “knowledge-orientated practices” to demonstrate how individuals will seek knowledge only when it corresponds with a perceived ‘sense of lack’. If these professionals/practitioners do not perceive such trajectory to align with their professional/practice allegiances, will they recognise lack? Also of significance is ‘calculated engagement’ whereby actors co-operate minimally to protect their interests, risking what might be termed an unproductive dialogue.

Therefore, there is a need to better understand the way that agentic intentionality, commitment and actions, also individuals’ biographies, identity and “habitus” (Bourdieu, 1990) which are shaped through past and concurrent social participation and learning, influence how and what individuals learn (Billett, 1998, 2004a, 2004b; Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; Hodkinson & Bloomer, 2002; Eraut, 2004; Fuller et al., 2005; Kakavelakis & Edwards, 2012). This has been more recently examined by Kakavelakis & Edwards (2012) in considering the merger of two European Brewing companies. They identified the importance of the emerging temporal-relational contexts for stimulating co-operation and conflict. Yet also recognised, significantly, how past experiences, biographies, knowledgability and current/future interests shaped actors enactment in new practices and thereby created opportunities for, or limited, their learning. However, empirical evidence to support this is still lacking.

Secondly, the concern over legitimisation of the learners raises concerns over conceptions of power, an issue for which Lave and Wenger are consistently criticised

(Fox, 2000; Contu and Wilmott, 2003; Fuller et al., 2004; Veenswijk & Chisalita, 2007). Whilst Contu and Wilmott (2003) acknowledge that Lave and Wenger do recognise the implications of power within their theorising, they stress that this explanation is somewhat limited in its ability to analyse the breadth of politics and power relations existing within contemporary organisations. As indicated in Chapter 1, the multi-agency context is reportedly beset by issues of power, notably professional hierarchies that are sustained through the persistence of socio-historically-developed jargon (for example, Anning et al., 2006). This illustrates Lave and Wenger's assertions that "processes of exclusion and subordination operat[ing] locally" (p.135) as well as those imposed structurally may enable some individuals to take a more empowered position. This 'intentional regulation' (Billett, 2004b, p.317) may work to present some professionals'/practitioners' knowledge-bases as 'superior', whilst excluding others from discussions or at least precluding them an equal role. Indeed, Edwards (2010), in her work on Children's Services' multi-agency teams across a number of UK locations, noted the importance of "politics of representation" (p.54): the "ranking" of representations, whereby the categories of one profession held rank over those of another. She further illustrated this with reference to Hjerne and Saljo's (2004) work, where bio-medical representations shaped discussions about children with Special Needs, disregarding contributions made by other professionals. Further evidence of these power relations within multi-agency teams are provided for example, by Midgley et al. (1998) in their study of service development for elderly people. Such marginalisation has implications for equality in participation, determining the learning opportunities open to them and in consequence, their role in the creation of new knowing.

However, Lave and Wenger also assert that relations of power within the community will inevitably shift, so individuals' participation status may change from moment-to-moment (see also Goffman, 1981). Therefore, it might be suggested that socialisation within a community also includes learning one's changing position within the organisation of the practice: their "personal action potency" (Dreier, 1999).

### ***2.6.2 Engendering new learning within a community-of-practice***

Whilst these facets of SLT help understand learning, Lave and Wenger's central notion of LPP procures further critiques of relevance to this research. Firstly, being based in Bandura's (1986) social learning theories that accentuate imitable learning, LPP favours reproduction. Therefore, it might be questioned how *new* learning might occur within these multi-agency communities (Fuller, 2007).

Drawing upon the 'third metaphor' of learning discussed above accentuates the importance of tensions through power inequalities, and resultant struggles for control created through imposed working structures, for engendering a more productive learning (for example, Fox, 2000; Hong & O, 2009) (cf critiques of Fuller, 2007; Kakavelakis & Edwards, 2012). Gherardi (2006) describes how these internal tensions within the community will encourage individuals to reflect upon contested practices and taken-for-granted assumptions, encouraging them to think and act in new ways and potentially transforming them (p.34). As Wenger (1998) suggests, this offers opportunities for "the old and the new, the known and unknown .... [to] act

out their differences and discover their commonalities, manifest their fear for one another, and come to terms with their need for one another ..." (p.116). Therefore, as is recognised in these contemporary views of SLT, an understanding of the reciprocal interaction and the co-evolution of meaning within these multi-agency communities requires recognition of how workplace contestation and dilemmas might be used fruitfully, perhaps encouraged, to engender new *knowing* (Contu & Wilmott, 2003; Fuller, 2007).

Secondly, Lave and Wenger assert that expertise is assumed through a centripetal movement from novice to expert. This has its problems; as Fuller et al. (2005) demonstrate, 'old-timers' might learn from 'newcomers'. Therefore, expertise is not always associated with experience and status. Moreover, many of the professionals/practitioners in this research might potentially be considered both experts and novices. As they move into these multi-agency communities many will be, or will have been, experts bringing in already formed and relevant knowing, skills and expertise in an equivalent field from another community. Therefore, they are not the 'true' novices usually considered by SLT in which no account is made of the skills/knowledge that newcomers have to share with others (Fuller & Unwin, 2004, p.22-24). Furthermore, a professional/practitioner might in some instances be the expert, yet at other times, perhaps even concurrently, be a novice within the same team (community).

Finally, Evans et al. (2006) identify that the existence of both novice and expert does not assure learning will take place. They draw upon Bathmaker and Avis' (2005) work to demonstrate how marginalisation might occur where there is a lack of alignment between the culture of the community-of-practice and that of the novices.

Therefore, in order to realise the potential of this theorising for this research, it is suggested that these communities require a form of LPP distinct from the centripetal novice-expert socialisation patterns typically associated with it. This is offered by Edwards (2010), who suggests that multi-agency expertise is fostered not through periphery-core learning, but rather through the development of relationships. She asserts that productive participation requires participants to have refined relational skills. This "relational expertise" comprises the 'know how' associated with revealing, accessing and working with the knowledge of others in a common, if slightly differently interpreted/understood, endeavour. However, this theorising is predicated upon the assumption that communication and sharing will instinctively occur within the community, and indeed offers no mechanism by which this might occur. Yet it provides a means to understanding how expertise might be engendered both through ongoing, and specifically by more infrequent participation such as that experienced by some of these professionals/practitioners. Through developing this relational engagement and expertise, so it is asserted that actors will have more favourable expectations of others so will ignore what might impede productive



dialogue (Tsoukas, 2009). Therefore, this offers a useful means of extending Lave and Wenger's understanding of expertise within multi-agency communities.

However, importantly, learning requires these professionals/practitioners (to want) to 'forget' their past ways of doing things, whether individually or collectively. Policy implementation is undertaken with the assumption that 'forgetting' and 'discarding' the past and engendering new learning will be unproblematic and non-conflictual. However, persistence with habitual practice and an inability to use this 'past' as a building block for the future both by policy makers and professionals/practitioners has been a major stumbling block to engendering change (Black & Hulme, 2011). The creation of new *knowing* requires the provision of opportunities, 'emancipatory space', for new ideas/practice to develop (Sturdy et al., 2004; Hulme & Cracknell, 2010). However, within day-to-day practice do such opportunities exist and/or do entrenched (managerial) power relations prevent its creation? (Macpherson & Clark, 2009). These issues will be examined later within this thesis.

### **2.6.3 Factors determining participation: Structures and artefacts**

In addition to the importance of relationships in engendering learning, participation may be facilitated or hampered by what Schatzki (2005) refers to as the "practice-order bundles": the structures and practices/routines, also objects/artefacts that impact upon and mediate the social relations. These determine if, and how, actors engage, why they do and what they do, thereby influencing and informing participation through relationships and defining norms of practice (see also Wenger,

2000; Callon, 2002; Carlile, 2004; Knorr-Cetina, 1982, 2001; Taylor & Robichaud, 2004; Engeström & Blackler, 2005; Antonacopoulou, 2008; MacPherson & Clark, 2009).

Carlile (2002) and Fenwick et al. (2011), amongst others, emphasise the role of artefacts for bringing about a 'collective sensemaking' and/or common practice language. Wenger (1998) refers to these as 'boundary objects': objects/artefacts that inhabit several communities, satisfying the requirements of each. Whilst different individuals will understand these socio-material elements of practice in different ways (*ibid*, p.150-151), they act as a conceptual tool for bridging the boundaries between the different communities (Bowker & Star, 1999, p.297). This provides a structure for interaction, mediating complementary knowledge and bridging epistemic contexts and communities (see also Star & Greisemer, 1989; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Carlile, 2002, 2004; Daniels et al., 2010; Ludvigsen et al., 2010). In the case of these Children's Services multi-agency teams, the professionals/practitioners have been provided with common artefacts, 'artificial' boundary objects such as the '*Common Assessment Framework*' (CAF) and '*Team around the Child*' (TAC). It was intended that these would act to offer a common language facilitating the bridging of boundaries between them (Gherardi & Nicolini, 2005). Alongside, these tools, Wenger (2000) emphasises the importance of "boundary workers" to act as bridges to facilitate this sharing of knowledge (see also Hargadon, 1998; Nonaka & Konno, 1998).

The importance of these structures and artefacts have been conceptualised by Fuller and Unwin (2003) in their 'restrictive-expansive' continuum (see also Fuller et al., 2007). This provides a useful heuristic device for considering how the multi-agency environment within this Children's Services might be fostering and/or hindering learning. Indeed, the authors themselves draw attention to the need for further understanding of such dimensions which impact on the creation of workplace learning environments through empirical case-studies (p.53). 'Expansive' environments create learning opportunities that foster 'deep learning' (Marton et al., 1984) and "the work of the imagination" (Wenger, 1998), and are also more likely to contribute to expansive or transformational learning (Engeström, 1994, 2001), whereas 'restrictive' environments hinder workforce development.

## **2.7 Situated learning and identity**

As has been discussed above, an important outcome of Lave and Wenger's situated learning perspective, is the enactment of a way of 'being' within this specific context. Therefore, learning is as much a matter of identity formation as it is knowledge and skills formation. Wenger (2000) suggests that this process of 'belonging' takes place within three modes (pp.174, 227-228):

- i. Engagement: doing things together (eg. dialogue, producing artefacts);
- ii. Imagination: constructing and expanding a new self-image of self, the world and community to reflect upon the situation and explore possibilities. This involves exploring other ways of doing and being;

- iii. Alignment: ensuring local activities are aligned with other processes so to enable their effectiveness.

Each mode requires a different kind of work, but importantly requires understanding of “*who am I becoming ..?*” in order to recognise where efforts need to be placed. However, despite this significant emphasis upon learning as becoming and being, Handley et al. (2007), also Fuller et al. (2005, p.29), observe how SLT offers little explanation of how and why identities develop and change. In acknowledging this, attention is drawn to other identity theorising.

### ***2.7.1 Understanding learning through identity***

This research has recognised that successful integration into these changed workplace contexts requires identification with it (for example, Fenwick, 2004). However, significant previous research across a diversity of organisations undergoing change has identified how employees’ commitments and thereby their ‘work-related identities’ are significantly challenged in these situations. As Volman & tenDam (2007) observe, identities sustained socially within one community may “inhibit participation in certain [other] practices” (p.845-846). Therefore, learning requires alignment between individuals’ desired identities and those afforded by the community(s) to which they have access (Billett et al., 2005, p.229-230). Yet a significant body of literature on multi-agency working across Children’s Services and Health has catalogued prevailing identities and endemic stereotyping as one of the many barriers to effective collaborative working (Hind et al., 2003; Mandy et al., 2004; Adams et al., 2006; Anning et al., 2006; Hean et al., 2006), as multi-agency

team members affiliate with their primary memberships rather than with those of the new multi-agency teams. This, these researchers assert, is due to the considerable strength, and deep-rooted nature of these professionals'/practitioners' identity which is embedded in well-defined social structures and enacted in ways that society recognises. This indicates a potential lack of alignment between the 'government-desired' multi-agency identity afforded to them and the workforce's initial professional identities.

Understanding multi-agency working as a 'way of being', a 'sense-of-self', rather than holding a specific set of competencies or skills, offers potential scope for understanding the challenges and resolutions to effective practice. The way in which these professionals/practitioners understand their identity will influence their intentions to 'forget' their past and to learn as multi-agency teams.

However, to date, research linking collaborations and identity generally is lacking within the organisational behaviour literatures (Huxham & Vangen, 2008, p.187), with little attention given to considering how a new identity might be created within an emergent community-of-practice. Therefore, further investigation of these frameworks is required to realise their potential for better understanding how identities inherently influence actions and feelings towards other 'out-groups' (Hogg, 2008); also how this might affect their willingness to learn and create a new multi-agency *knowing* (Handley et al., 2007).

### **2.7.2    *Defining identity: Identity studies as a well-researched but complex field***

Identity has become perhaps one of the most studied topics across the social sciences, and especially within the field of work (for example, du Gay et al., 2000; Svenningsson & Alvesson, 2003; Blader et al., 2007). However, despite this wealth of research it remains a highly contested and “amorphous” field (Giddens, 1991, p.52). It is characterised by different traditions and approaches, emphasising numerous different parameters including: structural/agentive influences; accounts of identity development; and the development of singular or multiple selves (Albert et al., 2000; Bartel et al., 2007; Handley et al., 2007; Watson, 2007). Indeed, Harre (1998) describes this as the most “muddled” area of thinking in the social sciences (p.88), with Wenger (1998) concluding that the concept has been “pushed beyond its usefulness” (p.50).

Consequentially, Svenningsson and Alvesson (2003, p.1166) assert that the researcher should select a definition and conceptualisation of identity that it fit-for-purpose. In acknowledging the socio-cultural approach affirmed by SLT, and that this research is specifically concerned with learning across professional/practitioners groups, this identity is defined according to Watson’s (2007) notion of “who or what a particular person is in relation to others”, their social environment and culture (p.136). In applying this to the research context of these multi-agency teams, the term ‘work-related identity’ is used in preference to the concept of ‘professional identity’ due to the nature of the context within which this research is undertaken. ‘Professional identity’ might initially seem more apposite. However, without intending to open

the debate over what it means to be a professional (see Evetts, 2003; Baxter, 2011), and using Hall's (1987) understandings of 'professional identity' as being a set of attributes formed through relatively long periods of initial training and professional socialisation, so it is recognised that this term is not appropriate for all members of the Children's Workforce. Rather, many of these individuals might be better termed para-professionals (Parsons, 1954; Hooley, 2005). Moreover, 'professional identity' might be understood to express a possession of specific professional skills and capabilities, whereas 'work-related identity' is a self-concept reflecting the situatedness of these skills in the work context (Howie et al., 2004). Aligning with Wenger and Watson's definitions, Grey (2009) asserts, our work "expresses and defines who we are" (p.53). Thereby, this identity is recognised as a self-concept that integrates organisational, occupational and other identities, shaping the roles and behaviours of individuals, that is, how they define themselves, at work. It is this that offers them a sense of meaning and purpose (Walsh & Gordon, 2008) and it is therefore, a form of social identity. This 'work-related identity' also encompasses what might be termed a workplace 'role identity'. Ashforth (2001) explains how this latter term describes a socially constructed "prefabricated self" (p.15) that determines how an individual should feel, think and do in role-relevant contexts. This is determined societally and organisationally, and inherently suppresses the individual self (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003; Alvesson et al., 2008). It is acknowledged that 'role' and 'identity' might be considered to be two independent modes of sociological thinking (Albrow, 1970; Stets & Burke, 2000). However, Merton (1957) and Linton (1936) understand them to be systematically intertwined with the boundaries between them blurry (cf Hogg et al., 1995). Indeed, work undertaken within Social

Care, a key profession within the Children's Services multi-agency teams that typically take the role of 'Lead Professional' within the TAC, indicates that Social Workers consider 'role conflict' has led to high levels of job dissatisfaction (Carpenter et al., 2003, p108), their role being "subordinated .... with social workers not feeling valued and their role not being understood" (Nathan & Weber, 2010, p.21). These authors' use of the term 'role' acts interchangeably with the definition offered above of 'work-related identity'. Furthermore, Pepperday (2012) offers a scientifically deduced correspondence between these terms. However, it is acknowledged that consideration should be made of the potential tensions and contradictions between their professional/practitioner identity and the role that these professionals/practitioners are required to assume within the multi-agency team (Gaertner et al., 1993; Eckel & Grossman, 2005; Mitchell et al., 2011). Such ambiguity risks potentially impacting upon their feelings of self-worth (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Carpenter et al., 2003; Brown & White, 2006).

Through understanding how to 'be', individuals feel socially situated. Therefore, their 'work-related identity' inherently affects their perceptions, how they act and behave, whether individually or as a member of a group, and the status they hold within the workplace (Sargent, 2003). It also works to engender their commitment, loyalty and informs their decision-making (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003), whilst also equipping them with a "rudder" (Albert et al., 2000, p.13): guidance at times of uncertainty.



However, this view conceals a series of key debates in identity studies, notably the important humanist and post-structural distinction. In what follows, these are examined and contrasted in order to illustrate the clear distinctions between them and therefore, to demonstrate their potential for understanding multi-agency learning.

Traditional approaches to identity studies have focused upon the psychological definitions, and thereby upon the individual. Whilst these studies have taken many forms, the prevailing approach understands identity as a fixed and stable entity, characterised by a combination of traits and qualities by which people define themselves, and in the case of the workplace, which personifies the culture of their profession/practice (Ashforth et al., 2008, p.350). Thereby, individuals create and seek to maintain a singular distinct self that is little affected by context, biography or 'others' (for example, Gardner, 1995; Ashmore & Jussim, 1997; Currie, 1998; Ibarra, 1999). This might also involve reflexively experimenting with 'provisional selves' before a full-identity is assumed (Herminia, 1999; Ibarra, 1999).

#### *2.7.2.1 The self as socially situated: the post-structural tradition*

By contrast to the traditional 'fixed' view of identity, in aligning with the post-structuralist tradition characterising SLT, it can be suggested that the ever-changing nature of societal interaction and of social situations means that identity is inherently unstable, "temporary, context-sensitive and evolving" over time (Alvesson et al., 2008, p.6; see also Alvesson & Wilmott, 2002). This 'evolution' takes place in

the context of, and in response to, others also evolving. Therefore, individuals must recursively understand themselves relative to 'others' (Ybema et al., 2009). The validation of their identity will vary according to how these 'others' respond to these identity claims (Riley & Burke, 1995; Jenkins, 2004).

Goffman (1959), amongst others (for example, Ball, 1972; Giddens, 1991; Reynolds & Pope 1991; Scott 1999; Scott et al. 1999; Sachs 2003, 2001), further emphasises the importance of individuals having multiple *selves* over which they attempt to achieve a sense of coherence. According to the prevailing social environment, so individuals will invoke a relevant identity to guide their behaviour. Therefore, 'work-related identity' is only one of the repertoires of identity that individuals will draw upon. However, where these identities conflict, or are misaligned, risks causing distress (Stryker & Statham, 1985; Reitzes & Mutram, 1995). Moreover, it has been shown that in uncertain workplace situations, so identity, their conception of self, is more typically secured in a variety of identities and anchored outside of work (Hogg, 2007).

From this post-structural perspective, identity assumes a "determinism ... imposed from outside" by social structures (Reedy, 2009, p.84). Consequentially, the individual is de-centered portrayed, by some as "powerless dupes" (*ibid*; see also Driver, 2009, p.488), with others playing "an essential part in the construction of individuals' identity" (Vidaillet & Vignon, 2010, p.222). Indeed, as King and Horrocks (2010) purport, the self is "no more than a part of the structures that constitute our

world” (p.216), with individuals seeking to secure and develop their identity in response to ever-changing cultural discourse and practices with which they engage and which is forced upon them (see also Fenwick, 2006). From this perspective, it might be argued that since multi-agency working is determined by policy, these professionals are not selecting their own work-related identity, rather the self is being made vulnerable to regulation, control and manipulation by social forces - the dominant government stakeholders (Alvesson & Wilmott, 2003; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003; Watson, 2007; Driver, 2009). However, such “identity regulation” (Billett, 2004a) and imposed acculturation can be counterproductive, and risks individuals’ rejection of this identity (negative identity work). This may cause them to separate themselves from it, reinforcing their personal self (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003; Handley et al., 2007). Yet, it might also be asserted that through retaining membership of their community-of-training so these professionals/practitioners might be “entrapped”, its influence sustaining their identity (Wenger, 1998, p.175). This risks their learning (Owen-Pugh, 2008).

#### *2.7.2.2 The self as agentic*

However, the post-structuralist account offered above is unduly deterministic and forgoes any degree of individual agency in identification (Billett, 2006). Therefore, it is argued, that this offers an incomplete representation of these multi-agency professionals’/practitioners’ learning (Warhurst, 2012). A complementary layer of theorising is developed in efforts to understand how they negotiate their identities.

This approach, which is drawn from within critical management studies, conceptualises identity as being construed at the intersection between the agentic individual and the social. Thereby, we “form ourselves” through a “dialectic between social structure and individual agency” (Reedy, 2009, p.104; see also Giddens, 1991; Sfard & Prusak, 2005; Kirpal et al., 2007; Collin, 2009). Consequently, the process of ‘work-related identity’ learning is not only influenced by both external, and sometimes internalised, forces of “identity regulation” (Billett, 2004b; Alvesson & Wilmott, 2002), but also by individuals’ motives, intended trajectories, personal biographies and experience (see for example, Kihlstrom & Klein, 1994; Bergner & Holmes, 2000; Van Oers, 2002; Holland et al., 2003; Collin, 2006). These in turn, may shape the context.

Therefore, ‘becoming’ is “achieved rather than given” (Alvesson & Wilmott, 2002, p.620) through the process of ‘identity-work’ (Sturdy et al., 2006). As they participate in the multi-agency community so these professionals’/practitioners’ identities are contested and challenged by others (Watson, 2007). Through using the resources and opportunities offered by the community, so they can actively form, repair, strengthen and revise their identities (Angott et al., 2008, p.416) in efforts to achieve some level of existential security (Giddens, 1991, p.5; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003, p.1165). This takes no predetermined direction or form and through their differing participations and their previous experience, individuals will develop differing selves. However, despite these differing selves, groups of

individuals may choose to project a coherent identity to 'others' to demonstrate, for example, expertise and control of the situation (for example, Handley et al., 2007).

The extent to which these professionals/practitioners choose to undertake this 'identity-work', to commit to and identify with the multi-agency endeavour, will be mediated by their degree of work-related insecurity. It will also be determined by their perceptions of the importance of the collaboration (Huxham & Vangen, 2013) and thereby, their need to reconstruct "a dignified self" (Collinson, 2006, p.182; see also Sennett, 2000). It would be anticipated that these professionals/practitioners would change their identity only if they can see the benefits outweigh the costs and others support them in this (Kielcot-Glasner & Glasner, 1994; Baruch & Cohen, 2007).

#### *2.7.2.3 The construction of self: influence of discourse*

Both SLT and this complementary concept of 'identity work', centralise discourse in understanding identity construction and maintenance (Holland et al., 2003). In this sense, and by contrast with the traditional view of language as a *representational view* of reality (Sambrook, 2008, p.29), discourse is seen as a "tool" for *constructing* "selfhood through narrative" (Reedy, 2009, p.117). It provides individuals with a "sort of identity kit which comes complete with ... instructions on how to act, talk ... so as to take on a particular social role that others will recognise" (Gee, 1990, p. 142). Therefore, it is through discourse that we "make ourselves intelligible" (King & Horrocks, 2010, p.218). Through their membership of a community, or through the

provision of new discursive practices, for example in the form of policy intervention, so individuals are afforded a narrative of self (Wenger, 1998, p.209). This forms the basis of their 'identity-work' (Sturdy et al., 2006, p.853).

From the post-structural and critical perspective, these discursive resources are understood to constrain, regulate or determine identity. Thereby "the knower and what s/he is expected to be" is "defined" (Sturdy et al., 2006, p.846). However, in recognising the humanist perspective, discourse might be knowingly and productively accessed and used by individuals to "select a customised identity" that aligns with their personal values and beliefs rather than acquiescing to those imposed socially (Reedy, 2009, p.84; see also Thomas & Davies, 2005; Fenwick, 2006; McDonald et al., 2008). Therefore, Alvesson and Wilmott (2002) do concede that the "organisational regulation of identity ... is precarious. ... Organisational members are not reducible to passive consumers of managerially designed and designated identities" (p.621). Indeed, empirical work by Handley et al. (2007) demonstrates how professionals do not passively accept discourses but "adapt, transform or even reject them" (p.179). Therefore, it might be asserted that reflexive, self-assertive agentic individuals might be able to exert identity control (Watson, 2007, p.149). However, it should be acknowledged that in the case of these multi-agency professionals/practitioners, such power/knowledge regimes might act as a barrier to learning. This is despite the mainstream literature on situated learning theorising emphasising a co-operative community characterised by benevolence and harmony. Sustained by the power and status attributable to their established identities,

individuals may feel threatened by the need for a change in their practices. Therefore, where 'identity-work' is assumed, this might not be directed at reconstructing their selves as 'multi-agency' but rather may be directed at maintaining their established identities through which they hold status as "respected knowers" (Boud & Solomon, 2003; Fenwick, 2012b) – an 'identity maintenance'. Also, they may, as discussed above, even seek 'negative identity-work' (Handley et al., 2007). This raises the question, as Thistlethwaite et al. (2012) inquire, "how then do we manage the practitioner who does not join in, who has no interest in the collective?" (p.5). How will this affect their learning and confine the intentions of the practice? (Billett, 2004a, 2004b).

#### *2.7.2.4 The influence of agency and structure*

This balance between agency and structure in identity re-formation and learning is not easily resolved. The professionals'/practitioners' strength of agency will influence which of these dominates these multi-agency negotiations (Billett, 2007a). This 'strength' will be determined by the space permitted to it by management practices, also individuals' capacity and/or desire, to resist social structures (Billett, 2006; Fenwick, 2006). However, the way in which this is understood, and how it fits alongside, or is in tension with, their chosen identity has significant implications for how these professionals/practitioners 'sensemake' as they develop as multi-agency professionals (McClean, 2012; see also Blader, 2007). Notably, it will influence their intentions to 'forget' their past and to create a new multi-agency *knowing* and *being*. Indeed, as Swan et al. (2002) illustrate through their work in healthcare, the

implications of externally imposed identities risks buy-in and thus possibilities for the agentic reconstruction of the self as a multi-agency professional/practitioner (ie. 'identity-work') might not be accepted. Moreover, Reedy (2009), amongst others, questions the extent to which this agentic influence is effectual. He highlights how "it is always easier to unthinkingly be moulded by collective norms" (p.104). Therefore, it might be asserted that individuals' ability to exercise their agency will be associated with how strongly they identify with socially-constructed work-related identity.

## **2.8 Chapter summary**

This chapter has located this research within the existing literatures of learning and knowledge. It has then progressed to examine the focal theory, centered upon Lave and Wenger's situated learning theory (SLT), as a means to understanding both practice and the ability of individuals as social participants to "apply knowledge as a question of *knowing*" (Filstad & McManus, 2011). This will be used in interpreting the data generated through the research, as examined in Chapters 4-6.

Whilst heeding Sfard's warning about the limitations of a "patchwork of metaphors" (p.12), the chapter has progressed to demonstrate that whilst focus needs to be upon learning through participation, so it is important to also understand the ways in which knowledge is put to use in this process of socialisation. That is, how local practice knowledge is informed by, and informs, technical knowledge. It has argued, that whilst the multi-agency context is very different to those in which SLT is



traditionally studied, being characterised by change, tension and a “stickiness” of knowledge (Brown & Duguid, 2001) rather than stability, harmony and sharing, this lens provides an invaluable context-specific insight into how new professional *knowing* might be stimulated through these professionals’/practitioners’ active participation in the context of their new day-to-day joint actions. This acknowledges both the structural and relational elements of learning within this collaborative multi-agency workplace.

The chapter has demonstrated how better understanding the nature of multi-agency working and learning, requires SLT theorising to be extended through consideration of the interplay between contextual affordances for learning and individuals’ engagement with these. In order to address a fundamental limitation of this lens, notably the gap between knowledge and *knowing*, so Lave and Wenger’s work is bridged with other theorising, specifically the role of agency (Billett, 2001b; Hodgkinson & Hodgkinson, 2004a), ‘relational expertise’ (Edwards, 2010), also Orlikowski’s (2002) ‘knowing-in-practice’. These theoretical juxtapositions comprise one of the unique approaches offered by this work.

Furthermore, in augmenting the socio-cultural approaches to understanding identity offered by SLT with complementary post-structural theorising and the critical management studies’ ‘identity-work’, so this offers greater understanding of the effects of multi-agency policy intervention on professionals’/practitioners’ ‘work-related identity’. This offers a view of identity that is shaped by both the self and

'others'. Thereby, it is asserted that being an effective multi-agency professional/practitioner might be best considered in terms of reconciling the difficult task of 'identity-work' against the inordinate forces of 'identity regulation'.

To the best of the researcher's knowledge, these concepts have not to date, been considered concurrently in relation to multi-agency working.

## **Chapter 3 Methodology**

### **3.1 Introduction**

As has been discussed, this research is concerned with how multi-agency professionals/practitioners within a specific highly contextualised situation are responding to a changing organisational configuration and the implications that this is having for their professional knowledge and selves.

This chapter introduces and critically examines the theoretical and philosophical orientation, approach and strategy underpinning this research. This informs the research design, participant selection, methods and techniques that are employed to examine the development of new *knowing* within these teams. Issues of accessibility encountered as an 'outsider' researcher are addressed. The methods of data analysis are then detailed. Awareness is then extended to the research standards and the ethical considerations. Finally, a discussion of these stages of the research is followed by a critical examination of the research methodology and tools adopted.

### **3.2 Research methodology**

In taking account of the lack of empirical work that has been identified considering the development of multi-agency '*knowing*', this research is exploratory in nature. Cohen et al. (2007) argue that there is "no blueprint" (p.78) for developing the research methodology, and that typically this is a "tactical consideration" (p.81).

However, adequate deliberation of this is critical to avoid research confusion (see also Guba & Lincoln, 1994) and will affect the use of differing data generation methods (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p.14). Therefore, in what follows, an examination is made of the ontological assumptions held by the researcher - the way she views the world (what is the form and nature of reality) - which give rise to epistemological assumptions regarding the nature of knowledge (what is known and the relationship between the known and the knower), thereby, informing the methodological considerations and, inherently, the data generation tools employed.

### ***3.2.1 Research philosophy***

Studies of knowledge, learning and practice have been dominated by objectivist, positivist approaches which are characteristic of the conventional 'acquisition' approach to understanding learning, in which knowledge is understood as a measurable, quantitative reality. As has been indicated in Chapter 1 (Figure 1.1), this functionalist paradigm has also predominated empirical work on multi-agency working, generating predominantly quantitative data through survey-based questionnaires and index scales. However, it is recognised that the corpus of work within the interpretative paradigm is growing. This has typically used semi-structured interviews (for example Barlow & Coe, 2013; Munroe & Lushey, 2013), participant observation (see for example, Cornes et al., 2011; Gannon-Leary & Carr, 2011) and, in the larger-scale projects, document analysis (see for example, Leadbetter et al., 2007).

Aligning with the theoretical framework examined in Chapter 2, this research was designed to depart from the 'single world' favoured by the majority of researchers to date. It was intended to provide opportunities for the professionals/practitioners to reflect upon their practice and for the researcher to *hear* the multiple and diverse voices within these Area Teams. Thereby, it has adopted a largely interpretivist, constructivist understanding, to align with the exploratory research aim. This approach recognises that people interpret their world and create meanings through their interactions with the realities of the world (Crotty, 2004), inferring that meaning is constructed through interactions between the subject and object, that is, their social, cultural and political context. Therefore, by contrast with the positivist perspective which would seek *explanation* of behaviour, this research aimed to elicit better *understanding* of how these professionals/practitioners interpret and make sense of their multi-agency lives. Further supporting the interpretivist tendencies the research acknowledges the constructivist ideals that this evolving meaning is jointly constructed through conversation and social interaction (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003). Therefore, the version of reality presented is just one specific version of reality, not a definitive one (Bryman, 2008, p.19). This invokes a need to consider the researcher's own reflexive position in the design, data generation, analysis and interpretation of the data. This is discussed further in 3.9.

### **3.2.2 Research approach**

As it will be shown (in 3.3), qualitative data was generated through the process of ‘social exchange’ between the researcher and participants. The intention was to build a complex representation of the phenomena of multi-agency working through rich descriptions and its careful examination (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Cresswell, 1998).

Whilst the study has been shaped by the theoretical discussions overviewed in Chapter 2, a largely inductive approach was adopted. Consequently, meaning was constructed from the data, as the researcher sought to build theory that might help understand this phenomenon of multi-agency working and learning. Therefore, the specific theoretical lenses adopted have been influenced by themes emerging from the data. The guidelines for undertaking this approach are somewhat diverse, so this research takes a pragmatic approach informed by, but by no means wedded to, the principles of grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Whilst informed by the literatures of participatory situated learning theory and identity theorising, this enabled the researcher to take an open mind (but not an empty mind), allowing the data to speak its own categories, embracing the “subtleties of meaning” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p.41), whilst also working iteratively with the data in constructing the meanings taken from them.

3.2.3 Research strategy

In order to extend and gain a nuanced understanding of this multi-agency context, specifically to explore the creation of a multi-agency *knowing-in-practice*, a case-study approach was adopted. This was with the intention of providing a rich description of this social phenomena and the context in which it occurred. The professionals/practitioners comprising the multi-agency teams within a purposefully selected North-West England local authority’s Children Services department acts as a single case-study (Yin, 2009, p.47). Within this, following Guest et al. (2006), five “embedded units of analysis” were selected: five of the eleven Area Teams within this Children’s Services department (Figure 3.1).

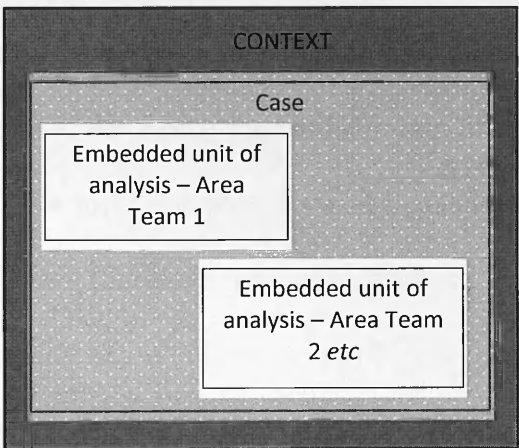


Figure 3.1: Embedded, single case design  
Source: Yin, (2009, p.47)

Tight (2010) documents the confused status of case-study research, observing its classification as a method, a methodology, strategy and design. This research understands case-study to be a research *strategy*, yet discussion is informed by Yin’s components of a case-study *design* (p.27). The ‘case’ presents a means to defining the spatial boundaries of the research, enabling better understanding of the social

lives of this specific research field in which there is currently a 'gap' in understanding. However, in accordance with Tight's advice, emphasis is placed upon the tools and techniques used, rather than the intricacies of what this case actually is and means (p.338). The use of one single case reflects the limited empirical and theoretical research that is available in this area. Moreover, this strategy has been proven valuable for enabling a deep and "thick description" (Geertz, 1973) of "a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context" (Yin, 2003, p.13), without the encumbrance of the socio-economic settings of different authorities (Gummesson, 2008). Thereby, as Wenger (1998) asserts, "we can see more by seeing less" (p.132). The limitations of this approach are however acknowledged in Chapter 3.11.

The case-study can be considered as both 'revelatory' and 'exemplifying' (Yin, 2009, p.47) and therefore, has broader relevance. The former reflects the inductive nature of this research. Moreover, the workplace configuration offered through the Area Teams presents one of the most complete forms of collaborative working offered within Children's Services. Therefore, following Starbuck (1993), the researcher suggests that this specific case offers a significant contribution to better understanding the development of a multi-agency practice and knowledge. Its 'exemplifying' characteristics reflect the nature of the environment. This case typifies the increasingly unsettled and fluid policy environment characteristic of much of the public (and some private) sector organisations as they face increasing demands for higher service quality against requirements for competitive efficiencies (Colley, 2012).



### *3.2.3.1 Selection of the case*

The Children's Services department that provides the case-study was selected on pragmatic grounds, which is regarded as legitimate in qualitative inquiry encouraging good quality data to emerge (McDonald et al., 2008b, p.359). An ex-Director of Children's Services, whom had ongoing links with this and a number of other authorities in the region, confirmed that this department exhibited the issues of concern to the researcher (Hussey & Hussey, 1997, p.67). The case also offered significant potential beyond others in the region due to the diversity of neighbourhoods located within it. Further the Senior Managers of this authority were open to research being undertaken within it. This case-study site was studied over the period February, 2012 to December, 2012.

The five 'units' selected were intended to illustrate the spectrum of the Children's Services department's activity and income/deprivation across the authority region.

The criteria used for selection were:

- The English Indices of Deprivation 2010 (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2011)
- Number of CAF referrals made January-March 2012.

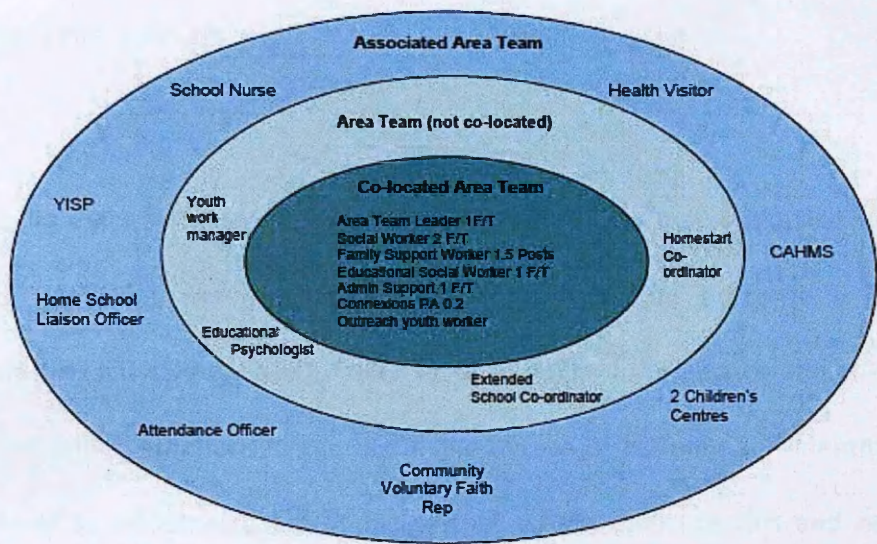
The suitability of these Area Teams identified through these criteria process were then confirmed through conversations with the Area Team Leads and the Chair of Information Governance within the authority's Children's Services department.

### 3.3 Details of the research case-study

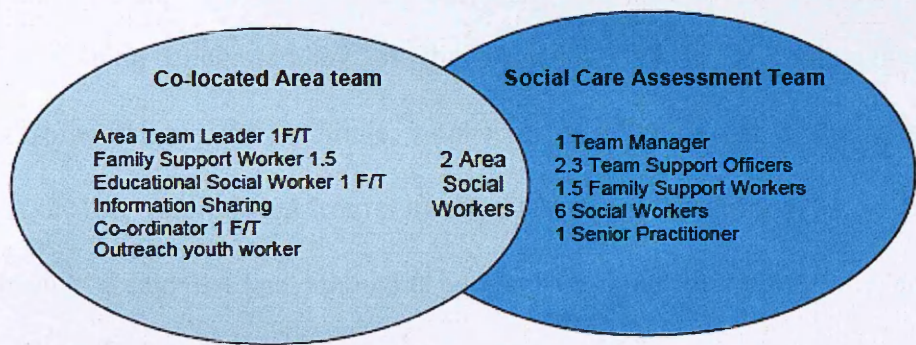
As it has been noted above, the case-study local authority lies in North-West England. It is amongst the most socio-economically diverse authorities in the region, although the 'Index of Multiple Deprivation' places it within the bottom 20% most deprived districts in England (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2011; IMD, 2007).

The authority's Children and Young People's (C&YP) Department was established in 2006 and is responsible for a wide range of services for over 74,000 C&YP, also their families/carers and schools. This encompasses youth provision, social care, early years, children's centres, youth offending service, children with disabilities and with special educational needs. The Department has an established 'Children's Trust', a strategic partnership with other organisations providing services to C&YP, notably, JobCentrePlus, Fire and Rescue, police, health service, community, probation service and the voluntary and faith sector. Underpinned by a commitment to their '*Children and Young People's Plan*', it has the purpose of ensuring the provision of an integrated child-centred front-line delivery, rather than an agency-based approach. This is epitomised in the form of eleven Area Teams. Established in 2008, these comprise a core membership of typically co-located professionals including social workers, family support workers, an education social worker, youth workers. Although not co-located, the Team also comprises an educational psychologist. Figures 3.2a/b offer a visual representation of this membership. Focus is upon supporting preventative early intervention and their workforce strategy provides a

structured approach to ensuring that all staff are equipped with a common core of skills and relevant specialist professional knowledge to enable this.



**Figure 3.2a:** Area team composition following co-location, July 2008  
Source: Local Authority source



**Figure 3.2b:** Full co-located Area team structure following incorporation of Social Care Assessment Team, October 2010  
Source: Local Authority source

### 3.4 Research design and data generation tools

The research design provides the “plan [to] guide the investigator in the process of collecting, analysing, and interpreting observations” (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 1992, p.77-78).

Ascertaining what has been learnt, and how, within informal workplace situations presents significant methodological challenges since the outcome is typically intangible or tacit (Eraut, 2000; Fuller et al., 2005). Informed by the theoretical framework which emphasised the discursive nature of learning and identity, there was a need to adopt a research design that would embrace this and recognise individuals as “a thinking and acting” research focus (Denzin & Lincoln 2000, 2003b). This pointed to qualitative interviewing, which is typically used across interpretivist research and within identity studies. Indeed, this approach has been proven effective for gaining understanding of the subjective world of multi-agency professionals/practitioners (for example, Anning et al., 2006; Frost & Robinson, 2007; Collett, 2010). Approached from a qualitative perspective, interviews do not focus upon ‘what’ is said: the facts, thoughts and feelings, but rather upon ‘why’ and ‘how’ it is said (Holstein & Gubrium, 2011, p.153). Using an open, flexible and ‘dialogical’ approach offers opportunities for the emergence of meaning through the social interaction between researcher and the researched (Bluff & Holloway, 2008). It also provides opportunities for response follow-up enable a deeper comprehension of issues arising (Bryman, 2008, p.439).

However, the complexities of their working situations and the 'trickiness' of exploring the hidden experiences of learning might constrain the extent of cognitive access to these professionals'/practitioners' lives that is gained through interview alone. Individuals' self-knowledge is likely to be restricted when they are 'put on the spot' within a one-off interview situation (Hammersely, 1992, p.144). Moreover, SLT also emphasises the importance of the contextual details. Whilst this is addressed to some extent by the case-study strategy, interviews are unlikely to reveal much of the social influences. Visual methodologies offer a further way forward to address both of these concerns (Black & Warhurst, *forthcoming*). Whilst they have played only a very minor role within the predominantly 'word-based' organisational research (Bryman, 2008), visual approaches foster different types of responses to conventional methods, and enable expression "beyond words" (Warren, 2002, p.230). They offer a 'window' to the socio-material, psychological or interior worlds of research participants, presenting facets that might otherwise have been overlooked, providing opportunities for exploring taken-for-granted assumptions held by either party (Rose, 2001; Warren, 2002). Moreover, they give the participants' meanings prominence, enabling the researcher to experience their participants' subjective 'world' through their own eyes, providing far greater insights into the worlds that they are researching. Such tools have been "proved to be both effective in terms of data quality and popular with participants" (King & Horrocks, 2010, p.198).

### 3.4.1. Photo-elicitation interviewing as a research tool

Accordingly, this research employed the as yet under-utilised, approach of participant-generated (termed 'autodriven' by Hurworth, 2003) photo-elicitation interviewing (PEI). The premise of this approach is that photos/images provided by the participants act as catalysts to help them talk about and expand upon difficult, and perhaps abstract concepts, in this case, of learning, identity, professional relationships and workplace practice (Warren, 2002, p.239). Creating a more authentic testimony of their "genuine experiences", that also encompassed the existence of contextual influences, political interests and social norms (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003, p.1170), it was anticipated that this would elicit richer and extended personal narratives of their multi-agency lives and experiences whilst also providing vivid and graphical illustrations of the context of multi-agency working itself.

The development of PEI may be traced back to Morin and Rouch's '*Chronique d'un été*' and to Collier's work on mental health undertaken in the 1960s (Collier & Collier, 1986). Whilst its use remains "sparse" (Ray & Smith, 2012), and indeed compared with other qualitative methods very little has been written about their use and their integration into the interviewing process (Hurworth et al., 2005, p.52), Harper (1997, 2002, 2005), Banks (2001) and Pink (2004, 2005) offer significant contributions to the field. However, the researcher has found no evidence, to date, of the use of PEI by researchers of *collaborative* situations *within* the multi-agency Children's Services' workforce.

#### 3.4.1.1 Advantages of photo-elicitation interviewing

Perhaps the greatest advantage of PEI lies in the greater interest and involvement it offers for the researcher, participant and research reader/user.

The use of images provides a means of empowerment for the *participants* as they act as 'guide' and 'expert' rather than being the *subject* of the interview (Widdance-Twine, 2006, p.496). This inherently offers them a "louder voice" in the research process, prioritising their way of seeing (Warren, 2005, p.864) whilst offering a means of expressing self-understanding and emotions. Such involvement is understood by Vince and Warren (2012) to be a "high priority" for qualitative research (p.1).

In helping to bridge the experiences of the researcher and the researched, images assist the *researcher* to see what they might not otherwise see – making the invisible/intangible more tangible. They also characteristically present facets that might otherwise have been overlooked, providing opportunities for exploring taken-for-granted assumptions held by either party (Silverman, 2000, p.38). Importantly, the participants have *advance* control over what they photograph, and have opportunities to reflect upon the questions and/or the issues they raise. This will help them to better understand how they think about themselves, rather than requiring them to provide an instantaneous verbal response (Walker & Weidel, 1985, p.143). Moreover, this opportunity for reflection will also typically offer clearer benefits for the participants through presenting them with opportunities to reflect

upon their learning and practice and thereby, to enhance their practice (Knight & Saunders, 1999, p.148). This encourages the generation of a richer, more nuanced data that better communicates understanding of how people think about themselves and experience their worlds.

Finally, for the *reader*, visual data arguably offers a more convincing and comprehensive articulation of the conceptions and relations being discussed and the multiple voices evoked. This helps the reader to 'see' what *we*, the researcher, have 'seen'. Yet as Berger (1972) asserts, it is not just the eyes that 'see'. Visual data invokes other non-rational thoughts in the viewer, offering a more emotional, aesthetic and sensory experience than that achieved through traditional text-based research. As Becker (2002) concludes, "what can you do with pictures that you couldn't do just as well with words? The answer is that I can lead you to believe that the abstract tale I've told you has a real flesh and blood life and is therefore to be believed" (p.11).

From a theoretical perspective, PEI offers richness to potentially reflect and develop theory/knowledge in this field. Perhaps most notably the signs, symbols and perceptions offered present multiple perspectives and interpretations. This contrasts with the fixed meanings offered through the dominant positivist approaches to examining learning and presents a basis for inductive theorising and theoretical review of the issues arising (Harper, 2002). Therefore, this approach



presents a basis to move beyond existing studies of multi-agency working to inductively develop the theorising in this field.

However it is recognised that this tool does present some challenges. These are considered alongside the limitations of the research methodology and methods in 3.11.

#### **3.4.2 *Using photo-elicitation interviewing in the research***

No formal guidelines have yet emerged for undertaking PEI (Vince and Warren, 2012, p.283), so consequentially this research tool has been used in many different ways. For the purposes of this research, the intention was that the photos/images set the agenda for the subsequent qualitative interview. Their role was to act as stimuli (Clark, 1999), to solicit comments, memory and discussion both from the participants *and* also the researcher, but led by the participant. However, they were also to act as data in their own right, although 'grounded' within the interview data. It was not intended that these photos/images would offer a 'truth', rather aligning with the underpinning interpretivist philosophy, this research recognises how "all images are socially and technically constructed" (Harper, 1994, p.406): *made* by photographer decisions (Harper, 2005) and subsequently co-created between the researcher and participant (Vince & Warren, 2012). They may be realist, representing what is depicted; expressive, communicating feelings or opinions; or aesthetic (Warren, 2005).

A participant-generated, 'autodriven' (Hurworth, 2003), approach to using PEI was adopted. As is documented in Appendices 1a, 1b and 2, participants were requested via email and a 'participant information sheet', to collect 5-8 photos/images in advance of an interview in response to three broad prompt questions, namely: *'what does multi-agency working mean to you?'*; *'what does being a multi-agency professional/worker mean to you?'*; *'[how] have you become the multi-agency professional that you are today?'*. It was anticipated that these photos/images would directly or indirectly illustrate the participants' working lives, their role, identity, culture, discourse and relationships. However, it was acknowledged that other abstract images might be presented. Whilst the researcher might have offered photos/images for exploration within the interview, this approach would have risked imposing the researcher's views and perceptions upon the participants, risking a failure to "break the frame" of the participants' view (Harper, 2002, p.20). Therefore, with the photos/images provided being embedded in the participants' social, cultural, political and cultural contexts, this approach offered greater opportunity for evoking and thus examining key tangibles and intangibles in their professional lives, such as their beliefs, values, philosophies, identities (Becker, 2002). Examples of the images provided by the participants can be found in Appendix 3.

As the main focus of the interview, participants were invited to select images from their set of photos/images, then to explain why they took the photo (or provided the representative image), and the meaning and significance these photo-images or

symbols held for them. Typical questions included asking about the significance of the objects within the photo/image. In this way data was generated *through* the photo/image, through resultant discussion and clarifications that arose through consideration of it. An accompanying interview question guide (Appendix 4) was also drafted to stimulate meaningful insights and critical self-reflection by the participants where specific aspects of interest to the researcher were not exposed through the photo/image stimulated discussions (Miller & Glassner, 2011, p.133) and/or where points raised required further clarification. The guide was used based upon the initial discussions with the authority and typically prompted critical-incident recall, to generate more specific details (McCall et al., 1988, p.27). However, the guide evolved through the course of the research to reflect the issues emerging through the interviews. As indicated above, the role of the researcher was as a co-creator, rather than as a director, of meaning, therefore, her intervention was restricted as far as possible.

The interviews themselves took the form of both individual and group interviews. It had been advised at the outset by the local authority, that due to the time pressures facing these professionals/practitioners, individual interviews would be the preferred approach. However, in practice, a number of these professionals/practitioners arranged joint/group interviews instead. It is recognised that the mix of individual and group risks affecting the data generated, as the group interviews might offer multiple understandings and construct joint understandings (Field, 2000; Robson, 2002, 2011) whereas the individual interviews would expose

the potential influences/biases of individuals' biographies. However, in practice, despite requesting group interviews, and despite researcher encouragement, the participants did not typically engage in counter-debates within these. Therefore, the data generated within group interviews was similar in nature to that generated through individual interviews. A total of three group interviews and sixteen individual interviews were undertaken. Two of these group interviews comprised three professionals/practitioners, with the third comprising two. It is acknowledged that dynamics within the group interviews might have affected the data that was generated: the photos/images provided and the discussions that took place. This is recognised as a limitation of this research.

The interviews were recorded, with participant permission, capturing the participants' accounts, and enabling the analysis of detailed verbatim transcripts. The intention was that meaning would be constructed through consideration of both what the participants said, and also how they said it (Bailey 2008). However, in transforming the oral to the written transcripts so this loses the voice and body language (Kvale, 2007). This was overcome, as far as possible, through checking the recordings post-transcription for any important meanings that might have been lost through this process. In recognising that there is no one reality, the participants did not validate the transcripts, rather the researcher's interpretation was exercised.

A log was created maintaining an accurate record of the data captured. This recorded such information as: date of interview; where interviews took place;

duration of interview; participants; photograph catalogue numbers.

### **3.5 Research procedure**

#### **3.5.1 Participant selection<sup>3</sup>**

In accordance with the guidelines offered by Miles and Huberman (1994, p.27), participants were purposively selected from within the multi-agency teams from the case-study authority in order to enable a good examination of the phenomenon in question (Hay & Hodgkinson, 2008, p.27). Volunteers were sought using a 'snowballing' approach. Following support from the authority's 'Chair of Information Governance', the Area Team Leaders provided the access, nominating suitable participants. These in turn were encouraged to nominate further participants. This approach was sufficiently "flexible to determine the individuals to be included" (Dey, 1999, p.5), and enabled the researcher to select those individuals with the "knowledge and experience the research requires .... [having] the ability to reflect .... [and] willing to participate" (Morse, 1994a, p.228).

A total of 24 professionals/practitioners participated. This number was based upon Bryman's (2012) recommendations. The participants (Table 3.1) were drawn from across both the core and non-core groups/agencies comprising these multi-agency teams. It is acknowledged that this represents only five of the eight Area Teams and only a small percentage of the professionals/practitioners within these Teams. Yet

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<sup>3</sup> The term 'participant selection' is used rather than 'sampling' in adherence with the qualitative, interpretative tradition.

with there being no intentions for generalisation from the findings (see 3.9) this offers reasonable depth to obtain primary findings to be of local value and to inform future research in this area.

Profession/practice	Function	N <sup>o</sup> . participants	Individual (I) or group (G) interview	Co-located?
Area Team Leader	Social care	3	2x G and 1x I	✓
Family Support Worker	Social care	3	2x G and 1x I	✓
Education Psychologist	Education	3	2x G and 1x I	
Information sharing co-ordinator	Social care	2	I	
Childcare Development Worker	Social care	2	G	
Police community Support Officer	Youth crime	2	I	
Youth Outreach Worker	Outreach	2	I	
Family Social Worker	Social care	1	I	✓
Family Support Co-ordinator	Outreach	1	I	
Universal Youth Support Manager	Outreach	1	I	
Education Social Worker	Education Social work	1	I	✓
Social Worker	Social care	1	I	
Youth Offending	Youth crime	1	I	
School Liaison	Social care	1	I	

**Table 3.1:** Research participants

It had been intended that interviewing would continue until category or theoretical “saturation” was reached; that is, the point at which no substantively new categories emerged from each additional participant. However, the highly fluid nature of the context under study made it difficult to achieve this. As one participant observed

*“Had you spoken to me 3 weeks ago, I would have told you something different ...”.*

This is discussed further in Chapter 4.

### **3.5.2 Gaining access**

Gaining access to the research field is a crucial yet complex undertaking – one that should not be taken lightly (Van Maanen & Kolb, 1985). Research access was required at two main levels: physical access and cognitive access. In what follows, these levels, and the implications for the research, are considered.

#### **3.5.2.1 Physical access**

Heeding Walford’s (2001, pp.36-47) advice, physical access was gained through a series of steps, comprising three key levels:

- initial negotiation of the research site
- ethical approval
- access to participants

As an external researcher, *initial access* to the ‘closed’ research site was secured through drawing upon existing relationships the researcher held with an ex-Director of Children’s Services from a nearby local authority. He was able to support the initial approach to this specific local authority (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002) enabling a meeting to be set-up with the ‘Remodelling Social Work Delivery Project’ Manager and the ‘Chair of Information Governance within Children’s Services’. This enabled the researcher to demonstrate the value and relevance of the proposed research to

the authority – establishing what Walford (2001) describes as a ‘desire’. Due to the sensitivity of the work of the department and confidentiality of the work of the Area Teams, certain research tools, notably observation and analysis of meeting reports, were not considered acceptable. This has emphasised the inherent conflict and tensions that exist in this, and indeed in much research, between the desirable and possible (Buchanan et al., 1988, p.53-4), the latter often diminishing the opportunities the former might permit.

Clearing this first hurdle then necessitated completion of a detailed research proposal for submission to, and consideration by, the authority, also a detailed application for *ethical approval*. Ethical approval was also secured from Lancaster University’s Research Ethics Committee (REC). The ethical considerations raised through this research are considered below (3.9).

However access is an ongoing and iterative process (Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Gummesson, 2008). This first stage access agreement and subsequent ethical approval secured from the ‘gate-keepers’, although critical for this research (Miller & Bells, 2002, p.53), did not assure access to the specific nor most valuable participants. Ongoing access agreements were required firstly with the Area Team Leaders and subsequently with the participants themselves. Their co-operation relied upon developing relationships with them (Robson, 2002), ‘selling’ the personal value and benefits they should gain from the research and their role in this (Walford, 2001), thus justifying the use of their/their staff’s time in participating. The support



of the 'Chair of Information Governance' in corroborating the credibility of the researcher's requests was invaluable in this.

### *3.5.2.2 Cognitive access*

Being granted physical access alone was insufficient to access these professionals' lives and experiences. However, methodological approaches, and the generation of reliable and valid data, are based upon the assumption that through securing physical access so cognitive access is also gained, with the participants willingly and ably sharing their views and experiences (King & Horrocks, 2010, p.17). Whilst the adoption of PEI aimed to enhance this cognitive access, it alone could not ensure this.

Cognitive access was required not solely at the researcher-participant interface. The researcher also required sufficient understanding of the organisation/context itself (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983) and of the potential biases in interpretation she would bring in through her values, past experiences and biography (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1989). This access was aided through having previously undertaken research within this context, although within different local authorities.

### **3.6 Analysis of the data**

This section considers the methods of analysis employed to examine the data generated through the interviews. Silverman (2011) emphasises the importance of quality analysis, suggesting that this requires greater attention than the data *per se* (p.54).

To assure the trustworthiness of the data analysis (see 3.8) the process and findings derived from it are described in sufficient detail to enable the reader to gain a clear and comprehensive understanding of exactly how the analysis was carried out; also its strengths and limitations. NVivo10 was used as the data management tool. This allowed ease of coding, graphical representation and enabled complex searches within the data to be undertaken (Bringer et al., 2004; Wickham & Woods, 2005). It also aids transparency, providing an “audit trail”, demonstrating the steps taken to create meaning from the data (Kelle, 2000; Bringer et al., 2004). However, it does not create theory, nor does it provide an analytical structure to the data (Pope et al., 2000). It is recognised that the researcher will have influenced the research process, therefore, researcher reflexivity aims to minimise the imposition of her own meanings (Butler-Kisber, 2010).

#### **3.6.1 Analysis approach**

In adherence to the qualitative, interpretative tradition, the intention of the analysis was for meaning to be generated through participants’ subjective explanations and

interpretations of the photos/images and of their experiences encapsulated within the interview texts. However, the complex relationship between words and images means that a lack of advice exists regarding the analysis of the photos/images themselves (Pink, 2007; Vince & Warren, 2012).

A number of different analysis techniques are used within qualitative research, although most share a key process of imposing some kind of order on the data: thematising it. In the case of this research, focus was upon both identifying codes emergent within the transcribed interview data, and also within the images themselves, but with this being grounded within the interview data. Therefore, as Bryman (2008) articulates, the photos/images formed a part of the “data-generating triangle, alongside the respondent and researcher” (p.460).

As it has been observed, it was intended that meaning would be constructed through consideration of both what the participants said, and also how they said it (Bailey, 2008). Therefore, the analysis adopted takes a modified “hybrid approach”, incorporating elements of both content analysis and thematic analysis (Vince & Warren, 2012). As was noted in 3.2.2, this was informed by, but not wedded to, grounded theory principles (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Whilst working inductively, the researcher could not assure that the data would be approached free of pre-conceived categories as required by grounded theory, nor was theory generation the sole purpose of the research (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Charmaz, 2005). This hybrid approach enabled patterns within the data to be recognised, and a description and

interpretation of these patterns to be made, whilst ensuring that expressive meaning was not lost as might have occurred through use of content analysis alone. Whilst Silverman (2006) dismisses content analysis as a purely quantitative approach, it is a well-used technique within the qualitative literatures of health care and educational research, and beyond into the related fields of sociology, psychology and business.

### ***3.6.2 Analysis procedure***

Following Berg (2011), analysis took three key phases: preparation, organisation and reporting. The full interviews and their supporting photos/images were taken as the unit of analysis (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004).

#### ***Stage 1: Data preparation***

Drawing upon the guidelines of Ritchie and Lewis (2003), familiarisation with the interview data was assumed through the reading of each transcript, on a case-by-case basis, several times and through consideration of the associated photos/images (see also Polit & Beck, 2004). Memos were made where ideas arose or relevant observations were made. These were lodged within NVivo10. Comparisons were made between photos/images and their interpretations portrayed within the interview transcripts enabling the researcher to develop an overall “portrait of the cases” (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001, p.150).

## *Stage 2: Organisation of the data*

The purpose of this second stage was to make sense of the data, to understand “what is going on” within it (Morse & Field, 1995). Codes were induced from within the data (Silverman, 2011) through the process of: open coding, creating categories and abstraction.

*Open coding* comprised the tagging of the ‘seen’ physical aspects comprising the transcripts and the photos/images (Banks, 2007, p.44-45), also the ‘latent’ content such as emotions revealed: silences, laughter etc. (Morse, 1994b; Robson 2011). These themes pertained to such ideas as types of learning, relationships, perceptions of self and others, professional attitude. Some of these represented ideas that had not been anticipated, whilst others were clearly linked to the interview guide. It is recognised that the coding was influenced by analysis of the initial interviews. A simplistic verification of the codes was secured through discussion with an experienced researcher colleague.

Relationships and connections between these initial codes enabled axial codes, or *categories*, to be established that seemed meaningful in describing the phenomenon of multi-agency *knowing* (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Inherently, each category can be linked to the data from which it is derived (or grounded) (Strauss, 1987). An example of this is presented in Figure 3.3.

Name	Sources	References	Created On	Created By	Modified On	Modified By
Boundary spanning and boundary tool	18	73	15/11/2012 14:51	KEB	18/01/2013 12:11	KEB
Commitment	3	14	27/12/2012 15:38	KB	18/01/2013 12:33	KEB
Child and family focus and commitment	21	64	22/12/2012 10:29	KB	18/01/2013 12:03	KEB
Commitment to other professionals and agencies	30	105	22/12/2012 10:09	KB	18/01/2013 12:07	KEB
Individual's commitment	25	95	15/11/2012 14:33	KEB	18/01/2013 12:33	KEB
Communication enabling MA working	10	34	23/12/2012 19:22	KB	18/01/2013 12:11	KEB
Culture - local	7	17	23/12/2012 19:22	KB	18/01/2013 12:44	KEB
Embeddedness	19	65	15/11/2012 14:51	KEB	18/01/2013 12:15	KEB
Hierarchies	14	57	22/12/2012 12:11	KB	18/01/2013 12:42	KEB
Identity - how they speak of themselves	5	10	23/12/2012 19:20	KB	18/01/2013 12:03	KEB
I_We as a multi-professional	18	97	23/12/2012 19:21	KB	18/01/2013 12:21	KEB
I_We as a uni-professional	9	78	23/12/2012 19:21	KB	18/01/2013 12:33	KEB
identity change	8	26	31/12/2012 12:47	KB	18/01/2013 12:03	KEB
Multiple identities	9	12	22/12/2012 16:45	KB	31/12/2012 16:06	KB
role change	8	39	31/12/2012 12:47	KB	05/01/2013 14:09	KB
role in the MA team	9	37	05/01/2013 12:02	KB	18/01/2013 09:29	KEB
'them' and 'us' versus 'we' as MA	11	145	29/12/2012 16:35	KB	18/01/2013 12:33	KEB
Uncertain identity - not belonging	5	14	22/12/2012 17:01	KB	31/12/2012 16:17	KB
Working as a MA team	31	176	16/11/2012 07:55	KEB	18/01/2013 12:21	KEB
Yielding and submitting to others	8	14	22/12/2012 14:08	KB	18/01/2013 12:42	KEB
Information sharing	28	176	22/12/2012 10:11	KB	18/01/2013 10:41	KEB
Initiative of individuals to work with others	11	30	22/12/2012 10:02	KB	18/01/2013 12:33	KEB
Inter-agency and professional competition and clashes	11	43	15/11/2012 14:52	KEB	18/01/2013 12:34	KEB
Knowledge and knowing	2	1	28/12/2012 11:19	KB	18/01/2013 12:38	KEB

- Identity - how they speak of themselves
  - I\_We as a multi-professional
  - I\_We as a uni-professional
  - identity change
  - Multiple identities
  - role change
  - role in the MA team
  - 'them' and 'us' versus 'we' as MA
  - Uncertain identity - not belonging
  - Working as a MA team
  - Yielding and submitting to others

- Identity - how they speak of themselves
  - I\_We as a multi-professional
    - As an individual within multi-agency
    - Identity taken over
    - New professional form - as MA
  - I\_We as a uni-professional
  - identity change
  - Multiple identities
  - role change
  - role in the MA team
  - 'them' and 'us' versus 'we' as MA
    - them and us
    - we as MA
  - Uncertain identity - not belonging
  - Working as a MA team
    - Negative - team
    - Positive - team
    - team identity
    - working as a group

Figure 3.3: Example coding from NVivo10





### *Stage 3: Reporting*

These category themes were then finally interpreted: compared and contrasted with themes identifiable within literatures, notably the four aspects of *knowing*: identity, language/discourse, practice and knowledge.

#### **3.6.3 Reporting the data**

In the reporting of this data textual illustrations are used to aid understanding of the meanings recognised within the participants' worlds. This use of the participants' 'voice' also acts to recognise, and thereby limits, how research accounts are "always constructed by the researcher on the basis of the participants' accounts ..."  
(Maxwell, 2002, p.49). Aligning with the interpretivist approach adopted, each participant's differing perspectives are represented within this.

Informed by the work of Patrick Reedy (2009) in his "*Manager's Tale*", short vignettes are used to encapsulate the different stories told by these professionals/practitioners. Assembled from the interview data, the purpose of these vignettes is to offer "short stories about individuals, situations and structures"  
(Hughes, 1998, p.381). Five distinct 'tales' can be elicited, referencing the participants' subjective perceptions and belief systems surrounding multi-agency working. These are used to support the researcher's subsequent grouping, and interpretation, of these multi-agency professionals'/practitioners' meanings. Across the social sciences, vignettes have formed a prevalent facet of the data collection phase of the research process. Indeed, this has been used in examining multi-agency



working (for example, Atkinson et al., 2001; Anning, 2005). However, their use in reporting research findings, to give voice to the participants through illustrating their 'stories', has seen a much more limited application. Nevertheless, this approach provides a valuable tool for gaining an insight into the nuances of these professionals'/practitioners' perceptions. Additionally, in telling not one individual's story but a fusion of many, so this ensures that the identities of individual participants themselves are not compromised.

Matrices are developed, as advised by Miles and Huberman (1994), to help identify the relative importance of the codes generated through the data; also intersections and relationships among categories. Simple conceptual 'maps' illustrate other aspects of the data.

### **3.7 Sub study: To better understand perceived professional hierarchies**

Following initial analysis it became apparent, as is indeed well-documented within the literatures (for example, Anning, 2005; Cameron et al., 2009), that whilst many of the professionals/practitioners explicitly suggested that they were operating in a mostly non-hierarchical system, the Children's Workforce remains strongly hierarchical in nature. Consequentially, in order to better understand these and thereby better understand some aspects of the data that had been generated through the interviews a further sub-study was undertaken.

This requested professionals/practitioners, both from within and outside of this authority's Children's Services, to rank the different 'professions' from within Children's Services that were provided by the researcher. Equal ranks were permitted. Thirty individuals were requested to respond. A response rate of 36% was secured. The data were used to construct a 'largely'-agreed hierarchy that was used to enhance understanding of the interview data. However, its limitations are recognised.

### **3.8 Research standards**

The significance and value of any research falls upon its adherence to the appropriate research standards. As Cohen et al. (2007) observe that, "whilst no measuring instrument is perfect, if a piece of research is invalid then it is worthless" (p.133). Yin (1994) asserts that case-study research must demonstrate construct validity, external validity (generalisability), internal validity and reliability. However, in taking a qualitative approach, concern is with the acceptable alternatives: trustworthiness/credibility, transferability, authenticity and relevance (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Whilst generalisability is not considered a particular purpose of qualitative research (Boeije, 2010), it can provide "insights" (p.180) that are *transferrable* with interpretation into new contexts (Collin, 2009); a process referred to as "analogous generalisation" (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Consideration of these issues within this research is made below in Table 3.2.

Risk identified		Control mechanism(s) employed within the research
Trustworthiness	<b>Credibility</b> "Confidence in the truth of data" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.235) Personal bias and involvement affecting data interpretation Researcher exerting influence upon interviewees' responses	Recording of all observations throughout the research and verbatim interview transcription; Verification and authentication of the data generated confirmed by an audit trail; Verification of coding by colleague; Personal reflexivity and explicitly recording the researcher's influence upon the study; Participant-led PEI offered fewer opportunities for the researcher's influence to be exerted (eg. Knight & Saunders, 1999).
	<b>Dependability</b> Trust in findings, facilitating future consideration and deliberation by academia and practitioners Influencing responses: through sequencing of the questions	Ensuring a consistent role was adopted across all interviews. Assisted through being a sole researcher; Clarity in methods of data generation and analysis (Lattu, 2003); Methods adopted and rigorous data analysis; Participant-led photo-elicitation interview approach.
	<b>Confirmability:</b> Establishing neutrality in representing the participants' views Congruence between observations and reporting	Providing detailed accounts of the research context, participant details and process (a chain of evidence), enabling the research readers to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• make their own informed decisions regarding the data, <i>also</i></li> <li>• follow the procedures again <i>and</i></li> <li>• have trust in the findings, which hold meaning and interest to them;</li> </ul> Following case-study protocol (Yin, 2009, p.41); Transparency in the data generation and analysis; Addressing rival explanations.
Authenticity	Participant desire for social desirability (Dillman, 2000) and compliance, generating <i>mis-information</i>	Ensuring that participants were sufficiently informed in advance of their participation within the research; Encouraged through the researcher's pre-existing experience within this research context and the relatively extensive data generation period, providing greater accuracy in making inferences from the data; Triangulation; Listening to detect responses where these problems might prevail. Re-examination later in the interview if/as necessary.
Transferability	Adopting a single-case approach does not afford direct generalisability of the findings across social settings (Bryman, 2008, p.376)	"Solid, thick description" generated enables readers to make thoroughly informed choices about the applicability of findings to their particular circumstances (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.362); Pattern matching within analysis (Yin, 2009, p.41)
Relevance	Wider impact of the research	Researcher made explicit, the value to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the participants in extending both their understanding of their social context and the views of others within it;</li> <li>• the wider community in engendering change or improvement within the context</li> </ul> Research report to be submitted to the local authority and all participants

**Table 3.2:** Research standards: Risks and control measures undertaken within the research

### 3.9 Reflexivity

Ellis (2007), amongst others, emphasises the value of reflexivity especially in undertaking qualitative research. **Personal reflexivity** requires the researcher to examine ways in which her own value system, identity and experiences have shaped the research. The researcher recognises that although she was an outsider researcher and therefore had the advantage of holding a more objective view, she has inevitably had an unavoidable influence upon the research: in the case selected, the data generation and analysis, and data interpretation. As examined in Chapter 1, the researcher has had previous experience within this field which may have influenced her understanding and interpretation of this specific research context. Therefore, it is important to make these influences as explicit as possible to the reader and to acknowledge the limitations that they inflict upon the research. With the research taking a constructivist approach, the interview process creates a jointly constructed meaning (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003) and the data is interpreted in this interaction between the researcher and participant. This calls for, as Alvesson and Skoldberg (2001) explain, the need to attend “to the complex relationship between the process of knowledge production and .... the involvement of the knowledge producer” (p.5).

**Epistemological reflexivity** requires consideration of how the findings have been defined and limited by the research aim and questions, also of how the assumptions underpinning the research have influenced the methods adopted (Willig, 2008).

Moreover, Ellis also observes the need to reflect upon the changing needs of the research processes and of arising ethical considerations. This was encouraged at the outset through meetings with members of the authority's senior management, and also with Area Team Leaders. The purpose of these was to ascertain opinions and feelings regarding the proposed research methods and format and to better understand its relevance to the authority and its professionals/practitioners. As the interviews progressed, their format and contents evolved, for example to include reflection upon critical incidents. This mirrored the researcher's developing understanding of its relevance to these professionals'/practitioners' working lives and practice and her changing relationship with the authority and participants. Furthermore, it was critical to understanding some of the comments made during the interview discussions.

### **3.10 Ethical considerations**

Ethical considerations should inform and underpin all approaches to, and methods of, social research (Robson, 2011), providing the researcher with rules for morally appropriate behaviour in relation to the rights of others who become the subject of, or are affected by the research work (Saunders et al., 2012). The growth of regulatory codes of practice for research (for example, Social Research Association, 2003; BAM, 2010; BERA, 2011) emphasises the increasing awareness around ethical concerns within research.

Ethical dilemmas potentially “lurk in *any* research involving people” (Robson, 2002, p.66). However, qualitative studies are especially vulnerable to ethical concerns because the research methods are generally more *invasive*, demanding more from, and greater exposure of, participants (Damianakis & Woodford, 2012). The researcher was especially cognisant of the potential issues and pressures arising through researching this specific workplace: a context especially subject to significant internal and external scrutiny. This was particularly the case in terms of ensuring that the anonymity and confidentiality of participants was not compromised; how they might be unintentionally identified through use of their job role/title in the reporting of the data. The use of raw data to illustrate and develop holistic accounts risks unintentional disclosure of participants’ identities and the identities of those they may refer to within their narratives (*ibid*, p.709). However, reducing individuals to ‘labels’ risks limiting the meaning and understanding reported. This then presents a dilemma in deciding where the boundaries lie in striking a balance between generating knowledge and their subjects’ rights (Cohen et al., 2007, Giordano et al., 2007; Tilley & Gormley, 2007; Tolich, 2010). However, providing the researcher acknowledges and makes explicit the ethical concerns surrounding their work, they can put in place strategies to enable new knowledge to be generated whilst protecting the participants (Damianakis & Woodford, 2012).

For visual researchers this remains an under-developed and contested area. Wiles et al. (2008) consider that additional ethical dilemmas arise from the construction of photo/images as used in this research (see also Banks, 2007, p.87; Harper, 2005). By

contrast, Lapenta (2011) and Pauwels (2011) assert that this poses fewer ethical concerns than most qualitative methods, since in essence it is a participatory form of research, prioritising the voices of the participants who have *advance* control over what they present and discuss. However, it is recognised that potential concerns exist where photos presented included people and/or organisational 'spaces'. Indeed, the right to photograph the public without their consent, for research purposes, has not really been confirmed, nor has the use of photos of public places and organisational 'spaces' without informed consent (Wiles et al., 2011). To minimise these issues, throughout the research the researcher adhered to the ESRC *National Centre for Research Methods Guidelines for Visual Research* (Wiles et al., 2008) and ethical advice was provided to participants using Vince and Warren's (2012) "responsible photography" guidelines (Appendix 2). Whilst it is recognised that any individuals or explicit identifiers appearing within the photos might be concealed, pixelated and/or blurred to anonymise them (Wiles et al., 2008, para.4.2), this approach is not undertaken due to its tendency to dehumanise (Sweetman, 2008) and to solicit connotations of criminality (Banks, 2001). The researcher secured written confirmation in advance from the participants' for their permission to incorporate their photos/images in the reporting and publication of the research. Only those photos that were considered not to pose ethical concerns have been included within this thesis and would be included within any subsequent dissemination and publication.

Silverman's (2009, pp.153-4) five key facets of "*proper*" conduct guide the generation, analysis and reporting stages of research: voluntary participation and the right to withdraw; protection of research participants; assessment of potential benefit and risks to participants; obtaining informed consent; not doing harm. Drawing upon British Educational Research Association [BERA] (2011) and British Academy of Management [BAM] (2010) guidelines, a risk assessment of the proposed research methods, data analysis and dissemination channels, was undertaken against these key ethical criteria. This returned a low ethical risk rating for each facet of the inquiry against both the likelihood of harm and the severity of harm. The assessment and the measures taken to limit the risks are presented in Table 3.3. Moreover, it suggested that the research techniques will have offered participant benefits through enhanced reflection on their professional learning opportunities and therefore, the researcher is convinced that all ethical obligations are more than met.

Ethical approval was granted by the local authority's Research Governance Committee (26 March, 2012) and by Lancaster University REC (23 April, 2012). The researcher recognises her accountability to both of these stakeholders, additionally to the participants and her employing University who had a long-running partnership with the Authority.



Facets of ethical concern	Severity x Likelihood = Risk*	Actions taken to reduce / eliminate risk
Voluntary participation and the right to withdraw	3x1=3	<b>Participation and right to withdraw:</b> Participants emailed directly and requested to participate. Where they did not demonstrate a clear willingness to do so, this was not forced. Emphasis, both in written and verbal format, that the participants had no obligation to continue their participation in the study; rather they remained free to withdraw at any point during it. Participants were given the right to refuse to answer any question, to withdraw their data, to request that the recording be turned off during the interview. Audio recordings destroyed after transcription.
Protection of research participants	4x2=8	<p><b>Anonymity:</b> PEI meant complete anonymity is impossible, as the researcher knows the participant and their their stories. Full anonymity assured in storage and dissemination of the data. All data was stored in accordance with the DPA 1998. All electronic data stored in password-protected files and encrypted. The participants and the local authority remain anonymous in all dissemination and publication of the data. These have been identified by aliases.</p> <p><b>Confidentiality:</b> Ensuring that details of participants are not revealed at any stage in the research (Cutcliffe &amp; Ramcharan, 2002). The local authority involved in the research and only the researcher and her supervisor know the Area Teams involved. Details of the participants not revealed to the Area Team Leads, and the Area Teams represented through the participants not revealed to the Authority's senior managers.</p> <p>There is no guarantee of complete anonymity and confidentiality especially when working with small networks of people where the chance of an individual being recognised through the research report is increased (Damianakis &amp; Woodford, 2012).</p> <p>Care in respecting the participants' choice to self-identify as both a multi-agency professional and/or with their 'base' profession</p> <p>Where data collations are used, the number of participants comments relate to is made explicit (Damianakis &amp; Woodford, 2012)</p>
Assessment of potential benefit and risks to participants	1x2=2	<p><b>Benefits (beneficence):</b> Through participation participants have been provided with an opportunity to gain better understanding of their practice. All participants will be provided with a copy of the research summary report and offered opportunities to discuss the findings contained within this with both the researcher and/or with their senior managers.</p> <p><b>Risks:</b> Meticulous in ensuring that, whilst the participants might have been minimally inconvenienced through the time required to participate. No specific risks identified. Recognition of risks posed through failing to comply with other facets of ethical concern, notably around anonymity and confidentiality</p>
Obtaining informed consent	2x1=2	Vigilance in ensuring that all participants were fully informed of the research, its intentions, the methods of data generation and their role within it well in advance of their participation. Secured through provision of a participant information sheet (PIS) in advance of agreement to participate. All participants confirmed their informed consent to participate through signing a consent form.
Not doing harm	3x1=3	Case-study authority remains unidentifiable in all dissemination. All participants treated equally and research inhibited participant exploitation. Respect of all participants demonstrated through the researcher's competence in ensuring rigour in the research design, conduct, analysis and reporting (Morrison, 1996). Recognises that the professionals as the 'experts', rather the researcher.

\*Risk score: **Likelihood** scores: very unlikely = 1-----5 = highly likely  
**Severity** scores: very low risk of psychological impact and / or no physical risk = 1-----5 = major psychological impact and / or possible physical danger  
Maximum score=25

**Table 3.3:** Ethical risk assessment and actions undertaken

### **3.11 Key limitations of the research acknowledged at the outset**

In what follows, the key limitations of the research methodology and methods employed, as acknowledged at the outset of the research, are discussed.

#### ***3.11.1 Limitations of the methodological approach, strategy and design***

Contrary to the dominant positivist approach to examining learning, knowledge and practice, this research has taken an interpretivist approach. Whilst interpretative research has become a better-understood and trusted method approach amongst the research community, it is subjected to significant criticism, notably in terms of:

- the differences between the different contexts/situations in which the data has been constructed;
- different researchers will interpret the same data in different ways, consequential of their own subjectivities, background, experience and knowledge;
- data is unique and therefore unrepeatably;
- emphasis is upon *understanding* rather than statistical comparison and generalisation;
- data sets are typically small-scale, cannot be generalised and therefore cannot be construed as 'rigorous data'

(adapted from Denzin & Lincoln 2003a).

These critiques have been responded to in what has been discussed above. Therefore, it is asserted that this approach is most appropriate for examining the research questions since the focus is upon “understand[ing] the meaning people have constructed about their world and their experiences” (Merriam, 2002, pp.4-5). This enables the researcher to make “artful” sense (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p.30) out of the multiple possible interpretations of these experiences (the data).

This **research strategy and design** provides clear spatial boundaries to this ‘in depth’ exploratory research. However, heed is taken of Yin’s (2009) observation that there is a need for the social scientist to “openly acknowledge” its limitations (p.3). Whilst an interpretative case-study strategy offers many benefits (for example, Walsham, 1995; Yin, 2009), this approach enhances the risks of bias and researcher subjectivity, certainly when compared with other strategies such as cross-sectional survey and experiment (Saunders et al., 2012). Indeed this underpins many of the critiques case-study research (see Nisbet & Watt, 1984 for detailed review). However, many of these critiques are based upon misunderstandings held especially by positivist researchers of, for example, the nature of ‘purposive and snowball selection’ compared with ‘statistical sampling’, and of ‘relevance’ compared with ‘statistical generalisability’. Yin (2009) highlights concerns over uniqueness surrounding the use of only one single case and the potential biases in its purposive selection. However, these issues are reduced through the use of embedded units, although it is important to ensure that a return is made to the larger unit of analysis rather than interpretation remaining at the sub-unit level.

Therefore, it is asserted that this is an appropriate lens through which to explore these multi-agency professionals' *knowing* in which the objective was not to discover 'truths' as a deductive, objectivist epistemology might suggest, but to examine how individuals bring their own perceptions and social meaning to this phenomenon of multi-agency working.

### **3.11.2 Limitations of photo-elicitation interviewing (PEI)**

PEI offers a distinctive approach to data generation, presenting significant value to the research process through offering potentially far greater cognitive access to complex, abstract concepts such as multi-agency *knowing* than interviews alone. However, this tool is not without its shortcomings. It is recognised that interviews, in whatever form, are inherently limited by their contrived rather than naturalistic interaction. Whilst PEI presents greater opportunities for accessing these professionals' stories it does not account for gaps between the espoused and their practice (Argyris & Schön, 1974; Knight, 2002). This espoused theory, that they consider they would like others to think they do, will be influenced by "assumptions about self, others and environment ...." (Argyris & Schön, 1974, p.30), functioning to diminish any vulnerability they risk through the exposure of actions and feelings. However, there may be little congruence between this and the realities of their practice. Moreover, individuals are not always fully conscious of what they actually do so their explanation of their actions may be very different to reality. These hold implications for the fullness of the picture portrayed and the reliability of the findings. The provision of photos, where they specifically depict practice, may help

to alleviate this. However, they too fail to offer “a transparent window on the world” (Mannay, 2010, p.99). Furthermore, the participants themselves are typically absent from the photographs so their actual ‘place’ within this reality is omitted (Felstead et al., 2004).

Perhaps most importantly, PEI is based upon the assumption that these professionals are able and willing (cognitively and physically) to impart information that is not subjected to issues of social desirability, such that a ‘valid’ representation of their meanings is gained (King & Horrocks, 2010, p.17).

### ***3.11.3 Limitations of proposed methods of analysis***

The proposed analysis approach is not anticipated to be without its limitations, notably in being time-‘hungry’. Nonetheless, it has several major benefits with regards to this research. Specifically, it offers an effective means to analysing the complex, sensitive and multi-faceted phenomena of knowing, especially with the large volumes of textual and image data that is generated. Further, it is highly flexible in terms of research design (Harwood & Garry, 2003).

## **3.12 Alternative methods considered for use in this research**

Alternative ethnographic techniques, notably ***observation*** of these professionals’ day-to-day work, as used extensively by the ESRC-funded MATch project (Anning et al., 2006) and the ESRC-LIW project (Warmington et al., 2004), would potentially

have yielded valuable data. Through the generation of 'primary' (direct observation), 'secondary' (statements made by others of occurrences) and 'experiential' (researcher perceptions and feelings) data, so this would have offered a way to getting to understand the learning of these professionals and to the root of what is actually 'going on' in this multi-agency setting. However, ethical issues arising due to issues of confidentiality surrounding children meant that this was not acceptable to the local authority.

**Workplace document analysis** may have offered invaluable insight into evolving practice. Whilst it is acknowledged that the discourse of meetings is different to everyday "social text" (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000, p.1136), this might have provided an alternative means of observing what is 'going on'. However, again this was not acceptable to the authority due to issues of meeting content confidentiality.

Consideration was also made of the use of both **online blogs and critical incident diaries**. These would have fostered critical reflective thinking, effectively documenting feelings and perceptions as well as 'facts' about events, illuminating key processes in both the development of multi-agency practice and of these professionals'/practitioners' experiences. However, the workloads of these professionals/practitioners negated securing the longer-term commitment required for their use. Previous research undertaken by the researcher has demonstrated the difficulties of recruiting and continuously motivating participants using such

techniques. However, within the interviews participants were encouraged to offer critical incident examples of effective and ineffective multi-agency working.

### 3.13 Chapter summary

This chapter has provided details of, and a justification for, the interpretive paradigm employed to examine the research questions. It has overviewed the case-study design that generates qualitative data from within one purposively selected local authority's Children's Services department. The approach of photo-elicitation interviewing enables a deep examination of five Area Teams as embedded units within the case-study. Details of the data analysis were outlined and consideration has been made of measures taken to ensure validity and reliability of the data. Regard has also been taken of the ethical issues arising through the research process. A detailed description of this analysis along with the research findings, are presented in the following chapters.

## Chapter 4 Making sense of multi-agency practice

### 4.1 Introduction

Chapters 4-6 make a detailed examination of the new *knowing* (knowledge-in-practice) that is being created within this new multi-agency community. As defined by Wenger (1998), this comprises these professionals'/practitioners' reified knowledge, discourse, practice and identity. These aspects are examined through these three distinct chapters. Firstly, in what follows, this chapter examines how these professionals were making sense of their multi-agency practice: how they explained their practice, their perceived effectiveness of this, the challenges they were encountering and the meanings that they took from this. Chapter 5 considers how these professionals/practitioners conceived what they were learning as multi-agency professionals and the sources of this learning. Finally, Chapter 6 examines how they saw and spoke of themselves within this multi-agency context, specifically how they were (re)constructing and (re)positioning their selves and the 'identity-work' they were undertaking in order to achieve this.

The findings illustrate both the complex and the highly dynamic nature of the multi-agency context under investigation. As one of the professionals observed,

*"what you are hearing are coloured by people's feeling of what's happening at the moment and that's changing all the time. Had you spoken to me 3 weeks ago, I would have told you something different ..."*



Consequentially, data saturation was not achieved. This is not considered to be problematic, but acts merely to demonstrate the fluidity in the meanings these professionals take from their daily professional lives. The significance of this is addressed further in Chapter 8 in considering the limitations of this research.

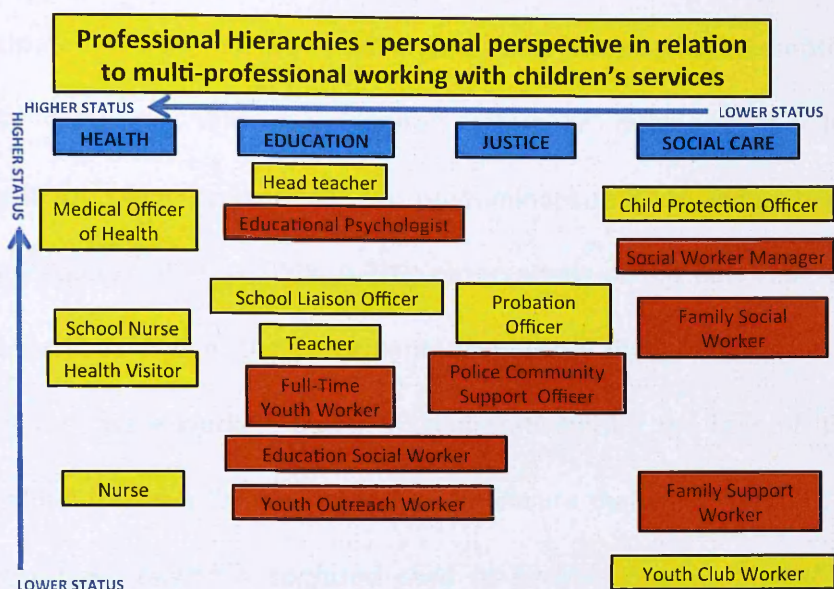
As was explained in Chapter 3.6.3, short vignettes are used through these three chapters to *"Tell the Tales"* told by these professionals/practitioners (Reedy, 2009, p.15). Matrices and 'maps' are also used to identify the relative importance of the codes generated through the data; also, where appropriate, intersections and associations between them.

Whilst it had been anticipated at the outset of the research that variations in the participants' perceptions would be grounded within the geographical area that the Area Teams concerned covered as per the socio-economic selection criteria, analysis of the interview data indicated that this was not the case. To the contrary, the themes that evolved from the interviews concerning multi-agency learning, knowledge and identity (re-)construction, distinguished five distinct classifications, "tales", anchored predominantly within the context of these individuals' specialism-of-training. Those individuals comprising these groups and the "tale" that tells their stories are indicated in Table 4.1.

← Classification, as grouped through analysis of the data →				
Social Care	Education psychology	Outreach	Education Social Work	Youth Crime
<i>Told by 'Tom's Tale'</i>	<i>Told by 'Beth's Tale'</i>	<i>Told by 'Lyn's Tale'</i>	<i>Told by 'Sarah's Tale'</i>	<i>Told by 'Nick's Tale'</i>
2x Information Sharing Co-ordinator	2x Education Psychologists	2x Childcare Development worker	Education Social Worker*	2x Police Community Support Officer
3x Family Support Worker*	Education Psychologist Team Manager	HomeStart Family support Co-ordinator		Youth Offending Service
Family Social Worker*		Universal Youth Support		
3x Area Team Leader*		2x Youth outreach		
School Liaison Officer				
Social worker				

**Table 4.1:** Research participants by groupings identified through the data analysis  
 \* indicates individuals that were co-located

To aid understanding of these “tales”, Figure 4.1 provides an indication of the perceived relative ‘positions’ of these professionals/practitioners within this Children’s Workforce. As was discussed in Chapter 3.7, this has been constructed through the use of a simple survey distributed to Children’s Services’ professionals and practitioners, both participants and non-participants within the main research project.



**Figure 4.1:** Relative 'positions' of the professional/practitioner groups

*[Orange shading represents those professionals/practitioners participating within the main research project]*

## 4.2 Making sense of multi-agency practice

This chapter now progresses to examine how these professionals/practitioners were making sense of their new multi-agency practice. The participants offered varied perceptions of its nature and effectiveness. As illustrated in Table 4.1, these broad views can largely be explained by whether the participants were core or non-core team members and by the broad professional/practitioner grouping from which they were drawn.

There was an overwhelming agreement across all of the professionals/practitioners that participated in this research that multi-agency working was essential in the twenty-first century. With only limited reference made to the legislative requirements for joined-up working, two predominant reasons were cited. Firstly, reinforcing Peckover et al.'s (2008, p.378) observations of the new repertoire that these reforms have drawn, the participants considered that there was a 'need' to ensure that they were working together co-operatively, for the sake of 'the child'. Some described this as a "*moral obligation*" to ensure that they weren't giving out "*mixed messages, causing a confused child to become more confused*". Whilst others explained how crucially, this ensured that "*they [child/family] don't have to keep re-telling the blooming story all the time to a thousand different people*" with a resultant lack of belief in the service. Corroborating this view, others spoke of how they knew that, in the past, they hadn't always operated in the service-users' best interests, sometimes with devastating consequences. They emphasised the significance of being able to now offer a far more specific individualised service based upon the needs of the child/family, rather than as had been the emphasis in the past, upon the services' requirements. In consequence, it was generally agreed that "*we've seen children's lives changed because we work together*". Therefore, this 'moral' commitment, accentuating how every child *does* matter, had prompted a willingness amongst these professionals/practitioners to develop the competencies that they needed to work effectively with others.

However, despite this espoused shared objective of the child's wellbeing, there were clear tensions between these professionals/practitioners as to the means by which this should be achieved. One participant was not alone in observing how,

*"a lot of the time it feels like we try to 'fix' kids and families as opposed to help them become more independent around helping themselves".*

Secondly, the professionals/practitioners emphasised how multi-agency working was invaluable to them personally, in offering them support and a *"friendly face"* for reassurance through their day-to-day work. The Social Care professionals/practitioners spoke most strongly of this, although the Outreach participants also understood that this was fundamental to their effective working. *'Lyn's Tale, Chapter 1'* clearly illustrates this view. Significantly, this 'tale' emphasises the perceived importance of inter-professional collegiality, but also the importance of sharing ideas and combining different perspectives. This enables them to develop more effective solutions for the child/family. These views corroborate both Anning's (2005) and Rose's (2009) work with children's services' teams which identified such synergies to be an important benefit of multi-agency working.

### ***Lyn's Tale, Chapter 1***

Lyn is really enthusiastic about multi-agency working and talks about how she *"feels that I am part of the team now. That's what's important to me"*. She perceives that *"it didn't work before because there was duplication: the poor children would have multiple workers and they just kind of went 'ugh, no more'. Professionals weren't staying in their job role either as you can only work in really bad situation and have no good outcomes for so long"*. Contrastingly, she reports how, *"beforehand I was very isolated, it was tough. But now, we've got that open door ... and you get loads of support"*. She sees that her work today is about information sharing, of *"learning about good practice from others in the Area Team, ... tapping into all that knowledge so then we can cascade down to the people we work with"*. She also explains that *"I couldn't manage on my own. I have to have the support of other agencies to come on board ... it's like a safety net too"*. However, perhaps most importantly, she reports that because *"I now work very, very closely with them [other professionals], so families are engaging with us much more. So that's a great outcome. It's a real bonus"*.

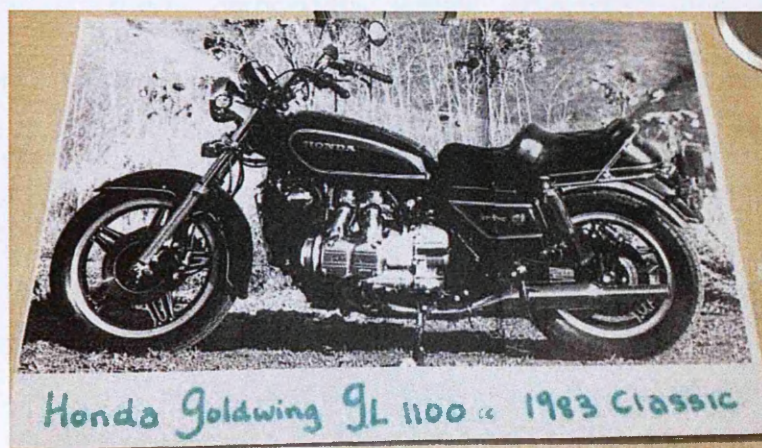
She also explains how *"everyone doesn't know everything. It's about linking in to other people, to their knowledge and skills .... We've got really good skills in the team here, so you know that you will get an answer ..."*. She reports, as an example, a recent incident where she had needed legal advice, *"... and so I knew I could phone Jon because he knows all about these legal things ... I'm paid to be reasonably skilled in my area of work but I certainly don't have the expertise across others"*.

Although perhaps not voiced as much as might have been expected given the financial situation that the case-study authority was currently facing (savings exceeding £100m over 3-years), there was extensive acceptance by these professionals/practitioners that, in achieving the ever-moving, higher-demanding, service delivery targets required, joined-up approaches were the only means to survival. Some of these comments related specifically to the financial costs, with one participant observing how, *"Area Teams are relatively cheap for what you get out of them"*. Others emphasised the wider efficiencies, with one Youth Services practitioner discerning, *"there can be no excuse in the current economic climate for*



*duplicating, duplicating, duplicating in activity*". The Social Care practitioners focused more upon the dependability of the Area Team configuration in the current climate, with one offering the image of his Honda Goldwing (Figure 4.2) to illustrate this. He explained how, like this bike, "his" team's working was

*"reliable, sensitive, consistent, rarely breaks down and is low maintenance. It might chug along keeping up the momentum, but it can go very fast too if it wants to ... as a result, it drives beautifully. I wouldn't ride anything else at the moment"*.



**Figure 4.2:** Participant-provided image of a Honda Goldwing

By contrast, some participants felt that the local and national austerity measures were having substantial repercussions for their team and workplace effectiveness. One Youth practitioner was representative in commenting how,

*"now the money is getting tight information sharing is getting very closed. It's all about self-survival really. Information is power ..."*.

Nevertheless, and to the contrary, there was a simultaneous, and acute awareness that, in some instances, these austerity measures were benefiting the multi-agency cause. Through financial necessity teams were being brought together under single managers, thereby creating more extensive multi-agency teams. As one of the managers observed,

*"I inherited 4 or 5 [staff] so we've now got an overview of several teams. So if you've got several teams you automatically have them working in a multi-agency way".*

In consequence, these participants largely considered that multi-agency configurations, despite their inherent difficulties, were a highly effective way to work.

#### **4.3 Differing perceptions of this changed practice**

Yet, despite this agreement that joined-up working was essential and effective, there were varied, and at times contradictory, perceptions of both what exactly this new working was, and how locally-embedded it actually was. As Table 4.2 illustrates, some participants, notably from within Social Care, saw this multi-agency practice as a completely new way of working, explaining how

*"it's all very different from what it might have been 10-15-years ago. To be honest it is different to about 4-years ago".*



Perceptions	Indicative statements made by participants within each classification grouping (coding density)			
	Density of shading and * denote perceived importance rating of this perspective by this professional group	Education Psychologists	Outreach	Education Social Work
As a completely new way of working	<p>Social care</p> <p>"each has absolved down this cliff, ...; they're all connected"</p> <p>"its like joining all the pieces of the jigsaw"</p> <p>"you've got different players playing different positions ... they've all got a part to play in the end result"</p> <p>*****</p>	<p>"That's just about delivering differently ..."</p> <p>"it's multi agency discretion not necessarily multi agency working ... it's like a tool-kit"</p> <p>"you get a set of tasks; people will go away and do those tasks ..."</p> <p>*****</p>	<p>"so we work very, very closely with each other and families are now engaging with us much better ..."</p> <p>"actually putting the resources together, ... putting the teams together, oh my word the piece of work we could do is phenomenal"</p> <p>***</p>	<p>Youth Crime</p> <p>"My role has changed ... they draw us into social services, mental health things ..."</p> <p>"we can't put down the phone and say, no that's not our job any more. We've got to ... deal with it and ... we've got to draw on others to do that"</p> <p>*****</p>
As a new delivery model	<p>"parents like that we ... are thinking about their needs"</p> <p>"... specific tasks are set out for the agencies ..."</p> <p>**</p>	<p>"It's made my role easier. If I'm having a problem with an individual then the chances are others have had the same problem. So working within the team I can draw on their expertise as/when ..."</p> <p>***</p>	<p>"what it comes down to is that you are still experts in your area, but it's having that greater knowledge of what everyone else does to know who you can draw upon when you need"</p> <p>*</p>	<p>"I've got to change shifts to attend some of these meetings but I'm more than happy to do that"</p> <p>***</p>
As a change of attitude	<p>"It's making sure that ... they actually are playing properly with everybody else"</p> <p>"And it's a new mindset ..."</p> <p>***</p>	<p>"It isn't just about the practice it's about having a shared set of what you think you would hope to achieve ..."</p> <p>*</p>	<p>"we can come here and say, this isn't working, and we can all bounce off each other ..."</p> <p>***</p>	<p>"we were multi-agency to start anyhow ..."</p> <p>**</p>
As a new title to continued practice		<p>"Its more awareness raising... nothing different as such"</p> <p>***</p>		

**Table 4.2:** Developing new ways of working

Note: Shading density, which aligns with star ratings, provides an indication of the proportion of responses coded within the category for this classification grouping

To the contrary, as is also illustrated in Table 4.2 others, notably the Education Psychologists, saw this change more as just a new way of assigning tasks, possibly even just a new title to continued practice. Comparable with, amongst others, Rose's (2009) research findings, this latter view highlighted a perception that clear territories still exist within these Area Teams, with each individual and/or group having their own specific remits.

Building upon this, Table 4.3 illustrates the degree to which these professionals/practitioners considered that multi-agency working was embedded in their local practices. Notably, the Social Care and Outreach professionals/practitioners reported what they considered to be a 'significant change with the past' to be well embedded in their day-to-day practice. However, paradoxically, as is shown, they also offered a predominance of examples demonstrating where this was not the case. For Outreach professionals/practitioners, this was typically reflected through information sharing protocols that meant that they were often unable to be kept informed and thereby, unable to function effectively within the multi-agency team.

Indicative statements made by participant classification groupings			Density of shading represents density of responses coded [blank denotes no representative comment]	
Classification grouping	Well embedded			Not well embedded
Outreach	<p>"we've seen a massive big change in the way we work ... integrated working has a massive presence"</p> <p>"CAF and TAC are here, yes, their shape might change but they're here to stay"</p> <p>"there's a lot more of, let's get together and solve this"</p>	<p>"I would say it's improving but I think we've still got a long way to go"</p>	<p>"My issue is we are working with hundreds and hundreds of youngsters that we don't know we have an issue with them"</p> <p>"They don't see a youth club as an agency, only somewhere they go to have a good time. That worker had been working with that person for two years and had no idea that there was an involvement in a really big agency"</p>	
Social care	<p>"I think it's now very much in our culture that we work strongly as a team with multiagency approach in our area"</p> <p>"we're like a chain all linked together"</p>	<p>"we've started to connect the pieces together ... but I'd like to see it a bit more embedded"</p> <p>"if we took away CAF and TAC, ... we might well go back to what we used to do"</p> <p>"it's the only way that we can work because we need to draw on, it's not just my issue any more, ... it's a multi-agency approach there"</p>	<p>"multiagency work is almost, it is seen as a bit of an add-on really"</p>	
Youth crime				
Education psychology			<p>"there are little pockets, but that's all"</p>	<p>"it's multi agency discretion, not multi agency working"</p> <p>"if you went and asked the team 'how often in your day-to-day work due you work alongside someone else in terms of planning, delivering, organising, sorting out your work?', I would imagine they'd say, we don't, we attend meetings with other people"</p>
Education Social Work				<p>"It's difficult to make a commitment when you've got to do it with three different teams"</p>

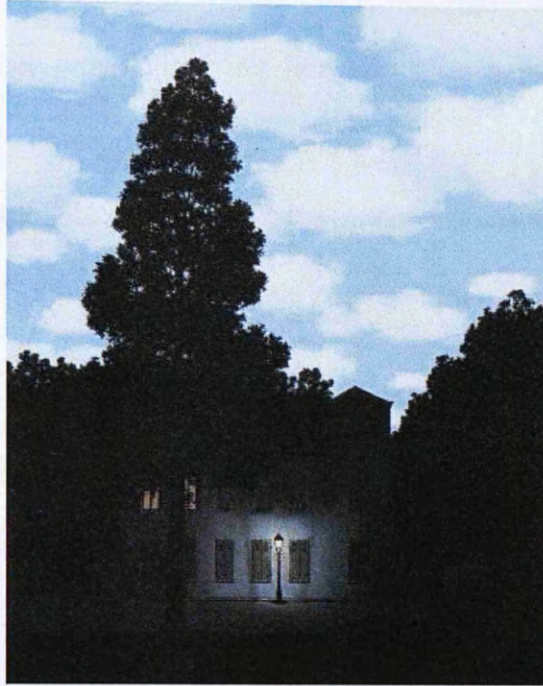
**Table 4.3:** How embedded is multi-agency working?

Note: Shading density provides an indication of the proportion of responses coded within the category for this classification grouping

Nonetheless, regardless of how this change of working was perceived, the impact it was having was reported to be substantial. This included: a far more proactive rather than reactive stance; increased representation from Outreach agencies/groups; a far greater understanding between the professions and a willingness to ask for advice. As one Youth Work Manager explained,

*“they had different ways of looking at the issues, so in putting them together, ‘oh my word’, what they can do is phenomenal and we’ve thought, ‘gosh we could make a massive difference here’”.*

This predominantly positive voice was further emphasised by one of the Area Team Leaders (ATL) (Social care). She presented a copy of Magritte’s *‘Empire of Light’* (Figure 4.3) to explain how at the outset, like the image, multi-agency working had seemed like a surreal and mysterious prospect, seeming to upset the central organising foundations of these professionals’/practitioners’ lives. She explained that the dark, nocturnal street reflected the initial unease, but the streetlamp had lit the way, and now the blue, light-drenched sky was starting to penetrate as they realised the value and the positive outcomes engendered by multi-agency working.



**Figure 4.3:** Participant-provided image of Magritte's 'Empire of Light'

Yet despite this optimistic interpretation, this ATL also spoke relatively extensively about the tensions she faced within this multi-agency configuration, observing for example, how

*"all the agencies were going to be co-located. But it hasn't happened. Its only Family Support and Education Support Workers. The others remain with their host agency ... this causes problems".*

So, in adopting Magritte's surrealist influence it might be asserted that 'things are not always as they seem'. This image might also be interpreted to illustrate the paradoxical nature of multi-agency working: the sunlight in this image, which is typically seen as a source of clarity, creating a puzzling uneasiness and uncertainty,



with the darkness seeming even more impenetrable. Whilst this was not explored with the participant, it might be questioned if this was a sub-conscious message revealed through her provision of this image. Other participants' views further support such an interpretation. Some acknowledged how, for some professionals/practitioners this way of working remained as a *"sometimes problematic add on"* rather than the primary focus of their day-to-day work.

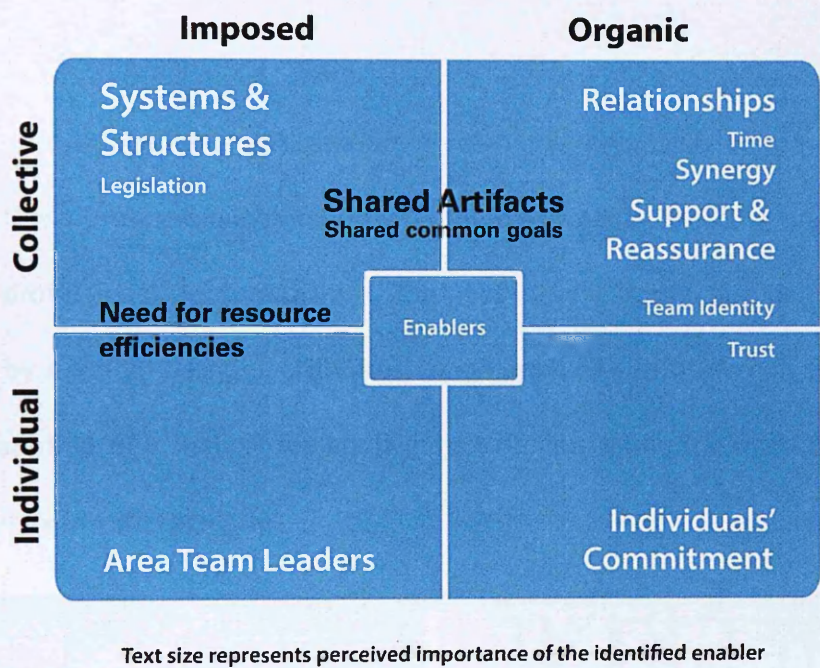
The comments reported by the Educational Psychologists in Tables 4.2 and 4.3 raise further questions over how embedded multi-agency working is. Although an explanation for these varied perceptions are, to some extent, offered within *'Beth's Tale, Chapter 1'*. She differentiates between the strategic and operational levels of practice and suggests how the origins of the multi-agency configuration have ultimately determined how effectively these practices are subsequently embedded.

#### ***Beth's Tale, Chapter 1***

Beth is an education professional and has been with the local authority for well over 10 years. She explains about how multi-agency working exists at different degrees at different levels within the authority. From a strategic perspective, she considers that multi-agency working is *"very healthy, with clear strategic targets and the development of groups around statutory frameworks ..."* However, at the micro-level, she reveals *"there are pockets, but it's down to individuals developing their own relationships with others"*. She also explains how the effectiveness of these multi-agency teams is down to their configuration. She suggests that projects/teams set up specifically as multi-agency arrangements have been effective. This she illustrates with reference to a model that she considers to be *"100% multi-agency"* and that *"is working incredibly well, with an extensive range of expertise to call in, as and when. It's very highly regarded by the families ... it's based on their needs rather than our service requirements"*. Yet contrastingly, where multi-agency processes have been imposed upon pre-existing projects/teams then the result is typically far less effective. She offers examples, in this latter instance, where the professionals aren't working together, aren't working to the same goals. This is often because *"the only time you have any access is through a report ... and then you might get given a series of tasks with the expectation that we just go away and complete these"*.

#### 4.4 Enablers of multi-agency practice

Through the interviews, a number of different factors were identified as enabling joined-up multi-agency practice. These are represented in Figure 4.4, which indicates both the individual and collective enablers and whether these were imposed centrally or had emerged through the course of working together.



**Figure 4.4:** Enablers of multi-agency working identified by the research participants (relative size of text denotes relative importance of the theme)

As is clearly illustrated, all of the participants spoke of the importance of the structures and systems that had been put in place, notably the local and national policy and accountability mechanisms that “mean that people have to work together” (participant emphasis). They explained how “people understand when



*there are rules”, without these “it would just be chaotic ... and assumptions are made”.*

Yet despite the need for these structures, many, the exception being the Education Social Worker, also explained how they had some autonomy in this, so

*“you don’t feel that you’re conforming to systems, you’re able to do what you want, what you need”.*

However, notwithstanding this autonomy, also the previously noted collegiality between these professionals/practitioners, the participants cited the ongoing need for inter-professional accountability. This was clearly borne out in two photos provided by a school-based Social Care professional: one of drawer of files (Figure 4.5) and another of a shelf of folders (Figure 4.6), illustrating the multiple agencies that she worked with regularly.



**Figure 4.5:** Participant-provided image



**Figure 4.6:** Participant-provided image



However, grounded within her interview, it can be asserted that these files also symbolised her underlying awareness of the need to archive detailed records of all activities and individuals, in order to

*“cover my back when they [other professionals, or the authority] later question why I did that”.*

Associated with these structures, supporting artefacts, notably the centrally provided ‘*Common Assessment Framework*’ (CAF) and ‘*Team Around the Child*’ (TAC), were repeatedly affirmed as being “*the catalysts*” to both stimulating joined-up practice and for facilitating formal communication between the different groups/agencies, but also for encouraging the important informal links and relationships identified in Figure 4.4. The nature and importance of these informal relationships are discussed further in Chapter 5. Many participants also spoke of the locally-developed ‘*Guide to Integrated Working*’ which they explained provided them with “*the processes we must follow so we all know what we are doing and who does what*”.

Significantly, many confirmed how these artefacts had “*given us a new language that we all understand*”. This was illustrated by one Social Care participant who explained how she had recently attended a meeting outside of her Area Team. She recalled,

*“it was a random selection of us, we were from different agencies and different schools, but it was just a clear demonstration of ‘this is how we all work’ and our*

*language is universal ... but yes, it is only really over the last 3-4 years that that universal language has come about".*

Such report compares favourably with previous research findings. These have indicated, for example, a lack of "patience" in offering clarification and the "daunting" nature of asking others (Robinson & Cottrell, 2005, p.552; see also Darlington et al., 2004; Healey, 2004).

Nonetheless, these participants did also recognise that language could, at times, be a barrier to their effective participation with other professionals/practitioners, as 'Tom's Tale, Chapter 1' (Social care grouping) clearly describes.

#### **Tom's Tale, Chapter 1**

Tom is a Social Care practitioner. He explains how *"when they go into jargon or use in-words or buzz words, then that does freak me out a little"*. To illustrate the confusion language sometimes engenders between the different professionals and practitioners, he speaks about a meeting he had been invited to a few months previously: *"a NAG meeting, what the hell's that then? They said 'Neighbourhood Action Group'. But still you wonder, what's that all about then?"*

He also describes a recent incident attending the hospital with a child and parent. *"The consultant was there, a nurse, and another medical person"*. The jargon that was being used by these professionals to describe what the girl needed to have done was *"just horrible - until we knew, and they weren't keen on telling us either. It was all in three letter abbreviations and we just sat there like, what the hell ... in the end I said, 'excuse me can you just explain that in lay terms to mother because she's now quite frightened what you're going to do to her daughter'. It was all basic stuff but it was all d-this, d-that, d-something else ...."* However, despite these instances, Tom did feel that their different ways of speaking about things *"was not a major stumbling block nowadays"*, because *"there is an increased understanding amongst most of us, perhaps with the exception of medics, that what's everyday language to one person might be something unfamiliar to another"*. He also agreed that *"we've all picked things up, and I do know that I can ask"*.

Tom's observations documenting health professionals' unwillingness to explain in lay terms were also supported by some of the Outreach participants. This also substantiates Abbott et al.'s (2005) findings that highlighted how Social Workers were marginalised in health settings and how health settings were typically perceived as giving little priority to multi-agency settings.

Significantly, and reflecting previous work undertaken (for example, Harker et al., 2004; Sloper, 2004; Carpenter et al., 2005), as indicated in Figure 4.4, most of the professionals/practitioners remarked of the importance of the Area Team Leaders (ATLs) in sustaining the team, in helping them to work around the problems that faced them and in developing the "*strong team culture*" that many considered now existed. Indeed, as a Social Care practitioner observed

*"you can put people in a room but if you [the ATL] don't actively work with them to do something to enable them to work together then it's just people sitting in a room isn't it?"*

In further clarifying the ATLs' importance, one participant provided an image of abseilers to represent how he saw multi-agency teams working together. He explained the ATLs' role in keeping all of the different professional/practitioner groups in formation 'on the abseil ropes', asserting how

*"there must be people at the top just making sure the ropes are all right going over the edge and not getting caught. There must be someone else just overseeing the whole process properly and saying 'oh you need to move across'*

.... *'we can do it better that way if we move there or do that' ...*" (participant emphasis).

Another participant, in again referring to his Honda Goldwing (Figure 4.2), explained how the ATLs

*"keep the bike lubricated ... bringing in another part, replacing a part, changing the ways we do it when we've used the wrong spares ...."*

These individuals can be considered to be Wenger's (2000) 'boundary spanners', acting as a bridge to encourage the different professionals within their Area Team to work together, to provide direction for the sharing of knowledge and experiences, and thereby, to engender greater inter-professional understanding and more effective joint-working. This is discussed further in Chapter 7.

#### **4.5 Barriers to multi-agency working**

Whilst, as explained above, these professionals/practitioners considered that the various structural facets in place were integral to enabling multi-agency working, they were also frequently reported to, at times, challenge multi-agency principles. This was typically the case where the professionals/practitioners were faced with conflicting targets and accountabilities: different sets of processes, paperwork and confidentiality codes. As one ATL explained, the problem is

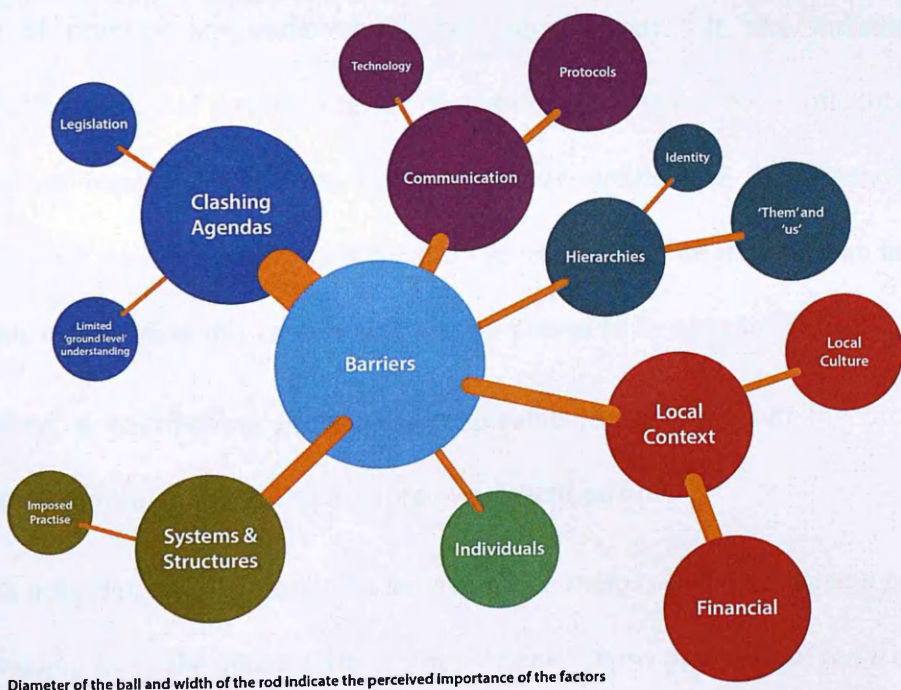
*"we now have an ever increasing rate of cases .... so it looks like it's not working in the Area Team ... but that's because they are now measuring the wrong thing".*

Lyn's Tale, Chapter 2' (Outreach grouping) further describes some of these challenges, notably what Frost et al. (2005) terms the key "fault line" (p.193): that of information sharing.

**Lyn's Tale, Chapter 2**

Lyn provided an image of someone pulling a sleigh to explain her understanding of multi-agency working and her place in this. She describes how recently she was trying to streamline the support that children who were attending one of the Youth Centres were receiving. She explains, *"I'd got the staff on the sleigh, I'd dealt with the bit of resistance,... I'd got some training for them, we were ready. So I pulled and then I realised I couldn't find which kids we were working with"* because of one agency's codes on information sharing. She also spoke of the exasperation she felt with another agency she worked alongside. However, she acknowledged that most of these problems were down to the fact that *"they have to meet other government targets as well, and they have to reach them absolutely ... you know that's not always their fault"*.

These challenges are illustrated, alongside other identified barriers to multi-agency working, in Figure 4.7.



**Figure 4.7:** Barriers to multi-agency working identified by the research participants (relative diameter of ball and width of rod denotes relative importance of the theme)



Yet, as 'Sarah's Tale, Chapter 1' (Education Social work grouping) explains, it was not just the accountability mechanisms that were problematic.

### ***Sarah's Tale, Chapter 1***

Sarah is an Education Social worker. In principle she recognises the value of multi-agency working; however in practice she sees it as problematic due to the way that it has been structured and administered. She explains, *"the person at the top didn't think it through. My caseload is generated by schools not geographically. Last year I crossed three Area Teams ... the others work differently and it doesn't fit and that's the problem"*. Sarah also explains how Education Social Workers have their own systems and paperwork, so their efficiency was being impaired by the need to adhere to the *"imposed social work framework ... another set of processes to go through to get what I want or need"*. This she explains is exacerbated by the fact that many of the other practitioners she is working with also don't buy-in to the new structures in place and so will just *"send it to child protection. They just ask 'why are we wasting our time with all this?'"*

This 'tale' emphasises this professional's anxiety where, as demonstrated by Warin (2007) in her work in childcare 'Early Excellence Centres', she feels that contradictory models of practice are undervaluing her contributions. It also indicates the perceived existence of power in terms of whose decisions are most influential (see for example, Healey, 2004; Rose, 2009). However, unlike Rose (2009) who's work indicated that power lay with the Education Psychologists due to their high levels of academic expertise, in this case, power was perceived to lie with Social Care.

Meanwhile, a Youth-crime professional explained the problems of the processes themselves, notably the 'CAF' procedure. He described how

*"it's a bit daunting, bit long-winded and if one thing is going to cause a problem it's going to be the actual form .... They'll think 'Oh my god I've got to fill out this form'. A lot of people, especially within the police, will just turn round and say no I'm not getting involved"*.

Such problems were also cited by Statham and Smith (2010) in their report on earlier intervention. Consequentially, these professionals/practitioners identified how, in some instances, the system had started to become less efficient than it might otherwise be. For example, one participant referred to people's reluctance to take responsibility for moving things forward. He described one instance where

*"it was because of all about who did what and who was responsible ... in the end nobody would take responsibility for holding a meeting, calling the agenda, following through the actions, so that was it, no meetings, no joint project".*

These 'complexities' he recalls, which have also been highlighted in previous research (see for example, Rose, 2009; Oliver et al., 2010), might be attributed to the problems of a persistence with habitual practice by both professionals/practitioners and policy-makers, and an inability to use this 'past' as a building block for the future. This has been identified as a major stumbling block to engendering a more coherent and integrated practice (Black & Hulme, 2011).

Other participants spoke about what one labelled as a *"system failure"*. In some instances this was caused by tensions between imposed structures and what, intuitively, the professionals/practitioners understood to be the 'best way' forward in a specific situation. In part, this was considered to be due to the fact that *"people higher up don't really know how it works on the ground"*. Although other participants reported how job cuts were creating 'failures', observing, for example, how

*“because there’s no-one there to do it, it becomes inoperable and that part of the system breaks down”.*

However, perhaps one of the greatest problems, encountered daily by some of these professionals/practitioners lay in the technological issues identified in Figure 4.7 notably, the incompatible computer-systems. *‘Lyn’s Tale, Chapter 3’* (Outreach grouping) relates these challenges.

### ***Lyn’s Tale, Chapter 3***

Lyn explains the problems that she encounters on a day-to-day basis in sharing information with others, due to the computerised systems in use across the authority. A number of the ‘outreach’ agencies/practitioners, such as herself, use a different database, so *“in some places, like some of the children’s centre, I can’t access all my stuff ... and then I can’t work here either”* However, she explains that whilst she had spoken with the *“IT guy”* and he had given her *“all those forms to fill in”* which she had passed back to her manager, she has been told she is unlikely to get a licence for the main database, and thereby have access to all of the necessary information at all times, *“because it’s a cost implication, of around £50 or maybe £500”*.

She also observes how some workers, for example, School Nurses, don’t actually have computers; therefore they are unable to access much of the information that might be able to help them out. They are also unable to access the emails, which are used as the main method of disseminating information across, and between, the Area Teams.

These professionals/practitioners also spoke of the gaps that still existed between the systems, not specifically within Children’s Services itself, but in the transition with other providers, notably between children’s and adult services and with 16-19 year old children with disabilities. This also extended to a concern over the commissioning process, which, one ATL explained, *“needs threading through the Area Teams. At the moment, it isn’t and this risks what we’ve built up”*. These shortcomings add further evidence to support to the growing body of existing



literature that has emphasised the “patchy” and “poorly co-ordinated” transition between services for young people (DoH, 2004, 2008; CAMHS, 2008); also the reported lack of well-established commissioning arrangements for young people (see for example, Kirton et al., 2007; Ofsted, 2011; Gill et al., 2011).

#### **4.6 The role of Individuals within multi-agency teams**

Whilst the participants perceived that working together was initiated and formalised through the structures in place, as Figure 4.4 illustrates, there was an overwhelming belief that

*“it’s not enough to agree to adhere to multiagency working ... it’s not just a case of having the structures in place, it’s down to individuals”.*

As another participant explained, it’s down to

*“individuals’ understanding of situations, individuals’ history, individuals’ prior concerns, their previous experiences ....”.*

Indeed, what was indisputably clear was the level of individual drive and commitment across all participants to “make things work” even though this could at times be “tiring and a pain in the neck”. Corroborating earlier findings by Anning (2001), and more recently those of Atkinson et al. (2007), also Daniels and McMahon (2010), many spoke passionately about their roles and about the people they worked with. This was exemplified by some participants’ willingness to change work shifts in order to attend Area Team meetings, as they knew how important these were to

continued effective practice. For others, their commitment extended well beyond their 'day job' as '*Nick's Tale, Chapter 1*' (Youth Crime grouping) illustrates.

### ***Nick's Tale, Chapter 1***

Nick is a youth-crime professional. He observes how "*we've become far more 'welfare' focused, more proactive than reactive*". He has spent considerable time developing relationships with the young people in his area in efforts to engage with them, rather than having to deal with the repercussions of their "*misbehaviour*". He explains how "*what they [the kids] wanted to do was play football. So now we're working with the kids .... as a reward ... So on Friday night we've now got between 50 and 60 kids up there for 2 hours, playing football, dodge ball, tennis, ...*". He explains how "*its made such a difference to everyone*". The kids and their parents, "*they're all made up*". For the local businesses whose shops were often "*'done in' by the kids because they were bored and often drunk*", their problems have been reduced significantly and "*we rarely get any trouble like that here now*". This has also had an added value. He used to run the club on his own, but now he can stand back a little as "*now I find those who have got problems, who've perhaps had a run in with the police ... now we've got them coming to be our sports coaches*". Nick then speaks about a local lad "*he had loads of issues, always in fights ..., just couldn't see any way out of it. Everything was doom and gloom really. One night, we should have arrested him, but in the back of the van I started talking about football. Found out he's quite good. I've worked with him and we've [the Area Team] sponsored him to be a coach. Next week he's going to the local FA, so hopefully in a couple of weeks he'll have a nice certificate on his wall from the FA. Once he's qualified then he'll run sessions on the Friday night .... So now I've gone from 'fighting on the floor' with him, to working with him. He's a different person ....*"

This 'tale' supports Mayer and Tuma's (1987) assertions that social forces are not just imposed from the social to the individual, but that individual agency, in this case his commitment 'above-and-beyond', influences, modifies and transforms. Moreover, the modification to 'Nick's' behaviours indicates how he is re-positioning his 'self' in the eyes of the young people, and perhaps also in the eyes of his colleagues – changing his way of multi-agency 'being'. This is discussed further in Chapter 6.

However, as well as these highly committed individuals, it was recognised that “*there will always be professionals who don’t really want to be involved in the process*”. For example, one participant reported a recent situation she had faced where the individuals concerned

*“won’t do the TAC, they don’t do CAF, they’re saying ‘I do professionals meetings, why am I wasting my time with all this?’ If they decide they’re not doing it, they’re not doing it”.*

This “individual intentionality” (Billett, 2002, 2004b) may be attributable to the well-documented protectionism characterising some of these professions and their desire to promote and maintain their own professional standing and power above that of service delivery (Miller et al., 2001; Markwell, 2009). Therefore, the requirements for multi-agency working do not feature with their personal trajectory and/or their “figured worlds” (Holland & Lachiotte, 2007) and, thereby, they choose not to participate in it.

## **4.7 Chapter summary**

This chapter has presented evidence to demonstrate how these professionals/practitioners within this local authority Children’s Services understand and are making sense of their multi-agency practices. In doing so, it has indicated the varied perceptions held by these participants of the nature, degree of embedded-ness and effectiveness of this. These perceptions typically, although not exclusively, align with their specialism-of-training. However, it has also highlighted a

number of commonalities held across these participants: significantly the moral need to ensure the best for the child/family.

Perhaps most notable is the importance assigned to the structures and artefacts that have been developed to facilitate the multi-agency process. Whilst the challenges that these present are recognised, most notably in terms of conflicting targets, accountabilities, different sets of processes, paperwork and confidentiality codes, many spoke of their certain importance. This lay not only in initiating and sustaining joined-up working, but also in providing a common language and process that they all understood. This shared discourse about their daily work offers opportunities to develop a stronger community-of-practice (Wenger, 1998). Many participants also remarked about the importance of the Area Team Leaders in ensuring the sustainability of the Area Teams, helping them to work together around problems that faced them.

In addition to these formalised structures, almost all of the participants spoke of the significance of the high level of personal commitment proffered by individual professionals/practitioners. Whilst it was agreed that there were always some individuals that didn't want to get involved, that didn't see multi-agency working to fit with their 'personal trajectory', what was indisputably clear was the level of individual drive, commitment and passion to make things happen and also to challenge the status quo. However, these findings do raise the question of if, and

what, these professions/practitioners have learned as they have offered this commitment to the multi-agency cause. This is explored in the chapter that follows.

## Chapter 5 Learning through participation in multi-agency teams

A key theme of this research was with if, and how, at the local level, these professionals/practitioners were learning and developing a new knowledge, as multi-agency professionals/practitioners. As Chapter 1 has asserted, government has assumed a techno-rational approach of individual knowledge acquisition to engender this practice-change. However, evidence to date has indicated the challenges this has presented.

As examined in Chapter 2, situated learning theory (SLT) conceptualises knowledge not as an individual psychological phenomenon, but in terms of a *process* of “competence with respect to .... social participation” (Wenger, 2009, p.201). In what follows, consideration is made of how the participants conceptualised what they were learning as multi-agency professionals/practitioners and how this learning came about. Two key contributors to learning could be identified: formal training, and informal social learning through participating and practising as a multi-agency Area Team. In the case of the latter, this chapter demonstrates the importance of the relationships that these professionals/practitioners have developed informally, outside of the formalised structures, for securing a multi-agency ‘expertise’.

## 5.1 The formal curriculum as a resource for understanding multi-agency working

Many of the participants emphasised the importance of the formal multi-agency training that they had attended, for offering them the *“key to working effectively together”*. They explained how *“we have one model that everyone’s trained in, everyone understands”*, but *“you’ve got to be trained to know what to do”*. This ‘knowing what-to-do’ they explained was about understanding multi-agency principles and practice and how this contrasted with the initial training that they had undertaken at the start of their careers. One Youth Worker spoke proudly of how *“I’ve been on the training courses, I’ve done the modules”*, whilst a Family Social Worker rationalised how:

*“I was trained to be a multi-agency worker, if I hadn’t done that, hadn’t learnt how to talk to these people [other professionals/practitioners] then I’d have got nowhere”.*

This ‘formal curriculum’ had, she intimated, increased her self-confidence to work alongside others. This had subsequently encouraged her to try things differently, and had, consequently, increased her confidence. She continued, to observe how the training had enabled them to acquire the necessary knowledge so that:

*“in three years’ time we will still have information, it’s so important, we’ve got to remember it”.*

This view exposes an underlying assumption that the training these professionals/practitioners had undertaken would be internalised into effective practice. Accordingly, there was a concern that not all of the practitioners were receiving this training. As one education-related professional observed:

*“the training has also to be for the health visitors, the nurses, the educational professionals, .... that isn’t happening ... so how will they know?”.*

As well as providing the ‘formal curriculum’, these training sessions had reportedly offered the professionals/practitioners opportunities to gain a better understanding of each other’s roles and responsibilities (see also Allnock et al., 2006; Moran et al., 2007). One of the ATLs explained how,

*“we had to describe what we thought particular professionals do, in a couple of sentences .... and then we were learning about the things that they did that we didn’t know they did ....”.*

However, perhaps most significantly, as was discussed in the preceding chapter, this ‘formal curriculum’ had offered them a new common language that they could use to discuss multi-agency issues.

## **5.2 The informal curriculum**

Whilst the participants explicitly emphasised how this formal curriculum was key to working effectively in a multi-agency configuration, it was also clear that the more valuable learning was that which was being engendered informally through their



day-to-day practice together. This practice-based learning was understood to take two distinct levels/forms: acquisitional and participatory learning.

In considering the former, many comments made distinctly related to one participant's remarks that the most important aspect of being in the Area Team was *"gaining their [other professionals'/practitioners'] knowledge and experience from them"* . She went on to explain how *"you try and gain all that knowledge from someone else, because it's going to help you"*. Many of these professionals/practitioners clearly wanted to broaden their expertise, to develop their competence base outside of that in which they had been trained. They expressed the importance of *"tapping into all that knowledge that others have"*, to gain their skills and experience. A number of the professionals/practitioners also spoke of the importance of being able to then transfer this knowledge to others. For example, an Outreach participant explained how, following Area Team meetings, *"my knowledge I get from here, it goes out along the vine really quickly"*. Therefore, both consciously and unconsciously, there was a distinct affirmation of the importance and centrality of acquiring and retaining knowledge (as a product) in order to be effective as a multi-agency professional.

By contrast, another participant was typical of some others in explaining how

*"when you get those opportunities to work alongside others, you learn a lot and it improves your working practice and it improves the outcomes ..."*.

So, as well as 'having' the 'codified knowledge' gained through training, a number of these professionals/practitioners recognised the value of the 'practice-knowledge' (Eraut, 2000) they had learned through working together with others within their Area Team. Corroborating Worrall-Davis and Cottrell's (2009) previous findings, this research also emphasises how through working, and thereby sharing knowledge and experience with others with very different training, and sometimes divergent views of 'how-to-do', was offering these professionals/practitioners a much broader perspective on their own professionalism. This was illustrated through one Social Care worker's explanation of how before she had been a member of the Area Team she had

*"little understanding of what the Autistic Society did, but now I've worked with them so I've gained that understanding ... now I know that I might draw on them again and we could do things better than I could on my own".*

Moreover, a youth practitioner described how she had now come to realise how her own perspectives and understandings had altered over the past few years, as her awareness of other professionals/practitioners/agencies roles had been enhanced. She disclosed that she had not considered this prior to the interview. However, she recalled how through working with another Team member, she had *"learned so much from being in there"* and now also *"understands the pressures that Social Workers are under"*.

### 5.2.1 'Knowing who': developing relationships

As was discussed in Chapter 4, structures and artefacts provided the necessary formal links between these professionals/practitioners. However, these also presented important opportunities for learning about others and for informal relationships to be developed. Almost all of the participants reported how 'learning and knowing who', which they had typically developed proactively and individually outside of the formalised structures, was fundamental to augmenting and extending their own knowledge-base. *'Nick's Tale, Chapter 2'* (Youth Crime grouping) emphasises this, however, unlike most others, 'Nick' had received no formal training in multi-agency working, so his multi-agency knowledge had developed purely through working with others.

#### **Nick's Tale, Chapter 2**

Nick explains that he has *"never been taught how to be part of an Area Team, its just evolved"*. However, he had learnt that on the occasions that he is facing problems with specific children/families then it is likely that others within the Team will have encountered these individuals too so he knows that *"I can draw on their expertise and their skills and they can draw on mine"*. Furthermore, he says that he has also *"learnt"* that if these individuals know that he is talking with other professionals/practitioners about them, then *"sometimes it's a bit of a wake-up call and so you get a better response from them"*. Consequential of working with these other professionals, and of drawing upon their knowledge and skills as/when necessary, he feels that he now knows so much more about the *"roles and responsibilities of their [the other professionals'] jobs"*. He also explains how he is now *"more happy, if I need help, to just go out there and actively look or ask for it"* since *"you can always learn off that other person, nobody doesn't stop learning from other people .... You are constantly learning really ...."*

Likewise a Social Care participant explained, *"the more people that come to sit round the table to bring a piece of the jigsaw the more you know ..."*. Therefore, and in contrast with Stuart's (2012) findings that emphasised how interpersonal issues

challenged the development of these relationships, through such practice-learning many of these participants believed they had a greater capacity to do far more than they might have been able to previously.

As well as augmenting their individual knowledge-bases, these relationships were also fundamental to enabling them to develop their expertise across the boundaries from their specialism/profession-of-training. It was the individuals that these participants reported that they had “a relationship with that had the appropriate expertise”, that they now turned to rather than working through problems independently. This was illustrated by a school-based Social Care participant’s ‘map’ of over 30 professionals, agencies and voluntary groups that she was in regular contact with and that she had learned with / from (Figure 5.1).

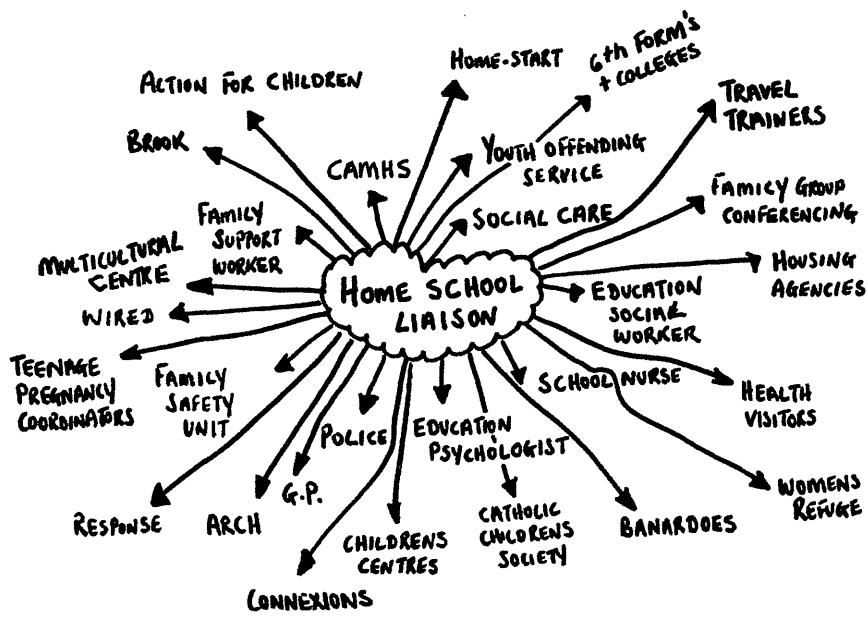


Figure 5.1: Segment from participant-provided image

These relationships can be likened to the creation of Edwards' (2010) 'relational expertise' which, as discussed in Chapter 2, emphasises the importance of developing advanced relational skills in order to access, and work with others. Developing these relationships, Edwards' asserts, enables a far greater understanding of one another to emerge, progressing more constructive expectations of one another and thereby encouraging them to disregard what might otherwise hamper effective dialogue and negotiations (Tsoukas, 2009).

That this 'relational expertise' had clearly enhanced individual and collective understanding is explicitly expressed within *'Tom's Tale, Chapter 2'* (Social care grouping).

### ***Tom's Tale, Chapter 2***

Tom has *"done all the training to be multi-agency"*. However, he concedes that although this was *"vital"*, what was most important was *"all that sort of stuff that you couldn't write down but that you do .... what it is that leads you to ask the right questions. It's that experience ... that you get only through doing it"*.

He suggests that his multi-agency knowledge is like a Russian doll. The knowledge he had gained through training is the outer shell whilst the inner layers represent the knowledge that he has developed through experience and through others. He explains how each episode of working together is like a *"dress rehearsal"* for future events: providing opportunities to *"see what works, what doesn't, learn from our mistakes and so on"*. This *"linking-up never happened years ago, you just got on with it ... "*. This was perhaps, he pondered, why things didn't always work effectively in the past.

Importantly, Tom also observes how working with other professionals *"brings up things that you wouldn't normally think about"*. This helps them to *"build up"* and increase their knowledge. In consequence, he asserts that *"the experts now are those on the ground. We've gone through the process and now understand. We can see where it works"*, not the senior managers and government.

Whilst all participants spoke of these relationships, their perceptions of these did vary. Some clearly indicated more formalised relationships suggesting how they merely *“worked alongside others ... as part of the system”* that was in place, undertaking tasks assigned to them. To the contrary, others suggested that these relationships were far tighter, creating a new integrated, mutually supporting and synergistic way of working. In this latter instance, the significance of informal relationships and *“corridor chats”* (Anning et al., 2006) rather than the imposed structural configurations were emphasised as being key to stimulating their learning. The importance of this can be summed up in one practitioner’s story of a young vulnerable female. She explained,

*“I’d identified an issue but it didn’t trigger procedures ... However, I work quite closely with the PCSO on another project so I mentioned it and said, ‘I’m a bit concerned about this person’. She said, ‘well funny enough I was going to mention it to you and ask have you had any contact because we’ve noticed’. So then I went through to the school and they said, ‘yes we’ve got the same’. Thankfully Mum and Dad they’d also noticed things. So there were three of us really that had noticed. So, that was a very positive ... because we were all working together and had a good relationship, so we felt comfortable to ask each other the questions ... She’s responded positively so it’s a good outcome and we’ve all learned from that”.*

### 5.2.2 Expanding knowledge: Changing ways of doing things

As well as 'knowing who' to ask and learning with them through joint experiences, both the 'mistakes' and 'successes' so, as '*Tom's Tale, Chapter 2*' above illustrates, through working together they were also broadening their joint-understandings. He asserts that through the inherent questioning of each other's practices and assumptions so, together, they had started to think differently, learned new ways to do things, disrupting the entrenched modes of practice and developing a new expanded practice knowledge. Corroborating the theoretical work of Daniels and his colleagues' (for example, Daniels et al., 2007; Leadbetter et al., 2007; Warmington et al., 20047), one Social Care practitioner concluded, "*we've definitely developed a new multi-agency knowledge*". The disruption to existing ways of 'doing' was further emphasised by one of the Family Social Workers who explained how

*"we tend to do such an awful lot on automatic pilot but it has made me think about what I am doing and why I am doing it ..."*.

However, the stimulus for developing new understandings and perspectives was recognised as being fundamentally agentic. As the Educational Psychologists agreed

*"it takes individuals to challenge and to say we're not doing it that way, we don't have to do it that way. Just because we've always done it that way doesn't mean to say that we have to continue doing that"*.

Consequential of this new co-created knowledge, 'Tom', amongst others, felt that he was now one of the 'experts', emphasising the often forgotten importance of learning from the 'front-line'. Indeed, as Chapman (2004) accentuates, ground level action cannot be controlled centrally as every action has unpredictable

consequences (see also Axelrod & Cohen, 1999), thereby, the 'relational expertise' that these professionals/practitioners had developed, had enabled them to both learn from and through others. Whilst the ESRC-LIW project (for example, Daniels et al., 2007) provided theoretical and some empirical evidence of this, little previous work has documented this expansive learning actually happening in practice.

This expanded knowledge, also its foundational relational development, was underpinned by a clear demonstration of the trust in others that had developed between these professionals/practitioners. One ATL related an amusing tale that clearly emphasised this trust and willingness to now ask others, whom in the past, most of the participants acknowledged they might well not have. She explained how

*"... they were talking about 'muggers', how underused all the 'muggers' are and how they should use the 'muggers' for football. So I had to ask, 'muggers to teach our kids to play bloody football. Have I wandered into a twilight?'. The place just erupted with laughter. The 'Muggers' are Multi-use Gaming Areas (MUGAs)".*

This finding contrasts with much previous research in multi-agency teams that demonstrates such trust to be distinctly lacking (see for example, Cameron & Lart, 2003; Sloper, 2004).



### 5.2.3 Unwillingness to learn and develop multi-agency competence

Despite these clear examples of multi-agency learning and knowledge, 'Sarah's Tale, Chapter 2' (Education Social Work grouping) offers a differing perspective. She vociferously lamented how being co-located and thereby in working-contact only with other professional/practitioner groups rather than with other Education Social Workers, was not conducive to developing her knowledge and understanding as a multi-agency professional. However, this was an isolated view identified within this research project.

#### **Sarah's Tale, Chapter 2**

Sarah describes herself as an *"individual, isolated in an Area Team ... I am isolated from my co-workers who are also Educational Social Workers"*. She goes on to explain how *"for me, there are issues about professional development, about actual support when you need it specifically specialised support ... if I don't touch base with my 'own kind' as it were I don't learn .... the only way I learn is by osmosis"*.

## 5.3 Influence of the local situation upon learning

Finally, but of considerable significance, is the context in which this new learning and new practices were being created. This has been alluded to in what is offered above, however, it also needs explicit attention due to the impact it has had upon the stories that these professionals/practitioners have told and the learning that they have assumed.

All of the professionals/practitioners overwhelmingly emphasised the considerable effects that the current economic, and resulting local 'political' situation, notably the

current restructuring, were having upon their actions. One professional spoke of the “*crescendo*” that they had reached about 2 years ago when the Area Teams were “*running like a dream*”. However, some, especially within the Outreach groups, reported how the information sharing was closing down as they sought “*self preservation in the face of market forces*”. They reported how the rise of commissioning had resulted in responses that contradicted principles of multi-agency working and were restricting their learning. As one Social Care participant questioned,

*“I am starting [to] wonder, should I be more guarded about what I say? Should I be making sure that my figures are good which means that I haven’t got the time to spend on what I was doing multi-agency. It’s a self-fulfilling prophesy isn’t it. You think there might be cuts, you start to panic about what you do, so you close down .... And you start to think, ‘is there any point in making the changes?’”*

Others commented how job cuts were having significant effects upon their provision. This was both in terms of reduced numbers of staff to deal with increasing numbers of cases, but also ongoing concerns over redundancy and the effect that this was having upon those that remained in post. One core professional reported, how they were now dealing with over 500 children rather than the previous average of 52, yet had lost around 40% of their staffing. However, an Area Team Leader acknowledged, this situation was not going to change short-term so,

*"I think we have just got to be more creative, I'm probably the least creative thinker you can come across but I think we have to learn to be creative".*

This clearly emphasises her realisation of the need for further expansive learning.

A number of the participants also spoke about the culture within the authority and the effect that this had upon opportunities to learn with and from others. This they suggested did, at times, create problems. They observed how

*"multi-agency, it's about having a shared set of goals ... and we don't always have that now it seems".*

For example, some participants reported how certain groups/agencies/professionals were starting to adopt more of a blended role, re-creating barriers as they sought self-promotion in the face of the changing economic climate. Indeed, three participants contrasted the emphasis that had up to around 18 months ago been upon 'similarities' between them, with the increasing current emphasis upon identifying 'difference':

*"what I've noticed is that everybody is saying, 'oh yes we can do that', ... I think it's about getting them seen to be in the high profile. Before they would have sat back, let someone else offer the support. I do think a lot more it's about being needed and being seen to be needed ... so there is less sharing"*

These problems were also being exacerbated by national policy that is promoting the 'Safeguarding' agenda, and thereby, Social Service's concerns. This was, some of the practitioners asserted, at times, causing senior managers to overlook the concerns of other professional/practitioner groups. Some of the education and youth-crime-related professionals/practitioners articulated how this had significant implications for the perceived priorities for the Area Teams and therefore, for resourcing.

Many of the professionals also spoke of their uncertainty over impending legislative changes and the effect that these would have. One image provided within one of the Social Care practitioners' portfolio, of a person shrugging their shoulders, patently epitomises this. They asserted how they thought these changes would increase the accountability mechanisms in place for multi-agency working, but had also resigned themselves to that fact that it was highly likely that this would result in having to learn to do things differently, again. However, as the Manager, who had used the analogy of pulling a sleigh through snow to explain her views of multi-agency working, suggested

*"I think what will happen is that it will morph into something else; the snow might freeze, you could end with ice, but then the sun might come out too. CAF and TAC are here but their shape might change ... so we need to keep on learning afresh".*

## 5.4 Chapter summary

This chapter has presented a clear indication of these professionals/practitioners, largely, wanting to broaden their field of expertise. It has offered evidence to support this reportedly broadened competence base which now, for many, also encompasses knowledge from outside of the profession/practice in which they initially trained and specialised.

The perceived importance placed upon the formal curriculum, offered through local and national trainings, for enabling multi-agency learning and working has been highlighted. However, the chapter has progressed to illustrate the far greater value of the informal learning that these professionals/practitioners have developed. Yet in this, it has identified the differing understandings/levels of learning held by the different participants. Some participants emphasised the importance of acquiring the knowledge of others to enhance their own knowledge-base. Others accentuated how, through working alongside other professionals/practitioners, so they had developed a far better understanding of others: a 'relational expertise' (Edwards, 2010). Many of the participants were acutely aware that they cannot, individually, know everything, and recognised the importance of collaborative knowledge and of collaborative competences. However, regardless of this perception, they felt they had, in consequence, developed an enhanced understanding of 'knowing who'.

Significantly, many of the participants recognised the value of engaging with ideas from 'outside' of their profession, to help them to see things differently. This has

encouraged them to work together, to co-create, collectively, a new expanded way of 'doing' and a new expanded way of 'knowing how/what'. Therefore, it can be suggested that their commitment to multi-agency principles has bred a willingness to develop multi-agency competencies, and the development of a 'relational expertise'. Perhaps most significantly, and in contrast with much previous research, these relationships meant that these participants felt sufficient trust in other professionals/practitioners to be happy to ask them for clarification or assistance if they felt uncertain and thereby, to learn from them.

Importantly, the chapter has demonstrated how individual learning (and thus practice change) varies with individuals' motives, based upon their life histories and accumulated experience (see Billett & Pavlova, 2005; Billett & Somerville, 2004), also upon changes in the social process of learning (Billett, 2004a, 2004b). This will inevitably have implications for what they learn and what they 'become'. This forms the focus of the following chapter.

## **Chapter 6    Becoming a multi-agency professional/practitioner**

### **6.1    Introduction**




Situated learning theory asserts that learning is as much a matter of identity formation as it is of knowledge and skills acquisition. Thereby, learning does not only constitute what one needs to 'know', as was examined in the preceding chapter, but also what one needs to 'be'; that is, these professionals'/practitioners' way of 'being' in this new multi-agency context. Therefore, workplace proficiency is understood as a way of becoming in relation to others (Wenger, 2009). As discussed in Chapter 2, it can be suggested that participation in the multi-agency Area Teams offers resources and opportunities for 'identity-work' and the re-shaping of the self in relation to others, their social environment and culture (Watson, 2007; Angot et al., 2008). This understanding forms the focus of this chapter.

### **6.2    Constructing their 'selves' through metaphors and images**

As examined in Chapter 5, many of the participants perceived that 'being' a multi-agency professional/practitioner was determined by whether they felt that had received the necessary training. However, this is only a part of the story. The participants' explanations illustrate how they saw themselves in different ways, indicating very varied degrees and foci of identification within this multi-agency context. Whilst one practitioner unambiguously stated, *"I just feel multi-agency"*, others offered a number of metaphors, typically illustrated through their portfolio of images, to help explain this. One of the Area Team Leaders (ATLs), explained, *"really*



*I see myself a matchmaker, perhaps sometimes a zipper*". This view of herself was, she explained, indicative of her co-ordinating role: introducing different practitioners/agencies to one another, 'locking' them together with the intention of looking for new joint solutions. Other metaphors that were used and/or illustrated by the participants are indicated in Table 6.1. The first of these, the 'rugby team' is encapsulated further within *'Tom's Tale, Chapter 3'* (Social Care grouping).

Metaphor and/or image	Indicative comment
Rugby team	<i>"you've got different players playing different positions, they clearly have their own role and their own identities but they've all got an integral part to play in the end result"</i>
Jigsaw piece 	<i>"I feel like I'm a piece of a jigsaw ... all the different agencies comprise the whole"</i>
Link of a chain 	<i>"we're like a chain linked together, a chain that can be lengthened too. I feel part of that multi-agency chain"</i>
Signpost	<i>"you're specialist in your role, there's so much you can't do so you have to signpost, you have to direct people to where they need to be"</i>
Clock cogs 	<i>"I think of us like a clock. A clock doesn't work with just little cogs, it's got a mixture of big and little ones and they all have an important role to play ..."</i>
Village gossip	<i>"I think of the Area Team as a village. You've got all those places in the village and everyone chats with one another. I'm the village gossip. I'm the one who tells everyone everything!"</i>

**Table 6.1:** Metaphors and images offered by the participants to explain how they saw themselves



### **Tom's Tale, Chapter 3**

Tom understands the Area Teams to be like a rugby team. He explains how *"you've got different players playing different positions. They clearly have their own positions, their own identities and roles, and they've all got a part to play in the end result"*. He then continues to explain how and where he sees himself in this. He suggests, *"I'm the one on the left there, because he's passing the ball, because that's my job, to pass on the information"*. He describes how in the image this team has scored a try and how this is *"making everyone happy. For the crowds on the side here, they represent the families, they've obviously got the best result they've hoped for, because of the input of the different team players, that is, the different agencies"*. However, Tom also emphasises how the team manager, also illustrated in the image, is like the ATIs. They are integral to this success, explaining how *"if he's not there on the side line, nothing will happen. We won't win games, we won't get a family happily together if you haven't got the team on the pitch working together well, gelling together, and getting the best results they can ..."*

Significantly, whilst a number of the participants clearly referred to their *'identity'* others spoke about their *'role'* within these Teams. This use of the terms can largely be attributed to whether they might be considered a *'professional'* or a *'para-professional'* (see discussion in Chapter 2). Indeed, those participants explicitly using the term *'identity'* were exclusively individuals who would have undergone significant periods of professional training at the outset of their careers and thereby might be expected to have a more embedded/ingrained identity, notably the Education Psychologists and Social Workers. However, in acknowledging Watson's (2007) definition of identity: *'a sense of being in relation to one another'* as discussed in Chapter 2, it might be asserted that the conceptualisations of these two terms, *'role'* and *'identity'*, as presented within the interviews are in most instances, fundamentally inter-connected. Thereby, whilst using the term *'role'*, so these participants were also inherently referring to their *'work-related identity'*.

### 6.3 Constructing a multi-agency team identity

That these professionals/practitioners used these specific metaphors indicates how they were typically seeing themselves in relation to others within this multi-agency context. This positioning is further emphasised by many of the participants' explicit declarations of a collective identity. As Table 6.2 illustrates, these professionals/practitioners were largely explicitly identifying as a member of a multi-agency community (exception being Education Psychology and Education Social Work). This collective identification also reinforces, as examined in the preceding chapters, the clear commitment, shared values and associated relationships that these participants had developed with the other professionals/practitioners within their Area Team. Yet, there were clear distinctions between the participants as to whether they identified with a '*group*' or a '*team*' – with one ATL referring to her "*area team group*" on a number of occasions. Those professionals/practitioners indicating that they saw themselves as 'multi-agency', also instinctively identified with the term 'team'. However, use of the term 'group' did not inherently assume a lack of identification with these other professionals/practitioners. For example, the social care worker explaining, "*I feel, multi-agency*", juxtaposed this with an explanation of how it was all "*about the support and help within the group*".

Classification grouping	Strength of perceived multi-agency team identity	Indicative statements	Contra-indicative statements
Outreach	***	"when I first started was HomeStart Co-ordinator, now it's HomeStart <location> co-ordinator. We're identifiable by our areas .. shows you're part of the multi-agency team"	"it depends on how much time its going to take, because multiagency work is almost, it is seen as a bit of an add-on really"
Social Care	****	"we're a team. It's separate from our own teams within our own agencies, it's the Area Team" "Its in our culture we work strongly as a team with multiagency approach ... so we make something more, we achieve more"	"I feel, multi-agency ... its about the support and help within the group that I get" "we do have to work together as a group, but we've got to be able to do our job individually"
Education Psychology			"we get together as a group of different professionals" "you've got your own professional responsibilities but you're having to work to others"
Education Social Work	*	"oh yes, I think it is about us working together as a team, but ..."	"... getting hold of them sometimes ... I've just swapped from ringing and leaving messages to emailing. This gives me a paper trail as well"
Youth Crime	***	"I'm working firmly part of the area team, I'm proud to do that" "we have formed a new quasi organisation, the effect is far greater than the sum of the individual portions"	"different people, organisations come from different perspectives ... we're all supposed to be part of the team, and we all want the bother to stop, but we're all trying this differently"

**Table 6.2:** Perceptions of a multi-agency team identity

Note: Shading density, which aligns with star ratings, provides an indication of the proportion of responses coded within the category for this classification grouping. No shading represents no indicative statements

Significantly, this collective identity was characteristically presenting these participants with a broadened understanding of their selves as they learned more about others' perspectives. Through repositioning themselves relative to others within the Children's Workforce so, as Table 6.2 illustrates, this had seemingly offered them a greater capacity to do more individually, thereby providing them with an elevated sense-of-self. Such findings contrast with much previous research within multi-agency teams (for example, Collett, 2010). Yet, in referring back to '*Nick's Tale*', this is evident in the way that he speaks of his new relationship with the community ('*Nick's Tale, Chapter 1*') as well as with other members of the Area Team ('*Nick's Tale, Chapter 2*'). This has inherently made him more able to participate effectively, thereby strengthening his agentic sense-of-self. Indeed, he commented that

*"I feel my identity is as working firmly part of the Area Team, I'm proud to do that. I promote being part of the Team ...",*

and continued to explain that it was through this that he was constantly learning about what it meant to 'be' multi-agency.

Such repositioning of self is also strongly indicated in the Outreach participant statement in Table 6.2. This individual spoke enthusiastically about her title, clearly indicating the alignment of her self with a valued group, that of the Area Team. This "*membership*" has then come to define her identity. Such a sense of 'belonging' had also given her a more assured and agentic sense-of-self (confidence). Likewise, it had also offered her a legitimate peripheral participation into the Team, to meetings

that in the past she would not have been invited, enabling her access to information to which she would not previously have been privy.

Similar to other Outreach participants, this also highlights how her professional/practitioner status had been elevated appreciably through working as a member of the Area Team. These participants observed how in the past, their agency would have been the last to have been invited around the table to discuss 'the child', yet the value of the work that they did was now being highlighted. As one of the Youth practitioners explained

*"now others have realised, actually we're not doing a bad job, that they can use us productively, to support some of the other work they're are doing. So it has highlighted the value of the work we do and we are now respected for what we do provide".*

Another practitioner observed how her role has been "kind of 'bigged up". Although, a lack of associated job title change had meant that she was sometimes making links with agencies/individuals that felt that they should be liaising with someone senior, she commented how *"I can't take it too personally that they don't always want to identify with you ..."*.

## 6.4 Constructing a duality of identities

In recognising their team identification, many of these professionals/practitioners spoke about the multiple, or duality, of 'work-related identities' that they now held. In this, many emphasised the importance of remaining allied to their initial specialism yet also being a part of the Area Team. As one of the Social Care practitioners explained,

*"it's about knowing your own specialism and being able to do that independently, but also about being very much part of the multi-agency group".*

Whilst another participant, an Outreach manager explained,

*"first and foremost in my mind I feel I'm a Youth Worker but in reality I'm actually a manager of a very large multi-agency team of staff, I rarely do face to face youth work".*

However, this was perhaps most graphically illustrated in one of the images presented by a Social Care participant. He explained that his image, presented as Figure 6.1, showed how they all remained as individual professionals/practitioners, yet simultaneously they were a vital part of something much larger with far greater impact, with a far stronger identity. This identity was represented by the company's advertising logo into which arrangement the individual abseilers had formed.





However, it is also recognised that this duality, or multiple identities, was in some instances creating a tension for these individuals. A Family Support Worker spoke about the uncertainty and personal conflicts he faced consequential of how he saw himself and how others were identifying with him. He observed how,

*"I've only got one hat then and that's an area Family Support Worker, and that's what I'm coming in [to the meeting] as. I'm not coming in as a representative of Social Care but other people see me as that".*

A further participant, a Social Care practitioner, also alluded to the need to 'compartmentalise' his different identities and how failing to do so caused only confusion. He reported that,

*"sometimes other agencies would disclose something in a meeting and would see it as, 'well I told Social Care' because I was at the meeting. Instead of me being myself that I am representing at that meeting, they would see it as I am working for Social Care. And then they argue, 'well we told Social Care' .... They think I'm going to take that mantle on and run with it but that's not what I am representing in that meeting, so it's not my responsibility, it's their's to tell social care".*

These difficulties experienced by this participant in reconciling these two identities has also been previously documented by Abbot et al. (2005) in their work within Children's Services.



As has been acknowledged in Chapter 4, these professionals typically embraced the multi-agency imperative, yet this duality of work-related identity might also be understood to illustrate the uncertainty that some felt around this new and changing work configuration. Consequentially, whilst adopting what might be considered to be multi-agency practices, they may have been continuing to anchor their identity in their more secure initial training 'professional/practitioner identity' (see Hogg, 2007).

## **6.5 Repositioning their selves and persisting professional/practitioner hierarchies**

Many of the participants explicitly asserted how, fundamental to this development of a multi-agency 'team-related identity' and the repositioning of selves within this team (or group), was the belief that "*unlike in the past we're now on an equal plane*" within the Area Teams. These manifest accounts, as illustrated on the right-hand-side of Table 6.3, suggest that the persisting hierarchies and divisions which have reportedly challenged multi-agency working (for example, Atkinson et al., 2002; Robinson et al., 2008; Collett, 2010) have been overcome, or at least significantly reduced. However, as the left-hand-side of Table 6.3 exemplifies, the nuances of these participants' language did, in many instances, suggest a different 'story' to this rhetoric.

Classification grouping	Indicative statements made by participants within each classification grouping ( <i>italics</i> denote participant emphasis) * indicates proportion of responses coded for this classification grouping. Shading indicates the dominant view of this classification grouping			
	'Them' and 'us'	Proportion of codes	'we'	Proportion of codes
Outreach	<p>"I don't know who they're with or whatever ..."</p> <p>"I still have people saying, Oh I didn't know you did that ..."</p> <p>"but they don't see their youth club or an outreach worker that they see on the streets, as an agency .. we're not a part of them"</p>	***	<p>"he's <i>our</i> area social worker"</p> <p>"we're multi-agency"</p> <p>"it's a sort of a membership"</p> <p>"7, 10 years ago ... [we] didn't really always understand each other ... there is a lot more professional respect now ... and a lot more of, let's get together and solve this."</p>	*****
Social care	<p>"in my job" (participant emphasis)</p> <p>"I've only got one hat and that's what I'm coming in as ...they won't always accept that"</p> <p>"some people around the table, seem to see the social care badge as a badge of authority ..."</p>	***	<p>"we can do it' because we're like a chain linked together"</p> <p>"it is all about us all working <i>together</i> ..."</p> <p>"You can't work as one-man we've got to have a combination of characters and people and strengths"</p> <p>"She is a team member here, she is part of <i>our</i> team"</p>	****
Education Social Worker	<p>"I am isolated from my co-workers who are 'x'-professionals"</p> <p>"If I don't touch base with my '<i>own kind</i>', ..."</p> <p>"without question, social work's at the top ... because we're all confirming to their processes"</p>	***		
Education psychologists	<p>"there's a kind of resentment about people that get paid more, or <i>they</i> think they know more ..."</p> <p>"in <i>our</i> service it's different"</p>	**	<p>"a clock ... got a mixture of big and small cogs and we all have an important role to play and I think we shouldn't ever, ever lose sight of the importance of everybody who has been brought in to support somebody else"</p>	*
Youth crime	<p>"there are always going to be boundaries, there are certain things I can't disclose ... but whereas it used to be a closed shop it's now more open"</p>	*	<p>"I'm committed to the area team so I want to work as part of the team ..."</p> <p>"So the first thing was I got on the phone to 'x' and ..."</p>	****

Table 6.3: Participant classification groupings' uses of terms considered to represent 'them and/or us' or 'we'

Indeed, perhaps most telling of the ongoing prevalence, in places, of boundaries and hierarchies within this workforce, one practitioner recalled a situation she had encountered during the preceding month:

*"People suggested that the Lead Professional [taking the case forward] couldn't be the Youth Worker that it would be the Year Head. 'But why the Year Head?' Well 'because he's the one with the qualifications'. 'Sorry, yes he's the one with the qualifications but he hasn't got the relationship'. .... There's a huge assumption there, because the youth worker he's talking with actually has a Masters degree with a very high grade. So he's as highly qualified, as experienced and already within and therefore understanding the situation".*

This questions the real cohesive nature of these relationships and the tenacity of this multi-agency identity if professionals/practitioners are still perceived by 'other' professionals/practitioners in this way.

However, despite examples of persisting hierarchies, there was clear evidence that the changed relationships and the apparent 'work-related identity' readjustment undertaken by these professionals/practitioners had also reflected a change in their attitude to one another. This had been fashioned both through the evidenced effectiveness of instances of joined-up working, as well as through their increased understanding and awareness of the value of a holistic team approach. As one professional commented

*"I'm realising that we aren't the be-all and end-all of a young person's support, others [other professionals/practitioners] are important too. For me that was the biggest learning curve".*

## **6.6 Engendering 'identity-work'**

What is evident is that these professionals/practitioners were generally signifying that they were seeing themselves in a different way to how they had in the past. Through participation within these new communities, and through exposure to the new discursive practice of multi-agency working, many had undertaken not insignificant amounts of 'identity work', re-defining and re-shaping their 'work-related identities'. This reflexively constructed identity had enabled them to build a sense of agency and had repositioned them as 'initiators' of change.

However, significantly there was very little indication that they felt that they were developing as the new 'hybrid' professional that has been assiduously reported within the literatures. Rather, as one ATL described,

*"professionals A and B, they are touching each other but they're not actually overlapping. We're not creating any completely new professional".*

Indeed, the importance of 'being in relation to others' together, rather than 'becoming one another', was encapsulated by a Social Care participant who explained how

*"... No-one else can do their bit for them, it's too risky".*

Yet despite the largely positive feeling amongst the participants, it must be acknowledged that a few spoke about the ambiguity they felt as a multi-agency professional. For example, one spoke about what might be termed as a 'lost identity', commenting how "*I was a social worker ...*" (participant emphasis), whilst an Area Team Leader spoke of her uncertain work-related identity, explaining how,

*"I was asking questions about where do we belong? Despite having a social care background, I had that sense, of not belonging to any particular professional group in this team ... we were very much a kind of bolt on".*

Significantly, the two education-related professional groupings offered two somewhat different 'tales' regarding their identity to the rest of the participants. The Educational Psychologists felt that their identity as Education Psychologists had been maintained, conceivably even strengthened, over the past decade. Consequentially, as '*Beth's Tale, Chapter 2*' (Educational Psychology grouping) illustrates, multi-agency working had not presented any real change in the way they saw their 'work-related identity'.

#### ***Beth's Tale, Chapter 2***

Beth understands multi-agency arrangements to be just another part of their "toolkit". She asserts that "*our multi agency input to the Area Teams that has actually decreased rather than increased .... everyone gets on very well, and people understand the system but that's multi agency discretion not multi agency working ... that doesn't happen very often I don't think. They [senior managers] were keen that we retained our professional identity by not being an essential component of the Area teams. We would just attend meetings ... So we attend these as Education Psychologists, not as anything else*". These meetings, she describes as solely "*an opportunity, to network... an awareness raising exercise*", explaining how "*I've never been asked for a specific contribution ... I mean we are different aren't we*"

By contrast, the Educational Social Worker implied a subordinated identity, asserting how the *"dominant culture is taking over"*. She felt that her professional standing and 'being' was being threatened by the obligation to follow the requirements of Social Care. She provided an image of the Star Trek characters, *The Borg*, to assert how Social Care was

*"assimilating the other species ... their biological and technological distinctiveness will be added to our own ... there's no compromise or reason ... resistance is futile"*.

She clarified this with *"that's what lots of them tell me they feel like ..."*, yet, her further comments corroborated that this too was her reading of her 'self'.

Whilst she explicitly reported her belief in the principles of multi-agency working, an apparent reluctance to identify with the other professionals/practitioners might indicate her resistance to change. She might fear the marginalisation of the ideas, beliefs and norms that have shaped her identity and the way in which she has lived her life (Davis, 1979). Her co-location with the Social Care professionals/practitioners, with whom she felt unable to identify, has accentuated this marginalisation. This was illustrated through her comment of *"the thing I have an issue with is being an individual isolated within the Area Team"*.

In order to manage this uncertainty that she was feeling, which opposed her intended personal trajectory as an Education Social Worker, she was accentuating the importance of her profession-of-training membership and its "identity-making resources" (Watson, 2008, p.128). 'Negative identity-work' was then acting to

embolden her assertions that *"no-one's going to turn me into something else"*. This was despite this view actually being in conflict with her espoused belief in multi-agency working. Moreover, in having to 'take on' Social Care's procedures and a 'required' identity, it could be advocated that she was feeling more like a novice, rather than the expert that she had been after many years in her profession. In consequence, she was defensive and protectionist. This participant's response offers some evidence of the "struggle" that often exists between a changed context and an individual's socialised beliefs/desires (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003, p.128). Her reaction has provided her a means of coping with, and reframing, the situation, and thereby, of realising a moderately acceptable way in which to work within it. However, it might also be suggested that she actually felt unable to participate with this new community, since, as Volman and tenDam (2007) suggest, "identities developed or sustained in one community may inhibit participation in certain [other] practices" (p.845-846).

## **6.7 Chapter summary**

This chapter has examined the ways in which these Children's Services professionals/practitioners saw themselves, saw others and how others saw them; that is, their identity that is being created through learning within multi-agency teams. It has demonstrated how most of these participants were now seeing themselves in a different way to previous. It has also offered examples of how through ongoing 'identity-work' they were repositioning their selves relative to

others within the team. However, there was little indication of the 'hybrid professional' assiduously reported within the literatures.

Significantly, and contrary to much previous research undertaken within multi-agency teams in Children's Services, and also within Healthcare, these professionals/practitioners demonstrated a strong degree of identification with their multi-agency Area Team rather than solely identifying with their own profession/practice-of-training. This had inherently engendered an increased sense of community. There was also extensive recognition that by working with others, so this offered them a far greater capacity to do more, and thereby, elevated their sense-of-self.



## **Chapter 7 Co-creating a new *knowing*: Interpretation and discussion of the findings**

### **7.1 Introduction**

The data presented in the preceding three chapters, comprising the findings of this research, have identified a number of themes that pervade the research aim and questions. This chapter aims to draw these together and to locate these within the existing literatures of learning and identity offered in the frameworks of Chapters 1 and 2. Specifically, it seeks to draw together the key strands comprising this new *knowing*. Thereby, the contribution that this research makes to the key frameworks of professional learning, knowledge and identity in multi-agency teams specifically in relation to this case-study, are presented.

### **7.2 The dominant perception of multi-agency working**

In contrast to the largely 'bleak' story told by many researchers of multi-agency working in Children's Services that were overviewed in Chapter 1, the research findings largely paint a picture of a willingness to adapt to the changes being imposed centrally and locally. Whilst there was some discrepancy between Social Care and some other professionals/practitioners as to the exact focus of their pursuit: whether 'fixing' or 'empowering', there was a strong collective and individual commitment to a shared goal, that of caring for 'the child' (Wenger, 1998). The findings have presented illustrations of these professionals willingly changing their day-to-day practices, developing a new multi-agency understanding and

ultimately shifting their 'work-related identity'. These are discussed further in what follows. The challenges that they face as they assume these new ways of 'doing' and 'being', and the constraints upon its extensiveness are, nonetheless, acknowledged.

The professionals'/practitioners' willingness to participate in multi-agency activity was, as has also been identified by Peckover et al. (2008), influenced by their perceived moral obligations to 'the child'. Therefore, whilst it is acknowledged that complexity and contestation did persist within these Area Teams, these participants were, at least until the impact of current austerity measures, largely prepared to share their skills and knowledge with the other professionals/practitioners. They were also willing to develop the necessary competencies to enable this, undertaking 'knowledge-orientated' practices where they perceived a sense of lack (Knorr-Cetina, 1997, 1999). In most cases this knowledge and skill development was intended to enable them to develop new solutions to the day-to-day challenges that they faced. There was no indication of a fear of others taking on their role in consequence of this sharing, which previous researchers have cited as problematic (see for example, Abbott et al., 2005; Leadbetter, 2006; Frost & Robinson, 2007).

Therefore, whilst the research offered some evidence of boundary clashes, notably in the case of the Educational Social Worker, largely these professionals/practitioners had developed effective ways of working together. Through this joint practice, and through addressing tensions that they faced productively, these participants had developed new, shared common values and a

common sense of trust in one another. This has indicated the development, over time, of a new community (Wenger, 1998).

The shared commitment and the allegiances demonstrated to one another contrasts with significant previous work that has been undertaken within Children's Services and indeed also across Health-care context. Chapter 1 examined the substantial body of previous research that has emphasised the enduring barriers between professionals/practitioners (Abbot et al., 2005; Atkinson et al., 2005; Frost, 2005; Anning et al, 2006; Hean et al., 2006; Frost & Robinson, 2007). This had identified the lack of clarity of purpose in connection with other professionals/practitioners, a lack of understanding of the respective roles and responsibilities of others, and a lack of focus upon inter-relationship building in order to re-engineer professional boundaries and practices (see for example, Harris et al., 2009; Cheminais, 2009; Pollard et al., 2012).

These professionals/practitioners motivation to bring about changed practice may also have been further enhanced through their conscious awareness of the need to move on from the 'old' ways. They acknowledged how these had, at times, been catastrophically ineffective. Yet, they also recognised how persistent uni-professional accountability mechanisms and other conflicting mechanisms, both nationally and locally, were in some instances constraining them and their multi-agency actions.

However, it is conceded that this willingness to engage with, and commit to, new joined-up practices might also be attributable to the austerity measures currently being imposed within the authority. Those participating in the research were clearly very much aware of the huge savings that were required and the implications that this had for their job security. Thereby, with the research having been authorised by the authority, it is acknowledged that this 'fear' may have influenced the nature of the data generated. Moreover, it is acknowledged that indicative of their willingness to participate in the research, these participants might have been convinced by the dominant positivist assumptions that cite collaboration to be entirely non-threatening, supportive and desirable (Morgan, 1995; Sandfort, 1999; Hudson et al., 2003). Therefore, their stories would be expected to substantiate this.

Despite the participants' apparent affective commitment to the multi-agency pursuit, they all considered that the supporting structures were central to its existence. It was generally asserted that these structures, supported by specified artefacts, were providing the opportunities for linking, communication and information sharing. Individuals then often developed these further, informally as they came to 'know the players in the game' (Orlikowski, 2002, p.257). Therefore, the persistence of multi-agency practices without these imposed structures was considered to be doubtful.

Yet, there is also clear evidence within these participants' 'stories' of their multi-agency practice that the imposed rules and structures for multi-agency working

alone have not steered their actions but rather are subsidiary to them (Polanyi, 1967). They spoke of the importance of what might be considered to be “non-canonical” actions (Brown & Duguid, 1991): the ‘street level’ interpretation and solutions (Lipsky, 1980). Consequentially, these participants believed that they were the now ‘experts’, in knowing what worked, rather than the managers and ministers. However, significantly, these professionals’/practitioners’ acceptance of this new way of working, or at least the consequential effectiveness of it, appeared to lie within what were considered to be ‘acceptable’ boundaries, notably that they had a feeling of influence over, and therefore ownership of, the changes they were facing. These findings are consistent with previous work that has demonstrated the need to establish a culture of commitment at operational levels to overcome indifference and apathy (see for example, Freeman et al., 2002; Harker et al., 2004; Robinson & Cottrell, 2005).

### **7.3 Learning as multi-agency professionals/practitioners**

Aligning with other previous research findings (for example, Reeves & Freeth, 2002; Pollard et al., 2012), these professionals/practitioners placed considerable emphasis upon the training they had undertaken, both centrally and at a local level. Most of the participants suggested how the factual knowledge they had acquired offered them the necessary ‘know-how’, and thereby, the confidence, to be a multi-agency professional/practitioner. They indicated how the most effective of these trainings had offered them opportunities to develop a joint understanding of the explicit knowledge of multi-agency practice, through providing opportunities to build and

sustain their social networks (Orlikowski, 2002) and to align their efforts through shared reflection (Schön, 1984; Wenger, 1998).

However, what was also clear, as corroborated for example by Oliver et al. (2010), was that this formal curriculum offered only a part of the story. Alone, it was insufficient to facilitate the necessary epistemic work required to enable them to perform in the “swampy lowlands of practice” (Schön, 1987, p.3). Although it was not generally explicitly recognised by these professionals/practitioners, it was apparent that what they had learned through training and its associated artefacts had provided the mechanisms, Sturdy et al.’s (2006) “language training”, to enable their participation within the new multi-agency community. It had presented them with opportunities and a shared language to ‘access’ other specialist experts – for horizontal knowledge sharing (Engeström, 2001). Moreover, through this formal socialisation, opportunities had been presented for individuals to, for example, work side-by-side with other professionals/practitioner groups, to learn from them.

However, a number of these professionals/practitioners also emphasised how more informal relations that they had developed individually had complemented these formalised links. These opportunities, what Anning et al. (2006) refers to as ‘corridor chats’, had further supported their professional progression. They had presented opportunities for further exposure to other’s *knowing*, aiding the development of their own knowledge-base, especially their practice-knowledge (Cook & Brown, 1991; Eraut, 2000; Orlikowski, 2002). Secondly, this had inherently, also enhanced a

number of these participants' perceptions of their own knowledge. In the case of the more marginal Outreach and Youth Crime professionals/practitioners, and many of the Social Care practitioners, this had resulted in a heightened sense-of-self, increasing their self-confidence and personal credibility. These findings contrast with Anning et al.'s (2006) work that evidenced feelings of loss of self-esteem and confidence by the peripheral agencies.

### **7.3.1 Evidence of difference**

Nevertheless, despite this apparent ostensive alignment in ways of 'thinking' and 'doing' between these professionals/practitioners, it would be naïve to suggest that there were no differences between them. Indeed, as the five distinct 'tales' told illustrate, there is clear evidence to demonstrate differences between these professionals/practitioners in terms of: the systems, technology and paperwork (structures); the language being used and understood; their perceptions of their self and others as multi-agency professionals/practitioners; and significantly, as noted above, their perceptions of the 'objective' of their work – 'the child'. However, possibly consequential of the passing of time, these differences do seem to be narrowing to a more acceptable, or at least a workable, level than previous research suggests. As Fatchett (2013) observes, whilst the term 'multi-agency working' "drops rapidly off the policymakers pens ... it is a skill that needs to be grown, developed and nurtured" over time (p.21). Indeed, it is recognised that conflict is inevitable in the early stages of collaborative activity (Robinson et al., 2008) but with the right combination of organisational and professional input so over time, shared

understandings can be accomplished (for example, Salmon, 2004; Orchard et al., 2005; Cheminais, 2008; Lee et al., 2012). In the case of these Area Teams this management at the local level, in the form of the Area Team Leaders (ATLs), has reportedly been fundamental to developing structure and cohesion as an effective community-of-practice.

Significantly, these differences between professionals/practitioners have previously been understood and reported to be problematical. Yet these findings offer evidence of how it is through recognition of this 'difference' that these professionals/practitioners have enhanced their competencies as a multi-agency professional/practitioner, expanding and transforming their learning. Whilst Lave and Wenger's (1991) theorising does not address such matters, the significance of this is considered in what follows.

As discussed in Chapter 2, situated learning theory favours reproduction and therefore lacks explanation of this expansion and transformation. However, Engeström's (2001, p.51) expansive learning cycles and Gherardi's (2006) internal tensions offer some clarification and explanation. Through the opportunities and assistance offered to these professionals/practitioners, typically by the ATLs, so they have been supported to reflect upon the 'differences' between them. Stimulated through the reported development of trust between many of these individuals and groups, encouraged through Wenger's (2000) "engagement", so they have felt able to challenge the previous relatively stable pattern of activity and the currency of one



another's practices. Also, in light of this, so they have felt confident to challenge the assumptions of their own practice. This has provided opportunities for analysis and transformation, Wenger's (2000) "work of imagination", thereby redefining the artefacts and social structures of their workplace. Therefore, this more productive learning has enabled them to think and act in new ways, transforming their ways of 'doing' and 'being' (Gherardi, 2006, p.34).

### **7.3.2 Expertise in multi-agency teams**

The existence of these 'expansive cycles', and this creation of new knowledge does however raise questions over expertise. Traditionally, for these professionals/practitioners, expertise has been developed through the apprenticeship model into the professional community-of-practice (for example, Georgeson, 2009), the keystone process of Lave and Wenger's theorising. Whilst many of the participants recognised Social Care to be the experts, as it is upon their 'ways of doing' that the new multi-agency structures are based, the multi-agency approach is not Social Care's approach. Therefore, this does not represent 'continuity' (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p.123). Rather, as many of the Social Care practitioners reported, their practice is concurrently being 'displaced' (*ibid*) as the other professionals/practitioners bring in their own knowledge and experience. Therefore, it is asserted that the 'expertise' within this community is not 'knowing what', held exclusively by 'old-timers' as Lave and Wenger's theorising would suggest, but comprises a form of 'relational expertise' (Edwards, 2010) in which 'knowing who', and the repositioning of their self in relation to this, is most

important. This expertise is achieved through developing individual and informal relationships beyond the formalised structures, enabling individuals to work effectively with others. It is this that drives the development of the community. This offers understanding of the interplay between policy context, newcomers, new ideas and established social care practices.

### ***7.3.3 Role of structure and agency in expansive learning***

The occurrence of these expansive learning cycles, and thereby, what these professionals/practitioners have come to know and the meanings they draw from it, has been mediated by the local context. This has been facilitated within these Area Teams through the provision of what has been demonstrated to be a more 'expansive' than 'restrictive' context (Fuller & Unwin, 2003; Fuller et al., 2007). In drawing upon Fuller et al. (2007), Table 7.1 illustrates how the participants largely considered that the synergistic value of cross-professional teamwork was recognised and nurtured at all levels within their Area Team context. Moreover, they had access to a breadth of learning opportunities, both formal, and more importantly, informally. Yet the current local economic situation locally had placed considerable structural constraints upon these professionals/practitioners. This has risked cognitive dissonance, and a questioning of their sense-of-purpose and efficacy (King & Ross, 2004; Daniels & Warmington, 2007). However, these professionals'/practitioners' work has been supported through the effectiveness of the ATLs. Indeed, these individuals are understood to be the essential "nutrients" for developing the learning capacity of these professionals/practitioners (Whittaker,

1998, p.34; see also Hambleton, 2000; Sullivan & Skelcher, 2002, Atkinson et al., 2007) rather than the structures in place. Through the participants' reports it can be asserted that these individuals act as a bridge, or spanner (Wenger, 2000), between the different professionals/practitioners. They have nurtured opportunities for dialogue, helping the professionals/practitioners to explicate their own 'stories' to others with whom they work, thereby fostering and sustaining this multi-agency community-of-practice. This has provided a building block for the creation of context-specific explicit knowledge and the generation of solutions to the problems facing them in this new landscape (Cook & Brown, 1999; Orlikowski, 2002). However, this 'boundary spanning' requires experience and a sense of agency (Stuart, 2012, p.11), which the ATLs, themselves observed, has taken time to develop.



Expansive	Restrictive	Evidence from the research participants
Participation in multiple communities of practice inside and outside the workplace	Restricted participation in multiple communities of practice inside and outside the workplace	Participants participate in multiple communities: multi-agency Area Team, own specialist profession/practice, other workplace teams. Some participants also work across Area Teams. Offers them further opportunities for learning and reflection
Primary community of practice has shared 'participative memory': cultural inheritance of workforce development	Primary community of practice has little or no 'participative memory': no or little tradition of apprenticeship	Apprenticeship dominated traditional professions, but government has assumed rapid, problem-free, uptake of the multi-agency model. These professions/practices traditionally have disparate beliefs, ways of doing things; additionally they bring the baggage of historical legacies of professionalism and more recent scars of ever-changing policy rhetoric
Breadth: access to learning fostered by cross-company experiences	Narrow: access to learning restricted in terms of tasks/knowledge/location	Working as multi-agency professionals across different professional/practitioner groups
Planned time off-the-job including for knowledge-based courses, and for reflection	Virtually all-on-job: limited opportunities for reflection	Formalised 'off-the-job' training has been provided for most professionals/practitioners, and is understood to be fundamental to their 'becoming multi-agency'. However, it was observed that some groups have been excluded from this. Participants suggested that 'excluded' individuals might be unable to work in a multi-agency way without training.
Gradual transition to full, rounded participation	Fast – transition as quick as possible	Participants speak of need for time to enable this transition, for these new practices to become embedded and for them to build experience together. However, this runs contrary to government intentions of an immediate transition.
Vision of workplace learning: progression for career	Vision of workplace learning: static for job	Clear emphasis upon the need for working, and thereby learning, together to engender effective multi-agency working. However, conflicting accountability mechanisms and structures sometimes clash with this.
Organisational recognition of, and support for employees as learners	Lack of organisational recognition of, and support for employees as learners	Opportunities are provided for training and ongoing CPD. However, this is often reactive rather than proactive. Some participants observe the value of also being able to 'try things out' and to learn from this. To the contrary, others observe the fact that they only get one chance and so have to get it right first time.
Workforce development used to align goals of developing the individual & organisational capability	Workforce development is used to tailor individual capability to organisational need	Broad approach to developing the whole workforce. Although training is typically to meet immediate needs rather than longer-term, there is evidence of an investment in people to enhance capability and improve performance
Workforce development fosters opportunities to extend identity through boundary crossing	Workforce development limits opportunities to extend identity: little boundary crossing experienced	Ongoing boundary crossing inherent to multi-agency teams. Clear evidence of identity work being undertaken. However, in some instances this is more 'coping identity work', and sometimes 'negative', as some participants indicated that they do not want to extend their identity, rather to maintain and safeguard it
Reification of 'workplace curriculum' highly developed and accessible to apprentices	Limited reification of 'workplace curriculum' patchy access to reificatory aspects of practice	Reification of practice both centrally in government policy documentation and supporting training materials, also locally, for example in the 'Integrated Working Guide'. These provide the necessary structures for relationship development, which are understood by the participants to be key to effective working.
Skills are widely distributed	Skills are polarised in particular areas/groups	Substantive skills are held by the specialists within the teams; however clear evidence of knowledge-sharing and of new skills being co-constructed within these teams.
Knowledge and skills of whole workforce developed and valued	Knowledge and skills of key workers/groups developed and valued	Each member of the multi-agency teams is understood to be important, and their knowledge of significance to the whole team in engendering a new way of knowing. Technical skills are valued rather than taken for granted.
Team work valued	Rigid specialist roles	Participants spoke extensively of their identification with the Area Team and of the synergistic nature of these configurations. However, the importance of retaining specialist roles was also emphasised.
Cross-boundary communication encouraged	Bounded communication	Intrinsic to multi-agency working; clarified by the participants to be intrinsic to their day-to-day work. However, some indications of ongoing boundaries, especially hierarchical.
Managers as facilitators of workforce and individual development	Managers as controllers of workforce and individual development	Clear evidence of ATLs as enablers of multi-agency working, sustaining the community. However also indications of higher level managers 'not understanding how things really work in practice'.
Innovation important	Innovation unimportant	Innovation as fundamental to the Area Team configuration. Participants speak of developing new and innovative ways of problem-solving.
Multi-dimensional view of expertise	Uni-dimensional top-down view of expertise	Multi-agency working understood as a means to developing new expertise. Expertise defined by the participants as 'knowing who' rather than 'knowing what'.

**Table 7.1:** The restrictive-expansive continuum to understand how this authority's multi-agency workplace fosters and/or hinders workforce development. Adapted from Fuller et al. (2007, p.745) and annotated with evidence from the research findings pertinent to this continuum.

☐ Dominant view held

☐ Secondary view held



Significantly, SLT theorising fails to embrace the importance of the informal, individual-initiated inter-professional relations that were considered to be fundamental to enabling and sustaining multi-agency practice. Indeed, the participants emphasised how rather than having access to inanimate resources, 'knowing who' governed 'what they came to know' (Granovetter, 1973; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Brown & Duguid, 1991, 2000a; Orr, 1996; Gherardi & Nicolini, 2002; Nardi et al, 2002; Engeström, 2008). This 'relational agency' (Edwards, 2010) has been crucial to these professionals/practitioners in realising the synergistic benefits of their multiple perspectives and developing a trust in one another. In contrast with many previous research findings (for example, Reder & Duncan, 2003; Cameron & Lart, 2003; Sloper, 2004; Munro, 2005), this trust developed between many of these professionals/practitioners has created "confidence pathways" enabling the mobilisation of "technical gossip" between them (Knorr-Cetina, 1999). However, it should be acknowledged that the participants did recognise the need for organisational level processes and structures to co-exist with and reinforce these individual level processes to maximise this knowledge-creation.

Yet this simplistic depiction of structure and agency is insufficient to understand the nuances of these professionals'/practitioners' 'tales'. The Outreach and Youth Crime professionals demonstrated a strong degree of agency through their multi-agency practice. For them, the need to develop these informal relationships was critical to their effectiveness. Consequently, this had shaped a reported enhanced sense-of-self as their work became more important and necessarily linked to that of others –

especially those perceived to sit higher up the workforce hierarchy (see Figure 4.1). By contrast, for the Educational Psychologists and Education Social Worker, the structural aspects of multi-agency working played a greater role in their practice. As the findings indicate, these individuals demonstrated a reticence to become proactively involved, preferring only to work centrally with the Area Teams when tasks were assigned to them that required this. Finally, for the Social Care professionals/practitioners both structure and agency were important. These participants spoke of the importance of both the informal and formal relationships that they had developed, but also of the structures that ensured multi-agency practice. Significantly for these individuals, the Area Team structures were underpinned by Social Care requirements. Therefore, by requiring others to essentially conform to their ways of working, so this had enhanced their sense-of-self. Previously they had been positioned towards the lower tiers of the workforce hierarchy.

## 7.4 What this multi-agency learning *is*

Significantly this research sought to identify *what* this multi-agency learning actually *is*. The expansive learning, the development of a new 'economy of meaning' embedded within this participation (Wenger, 1998), is illustrated through a number of different facets of the research findings. However, it is most notably manifested through:

- making sense of practice through the generation of a shared language and a shared repertoire;
- generating artefacts which express, either through speech, or by some other forms of communication, the multi-agency culture (Wenger, 1998);
- ongoing identity work, enabling these professionals/practitioners to function in the new multi-agency context.

These are now examined.

As it has been noted, the formal curriculum has provided the "language training" (Sturdy et al., 2006), to enable these professionals/practitioners participation within the new multi-agency community. Moreover, the provision of such artefacts as the '*Team Around the Child*' and '*Common Assessment Framework*' procedures have provided a shared language and acted as a form of shared 'boundary tool' between these professionals/practitioners (Wenger, 1998). These have created a bridge between the boundaries of the different professionals'/practitioners' knowledge. They have also provided a common-basis for interaction between the multiple social words of these multi-agency teams and, thereby, a focus for new learning and

shared understanding (see also Star & Greisemer, 1989; Daniels et al., 2010; Ludvigsen et al., 2010; Fenwick et al., 2011).

As well as the use of centrally-produced artefacts to guide the multi-agency processes, so there was evidence of further localised artefacts being reified within the community as a result of developing practice (Wenger, 1998), most notably the '*Integrated Working Guide*'. In addition to these artefacts, shared cultural mentifacts (Huxley, 1955), shared beliefs and values, were also developing as an outcome of "engagement" (Wenger, 2000).

A further, and key, aspect of the socialisation and the situated learning process is the development of 'soft' knowledge: the unspoken conventions of the community. The development of both forms of "engagement" and "sensemaking", integral to Wenger's (2000) "process of identification", were reported by participants and observed by the researcher through the joint interviews. Through this use of a shared language and knowledge structure, that clearly had meaning for those belonging to that multi-agency team (community-of-practice), they had they had to 'come to know' the reality of their new learning environment (Wenger, 1998). However, despite the creation of this shared language there were, at times, problems resulting from the persistent use of 'old language', jargon, especially by one particular professional grouping notably, as observed in previous research (for example, Abbot et al., 2005), by healthcare.



Being core to this multi-agency engagement, the participants offer considerable evidence of how they are not only fostering deeper learning and through “work of the imagination” but also reframing their identification (Wenger, 2000). This contrasts with other research findings that have indicated little disturbance to the professionals’ identities (for example, Abbott et al., 2005). Yet these participants illustrated how they have, in some cases, made identity concessions as well as expanding and enhancing their sense-of-self, as they have explored other ways of doing things, aligning these with their new context and the cultural or discursive notions of ‘who they should be’. This process has engendered a need for ‘identity-work’, as they have endeavoured to shape a relatively coherent and distinctive notion of personal self-identity (Watson, 2008). This ‘identity-work’ is now considered in detail.

## **7.5 ‘Identity-work’**

### **7.5.1 *Positive ‘identity-work’***

Clear episodes of positive ‘identity-work’ were reported by many of these participants, especially the Outreach and Social Care professionals/practitioners. Within their discourse of multi-agency working there was clear evidence that they were willingly redefining/reframing their ‘identity-badge’. Through this they were changing their priorities and concepts of what constitutes professional work and themselves as professionals/practitioners, thereby maintaining a self-coherence to fit with the needs of the changing context. This is perhaps made easier for these specific groups of professionals/practitioners as they have previously struggled to

attain their 'professional' status (Bessant, 2004; Baldwin, 2008) so are perhaps more receptive to the need for 'identity-work'. However, their use of "identity-making resources" in this 'positive identity-work' varied according to the individual: notably, how central this is to "who they take themselves to be" (Watson, 2008, p. 129). Secondly, and perhaps significantly, this was also determined by whether they felt that they were selecting their own self-identity as multi-agency professionals/practitioners (King & Horrocks, 2010). The research findings indicate that this perceptions of 'who they are' was dependent upon their relationships with others within the Area Team, rather than upon an identity that was being instilled upon them by the managers and government (see also Daniels & McMahon, 2010). However, despite this apparent enhanced sense-of-self, it must be questioned whether these para-professionals have sufficient salience to withstand their increased responsibilities over the longer-term (Baxter, 2011).

### **7.5.2 'Coping' and/or 'maintaining' 'identity-work'**

'Identity-work' is often perceived as a "struggle" (Watson, 2008, p.129) between environmental factors, socialised beliefs and personal desires. As is evidenced by some of the participants, notably the professionals rather than the para-professionals (Hooley, 2005), the beginning of 'identity-work' had engendered feelings of considerable uncertainty, emotional and psychological stress as they sought to reconcile identity inconsistencies (Knights and McCabe, 2003; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). This is also supported in the reports of the ATLs who were finding

themselves in a “zone of in-between” (Marchington & Vincent, 2004), as an indistinct and shifting “boundary bricolage” identity (Ellis & Ybema, 2010, p.283).

These individuals’ responses to this might be considered to exemplify a ‘coping identity-work’ as they work to reconcile their self to the new situation and to discover a moderately comfortable modus in which to work, aware that it cannot be changed. In some instances this coping is emphasised through the professionals/practitioners compartmentalising their multiple identities (Roccas & Brewer, 2002). Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003) argue that individuals strive for coherence between their multiple identities, through “flipping the on/off switch” (Kreiner et al., 2006, p.1044) as they make efforts to separate out their different ‘lives’. For example, the Educational Psychologists offer clear evidence of this ‘flipping’ as they seek to sustain their initial identity through disengaging with the day-to-day activity of the Area Teams, engaging only when specifically called upon as Education Psychologists (see Hogg, 2007). This suggests that they were resisting the imposition of Social Care’s framework by reframing their relationship to the multi-agency requirements. In other instances, this ‘coping’, or ‘maintaining’ ‘identity-work’ was stimulating comments about ‘in’ and ‘out-groups’, with references made to ‘them’ and ‘us’ (Hogg, 2007).

Despite this, there was significant evidence, across these participants, of their developing a distinctive collective team identity alongside their existing professional/practitioner identity. The degree of this team identification was, to

some extent, inferred to relate to their commitment to it, notably whether they felt that multi-agency working had been imposed upon them (Freeman et al., 2002; Harker et al., 2004).

### **7.5.3 Negative 'identity-work'**

The findings also evidence, although through only a minority of cases, how some of the participants were seeking an active rejection of this new, and what they perceived as 'imposed', identity. Whilst on paper, in being co-located, the Education Social Worker was being offered full-access to participate within the multi-agency community, she was actively resisting this. She presented a 'defensive pessimism' (Cantor et al., 2007) as she spoke of being "*taken over*" by Social Care's processes and procedures and how resistance to this "*is futile*". Rather, she preferred to work with and learn from "*her own kind*", maintaining her sense-of-self. This response had been exacerbated by her concerns over the de-professionalisation of the workforce (Kubiak, 2010).

Similarly to other individuals that could be identified as being 'in the midst' of identity-work, this participant was also seemingly questioning 'do I want to be what it takes to be multi-agency professional?'; 'do I want to meet these expectations?' It is only through knowing 'who I am becoming' that Wenger's (2000) 'process of identification' can be achieved. Significantly, she also recalled how Social Care often fail to return her calls/emails, and how by being co-located she is unable to readily communicate with other Education Social Workers. This might suggest that her

access to learning within this community was being ‘intentionally regulated’ (Billett, 2004a, 2004b), and emphasises the role and influence of professional hierarchies upon learning within these Area Teams.

However, by contrast with previous research (for example Atkinson et al., 2002; Robinson et al., 2008; Collett, 2010), there was little evidence to suggest that persisting traditional hierarchies were explicitly and intentionally constraining participation. Yet it can be suggested that in the case of a few participants, notably the Education Psychologists, that their perception of their selves within the traditional hierarchy was affecting their preparedness to participate and therefore inherently, their ability to learn. It might be suggested that their need, as ‘experts’, to learn from what they might term to be ‘novice’ Social Care practitioners, had presented a threat to their sense-of-self. However, significantly, where there was this reluctance to proactively fully engage there was no evidence to suggest that this was “disrupting the community-of-practice” (Payler & Locke, 2013) as, concurrently, their relationships with others were seemingly changing through their “discretionary” engagement with the Area Teams.

Therefore, it can be asserted that the way in which these professionals/practitioners were responding to the disturbance to their self was being determined agentially, although within the existing structures and “practice-order bundles” (Carlile, 2002; see also Giddens, 1984; Hodkinson et al., 2007). This highlights the importance of how the individuals perceived the disturbance and how this fitted with their life

experiences, their individual intentions and trajectories. Inherently, this has determined how they were defining their selves in relation to the multi-agency agenda. It can be asserted that, in the case of one participant, from Youth Crime, this coincided with other external pressures to change their image and thereby to undertake 'identity-work'.

## **7.6 Chapter summary**

This relatively short but significant chapter has drawn together the preceding three chapters to highlight the key findings of this research. It has concurrently related these to previous understandings of multi-agency working and of professional learning. In doing so, it has identified that contrary to much previous research these multi-agency professionals/practitioners are far more aware of the need for collaborative understanding and are therefore more willing to work with others within the Area Teams. In this, the importance of relationships, initiated outside of the formalised structures, has been identified. These are demonstrated to be critical to developing a multi-agency 'relational expertise' in which 'knowing who' is prioritised over 'knowing what'.

There is still evidence of inter-professional differences and in some instances, a degree of conflict, especially in the case of the 'true' professionals (rather than practitioners/para-professionals) such as the Educational Psychologists. However, importantly, and distinct from what has been reported in much previous research, these professionals/practitioners are recognising, and using productively, these

differences in their ways of 'doing' and understanding. As a collective, this is presenting them with opportunities to generate a far more powerful response to problem-solving. Anning et al. (2006) highlight the dilemmas of creating new forms of knowledge. Yet the findings of this research have indicated that through opportunities presented to them, both through training and the support of the ATLs, these professionals/practitioners are beginning to recognise the shortcomings of their 'traditional' uni-professional ways of doing things and are using this to expand their understandings – a new expanded learning and practical knowledge.

A number of the participants offered clear evidence of their intention, and in some cases a strong commitment, to change their way of 'being', to actively engage in the necessary 'identity-work'. They recognised that there was a need to move on from what have been, in some instances, catastrophic past practices. However, it is also recognised that some of these participants were undertaking 'negative identity-work' as they sought to retain their pre-existing identity. Significantly, many of the participants perceived that it was important that they retained their specialisms rather than blurring their identities and developing as the much-quoted 'hybrid professional' (Atkinson et al, 2002; Sloper, 2004; Frost & Robinson, 2007; Moran et al., 2007).

In drawing these conclusions, the researcher is mindful of the fact that many of the participants were what might be termed 'practitioners' or 'para-professionals' rather than 'professionals'. If the latter group had dominated the research, so the findings

may have indeed have been different. This is certainly anticipated if the apparent minority view of the Educational Psychologists and Education Social Workers are considered. This is examined further in Chapter 8.

The following, and final, chapter will seek to draw conclusions from the research, relating the findings to the research questions identified at the outset. It will also discuss some of the implications that this research has raised both for practice at the local level and the opportunities that it provides for future research.



## Chapter 8 Research conclusions

### 8.1 Introduction

This research has examined the far-reaching changes in public service delivery engendered through requirements for collaboration within what was previously a more silo-based organisational-form. Specifically it has focused upon how professionals/practitioners comprising the multi-agency teams of a North-West England local authority's Children's Services department work together and how they learn together within this multi-agency configuration arising from the 2003 '*Every Child Matters*' agenda (DfES, 2003).

Whilst collaboration between Children's Services' professionals/practitioners has been promoted as 'best practice' across Western Europe (Laming, 2009; HM Government, 2010), it has been beset by challenges, not least, as Brandon et al. (2009) report, through "chaotic behaviour ... [and] fixed thinking". Previous research has identified the need for learning on behalf of these professionals/practitioners in order to overcome these challenges. The literature in this field is growing exponentially. However, as it was asserted at the outset of this thesis, the complexities surrounding the realities of professional formation and practice in the implementation of collaborative working practices still remain inadequately conceptualised and theorised (Hartley & Bennington, 2006; Glasby & Dickinson, 2008; Oborn & Dawson, 2010).

As has been discussed, the governments' 'scientific' approach to engendering the necessary learning for multi-agency working has been proven ineffective (for example, Oliver et al., 2010). Therefore, this research has taken a practice-based approach, drawing upon Lave and Wenger's (1991) situated learning theory (SLT). This distinguishes learning not only as 'knowing about' a practice, but as 'knowing how to be', to participate holistically in the practice of a community (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998; Brown & Duguid, 2000). Therefore, this research specifically aimed to offer empirical evidence of the co-creation of new *knowing* between the professionals/practitioners comprising these multi-agency teams. This *knowing* is understood to comprise reified knowledge, discourse, practice and identity (Wenger, 1998).

This final chapter draws together the research. It considers the research findings and the interpretation of these based upon the theoretical framework offered to underpin the research, to draw conclusions regarding the research questions and overall aim. The theoretical, empirical, methodological and practice contributions that this work makes to the key concepts of professional learning, knowledge and identity in multi-agency teams are presented. Conclusions drawn emphasise the new *knowing* that is being created between these professionals/practitioners. This is characterised by the need for 'relational expertise' as well as discipline expertise and emphasises the importance of both structure and agency in learning.

A critical evaluation of the methodology adopted is then articulated, providing an appraisal of the value of the study and of the credibility of the findings of the research. This also explicitly addresses the limitations of the research. Examination is then made of the significance and implications of this study for furthering understanding of both theory and practice within this research field, notably how this work might inform future research and how this might be approached. Finally a personal reflection upon the research and its process is offered.

## **8.2 Addressing the research questions**

Three research questions have underpinned the development and pursuit of this research.

1. How do these professionals/practitioners understand multi-agency working?
2. What evidence is there of learning having resulted through these professionals/practitioners working together?
3. How has this learning shaped these professionals' 'work-related identities'?

In what follows, each of these will be examined to determine the extent to which they have been attended to since their initial conception in Chapter 1. Each of these questions will be addressed in turn, however, it is acknowledged that there overlaps between them.

### 8.2.1 Conclusion about the research questions

Research question 1

*How do these professionals/practitioners understand multi-agency working?*

As it has been shown, the professionals/practitioners participating in this case-study research largely offered a far more positive perception of their multi-agency configuration than previous research have indicated. This could be seen at structural level, through for example their recognition of the importance of the processes in place to engender multi-agency practice and a willingness to engage with these; also the largely effective communication processes that had been developed. At an ideological level, this was demonstrated through these professionals'/practitioners' commitment to the shared goal of 'the child'. Whilst it was seen that there was some discrepancy between the Social Care and Education-related professionals as to the exact focus of their pursuit: whether 'fixing' or 'empowering', there was a strong collective and individual commitment to this shared goal. Finally, at a procedural level, there was clear evidence of these professionals/practitioners having developed shared artefacts and a shared discourse of what it meant to be multi-agency, also of them aligning their efforts to co-ordinate effectively across the team. It is acknowledged that the local financial climate, in which these professionals' feared further job losses, might have deepened their attentiveness to the need to be working more efficiently. However, the shared commitment and the largely strong allegiances that they have demonstrated to one another run contrary to much previous research within Children's Services that has emphasised the enduring

barriers between professionals (Abbott et al., 2005; Atkinson et al., 2005; Frost, 2005; Anning et al., 2006; Hean et al., 2006; Frost & Robinson, 2007).

However, it is observed that the extent to which the participants perceived this new practice-model was embedded within their day-to-day work varied. This was affected by a number of factors: structural, notably the need to adhere to pre-existing accountability mechanisms and processes; also individuals, notably their predilection to want to forget their past ways of 'doing' and 'being'.

Notwithstanding this predominantly positive image, there were clear problems still challenging these participants within this multi-agency context. Significantly, despite assertions to the contrary, there was evidence of persisting hierarchies within this workforce. This risked effective practice and learning.

#### Research question 2

*What evidence is there of learning having resulted through these professionals / practitioners working together?*

The mutual beliefs shared by these professionals/practitioners, and the supporting structures and artefacts provided both locally and nationally, have encouraged the sharing of knowledge as they have worked together. The governments' 'scientific' approach of providing formal training had offered the necessary "language training"

(Sturdy et al., 2006) to enable interaction between these individuals. However, it has been shown that much of their understanding had been developed informally, over time, as they worked alongside the other professionals/practitioners. This emphasises the importance of the interplay between knowledge and *knowing* (Orlikowski, 2002). Indeed, Orlikowski's (2002) five "repertoires of practice" and their compositional activities illustrating how knowledge is constituted within practice, as examined in Chapter 2, can be recognised in this multi-agency context. Through practicing together, and importantly, as a result of the trust that they have nurtured through the development of largely informal relationships, so these professionals/practitioners have been afforded opportunities to both challenge the currency of one another's practices but also the assumptions of their own practice. The findings have offered evidence to suggest that this has stimulated a productive participation with expansive learning outcomes. Thereby, through thinking and acting in new ways, so their knowledge and practice has been transformed (Engeström, 2001, 2007; Eraut, 2000; Fuller & Unwin, 2004; Gherardi, 2006; Wallo, 2008).

This study has served to further affirm the importance of Lave and Wenger's (1991) learning-through-practice and the significance of the situated nature of this. The context – the institutional forces, structures, local culture, relations with other professionals, and also the wider economic climate, have been shown to have significant implications for what these professionals/practitioners have come to know and the meanings they have drawn from it. Importantly, this has also

influenced the challenges presented to them. This confirms the importance of Fuller and Unwin's (2004) enablers of learning and what they term, 'restrictive' and 'expansive' learning environments. This 'expansive environment' has also been engendered through the proficiency of the Area Team Leaders. Whilst they themselves have had to learn new ways of 'doing' and 'being', they have also provided opportunities for others within their teams to learn. In acting as Wenger's (1998) 'boundary spanners' so they have bridged between the different professionals/practitioners, fostering and sustaining what can be considered to be this new multi-agency community-of-practice. However, despite this generally expansive context, there are some indicators of more restrictive persistence with past practice. Expansive learning requires the past to be forgotten which these professionals/practitioners, largely, seemed prepared to do. Yet, they are working within the constraints of government structures within which past policy, notably around uni-professional accountability systems still persist.

However, rather than just affirming that new learning has occurred, as has been the focus of previous research within this field, this research has offered evidence of *what this new knowing* actually is. It has been shown that this community's practice has started to re-form into what might be termed a multi-agency practice model, depicted through relationship development and 'identity-work' on behalf of the professionals/practitioners. The development of a relational agency, which has been engendered through these individuals repositioning themselves relative to others within the team, and through their identification with the 'team' encouraged by the

shared objective of the 'care for the child', has enabled the expansion and creation of a new professional *knowing*. Whilst it is recognised that a diversity of other factors have also clearly influenced this repositioning (Billett, 2007; Hogg, 2007), there is significant evidence offered to suggest that many aspects of these professionals' day-to-day activities are distinctly different to that with which they would have been involved pre-2003.

It can be asserted, 'old timers' do not hold exclusive expertise within these new multi-agency communities, as Lave and Wenger's theorising would suggest. Indeed there were questionably any 'old-timers' within this new community. Rather, expertise within this multi-agency community-of-practice comprises a form of 'relational expertise' (Edwards, 2010) in which 'knowing who' is considered to be more important than 'knowing what'. This 'knowing who' had been achieved through the development of relationships, which have characteristically evolved informally and through individual initiative beyond, although within the bounds of, the formalised structures (Giddens, 1991; Hodkinson et al., 2007). This has enabled these professionals/practitioners to work effectively with others in caring for 'the child'. Indeed, Lin and Beyerlin (2006) emphasise how the relational aspects of learning are key to collaboration, whilst Spretnak (2011) asserts that the crises faced within education and healthcare are the results of anti-relational thinking. Therefore, this portrayal of these Area Teams should be considered encouraging. Indeed, Spretnak asserts how "cultivating relational trust ... [is] the secret of success"



(p.40). This would certainly seem to hold true for these case-study multi-agency participants.

The findings also emphasise the importance of agentic influences, specifically individuals' commitment, to learning and working effectively as a multi-agency team. Indeed, the Social Care, Youth Crime and Outreach participants offered considerable evidence of this. However, by contrast, some individuals, notably the Educational Psychologists and Education Social Worker, have been shown to be working more to satisfy their personal trajectories rather than this collective cause. Their 'tales' advocated efforts to 'protect' their professional distinctiveness and interests and thereby of distancing themselves from this practice-based learning. Whilst not actively excluding other professional groups, these individuals demonstrated some indifference to others' 'know-how' (Billett, 2004b). It might be suggested that, due to the Area Team processes being predominantly led by those of Social Care, that these professionals were feeling threatened and thereby sought to protect their professional status through disregarding others. These socio-emotional issues inherently connect with Lave and Wenger's (1991) assertions that participation does not only shape practice, but also 'who we are'.

### Research question 3

*How has this learning shaped these professionals' 'work-related identities'?*

The research has demonstrated how it was not just these professionals' practice that had evolved, but inextricably, so had their identity. There was still some enduring

'in' and 'out-group' identification, distinguished by references to 'them' and 'us', and some indications of persistent professional hierarchies. However, largely, these professionals/practitioners had undertaken a significant degree of positive 'identity-work' (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003), with their 'old' identity being replaced by a more dynamic, flexible self that was constantly learning. These findings run contrary to previous public sector identity research, which has concluded that core, stable elements of an individuals' identity solely meld with a new understanding of what it means to be multi-agency (Baldwin, 2008; Jeffrey, 2008; Lewis, 2010; Sieminski, 2010; Wiles, 2010).

This 'positive identity-work' was especially evident with the Outreach and Youth Crime professionals/practitioners. These individuals offered evidence to suggest how this had acted to enhance their sense-of-self and to build their confidence in their multi-agency practice. This highlights how, if 'identity-work' is embedded within life and work, so it is inevitably strengthened (Hargreaves, 2000). The participants had also largely developed a distinctive multi-agency team identity alongside their existing professional/practitioner identities: establishing a duality of 'work-related identity'.

As well as this 'positive identity-work', there were examples of a 'coping' or 'maintaining' 'identity-work', mainly by the Area Team Leaders and some Social Care professionals/practitioners. However, a few individuals, notably the Education Social Worker, appeared to be actively undertaking what might be considered to be a

'negative identity-work' as she sought to reject this new 'imposed' identity. It might be suggested that this was a response to finding herself back as a 'novice' in a context in which she had previously been an expert. However, it should also be questioned as to whether, in addition to these individual's intentional regulation of their identity, the community itself was also acting to regulate this (Billett, 2004a, 2004b). The implications of where some individuals want to 'stand still' yet the community-of-practice is moving on in terms of its learning, are uncertain. However, there was no evidence that these individuals were disrupting the multi-agency community-of-practice.

Therefore, it can be concluded that through thinking and acting in these new ways so these professionals'/practitioners' practice and their way of 'being', has largely been transformed, developing new supporting artefacts, discourse and identity – co-creating a new multiagency *knowing* to aid their endeavours (Brown & Duguid, 1991; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Eraut, 2000; Gherardi & Nicolini, 2000; Fuller & Unwin, 2004; Gherardi, 2006; Wallo, 2008). Significantly, this is not a hybrid, or a 'watered down' version of the original, but a characteristically new knowledge and identity that has been secured synergistically and expansively. This has created a multi-agency professional that is a relational expert as well as a discipline expert. Yet, this is not static. Rather, it is evolving as the community develops, as policy changes and as the needs of the child and families change. Time and space are therefore fundamental to this developing.

Significantly, this research recognises how, in the case of these Area Teams, the interplay of both tacit practice and explicit training knowledge has been key to co-creating this *knowing* (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998; Orlikowski, 2002). However, it is also recognised, as depicted in the five different ‘tales’, that how this new *knowing* is conceptualised does vary across these professionals/practitioners.

Consequently, it can be asserted that situated learning theory, when supported by additional theorising, has provided an invaluable lens for understanding the importance of learning as a consequence of practice within multi-agency teams. It is acknowledged that the qualitative research reported in this thesis is exploratory in purpose and cannot, therefore, provide confirmable explanations. However, the findings have demonstrated how, contrary to the assertions of much previous research, these multi-agency professionals/practitioners have largely (exceptions being Education Social Workers and Educational Psychologists) learned to work together effectively, and have expanded their ways of ‘doing’ and ‘being’. The research has provided illustrations of these professionals’/practitioners’ changing day-to-day practices, indications of the development of a multi-agency discourse and their consequential shifting identity. The challenges that they face in this and inherently the limitations that constrain its extensiveness have, nonetheless, been acknowledged. It is recognised, as Huxham and Vangen (2000, 2013) assert, for multi-agency configurations to be and remain effective so they need to be staffed with the right people. Firstly, there is a need for good leadership, and secondly,

there is a need for diversity to engender conflict and to foster synergy, in the expectation of creating sharpened and original solutions.

However, it is important to recognise that the data generated through this research was imbued with significant power relations dominating the interactions between these professionals/practitioners. As was discussed in Chapter 2, Lave and Wenger's theorising is under-developed in its treatment of power relations and make no reference to the wider historical, cultural and social context within which these communities operate (Fox, 2000; Contu & Wilmott, 2003; Fuller & Unwin 2003). For this reason, that is, the lack of analytical tools available within the adopted theoretical framework to trace the power relations within the Area Teams, these issues were not examined or analysed in detail within this study. However, it is appropriate, at this juncture, to make these explicit. They are discussed, although briefly, in what follows, presented as areas for potential future analysis.

Perhaps most discernible, as was alluded to within Chapter 6, was the persistence of the traditional distinct professional/practitioner hierarchies. Despite many participants' assertions to the contrary, there were clear indications of these enduring within these multi-agency teams and of intra-relational power struggles resulting from extant foundations of power. This was perhaps most evident in the Educational Social Worker's perspective of being "*taken over*". These hierarchies might also be considered evident in the predominantly task-based interactions referred to by some of the participants, rather than the more socio-emotional

interactions that would indicate a more comparable relationship (Bell, 2001; Atwal & Caldwell, 2005). Whilst it cannot be verified, it may be suggested that the contradictory rhetoric presented by the participants may in themselves represent further connotations of power. It may be argued that the participants were seeking to promote a 'hidden' agenda (Flyvbjerg, 1998), that of the success of the Area Teams, in a period in which they were under both internal and external scrutiny. However, to the contrary, it may also be suggested that these professionals/practitioners were not actually 'seeing' the persisting hierarchies. Indeed, as Berger (1972) asserts, ways of seeing depend upon the devices through which the looking is done. As such, all ways of seeing are also ways of not seeing.

It is also essential to document the evidence which suggested that, contrary to much of the literature (McCabe, 2010), whilst central government and its operatives were legitimately the dominant authority they did not have the power to actually enact policy at practice level. In consequence some of the participants spoke of what might be considered to be the non-canonical practices (Brown & Duguid, 1991) with which they were involved. Aligning with Baunsgaard and Clegg's (2013) study of collaborative teams within a Danish SME, this emphasises how power was being exerted by the inheritors of policy, as well as the initiators of it (McCabe, 2010).

### **8.3 Contributions to knowledge made by this research**

Focus now shifts to examine the contributions that this research has made to this field. Specifically it will consider its empirical, theoretical, methodological and practical contributions.

#### **8.3.1 *Empirical contribution of the research***

This research has responded to a number of concerns that have been raised regarding the lack of empirical evidence to support the growing corpus of theory that has considered relationships and learning especially within the public sector (Hartley & Bennington, 2006; Glasby & Dickinson, 2008; Rashman et al., 2009; Oborn & Dawson, 2010; Reeves, 2010; Collins & McCray, 2012). It has also provided greater understanding of what this learning actually *is*, rather than just how it might come about. It is the latter approach that has formed the focus of most previous research.

Specifically, it has also embraced Reeves' (2010) concerns over the paucity of qualitative research, especially that informed by sociological perspectives (p.218) being applied to the field of inter-professionalism.

Consequential of the practice-theorising used, the research also responds to the recognised deficit of empirical studies considering contextual influences on the creation of knowledge (for example, Edelman et al., 2004), and to Ellis and Ybema's (2010) assertions that despite boundary-crossing being characteristic of many

contemporary organisations, there is a lack of empirical evidence examining the identity implications of this for individuals acting these roles (p.283).

The contribution made by this work also extends to its application of the accepted models concerning knowledge that have, to date, been little tested but well-referenced. In addition to offering empirical evidence of 'situated learning', 'expansive-restrictive learning environment's and 'relational expertise', it has offered empirical evidence to support Orlikowski's (2002) model of the interplay of knowledge and *knowing*.

### **8.3.2 Theoretical contribution of the research**

Therefore, the research fills an important gap in the literature in providing empirical evidence of relationships and learning within multi-agency teams. However, as Ashwin (2009) observes, it is important for this evidence to converge with existing theoretical understandings in order to contribute to further theory development.

As it has been demonstrated, this research has refined and extended perceptions of situated learning beyond those conventional accounts that stress the regularity of practice and social cohesion. By contrast, it has examined learning within a context that, akin to many contemporary workplaces, is more typically associated with conflict and tension, difference and change. The mainstream literature has indicated how individuals experience and understanding will affect their connection to their



social context. This research has demonstrated how the evolving context and circumstances have created opportunities and demands that have required these professionals/practitioners to re-evaluate their actions reflexively, although within the constraints of their knowledgeability and the situation (see also Archer, 1996; Kakavelakis & Edwards, 2012). This offers clarification to the structure-agency debate that is under-examined by Lave and Wenger to suggest how the structures provided by policy both nationally and locally have created the rules and the resources that these professionals/practitioners draw upon in their actions. These both enable and constrain action. However, these actors, in continuously reflecting upon their actions, also inherently shape the structures and have, therefore, a defining role to play in enabling effective multi-agency working. It has been shown through this research, that it is their commitment to the cause that has been fundamental to engendering change rather than the structures themselves alone.

Therefore, whilst some might argue that the fast-paced change facing these Children's Services' professionals/practitioners might not be favourable for workplace learning, this research has demonstrated how opportunities provided for reflection-upon-practice has enabled them to challenge the assumptions of their practice, stimulating an expanded outlook and thereby the co-creation of new ways of thinking, 'doing' and 'being' (Gherardi, 2003, 2009b). However, for this expansive learning to develop requires an 'expansive' environment characterised by such attributes as cross-boundary communication and a valuing of all individuals' roles and responsibilities rather than polarisation and central control (Fuller et al., 2007).

Many studies on '*knowing*' have tended to overlook the importance of knowledge itself or have tended, as Lave and Wenger's work does, to conflate the two. This research has endeavoured to 'correct' this blurring by recognising the different components that contribute to the '*knowing*' experience: the importance of the formal, as well as the informal, curriculum; also the role that each of these takes in this.

The research has also offered a means to understanding how contrary to Lave and Wenger's centripetal process of 'legitimate peripheral participation' from novice to old-timer expert, expertise within these multi-agency communities is not held by old-timers. Instead, it has been shown that expertise within these multi-agency communities is a 'relational expertise' characterised by a 'knowing who', rather than a 'knowing what'. Significantly, such expertise is also seemingly developed, at least to some extent, by those individuals that do not explicitly embrace the multi-agency agenda through their practices.

Finally, this research has demonstrated how by assimilating other theorising from the post-structural and critical management studies domains, situated learning theory can be used effectively to understand learning in a new community-of-practice. Therefore, it can be concluded that this research has demonstrated how a coherent assimilation can be made by interweaving an examination of the expansive learning that occurs and the interplay between contextual affordances, relationships

and individuals' engagement, to enable Lave and Wenger's situated learning theory to be revitalised. This inherently extends understanding of workplace learning across professional boundaries. However, every situation will differ, according to the specific context and its enablers/constraints, also the distinctive individual contributions.

### ***8.3.3 Methodological contribution of the research***

In addition to these important empirical and theoretical contributions, the research has offered a contrasting methodological approach to examining multi-agency learning and practice. Whilst the limitations of the case-study approach are recognised, certainly in terms of the generalisability of the findings, the tool of photo-elicitation interviewing was invaluable in assisting the researcher, as an 'outsider', to better understand the participants' multi-agency worlds. The reasons for selecting this methodological approach were discussed in Chapter 3. Most importantly within the context of this research, this tool acted not only to prompt the participants to talk about the complex concepts under study and the complexities of their working lives, but also enabled the researcher to question and probe objects/emotions represented within the images. Where graphical illustrations of the context of multi-agency working itself were presented, this also gave the researcher opportunities to enquire further about the actual nature of the participants' work and the meanings that they derive from it that might have otherwise been missed. Perhaps significantly, in recognising the centrality of the research participant, a number of these professional/practitioner participants

commented on both how personally useful, as well as more interesting, the collection of images had been for participating in the research.

Therefore, the use of this, as yet, under-utilised tool of photo-elicitation interviewing has undoubtedly generated a far richer data than it is anticipated would have been secured through other traditional methods. This is especially the case given the nature of the specific context concerned, the researcher and the lack of access to undertake any form of observational work. The researcher appeals to others to follow this lead in adopting more innovative approaches to data generation in anticipation of generating more valuable and nuanced data than the traditional qualitative approaches offer.

#### **8.3.4 *Practical implications of the research***

Although the primary intention of this research was to understand the development of a multi-agency *knowing*, the findings do have practical implications. Recognition of these acknowledges the ethical concern that research should have value to the participants as well as the researcher. Attention is paid to two focal points of importance in this context.

As has been asserted throughout this research, the rapidly changing and complex twenty-first century workplace accentuates the need for continuous learning. Conventionally, and certainly within the public sector, learning has been considered

best assimilated through training and off-the-job education. However, this research has offered evidence to support the view that what is important in change is not this explicit 'standardised' knowledge that has been prioritised by policy-makers both nationally and locally, based upon the assumption that this will ensure action. To the contrary, this work has contributed evidence to support the significance of the interplay of knowledge and action: the importance of enabling learning through practice: a *knowing-in-practice*. Through a better understanding of the importance of this so change agendas have a greater likelihood of success.

Significantly, this research has also emphasised the importance of time, space and flexibility for such *knowing* to develop. Whilst it is recognised that public services are under pressure to learn and innovate rapidly to meet performance improvement targets (Nicolini et al., 2007; Hartley, 2008), space and time is critical to engendering effective multi-agency practice. This is particularly important in cases where there is a need to diminish the compulsion of top-down policy imposition, where there is an increased need to stimulate expansive learning within workplace settings. Expansive learning requires the learners to reflect upon the beliefs, attitudes and values that inform their practice. Therefore, there is a need to cultivate an environment, with ground level flexibility, wherein learning through practice is encouraged and opportunities provided for reflection upon this (Ellinger & Cseh, 2007). It is recognised that within this research, despite the constraints facing them, the Area Team Leaders are making efforts to engender such conditions and to foster the natural emergence of practice. However, it is only through senior management

supporting such actions that they will be able to effectively to face the challenges of future change.

This raises the second important research implication: recognition of having the 'right people' within, and leading, these teams. The participants spoke persuasively about the importance of 'individuals' in initiating the necessary relationships for engendering change. They also spoke of the importance of the ATLs for motivating and sustaining the new multi-agency community. The importance of securing these individuals in all positions within the team is therefore paramount if Wenger's (1998) three elements of mutual engagement are to be assured: the negotiation of a joint enterprise defined by the members; mutual accountability and the development of a shared repertoire. In attending to these three processes, so effective multi-agency working has a greater possibility of becoming reality.

However, two ongoing 'challenges' are again raised through this research. These require consideration and addressing, both locally and nationally, to secure the future of an effective multi-agency provision. A recurring theme within the data was of the ongoing barriers between these professionals/practitioners participating in this research and those in schools and healthcare settings. This is not only a local issue but has been reported previously elsewhere in larger-scale research projects (for example, Atkinson et al., 2002; Salmon, 2004; Abbott et al., 2005; Anning et al., 2006). Therefore, further supportive and shared working protocols are required both at a strategic and micro-level. How this is achieved lies beyond the capabilities

of this research but might position around the greater inclusion of both healthcare and school-based education professionals within these multi-agency teams rather than their current more peripheral role. As Salmon (2004) observes, “individuals need to view themselves as part of a team working on a mutual goal. .... Environmental and personal antecedents are a person’s readiness, confidence, understanding, role acceptance, ability to contribute to the process”. (p.159). At present, there was little evidence of this being secured in the case of these two broad professional groups, so this will, by definition, affect how they associate with it.

A further concern, and of growing importance in the future, is the issue of commissioning of services, which, in the case of young people is currently characterised by a lack of well-established arrangements (for example, Kirton et al., 2007; Ofsted, 2011; Gill et al., 2011). Yet as increasing number of services are subjected to commissioning, consideration must be made of the future of these existing multi-agency teams and the implications for integrating commissioned services with others. This needs addressing both at the local and national levels.

Finally, as has been clearly articulated through the research findings, the multi-agency context is evolving continuously and rapidly, shaped by both central and local influences. Therefore, there is a need for these professionals/practitioners to continually readdress their practice: continuously looking for alternatives and

improvements. Learning is ongoing and as they participate in the community, as they learn, so they change it (Wenger, 1998). This has implications for all concerned.

## **8.4 Critical evaluation of the adopted research methodology and methods**

The anticipated limitations of this research were examined at the outset in Chapter 2. However, other barriers were encountered during its undertaking. Whilst these potentially provide the basis for further research, their implications for the data generated and the conclusions drawn must be explicated. In what follows, consideration is made of the limitations both of the methodological approach itself and of the data collection method.

### ***8.4.1 Appropriateness of the methodological approach adopted***

Firstly, and perhaps most significantly, recognition must be made of both the small-scale nature of the inquiry; also the degree of researcher subjectivity both in selecting participants and in analysing and interpreting the data. However, as the research is underpinned by a largely interpretivist ontology which recognises that there are multiple realities there is no concern for generalisability of the findings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Instead, the strength of this research approach lies in recognising the detail that the inductive, qualitative case-study approach provides (Willig, 2008). This has supported the generation of a richness of data, eliciting findings of significance in terms of better understanding the meanings that these



professionals/practitioners attach to what it is to 'be multi-agency'. It has also enabled contrasts to be drawn with previous research findings. The documentation of the detailed analysis and interpretation of the findings has been appropriate to enabling the reader to decide for him/herself what does, and does not, have relevance for them. Therefore, this approach has enabled the development of a research strategy appropriate to the research aim.

#### **8.4.2 *Appropriateness of the methods employed***

Photo-elicitation interviewing was employed as the primary method of data generation. The value of this has been discussed in Chapter 3; also above in evaluating the methodological contribution of this work. Whilst this tool has considerable strengths in examining 'abstract' concepts, the problems encountered in practice and the inherent limitations of these are illustrated in Table 8.1. The method of participant selection also presents limitations. The research relied upon volunteer participants and therefore, the willingness of professionals to participate. Access was initially gained through the Area Team Leaders. It is not known to what extent they were biased in their recommendations. This selection approach means that the stories and experiences gathered may differ significantly to those of other professionals/practitioners within these multi-agency teams.

Problem encountered in application	Response made by researcher	Limitation of the response
Being an outsider researcher	Familiarising self with context as far as possible, and from a number of different perspectives (including service users, managers, practitioners) prior to data generation.  Empowering the participants to lead the PE-interviews as far as possible, thereby gaining as great an insider insight as possible	Researcher may still have missed important signs, symbols and messages within the data generated.
Limited number of participants that could be recruited due to the time constraints upon these professionals'/practitioners' time (and indeed, the researchers' time)	Gaining as large and broad a sample of participants as was possible ( <i>links also to following 'problem' identified below</i> ).  Recognition of the research as 'exploratory' in nature (Robson, 2002)	Important 'stories' may have been missed that may have modified the overall picture achieved.
Omission of some professional/practitioner groups from the research due to the breadth of membership of the multi-agency teams and the predominance of access to Social Care professionals /practitioners	Gaining as broad a sample of participants as was possible	<i>As above</i>
Researcher's inexperience of the photo-elicitation method	Development of an <i>aide memoir</i> to guide interview questioning if/as necessary	Researcher may have missed important nuances that a more experienced and/or insider researcher, would not have
Unable to establish data saturation, as a more positivist qualitative researcher might seek, due to the dynamic and fluid research context	Took pragmatic approach advised by Miles & Huberman (1994) of adapting tools to fit the research purpose.  Recognition of the compromise. Findings may act as a starting point for future research	Stories/views /perceptions may have been omitted
'Socially desirable' responses (Dillman, 2000), especially given the locally 'political' nature of the research in the current economic situation	Awareness of such responses the researcher made efforts to ask further questions later in the interview to confirm or refute these	Data contamination (Saunders et al., 2012, p.359)
Use of ATLs as the main point of contact with the participants	The ATLs may have been selective in who they suggested would be available to participate, thereby influencing the 'stories' told	Data contamination (Saunders et al., 2012, p.359)
Presence of ATLs within a number of the focus groups	The participants may have been more reserved about what they spoke about ( <i>relates to 'social desirability of responses, above</i> )	Incomplete 'picture' and data contamination (Saunders et al., 2012, p.359)

**Table 8.1:** Limitations of the methods, as identified during the course of the research

Additionally participant selection relied upon professionals'/practitioners' readiness to engage in truthful discussions. However, they may have made intentional efforts to portray their experiences and understanding in a particular fashion rather than that which perhaps better reflected reality. This may have been especially problematic in the case of the group interviews where power dynamics might have limited what participants were prepared to divulge and how they did this. This gap between what is said and actions/thoughts is an important limitation of this research. In acknowledging this, the researcher stresses that the research reports these professionals'/practitioners' perceptions at this one point in time, *not* empirical truths.

Finally, with this being a growth area of research it is possible that despite a rigorous and systematic review of the literature in this field being undertaken over a three-year period, that further relevant texts and/or resources have been missed. Furthermore, literature in very recent publication would, undoubtedly, have provided further insights not examined by the researcher. However, limits had to be drawn both temporally and spatially and the limitations of this are acknowledged.

Despite these limitations it is asserted that this is a valuable piece of research, with this 'emerging' study contributing to the understanding of this growing field of study and offering fertile areas for future research.

## 8.5 Implications and opportunities for future research

As W.G. Auden (1965), in quoting Valery, observed, "*A poem is never finished; it is only abandoned*". Confirming his thoughts, the researcher considers that '*this thesis is not finished, it is only submitted*'. As with any research, through the research process so further questions have been raised that may warrant further examination. Consideration of these is now made.

In light of the limitations noted in Table 8.1, future research should focus upon trying to achieve a more 'neutral' perspective of these professionals' lives. A comparative case-study would also diminish the effects of the local 'politics' influencing the case-study authority at the time of the research. Moreover, a longitudinal study involving a wider range of core and non-core professionals might be particularly revelatory of the realities of these professionals' workplace learning. This is especially significant in light of the very different stories told by the four education-related participants: the Education Social Worker and Education Psychologists. Participants falling within the broad realm of Social Care dominated this research. Further examination of these other groups is essential.

As was noted previously (Chapter 8.2), in light of the limitations of the situated learning lens for examining power relations within communities-of-practice, further analysis of the data might be made to consider the power relations at play within these multi-agency teams. This might, for example, draw upon Foucaultian

conceptualisations of power, which recognise power as being fashioned bottom-up, to support Lave and Wenger's theory in explicating these phenomena.

Photo-elicitation has offered an invaluable tool for gaining a far deep insight into these professionals'/practitioners' lives; however, it too fails to offer a naturalistic view of these professionals' actions and relations. This requires a more explicit observational approach to be employed, thereby eliminating the potential gap between what is said and what is done.

An examination should also be made of the benefits of this co-created *knowing*. Has it resulted in improved performance and service-delivery from the perspective of the service users and/or the local authority?

Finally, whilst the qualitative approach taken has offered an exploratory view, in moving to the quantitative paradigm so a cross-sectional survey might be developed to test and isolate the variables influencing these professionals'/practitioners' learning (Cian, 2011). This might, for example, include the use of Q-methodology which would offer a means of validating the 'groupings' identified within this work (see for example, Watts & Stenner, 2012).

## **8.6 Personal reflections upon the research and the research process**

From a personal perspective this research has offered the researcher many opportunities. It has enabled her to explore a 'live' problem that has challenged policy and practice at both a local and national level, within its complex and rapidly evolving context. It has also provided the researcher with experience of a new research paradigm, offering her insights into the use of a much under-used, yet highly valuable, research tool, that of photo-elicitation interviewing. Her previous research experience has been predominantly quantitative and deductive in nature.

However, this thesis does not only formally present 'content', with the research portrayed as a linear process. This fails to encapsulate the realities of the highly iterative process that was undertaken as the researcher was required to reconsider previously accepted aspects of the research in light of later stages, notably following her engagement with the empirical data. In keeping with the methodological stance of this research, the researcher offers Figure 8.1 to encapsulate the 'journey' of reflection she has undertaken during the course of this research.



**Figure 8.1:** Researcher provided image

The different elements of the photo depict many different aspects of this period. Offering the 'rite of passage', the trees illustrate the superlative forces of strength of will, endurance, energy and inspiration that the researcher needed to exhibit in undertaking the research whilst working full-time and, at the outset, in a new academic role. Simultaneously, the trees' roots are drawing up nutrients, the wisdom, knowledge and understanding of academics, professionals and practitioners which she drew upon in order to establish a solid base for this work. In the foreground, the ivy offers illustration of the commitment both to self and to others, notably the participants, to complete a worthwhile piece of work. The walkers in the photo represent the friends, colleagues and other researchers that have guided her in this process. Finally, with the photo having been taken during a recent 100-mile run/walk that the researcher undertook, the image reminds her of Armitage's (2013)

observations that “to embark on the walk is to surrender to its lore and submit to its logic and to take up the challenge against the self” (p.278). This epitomises the undertaking of this thesis. It cannot be doubted that this opportunity has been very worthwhile for the researcher, providing her with a substantial learning process both in terms of the subject matter but also in terms of better understanding the ‘role of the researcher’.

## **8.7 Chapter summary**

As identified at the outset of this thesis, this research aimed to make a contribution to the growing corpus of literature on learning across professional boundaries. It sought to do this through a specific examination of the learning of professionals within the multi-agency teams comprising a local authority’s Children’s Services department.

This chapter has drawn together the research findings and the conceptual framework, as offered in the preceding chapters, to draw conclusions about the three research questions conveyed to support the research aim. These have suggested that there is evidence of these case-study professionals/practitioners having a more positive view of multi-agency working than much previous research has suggested. Despite recognising that there are some, sometimes problematic, differences between them, they report the development of trust between them that is allowing them to participate in a productive form of learning. In consequence, a new *knowing*, sustained by supporting ‘identity-work’ has developed, or at least is



developing, between them. Significantly, the participants recognise the importance not only of imposed structures, but also of both individuals and relationships in determining the effectiveness of this.

The chapter then progressed to critically evaluate the research methodology and methods adopted, to consider the limitations of this research and to identify areas for future research. Finally, a short personal reflection on this 'research journey' has been offered.

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# Appendices

## **Appendix 1a: Example email sent to the Area Teams requesting participation**

Dear XXX

I am currently undertaking research for my PhD through Lancaster University. This proposes to examine your understanding of working within a multi-agency team and the meaning that you drawn from this.

***The research has the approval of the XXX Research Governance and Ethics Approval Panel.***

I am intending to interview approximately 20 professionals from across the XXXX Children's and Young People's department Area Teams. These interviews will be of maximum 1-hour duration.

In this research I am using a form of interviewing called photo-informed interviewing. This would involve you collecting 5-8 photos or images (such as clip art or magazine images) in advance of an interview. These photos or images that you provide should respond to the following three broad questions that we will discuss during the interview, namely:

1. 'what does multi-agency working mean to you?';
2. 'what does being a multi-agency professional/worker mean to you?';
3. '[how] have you become the multi-agency professional that you are today?'.

The photos or images that you provide might illustrate your working life, your role and relationships within your team. However, you may choose to present other, more abstract, images. These photos/images will be used during the interview to help me better understand your practices and role within the Children and Young People's department / Area Teams.

***All photograph/image and interview data will be kept confidential and stored anonymously. It is not intended that these photos should contain identifiable, named individuals. However where individuals are included, they will be fully anonymised in any future reporting of the images. I have attached a copy of the 'research information sheet' that offers further information about this research, also some simple guidelines for undertaking 'responsible photography'.***

***If you and/or other members of your team are able to help me with this, please would you contact me at XXXX as soon as possible. I would be able to undertake these interviews at your convenience, at a location and time of your choice.***

If you have any questions relating to this research, please do not hesitate to contact me.

I look forward to hearing from you and thank you in advance for your support with this research.

Regards

Kate

## **Appendix 1b: Participant information Sheet**

### *Creating new knowing: The case of multi-professional working within Children and Young People's Services in England*

Thank you for expressing an interest in participating in this research. Before you decide whether to go ahead, please take time to read the following information carefully. If there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information, please do contact me directly, via email or via telephone. My contact details are listed at the end of this information sheet.

#### **The purpose and aims of the research study**

The purpose of this research is to examine context-specific understandings of the working-lives of professionals/practitioners working in multi-agency teams.

Whilst previous research has considered *how* Children and Young People's workforce professionals/practitioners might work and learn together, to date, little/no consideration has been made of *what* this learning actually *is*. Therefore, this research intends to examine the professional learning created in the implementation of the "Every Child Matters" integrated working agenda.

It is anticipated that this will offer better understanding of how these working configurations might be created and developed at the local level. Therefore, the findings are anticipated to have practitioner value and significance, whether as a manager or professional, in the interpretation of the integrated working policy into practice at the local level within the local authority CYPS.

#### **What will happen?**

In this study you will be asked to undertake two key tasks. This involvement consists of you generating or collecting 5-8 images/photographs or images that respond to the following three key prompt questions, namely:

1. *'what does multi-agency working mean to you?'*;
2. *'what does being a multi-agency professional/worker mean to you?'*;
3. *'[how] have you become the multi-agency professional that you are today?'*.

These photographs/ images may illustrate your working life, your role, and workplace relationships, although you may also choose to present other, more abstract, images.

I shall use these within the interview to inform the interview discussions (max 60mins duration).

The interviews will be recorded to enable their transcription for subsequent analysis.

*Wherever possible, you should avoid including identifiable, named individuals. However where individuals are included in these, they will be anonymised in any future reporting of the images. Please also read the "responsible photography guidelines" provided.*

### **What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

You may find that taking part in the study allows you to better reflect upon your role and the relationships within it, thus enabling you to gain better understanding of your practice and the challenges that face you in your role within Children and Young People's Services.

### **What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?**

It is not anticipated that any aspect of the research will present an adverse effect or risk to you as a participant. You may be unsure of what you should include in your photos/images, however you will be given guidance on this and may ask me for guidance at any time. You may be minimally inconvenienced through the time required to participate in the research, however I anticipate that through your participation, you will gain better understanding of your practice and the challenges that face you in your role within Children and Young People's Services.

### **What will happen to the results of the research study?**

The photographs/images will be used during the interview to help me better understand your practices and role within the Children and Young People's department.

This data is being collected as the basis of my PhD studies at Lancaster University and will be submitted as a thesis (preliminary submission date: December 2013). I may also subsequently present the data at conferences and / or in research articles. All data reported will be pooled and anonymous. Although anonymous quotes may be used in dissemination, you will not be identifiable as an individual.

Additionally the findings will be disseminated through a technical summary provided to XXXX Council. A non-technical summary will also be made available to all participants at the end of the study.

All data will be used and stored anonymously and in accordance with the DPA 1998. All e-data will be encrypted.

### **How will I ensure anonymity?**

All photograph/image and interview data will be stored using just a participant code rather than your name or the team within which you are based.

### **Your rights**

Your participation is entirely voluntary. You can withdraw from the study at this point, or at any time after you have started, without giving a reason. You are free to decline to give answers to any questions or requests for information. I shall respect your decisions at all times.

To request the withdrawal of your data you should contact me via email or by letter. Alternatively you may contact my supervisor, Professor XXXX, at Lancaster University, via email at XXXX@lancaster.ac.uk

Your data will be kept confidential and will be used only in connection with the research. Any notes will be entirely private unless you make the decision to share

information with us. Your decision to take part or not to take part, your data, your opinions, any decisions to withdraw from the study or withdraw your data from the study will have no impact whatsoever on your professional role or standing.

**People on the project and project funding**

This research is managed by Kate Black, PhD student at Lancaster University and Lecturer in the XXXX at the University of XXXX.

The project is receiving no internal or external funding

**What if I have any concerns over this research?**

If you should have any concerns at all about this research you should contact me directly. If you have any issues regarding the conduct of the research you should contact my Supervisor, Professor XXXX via email at XXXX@lancaster.ac.uk. Alternatively you may contact XXXX in the Children and Young People’s Department at XXXX Council by email at XXXX@XXXX.gov.uk or by phone at XXXX

**My contact details:**

Email: k.black@chester.ac.uk  
Mobile: XXXX Phone (direct line): XXXX  
Address: Kate Black, XXXX

***Please keep this participant information sheet so you have access to the information, in case you need it. However, should you lose it, please feel free to ask me for a replacement copy.***

# Participants' Consent Form

**Title of project:** *Building new knowing: The case of multi-professional working within Children and Young People's Services in England*

**Name of researcher:** *Kate Black*

Please initial the boxes that apply and then please sign below. You are free to withhold consent for selected items, if you wish. Your consent form will be stored separately from your data, which will be stored fully anonymously.

☐

I confirm that I have read the participant information sheet, have understood its contents and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

☐

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason and without my legal rights being affected.

☐

I understand that the interviews will be recorded.

☐

I agree to take part in the above study.

☐

I understand that if during any interviews anything is disclosed that might put a child, young person or adult at risk of serious harm, I shall make contact with the Children and Young People's department at XXXX Council

_____ Name of Participant	_____ Date	_____ Signature
_____ Name of Person taking consent (if different from researcher)	_____ Date	_____ Signature
_____ Researcher	_____ Date	_____ Signature

## **Appendix 2: Example of brief given to research participants taking photographs**

Source: Vince, R. & Warren, S. (2012). Participatory Visual Methods. In C. Cassell & G. Symon (Eds.) *The Practice of Qualitative Organizational Research: Core Methods and Current Challenges*. London: Sage.

### **Responsible photography**

Taking pictures can be a personal thing. Please ask any people who are the subjects of your photographs for permission to show them to us (either before or after you take the picture).

You might also need to take care not to photograph anything that invades another person's privacy or contravenes your organisations' confidentiality policy (for example, visible contents of documents or computer screens).

You will be given full opportunity to have any of the pictures that we discuss deleted and I will ask you for permission, during our 'interview' meeting, to use each individual picture in any dissemination of the research, so you will remain in full control at every stage.

I hope you will enjoy taking part in the research and look forward to seeing the pictures/images that you provide.

Once again, I'd like to thank you for agreeing to help me with this important study, if you have any questions at all about the research at any stage, please do not hesitate to contact me at XXX

Kind regards

Kate Black

**Appendix 3: Examples of images and photographs provided by the participants**

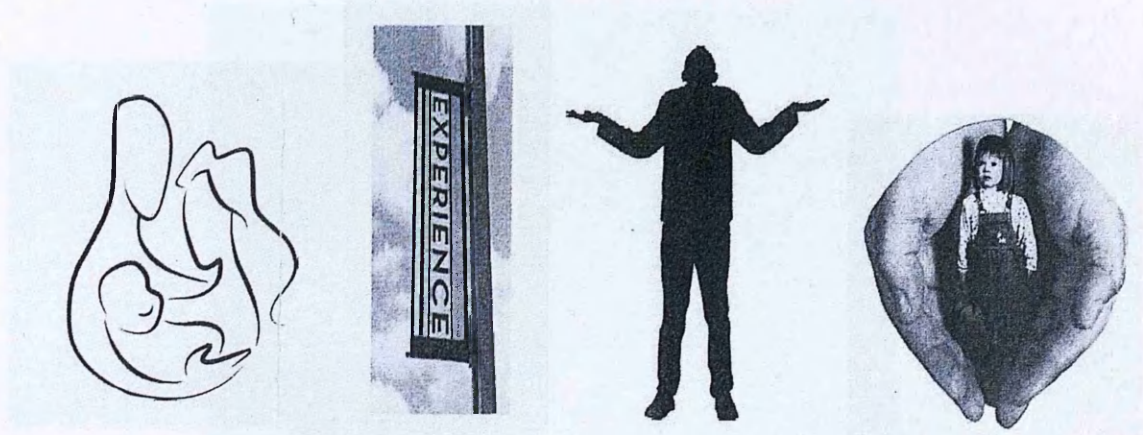
*(excludes images presented within the body of the thesis and those with explicit details of the local authority case-study itself)*

**Example images presented by participants of the ‘Outreach’ grouping**





Example images presented by participants of the 'social care' grouping

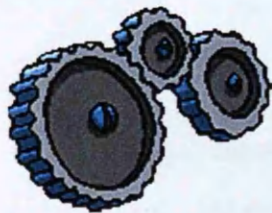




Example images presented by the Education Social worker participant



Example image presented by participants of the 'Education psychology' grouping



Example images presented by participants of the 'Youth Crime' grouping



## **Appendix 4: Initial Interview question guide sheet**

### ***Pre-interview***

- *PIS/consent form signed*
- *Name; role; how fit into the multi-agency team format*

### ***Select photo to discuss***

- *Why take/provide this image?*
- *What meaning or significance does it hold for you?*
- *What is depicted within it?*

### ***Focus:***

- *Feelings*
- *Experiences*
- *Beliefs*
- *Convictions*

### ***What does multi-agency working mean to you? (how do you understand multi-agency working?)***

#### ***ie. What are your perspectives and feelings about multi-agency working?***

- *Share your reflections*
  - *describe the experience*
1. What does multi-agency working mean to you in
    - a. in theory?
    - b. in practice? (how do you understand multi-agency working?)
  2. Do you consider that there are any boundaries between the different groups? (horizontal / vertical boundaries)
    - a. Do you feel that all professionals have an equal role in these multi-agency teams? (inequalities, tensions, divisions of labour, strength of professional classifications)
  3. Do you think that multi-agency working is effective?
    - a. Evidence of this?
    - b. Constraining/inhibiting structures/factors?
    - c. Facilitating structures/factors? (ie. processes)
  4. For you, what are the advantages of working as a member of a multi-agency team?
  5. How do you think that effective working between the professionals has been brought about? (if it has?)

***What does being a multi-agency professional mean to you?***

***ie. What are your perspectives and feelings about being a multi-agency professional?***

- ***How do you feel about being a multi-agency professional?***
  - ***Share your reflections***
6. How would you describe yourself as a multi-agency professional/practitioner?
    - a. (How) has this changed since 2003?
    - b. How has this been learnt, nurtured, reinforced?
  7. What influence do you have in shaping the policy rhetoric at a local level? (Professional freedom?)
  8. The CAF has been designed to “produce a shared language across agencies” (CWDC, 2007 Integrated working factsheet)  
Do you think that it has been successful in this?
    - a. Can you give some examples of this: why and how? - EVIDENCE  
Can you give some examples of this?
    - b. What has helped in this?
  9. How do you feel about these multi-agency working arrangements?

***How have you become the multi-agency professional that you are today?***

10. How do you see yourself in your role today?
  - a. (How) has this changed since 2003?
11. How do other professionals see you in your role?
  - a. (How) has this changed since 2003?
12. How do senior managers see you in your role?
  - a. (How) has this changed over the past 9 years since 2003?
13. What structures are in place to facilitate the development of effective multi-agency teams?
  - a. Do you think that these are effective? – EVIDENCE?