

Institution: University of Brighton		
Unit of Assessment: C20 Social Work and Social Policy		
Title of case study: Developing 'Communities of Practice' to build resilience in children and young people and embed value-creation in social learning spaces		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2007 – 2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Kay Aranda	Reader	1999 – to date
Josh Cameron	Principal Lecturer	2002 – to date
Suna Eryigit-Madzwamuse	Senior Research Fellow	2010 – to date
Angie Hart	Professor of Child, Family and Community Health	1998 – to date
Becky Heaver	Research Officer	2010 – to date
Etienne Wenger-Trayner	Professorial Fellow	2016 – to date
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2013 – 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact		
<p>University of Brighton (UoB) research on 'Communities of Practice' has produced systemic changes across social and education services, strengthening resilience for children and young people and embedding value-creation in social learning spaces. The research underpinned the strategic direction and planning of the National Lottery-funded <i>Headstart</i> programme, with GBP75,000,000 invested into 6 new partnerships. As a result: i) the Wolverhampton partnership established a Youth Engagement Strategy placing young voices at the heart of decision-making affecting 13,000 children and young people; ii) the Blackpool partnership, the <i>Resilience Revolution</i>, has invested GBP11,000,000 in a town-wide programme that has created 40 new jobs, and provided resilience training for over 3,000 practitioners from 150 organisations. Value-creation is integrated into the Blackpool partnership and applied to improve inclusion and outreach in Autism Education (UK), Community Fellows (USA) and sports coaching practices (UK/Canada).</p>		
2. Underpinning research		
<p>UoB researchers have created new knowledge and built expertise in delivering social change using the Communities of Practice (CoP) approach (Wenger 1998). Upon joining UoB in 2016, Etienne Wenger-Trayner enabled closer, mutually beneficial, interplay between two well-established strands of research: CoP research under development by Wenger-Trayner since the 1990s and Resilient Therapy (RT) research led by Professor Angie Hart. CoP research had been evolving at UoB from 2007 in Hart's early development of RT, a therapeutic methodology designed specifically for children and young people (C/YP) suffering persistent disadvantage [reference 3.1]. In 2010, UoB researchers received ESRC funding to set up, with community partners, a social enterprise <i>Boingboing</i>, which was used to build on the research, proposing a set of principles, or 'resilient moves', to guide the ways in which resilience could be built with, by and for disadvantaged C/YP. Between 2008 and 2013, RT was applied in different settings where research into RT effectiveness revealed that CoP approaches helped bring changes, not only in C/YP themselves, but also in the wider support systems including families, schools and public sector services [3.2].</p> <p>In 2013 Hart and colleagues collaborated directly with Wenger-Trayner who was then working as an independent researcher, theorist and adviser and had developed a first version of the Value Creation Framework (VCF). The VCF allows practitioners cultivating and assessing CoPs to focus on the value creation arising from by social learning spaces for members and stakeholders. This collaboration with UoB produced research on the major challenges of using a CoP approach for the co-production of knowledge, addressing issues related to power, participation and boundary working, particularly as they emerge in community-university partnerships [3.3]. The development of these practice-focussed CoP approaches became a foundation for joint research programme between Wenger-Trayner, Hart and UoB colleagues, as well as for the practical interventions that enabled the impacts from the partnership-based research programmes.</p>		

The practice-focused approach to CoPs was tested empirically and systematically in the 'Social Context' work package of the ESRC funded GBP3,000,000 *Imagine* Programme [3.8]. This research confirmed that complex, 'whole system' scale RT interventions, involving several interacting actions such as workforce training, targeted individual support, and system change, can result in deep outcomes. These increase individual protective resilience mechanisms and reduce systemic risk factors associated with social inequalities, confirming some of the findings in the earlier research [3.5, 3.8]. Hart and colleagues led a series of action research activities working with a range of at-risk groups in multiple adverse contexts, including C/YP with learning difficulties, C/YP in institutionalized care, C/YP with child neglect history, C/YP with mental health problems, parents experiencing social disadvantage, and practitioners, including those with their own lived experience of mental health issues. The research demonstrated how people from very different backgrounds bring about better and more resilient collective futures [3.4].

On joining UoB in 2016, Wenger-Trayner continued to collaborate with Hart and colleagues in ways that strengthened both strands of CoP research. The VCF was used in the *Imagine* Programme as a participatory mixed-method evaluation approach, supporting the generation of both formative as well as summative assessments and embedding continuous social learning that enhanced the value of the interventions. Using the VCF in the *Imagine* Programme provided a shared language for negotiating actions, overcoming epistemic tensions in mixed methodology research. It acted as a bridge across 'boundaries of practice' to bring together multiple data streams including quantitative data and a qualitative format called 'value-creation stories' [3.6]. The empirical evidence from the *Imagine* Programme, together with evidence from other projects, was utilised to extend and refine the theoretical basis and practical application of the VCF, culminating in a new iteration of the VCF set out in Wenger-Trayner's co-authored monograph [3.7]. Since 2018, the VCF has been used systematically in Blackpool's National Lottery-funded 'Resilience Revolution' alongside practice-based CoPs and RT initiatives, as part of its 'test and learn' programme that is working in new ways to support C/YP mental health and wellbeing across the whole town.

3. References to the research

[3.1] Hart, A., Blincoe, D. with Thomas H. 2007 *Resilient Therapy: Working with Children and Families*. Routledge: London. [Quality validation: a monograph that has received recognition among practitioners as well as the academic community].

[3.2] Aranda, K & Hart, A 2014, 'Resilient moves: tinkering with practice theory to generate new ways of thinking about using resilience', *Health: An Interdisciplinary Journal for the Social Study of Health, Illness and Medicine*, vol. 19, no. 4, pp. 355-371. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1363459314554318> [Quality validation: output in a leading journal].

[3.3] Hart, A., Davies, C., Aumann, K., Wenger, E., Aranda, K., Heaver, B. and Wolff, D. (2013). 'Mobilising knowledge in community–university partnerships: what does a community of practice approach contribute?' *Contemporary Social Science* 8 (3) 278-291. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21582041.2013.767470> [Quality validation: output in a leading journal].

[3.4] S. Banks, A. Hart, K. Pahl, & P. Ward (Eds.), *Co-producing Research: A Community Development Approach* (Connected Communities). Policy Press. [Quality validation: peer-reviewed edited collection].

[3.5] Hart, A, Gagnon, E, Eryigit-Madzwamuse, S, Cameron, J, Aranda, K, Rathbone, A & Heaver, B., 2016. Uniting resilience research and practice with an inequalities approach, *SAGE Open*, vol. 6, no. 4, pp. 1-15. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244016682477> [Quality validation: output in a leading journal].

[3.6] Wenger-Trayner, B., Wenger-Trayner, E., Cameron, J., Eryigit-Madzwamuse, S., Hart, (2017) 'Boundaries and boundary objects: an evaluation framework for mixed methods research.' *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, published online 26 Sep 2017, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1558689817732225>. [Quality validation: output in a leading journal].

[3.7] Wenger-Trayner, E., Wenger-Trayner, B., (2020). *Learning to make a difference: value creation in social learning spaces*. Cambridge University Press. [Quality validation: a publication that has received widespread recognition for its development of the practice].

Key research grants

[3.8] Pahl [PI], ESRC *Imagine* Programme, 2013-2017. The social, historical, cultural

and democratic context of civic engagement: imagining different communities and making them happen. Total funding: GBP1,821,637 UoB funding: GBP395,911.

[3.9] Suna Eryigit-Madzwamuse [PI], Blackpool Council, 2018, Evaluation of HeadStart Programme, Total funding: GBP505,292.

4. Details of the impact

Redesigning whole-systems interventions for children and young people's services

UoB research on the role of CoPs in RT practice has contributed directly to the design and delivery of the UK-wide National Lottery *HeadStart* Programme, the largest funder of community activity in the UK [Source 5.1]. Established to drive system change and build resilience to prevent serious mental health issues for C/YP, Hart's advisory role in the programme was '*instrumental*' in bringing '*rigour through the design process*' [5.1].

HeadStart is one of five long-term strategic investments in England (GBP75,000,000) to tackle some of society's most entrenched social problems. UoB research ensured the inclusion of CoP principles, the need for a shared language of resilience, and a whole system approach, with Hart playing a key role in developing '*the strategy that initiated this national programme*' [5.1, 5.2]. Hart went on to steer the development of bids across all areas and, following pilots in 2014 - 2016, *HeadStart* funded 6 CoP partnerships in Blackpool, Cornwall, Hull, Kent, Newham and Wolverhampton, each with approximately GBP10,000,000 funding and all based on an '*ecological systems approach to resilience with co-productive practice*' [5.2]. In the Wolverhampton partnership a co-production toolkit for developing resilient mental health services has been rolled out to all *HeadStart* schools. The city's Youth Engagement Strategy (#YES) now includes co-production as one of three core themes and puts '*young people at the heart of the strategy [...] to drive forward the strategy's ambitions*' [5.3]. Over 13,000 children have been supported with a new youth engagement team and a further GBP2,000,000 in funding to develop the opportunities [5.3]. Hart continued to provide leadership and guide the programme via national workshops and strategic support to key National Lottery staff. The CoP approach has continued to be '*a key intervention of the national learning team*' [5.1, 5.2].

Implementing a whole-systems approach to deliver improved resilience and wellbeing

The *HeadStart* partnership at Blackpool comprises the first-ever implementation and evaluation of RT on a whole-town scale. In its GBP11,000,000 town-wide *Resilience Revolution (RR)* led by Blackpool Council (2016-2022) it has created 40 jobs to action the fund's priorities [5.4]. In 2015 a new Council Plan was published, heralded as a 'decisive break' from the past ethos. The plan now adopts two main Council priorities: i) growing the economy and ii) strengthening communities by increasing resilience [5.2, 5.5, 5.6]. The focus of the refreshed plan is early intervention, empowering communities and individuals and reducing demand [5.5]. Blackpool is the most deprived local authority area in England with 30% of C/YP living in poverty and three times the national average admitted to hospital for self-harm. The *RR* adopts a whole town approach to address the mental health needs of C/YP by utilising the RT approach with CoPs working across education, health, social care, leisure, culture and community settings. The *RR* has embedded UoB research to develop a shared resilience language, integrate training and workforce development, and provide opportunities for C/YP to engage in decision making [5.4]. The RT approach is '*galvanizing a community-based development approach [...] rather than simply implementing a series of health and social care interventions*' [5.4].

Blackpool Council reprioritized GBP5,000,000 for Children's Services from its overall budget and, between 2016 and 2020, 3,121 practitioners across 150 organisations participated in RT training based on the UoB research. The Young People's Executive Group (YPEG) engages C/YP in shaping *HeadStart* projects and initiatives. The co-production approach has given a voice to C/YP who have led wider interventions including presentations to the Blackpool safeguarding board and Clinical Commissioning Group [5.1, 5.6]. Participants have reported greater confidence, better opportunities and an improved home environment. This adds a cumulative value to the heart of the whole system scheme: '*At its core, our grassroots social movement represents the transformational aspirations of a town that is full of pride, empowerment and innovation*' [5.1]. The *RR* also delivers wider support by connecting services, eg for C/YP and families requiring support relating to self-harm. Since

the project started, 117 people have received eight-weeks of support for self-harm and 82% of those have not re-presented with self-harming thoughts or injuries [5.4].

Blackpool's *RR* published a Manifesto for community development and, to date, 18 organisations have confirmed their commitment to work with RT principles. For example, an after-school Resilient Stories Programme, funded through the Ragdoll Foundation with a follow-on pilot funded by Esmee Fairbairn (GBP200,000) is reaching 350 young people who would not otherwise have access to this provision. The Blackpool *RR* pilot is continuously evaluated using Wenger-Trayner's VCF. By illuminating mechanisms of change, the VCF has enabled the team to provide plausible explanations for the delivery of impact outcomes as well as to refine and enhance practice on an ongoing basis [5.7]. Blackpool's Director of Children's Services has confirmed that the VCF continues to play a key role in the impact of the Blackpool *RR*. The VCF operates as a tool that helps the programme achieve the 'realised value' of improved outcomes on school exclusions, emotional and behavioural difficulties and self-harm. It helps identify the value that different stakeholders bring, not privileging one type of expertise over another. This contributes to the whole system delivery and ongoing social learning of the programme. As an iterative form of evaluation, '*it identifies the creation of value as it is being done*', helping to '*direct our work as we go along*'. [5.7]

All 44 Blackpool schools have implemented a school-based approach to Hart's RT with 390 pupils across Blackpool actively engaged in decision-making as members of Pupil Resilient Committees and 16,079 children supported in some form [5.4]. *RR* interventions targeting pupils in transition to secondary school have reached 3,134 C/YP across 25 primary schools (every primary school in Blackpool), through Lancashire Mind's Bounce Forward programme [5.8]. The evaluation identified important gender factors related to socio-emotional development in boys and self-esteem in girls and evidence that the *RR* interventions are effectively addressing them [5.8]. In addition, a tailored 2-year programme of one-to-one support was created for C/YP in the care of the local authority who were identified at risk of school exclusion. Between 2016 - 2019 this programme supported 30 at risk C/YP to remain in school increasing their attendance on average by 5.3% [5.4]. Students' perception of their wellbeing significantly improved after school-based interventions. Across a survey of over 2000 C/YP, 55% reported increased wellbeing, mental health and resilience with 12% improvement on average. Across those with lowest resilience scores initially, there was an observed increase in attendance, of an average 7.6 additional days. Exclusion rates dropped from 21 fixed-term exclusions to 6 fixed-term exclusions [5.4].

This approach has also delivered meaningful change beyond Blackpool through an application of RT devised specifically for schools, co-produced by Hart and UoB Community Fellow Lisa Williams. This was adopted by YoungMinds, the UK's leading charity committed to improving wellbeing and mental health of C/YP and now provides the basis for all of their school improvement work. Over 300 individual schools across the UK have received training or facilitation support from *Boingboing* or YoungMinds in the last five years [5.9]. The CoP approach has contributed directly to systemic change across city education services with the Liverpool Child and Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and the Merseyside Youth Association using the key principles to underpin new training programmes to cascade resilience support within schools in Liverpool [5.10, 5.11]. In Durham, the County Council employed a team of 5 facilitators to implement the school RT model in all 35 schools through public health funding. School leaders reported that the CoP approach has built schools' capacity to make sustainable changes including reduced workload, improved communication and connection, creating the foundation for a new strengths-focused and inclusive approach [5.12].

Utilising the VCF in Higher Education interventions

Since 2016 the expanded VCF has been adopted across a range of practices and spaces in the UK and North America. The Autism Centre for Education and Research at the University of Birmingham adopted the VCF's participative social learning approach, working with a transnational CoP from the UK, Greece, Italy, Dubai and Malaysia to make the classroom more inclusive. The VCF was key to demonstrating the impact of the programme [5.13]. The Centre for Community Learning at Western Washington University (WWU) adopted the VCF to assess their Community Engagement Fellows programme, the University's primary community outreach and development initiative. The VCF was used to articulate the value of

the program to stakeholders and secure support by the university's administration and community organizations. WWU is now creating a network of HE institutions interested in using the community learning approach and have built the use of the VCF into their Learning Together Training Series [5.14]. The University of Ottawa used the VCF in studies of parasports coaching - for example, to evaluate an intervention to increase learning capabilities of the Wheelchair Curling (WC) coaching landscape. Drawing on the two strands of UoB research, these studies identify the gaps in disability sport coaching, and highlight next steps in framing a social learning space [5.15]. This approach is now spreading into sporting federations worldwide – for example, UK Coaching '*deploy the VCF as a tool for planning, delivering and evaluating our work on an ongoing basis*'. Used initially in the Coach Developer programme, the social learning has supported applications by participants in their own settings and has helped the UK Coaching organisation evolve or 'mould' Coach Developer support across both current and future programmes [5.16].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

[5.1] HeadStart – Strategic investments in England:

<https://www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/funding/strategic-investments/headstart> [Accessed 18th January 2021]. Supported by a testimonial from the former England Deputy Director at the National Lottery Community Fund on the strategic role Hart played in its design and delivery.

[5.2] Testimonial from the HeadStart Programme Lead that confirms Hart's Strategic role across the whole programme as well as outcomes within the Blackpool partnership.

Supported by a video on the Blackpool activities:

<https://www.facebook.com/HSBlackpool/videos/437697023348349/> [Accessed 18/1/2021].

[5.3] Impact of Wolverhampton Headstart funding and strategies:

<https://www.wolverhampton.gov.uk/news/headstart-legacy-says-yes-childrens-emotional-wellbeing> <http://www.youthengagementstrategy.co.uk/being-you.html> [Accessed 18/1/2021].

[5.4] HeadStart Blackpool annual reports 2018-2019; 2019-2020. PDFs available. Supported by an ESRC report on the outcomes: [Collaborative research transforming communities - Economic and Social Research Council \(ukri.org\)](https://www.ukri.org/research/collaborative-research-transforming-communities-economic-and-social-research-council) [Accessed 18/1/2021]

[5.5] Council Plan 2015-2020 [Report Template \(blackpool.gov.uk\)](https://www.blackpool.gov.uk/council-plan-2015-2020-report-template) [Accessed 18/1/2021]

[5.6] Headstart Blackpool Phase 3 bid:

[1.headstart-blackpool-phase-3-bid-final.pdf \(brighton.ac.uk\)](https://www.brighton.ac.uk/headstart-blackpool-phase-3-bid-final.pdf) [Accessed 18/1/2021]

[5.7] Testimonial from the Director of Children's Services at Blackpool Council on the evaluation and learning of the RR using the VCF.

[5.8] Bounce Forward: A School-Based Prevention Programme for Building Resilience in a Socioeconomically Disadvantaged Context, *Frontiers in Psychiatry* Vol. 11, (2021)1522 pages <https://www.frontiersin.org/article/10.3389/fpsy.2020.599669> [Accessed 18/1/2021]

[5.9] Testimonial from Youngminds on the impact of the research on the development of work in Schools <https://youngminds.org.uk/youngminds-professionals/our-projects/academic-resilience/> [Accessed on 18/1/2021]

[5.10] Merseyside Youth Association/Liverpool CAMHS, programme for cascading training based on RF https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2iujsakR_sw [Accessed 18/1/2021]

[5.11] Testimonial from CAMHS on the learning, development and training in Liverpool.

[5.12] A report that evidences the developments of the work in Durham. Available as a PDF.

[5.13] Guldberg, K., Achtypi, A., D'Alonzo, L., Laskaridou, K., Milton, D., Molteni, P. and Wood, R. Using the value-creation framework to capture knowledge co-creation and pathways to impact in a transnational community of practice in autism education. *International Journal of Research and Method in Education*.

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/1743727X.2019.1706466>

[5.14] WWU guide: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1XCq5OdX_zFVdv-n9yPqrhgS1Y23JccooX1x5OdzdqtA/edit [Accessed on 18/1/2021]. p.46 of this guide confirms the use, supported by a testimonial on its value with Community Fellows.

[5.15] Framing a social learning space for wheelchair curling

<https://journals.humankinetics.com/view/journals/iscj/aop/article-10.1123-iscj.2019-0095/article-10.1123-iscj.2019-0095.xml> [Accessed on 18/1/2021].

[5.16] Testimonial from the Director of UK Coaching on the adoption and value of the VCF.