

<b>Institution: Plymouth Marjon University</b>		
<b>Unit of Assessment: UoA 23 Education</b>		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Improving the effectiveness of youth work in international contexts through an innovative evaluation methodology		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2009-2020		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>
Dr Jon Ord Dr Susan Cooper	Associate Professor Associate Professor	Aug 2003 – present March 2005 - present
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 2014 – 2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> No		
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words) <p>Marjon researchers developed the 'Transformative Evaluation' methodology for use in youth work contexts. Application of this tool has enabled a wide range of youth and community work organisations internationally to demonstrate the impact their work has on the lives of young people and across their wider community, thus filling an identified gap. Impact is threefold: enabling youth workers to better evaluate their practice, leading to improved practice through reflection, increased understanding and deepened relationships with young people; enabling organisations to better identify and share the outcomes of their work; and facilitating changes in evaluation processes within both organisational and national policy.</p>		
<b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words) <p>The premise of this research is a belief among academics that existing evaluation regimes are inadequate as they focus on quantitative data and prescribed outcomes (Ellis and Gregory, 2008; Issitt and Spence 2005). This results in youth workers being unable to identify qualitative outcomes, as well as being de-skilled in evaluation (3.1, 3.2). The initial underpinning research was conducted by Dr Susan Cooper, Associate Professor of Education, developing, testing and reviewing the viability of an innovative evaluation methodology between 2009 and 2017 (3.2, 3.3). This involved an action research process and produced a rigorous means of generating qualitative data. The fieldwork took place in a medium-sized voluntary sector youth work organisation in Cornwall, England. A qualitative study of the youth workers' perceptions and experience of conducting evaluations identified that youth workers felt alienated by the dominant quasi-experimental quantitative evaluation approaches in use at that time and supported the need for an alternative approach (3.1, ch. 3). Therefore, the <b>novel Transformative Evaluation (TE) methodology</b> was developed and piloted in the organisation (3.1, ch. 6), and a further qualitative study highlighted the benefits of this participatory methodology for practice, practitioners and organisations (3.1, ch. 7).</p> <p>The methodology synthesises aspects of transformative learning, appreciative inquiry, the most significant change technique and practitioner evaluation. Its participatory nature engages young people, youth workers and external stakeholders in the generation of narratives of change. <b>The key findings of this initial research indicate that TE improves understanding of the demands of evaluating practice for both youth workers (3.2) and their wider organisations (3.3), promotes youth workers' active re-engagement with evaluation, and enables</b></p>		

**practitioners to identify and communicate the impact of youth work to a range of stakeholders (3.1).**

Funded by an Erasmus grant, the second stage of underpinning research, led by Dr Jon Ord, Associate Professor of Education, involved testing the applicability of the TE methodology among larger groups of professionals and more diverse youth work organisations between 2015 and 2017, in five European countries (England, Finland, Estonia, Italy, France) (3.A). The Erasmus research project generated 715 stories from individual young people in three open-access youth centres in each of the five countries to identify the impact of youth work (3.5). The data was coded separately in each of the five country contexts and then over-arching themes were produced through further thematic analysis – the themes were *Sense of self, Creating places and spaces for young people, Relating to others, Experiential learning, Social inclusion*.

**The outcomes of this underpinning research were two-fold – firstly, that youth work organisations were able to better identify the outcomes of their work (3.1; 3.3; 3.4; 3.5; 3.6), and secondly, that youth workers re-engaged in the process of evaluation believing that the methodology provided a useful means of assessing and improving their practice (3.1; 3.2; 3.4; 3.5; 3.6).**

**3. References to the research** (indicative maximum of six references)

- 3.1. Cooper, S. (2018). *Participatory Evaluation in Youth & Community Work*. London: Routledge, chs. 3, 6 & 7. [listed in REF2]
- 3.2. Cooper, S. (2014). 'Putting collective reflective dialogue at the heart of the evaluation process'. *Reflective Practice*, 15 (5), 563-578 (<https://doi.org/10.1080/14623943.2014.900019>). [can be supplied upon request]
- 3.3. Cooper, S. (2014). 'Transformative evaluation: Organisational learning through participative practice'. *The Learning Organisation*, 21 (2), 146-157 ([https://marjon.repository.guildhe.ac.uk/15434/1/Transformative%20evaluation\\_Cooper.pdf](https://marjon.repository.guildhe.ac.uk/15434/1/Transformative%20evaluation_Cooper.pdf)). [listed in REF2]
- 3.4. Cooper, S. (2018). 'Impact of youth work in the UK (England)'. In Ord, J. (ed) with Carletti, M., Cooper, S., Dansac, C., Morciano, D., Sirula, L., & Taru, M. *The Impact of Youth Work : A study of five European Countries*. Helsinki: HUMAK (<https://www.humak.fi/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/The-Impact-Of-Youth-Work.pdf>).
- 3.5. Ord, J. (2018). 'A comparison of youth work in England, Finland, Estonia, Italy and France'. In Ord, J. (ed) with Carletti, M., Cooper, S., Dansac, C., Morciano, D., Sirula, L., & Taru, M. *The Impact of Youth Work : A study of five European Countries*. Helsinki: HUMAK (<https://www.humak.fi/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/The-Impact-Of-Youth-Work.pdf>).
- 3.6. Cooper, S., Morciano, D., Scardigno, F. & Ord, J. (2019). 'Transformative evaluation in youth work and its emancipatory role in Southern Italy'. *Italian Journal of Sociology of Education*, 3, 133-152 (DOI: [10.14658/pupj-ijse-2019-3-7](https://doi.org/10.14658/pupj-ijse-2019-3-7)).

All outputs have been rigorously peer reviewed by two independent assessors as being of at least 2\* quality. 3.5 is linked to the research grant 3.A (below). The project report was awarded a grade of excellent – 89 out of 100 – by the UK National Agency for Erasmus+ (a partnership between the British Council and Ecorys UK).

**Research Grant:**

**3.A.** PI: Dr J Ord. Awarded from Erasmus+ key Action 2 'Innovation and Exchange of Good Practices'. Title of Research Project: 'Developing and Communicating the Impact of Youth Work across Europe (DCIYWE)'. Period of grant: 01/2016 – 10/2018. Value to Plymouth Marjon

University: £234,273 (€302,640). Key Partners: HUMAK (Helsinki University of Applied Sciences), Tallinn University (with Estonian Youth Work Association), University of Bari, University of Toulouse. Linked to **3.5; 3.6**.

#### 4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

##### Background:

The case study is set within the context of the challenges across Europe in evaluating youth work practice ([EC, 2014](#); [EC, 2015](#)), which emphasises the importance and benefits of identifying impact. Similarly, in 2011 the UK government challenged the sector to produce 'robust but sophisticated outcome measures ... on young people's personal and social development'. Despite the production of the government-funded Outcomes Framework ([2012](#)), methodologies identifying impact remain limited.

Our **innovative evaluation methodology – Transformative Evaluation** – was developed to respond to these challenges, despite a UK youth policy vacuum. **It is significant because it provides youth work organisations with a tool to demonstrate the impact of their work** and was initially implemented within North Devon Homes, southwest England.

Bolstered by favourable results and facilitated by Erasmus+ funding (**3.A**), and later, with the initial research serving as foundation for further rigorous, peer-reviewed research projects which carried out TE in Scotland (**5.1**) and Western Australia (**5.2**), the methodology has been implemented successfully across the youth work sector. For example, the Deputy Director of the Estonian Youth Work Centre commented of TE, '**as an assessment tool, it filled a gap across Europe**' (**5.3**).

##### 1) Individual level

Between 2016 and 2020, **young people, as beneficiaries, in a variety of national and international youth work settings reported 'feeling heard and listened to' during the TE process (5.4; also 5.5)**, thus having their voice amplified (**5.2, p.2; 5.6, p.34**). **This impact is significant, because it helped increase their trust, leading to improved relationships with youth workers and greater engagement in programmes**. For example, Helsinki charity Youth Guarantee House's Manager reported that young people in Finland said TE made them feel valued for themselves rather than their accomplishments when youth workers listened to them and changed their practice to focus on relationships instead of tangible outcomes (**5.5**).

**The methodology also empowers young people**. One example involves a young person at Space\*, a social enterprise in Devon, who verbalised how he gained a greater awareness of himself and his responsibilities through TE discussions, and **he can thus 'take better life opportunities'** (**5.7**). Others, in Scotland, '**spoke about their recognition of the youth worker as a trusted adult...for advice and support**' (**5.1, p. 24**). Evidence from a report published in 2019 by NHS Health Scotland indicates that '*young people consistently view the trusted adult role as positive and indicate that it can help achieve outcomes such as higher educational attainment, optimism, self-efficacy and reduced internalising symptoms*' (**5.8, p.2**). By enabling youth workers to recognise the importance of their role as a trusted adult and improve their practice (noted below), **TE supports better outcomes for young people in adult life**.

TE has numerous positive impacts on **youth workers as beneficiaries**. Youth workers corroborated the underpinning research findings of feeling alienated from existing methods of evaluation (section 2). In Estonia, **they reported being reinvigorated by TE**, finding it more

complementary to their working practices, of greater relevance and producing better evidence of impact (5.3). Further, the Director of the UK charity Barefoot maintains the methodology **‘engendered a realisation among practitioners of the extent and importance of their work’**, especially of the *‘far-reaching impacts on [young people’s] lives’* (5.4); **it also provides them with a tool to more easily demonstrate to others the impact of their work** (5.3), a task that they often find difficult.

In addition, youth workers in Finland, England, Estonia, Australia and Scotland reported that, since 2014, **the cyclical nature of TE has helped them improve their practice**, including through opportunities for reflection. In Australia, one stated, *‘[It] helped to more actively identify changes in a young person and provide that feedback for them....I was able to identify the things that I do well and perhaps other aspects of my work that I could improve on’* (5.6, p.39). Other impacts included: being better able to perceive and respond to young people’s preferences and needs (5.2, p.8; 5.4; 5.5); increased understanding of the significance of and need to develop trusting relationships (5.5; 5.2, pp.1-2,7-10; 5.1, p.26) and of the importance of providing an inclusive, non-judgmental, safe space for young people (5.1, pp.24,26,28; 5.2, pp.7-9,12-13; 5.3; 5.5; 5.6, p.39; 5.7), which in turn reinforced these practices. **TE thus resulted in youth workers’ ability to better contextualise young people’s stories to inform future work and development of programmes, activities and policies affecting them** (5.4; 5.9).

## 2) Organisational level

**At organisational level, TE leads to more robust evidence of impact (5.3). This results in better understanding of best practice at managerial level, further leading to improvements in procedures.** The Manager at Youth Guarantee House commented that the information arising from TE led directly to a policy shift in 2019 where developing relationships was prioritised (5.5). The Director of Barefoot asserted TE revealed the importance and effectiveness of relationship-building and outdoor activities; thus, specific funding was recently sought and acquired (from The Health Trust) for trips out combining these two elements of youth work (5.4). **Such impact benefits the organisations, practitioners and young people.**

Because TE evidence is reliable and accessible, **organisations can better communicate the outcomes and value of youth work to stakeholders**, for example, local councillors, health board officers, politicians, parents and headteachers, **and to the wider community** (5.1, pp.5-6; 5.3; 5.4; 5.6, pp.41-43), all of whom benefit. Organisations in Western Australia report that the methodology made a significant contribution to stakeholders gaining a better understanding of youth work, appreciating the knowledge, skills and complexity of judgement required by youth workers (5.6, pp.41-43). Various Scottish organisations stressed that TE *‘[provided] much-needed evidence to support the youth work sector to sustain and further develop their service’* (5.1, Executive Summary). In England, the Director of Barefoot maintains **‘TE served to change people’s perspectives about youth work, affirming the organisation, especially [outside] the sector’**, with plans for local residents to become involved in the process (5.3), indicating that **TE’s positive impact extends into society more generally.**

Moreover, **TE strengthens staff learning, facilitates sharing practice, and builds teamwork.** In England, TE has been used as a staff learning tool, because it *‘fostered in youth workers the ability to become better attuned to noticing what young people want, hearing them when they*

say it, and adjusting their practice accordingly' (5.4). In Estonia (5.3) and Australia, TE 'created opportunities for reflection and peer discussion around practice' (5.6, p.39).

### 3) Policy level

**Transformative Evaluation has been adopted at regional and national policy levels.** Most significantly, **the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research implemented the methodology as a key qualitative evaluation tool for the assessment of youth work.** The Estonian Youth Work Centre, under the Ministry's authority, embedded TE into its current Annual Activity Plan 2020 (5.10) and provided financial support in 2019 for the Estonian Association of Youth Workers to roll out the methodology in 10 municipalities. In 2019-20, youth workers were trained in the methodology and it was disseminated throughout Estonia (5.3).

**The methodology has also been integrated into youth work organisations' policy and extended to other organisations, thus enhancing assessment and practice.** Perth Inner City Youth Service (PICYS) in Australia and Space\* in Devon have embedded TE into their service model (5.2, p.15; 5.9). In 2019, Youth Guarantee House integrated its use into its normal annual procedures and extended it across Finland (5.5). In Plymouth, Barefoot recently acquired expansion funding, and TE is being built into the new structure of the organisation (5.4).

### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- 5.1 Fyfe, I. (2018). The Impact of Community-based Universal Youth Work in Scotland<sup>1</sup> (<https://www.youthlinkscotland.org/media/3183/impact-of-community-based-universal-youth-work-in-scotland-november-2018.pdf>).
- 5.2 PICYS (2019a). Most Significant Change 1<sup>st</sup> Biannual Report ([http://picys.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/PICYS\\_MSC\\_Booklet.pdf](http://picys.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/PICYS_MSC_Booklet.pdf)).
- 5.3 Factual Statement from Deputy Director, Estonian Youth Work Centre, Tallinn, Estonia.
- 5.4 Factual statement from Director of Barefoot, Plymouth, UK.
- 5.5 Factual statement from Manager at Youth Guarantee House, Helsinki, Finland.
- 5.6 Cooper, T., Brooker, M., McCabe, D., Madden, P. and Simons, O. (2019). 'Transformative youth work in local government youth services'. *International Journal of Open Youth Work*, 3, 30-47 (<https://indefenceofyouthwork.files.wordpress.com/2019/10/190912-third-edition-med-cover.pdf>).
- 5.7 Online TE narratives by young people and youth workers, Space\* website, (<https://spacepsm.org/category/te/>, <https://spacepsm.org/milos-story/>).
- 5.8 Whitehead, R., Pringle, J., Scott, E., Milne, D. and McAteer, J. (2019). The Relationship between a Trusted Adult and Adolescent Health and Education Outcomes. Edinburgh: NHS Health Scotland ([http://www.healthscotland.scot/media/2325/the-relationship-between-a-trusted-adult-and-adolescent-health-outcomes\\_6588.pdf](http://www.healthscotland.scot/media/2325/the-relationship-between-a-trusted-adult-and-adolescent-health-outcomes_6588.pdf)).
- 5.9 Online overview of Space\*'s use of TE methodology to evaluate impact, Space\* website, (<https://spacepsm.org/our-impact/>).
- 5.10 'Inclusion of Youth at Risk of Social Exclusion and Improvement of Youth Employability', Annual Activity Plan for 2020, approved by the Minister of Education and Research on 11.06.2020, Directive No. 1.1-2 / 20/136, Estonian Youth Work Centre [document in Estonian].

<sup>1</sup> Dr Susan Cooper is acknowledged as a contributor for an appendix entry in the report regarding the methodology, but the research was undertaken entirely separately to Marjon staff