# Chapter 7:

# A Review of the Methods of Inquiry

## Introduction

This chapter describes the organisation and conduct of the research over the five years of the study from 2000 to 2004. I have outlined in the previous chapter how I arrived at a critical hermeneutic approach to inquiry. I also indicated how the methods I used to collect and interpret data were a 'bricolage' of techniques suited to the situations and questions at any one time. This chapter begins by outlining the ways in which the research into the Stoneleigh Project was structured to help the reader understand the diversity of contexts in which data was collected. I have organised the discussion of the methods used into three focus areas. The first focus concerns the methods developed to support the research undertaken into the educational approach of the Stoneleigh Project. The second focus discusses the collection of the data concerning the influence of the Stoneleigh Project on life stories of the young people. The third focus considers the approaches used to study the politics involved in the Stoneleigh Group and the advocacy work in the wider youth work field.

The ways in which this research was of benefit to the stakeholders involved within it is also discussed.

## A Structure for the Inquiry

The Stoneleigh Group ran six programmes involving sixty-five young people and ninety-five other participants. Table 3 below repeats the calendar of the Stoneleigh Group's activities from Table 1 in Chapter 2 with the addition of the key research activities undertaken to collect evidence for this thesis.

## Table 3: Research Calendar

| Date | Event | Research Activity |
|---|---|---|
| Late 2009 | Rank Foundation hold a 'Gappers' retreat. | Interviews with Colin of the Rank Foundation. |
| May 2000 | The Stoneleigh Group is formed. | |
| Sept. 2000 | The first group of participants are invited to the first retreat at Camas, Isle of Mull as a pilot. | Data collected (participative inquiry, participant observation and interviews) for an evaluative study of Camas. Invited to evaluate Stoneleigh Project at the same time. |
| Dec. 2000 | The first Camas follow up weekend, Silesian Sisters, Cumbria. | Frampton collects data as participant observer, focus group and by interview (Frampton, 2001). |
| 2001 | Major funding secures the first phase of the project. | Evaluation project secured. I ask to use the data and extend the data collection for this research. Research questions formulated and ethical framework approved by Stoneleigh Group. |
| 2001 | The first Stoneleigh Group forum in Coventry. | Data collection (participant observation) begins at Forum, in partner organisations and in management team. Focus on pedagogy of the retreats. |
| May 2001 | The second group of participants go to Camas. | Co-operative inquiry begins. |
| Sept. 2001 | The second Camas follow weekend, Global Retreat Centre, Oxford. | Co-operative inquiry continues. Focus groups begin. |
| Sept. 2001 | The third group of participants go to Camas. | Co-operative inquiry continues. |
| Dec. 2001 | The third Camas follow up weekend, | Co-operative inquiry continues. Focus groups continue. |
| Feb. 2002 | The First round of evaluation is competed and the first conference is held at Stoneleigh. | First report on evaluative study given. Interviews with management team, forum members and mentors. Telephone interviews with all participants to date. Secondary sources collected. |
| March 2002 | A second round of funding launches the second phase of the project. | Research focus shifts to the individual case studies. |
| April 2002 | Paper given to EOE Conference at Brathay Hall, Cumbria. | Bennett, Loynes, Redshaw and Rigler (2004) |
| July 2002 | Paper given at ESRC Young People' conference, Keele University. | |
| Sept. | The third and last group of | Co-operative inquiry continues. Interviews |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 2002 | participants go to Camas. | with case studies begin. |
| Feb. 2003 | The second Stoneleigh Group Forum at Stoneleigh. | Focus group with Stoneleigh Group partners and other youth organisations. |
| April 2003 | A training camp is held at Cae Mabon, Gwynedd. | Co-operative inquiry continues. Interviews with case studies continue. |
| Oct. 2003 | A group of participants go to Gillerthwaite, Cumbria. | Co-operative inquiry continues. Interviews with case studies continue. |
| Dec. 2003 | Gillerthwaite follow up weekend at Gillerthwaite. | Co-operative inquiry continues. Interviews with case studies continue. |
| 2004 | A group of participants go to Cae Mabon. | Co-operative inquiry continues. Interviews with case studies continue. |
| May 2004 | The second phase of evaluation is complete, a report produced and the second conference is held at The Global Retreat Centre in Oxford. | Final evaluation report published. (Loynes, 2004). Focus groups with young participants. Young people present the findings of the co-operative inquiry. Secondary sources collected. |
| June 2004 – autumn 2005 | Advocacy work begins. | Interviews with case studies continue. Interviews conducted with Stoneleigh Group partners and advocates. Secondary sources collected. |

The first phase of the Stoneleigh Group's activities took place in 2000 with one cohort attending Camas for the first retreat. This research study had not been conceived at this point. However, I did attend the retreat as a participant observer collecting data for a study of the work of Camas. Some data from this retreat and some of the interview material collected from the Camas community at that time has been used for the purposes of this research with the permission of the individuals and of the Camas management group. This data has some limitations as the observations and notes made and the questions asked were related to the needs of the evaluation of Camas, a different if related set of questions to those being asked of the Stoneleigh Project. The overlap was that Camas had also asked me to articulate their philosophy and pedagogic practices for them. Nevertheless, this data has been used with caution. Any data referring to other groups attending Camas or collected from community members that were not present after the research had started has been excluded from this work.

Prior to the first retreat, I had also interviewed Colin, the director of the Rank Foundation, in relation to the development of the first Stoneleigh Group programme at his request. This data has also been included in this research with his permission. In my view, this data,

whilst not collected during the research for this study, was directly concerned with the Stoneleigh Project. Whilst I may have raised different lines of inquiry during the conversation if I had been interviewing Colin in the context of this research, the data gathered does relate directly to this study and so has been treated with some confidence.

The success of the first programme led the Stoneleigh Group to fund raise for a further two programmes to be provided in 2001. This included funding for the evaluation role I was asked to undertake. At this point, I raised the possibility that I would like to draw on the data from the evaluation study, and collect additional evidence, to conduct my own research into the pedagogic processes and curriculum content of the Stoneleigh Project as a case study of what the Stoneleigh Group referred to as 'informal education outdoors for young people'. The Stoneleigh Group agreed to this subject to an ongoing discussion about the nature and focus of my research questions. Additionally, they asked that I agree to work to any ethical guidelines they might wish to add to those already binding on the research or adopted by me.

The Stoneleigh Group management team undertook to supervise the collection of the evidence for this research study on behalf of the Stoneleigh Group. All 4 research questions were discussed with this team and were accepted. The distinction between a co-operative inquiry based on a participative approach and a critical analysis were explained and discussed. In practice the management team felt that the evaluative study benefited from the additional research time and from the additional data collected in order to address the research questions. The participants who were invited to participate in the extended study introduced by the research project also reported that they felt they had benefited from the extended and additional involvement with the research work. No additional ethical guidelines were requested.

My initial research questions, described in Chapter 1, were concerned with the educational approach of the Stoneleigh Project and, especially, the retreat component. My focus during this first phase of the research was on an ethnographic inquiry of the Stoneleigh Project. The methods used are considered below as 'focus 1' of the study.

During the latter stages of phase 2 of the Stoneleigh Project the Stoneleigh Group received a third round of funding which supported a further 3 programmes with one more Camas based retreat and the piloting of 2 retreats at new venues in England and Wales. This also included funding to extend the evaluative work. This gave me an opportunity to extend the research study by continuing the ethnographic inquiry concerning the Stoneleigh Project. During this phase I also paid attention to the life stories of the young people after their programmes were completed. The methods used in this aspect of the research are discussed below as 'focus 2'. As a result I was able to extend the data available about the programme itself including, most usefully, the development of the retreats at other venues. At the same time I was able to explore the impact of the programme on a larger group of young people and, for young people from phase 2 of the Stoneleigh Group's activities, over a longer period of time. In 16 cases I was able to collect data from young people over 4 years.

During this phase of the Stoneleigh Project I introduced my fourth research question. I had become interested in analysing the data from a critical perspective in order to consider the claims of the Stoneleigh Group in an ideological context. The purpose of this question was to explore from a critical sociological perspective the claims made by the participants for empowerment and personal and social transformation. The Stoneleigh Group also made ideological claims for the programme and so I also applied this question to a critical analysis of their advocacy work. 'Focus 3' discusses the methods used to obtain data concerning this work.

**Focus 1: An Ethnography of the Stoneleigh Project Programme**

The first focus of this research was to address the questions concerning power and knowledge within the Stoneleigh Project programme. For the reasons discussed in Chapter 6 I decided to use an ethnographic approach for collecting the evidence from the Stoneleigh Project. A number of issues concerning ethnographic work were decided for me by the context of the Stoneleigh Project and my existing consultancy relationship with it. Silverman (2000) claims that one decision it is necessary to consider is whether to enter the field covertly or overtly. As I was already overtly in the field as an evaluator it would have been difficult to operate covertly for the purposes of this research. It would have betrayed my standing agreement with the Stoneleigh Group for an open approach to the evaluative

work making it harder to build trust and to have access to the field as fully as possible. In practice this made no difference, as, for ethical reasons and for methodological reasons, I would have chosen to research the programme overtly in any case. From the perspective of the participants they did not distinguish between my evaluator and researcher roles. The research task made no apparent difference. Nevertheless, I sought written consent for this research from all the participants the first time that I encountered them on a programme.

Another key decision that was already decided through my role in the field as an evaluator was to enter the field first before developing a theoretical framework with which to analyse the data or before forming questions that were too focussed. I wanted to respond to Rickinson *et al's* (2004) challenge that too much research has been done in outdoor education that approaches the field with a well-defined lens with which to examine it. Like them, I wanted to see what I might discover if I collected evidence around more general questions. This was also the aspiration of the Stoneleigh Group. Although the members of the Group had clear goals and ideas about a way to support them, as a pilot programme they also held the goal of understanding how the programme worked and what it actually achieved.

This grounded approach, first described by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and discussed in Chapter 6, meant that my intention was to observe as carefully as possible what happened and what the participants made of it. This had two implications for method. The first is that it was not easy to plan for a particular approach. Glaser and Strauss argue that it is more helpful to be open to opportunities as they arise or develop a technique to respond to a particular task at the time. The second is that theoretical concepts emerge later. These may emerge from the evidence or, as in my case, have already been developed elsewhere and are applied as a useful tool with which to explore the data for the questions I had raised.

Access to the field was readily available as my role as evaluator gave me the opportunity to spend as much time with the participants as I could manage. This involved being in several different settings including being with the participants on the programmes, visiting the young people and the mentors in their voluntary organisations, attending the

programme design and management team meetings and attending Stoneleigh Group events.

The co-operative inquiry approach to the evaluative work had already established ground rules for access to information about the participants and their experiences that also worked well for this research. Whilst many personal issues were discussed between individuals whilst they were together on the programme, only information that was presented to the participants as part of the co-operative inquiry was available to me for research purposes. Whilst this meant that, during this first phase of the research, I did not have access to some elements of the life histories of the young people in particular, I could be confident that the evidence I did gather was available to this research with full consent. In some cases the data gathered in this way was not as authentic as it might have been if I had been present at the time. Stories were offered to the inquiry groups that I had not observed. However, I could not be present for more than a fraction of the interactions that took place. This meant that some of the data refers to events that I also observed and some is only reported. I have been careful to consider this in the way I handle the data for analysis. No data has been presented, whether I observed it or not, that was not also made available to the co-operative inquiry.

In practice, my experience was that little was intentionally withheld from the co-operative inquiry groups. The loss was more to do with incidents I would have found informative but that were not shared because the participants did not perceive them this way. In some cases events remained unreported even when I attempted to prompt the group. This issue is a matter of some concern to any research that is attempting to study a group of people in an intensive situation. My approach has been, as Silverman (2000) argues, to make the most of the partial data that I have. In itself this was a considerable body of material. The problem was also mitigated, I suggest, by the active involvement of the participants in the research via the co-operative inquiry, the length of time many participants had to consider what might be of interest to the research and the number of participants from several programmes from who I was able to gather data. All of these factors tended to help with a more rather than a less complete picture both in terms of what happened that was thought to be significant and the various ways in which that was understood.

At this stage I understood the data I was collecting, as discussed in Chapter 6, as interpretations of experience. Both individuals and groups of participants were making meaning of their experiences and constructing narratives that combined their emerging identities with the events around them. Reason and Heron (1999) argue for an appreciative approach to this data that respects the voice of the participant. In their view, as well as encouraging and representing the views of the participants, it often involves the researcher in giving voice to implicit or unarticulated stories that the participants might not have found the words for or thought of as of value in the study. This became a popular aspect of the early stage in each programme leading to the participants seeking stories more actively that highlighted things they wanted to report. It was this activity that the Stoneleigh Group facilitators thought was also constructive for their pedagogic purposes.

Silverman (2000) proposes that, at this stage, the researcher's approach should, as far as possible, be non-judgmental though aware of the interpretation that is applied by his or her perspective. He suggests that, to ensure that the voices of the participants are interpreted as authentically as possible, that the researcher seeks feedback on his or her interpretations from the participants. This approach is structured in to the co-operative inquiry approach of Reason. Each participant is understood as a researcher of his or her own experience. In this situation feedback is sought from other participants as well as the formal 'researcher'. The researcher's voice is acknowledged in the process as one of equal weight but with a different perspective to offer. I made full use of this approach by reflecting back to the participants my interpretations. They were able to read my notes, discuss my ideas and critique presentations and reports.

However, whilst the voices of the participants were the final arbiters of the interpretation of events in the evaluative study, I retained and exercised the right to maintain my interpretations when they were different from those of the participants in the research study. This meant that any evidence used in this thesis has been explored fully by the participants and, if I have offered a different understanding, I would argue that this has been tested rigorously before I decided to use my interpretation. I sought permission for this approach in the discussions with the participants about the research study and it was explicit in the consent form. In practice, where my voice differed was usually in situations

where the questions for this research study raised ideas that the participants did not find of interest rather than that they disagreed with them.

The data from the ethnographic inquiry is, in my view, valid for research purposes. This is for several reasons. The co-operative inquiry method ensures that, wherever possible, the evidence presented is based on the views of the participants. Additionally, where a collective interpretation does not arise, it represents diverse views and it respects the uniqueness of the impact of the experiences on each individual. These interpretations undergo several levels of checking. First, they are confirmed in the discussions of the inquiry group. In many cases these interpretations were presented by the group as an account of their experiences to other participants or members of the Stoneleigh Group. This gave me another opportunity to here their stories as they wished them to be told. Some participants were also present at my presentations and were encouraged to give feedback on the accuracy of these. This opportunity was regularly exercised.

In addition, themes illustrated in this thesis by particular accounts have consistency as they have been chosen to represent interpretations that were repeated in more than one person's narrative and, often, from people who attended different retreats.

***A Co-operative Inquiry***

The starting point for collecting data for this research was the co-operative inquiry that was already underway as part of the evaluation of the programme. In the early stages of the research study I did not add any other data collection methods to the process. This was partly for simplicity and partly to find out what the data from this inquiry could provide before adding any other layers to the research study.

The decision to adopt a co-operative inquiry approach to the evaluation was influenced by several factors. In the first phase of the evaluation the project designers and I became a design team. It was this group that concluded that the approach to evaluation and the approach to development training with which we were comfortable were not only based on similar values but were also aimed at achieving similar outcomes.

- The Stoneleigh Group had expressed an interest in data in which the voices of participants were heard and which helped with an understanding of the work.

- The funding would not allow one evaluator to attend all Stoneleigh Group events especially the retreats.

- A co-operative approach was expected to help inform each person more fully about his or her role in the project, that is it was understood as staff development.

- The congruence between the purpose of the evaluation of the Stoneleigh Project and the purpose of the retreats as opportunities for spiritual inquiry meant that the evaluation was understood as supporting the pedagogic practice of the facilitators. The co-operative approach was, therefore, also understood as enhancing personal development that was congruent with the aims of the project.

- The ethics of co-operative inquiry were thought to be congruent with the youth work ethics of the organisations involved in the Stoneleigh Group.

The design team set out to integrate the delivery and evaluation. This involved developing an approach to inquiry that, as far as possible embedded the questions we were exploring into the pedagogic practice of the retreat. Implementing the evaluation became the responsibility of the facilitators of each retreat. These four people were drawn from the design team. Each retreat was facilitated by at least two out of this team. Each group of people on a retreat, consisting of host volunteers, mentors, participants and facilitators, were treated as a separate co-operative inquiry 'cell'. This ensured that the confidentiality of each retreat group was contained within the group. It also ensured that the group sustained the collective narrative of the experience.

In one case, the first retreat programme, Frampton, a student from my department, collected data from the participants during their follow up programme. As part of my evaluative work for Camas I had observed this retreat. Before the follow up weekend the Stoneleigh Group received news of funding for their next phase and I was invited to evaluate the continuation of the Stoneleigh Project. The student, who had an interest in retreat based approaches using the outdoors for a dissertation (Frampton, 2001), was asked to collect data from this follow up weekend as a way of helping the Stoneleigh Group develop the next phase of its programme. The questions asked by the student were developed with me so that they were congruent with the aims of the evaluative study. A co-operative inquiry approach was used and consent gained in the same way as for the rest of the Stoneleigh Project. The data from this set of participants has therefore been included in the data for this research study.

### *Participant observation*

Participant observation was what each 'researcher/participant' in the co-operative inquiry was practising. In this situation the participants were, as Simpson and Tuson (1995) put it, 'looking systematically for specific categories of events' (p. 17) that related to the purposes of the retreat and the evaluation of the retreat. In this context, however, I am referring to my participant observation. Initially, this contributed to the co-operative inquiry. Later in the process, as the themes involved in the evaluative and research studies diverged, an increasing amount of my observations were recorded outside of the co-operative process. In this situation my observations were more in keeping with what Simpson and Tuson describe as 'looking at a social situation and generating categories to explain complex interactions' (p. 17). The nature of the retreats was such that wide ranges of personal and social situations were available for observation. Apart from the actions and conversations of the retreat experience there were numerous pedagogic devices used to support the participants express to themselves and to each other the meaning of the experiences to them. By living as a member of the community I was able to sample all of these situations. Inevitably, however, I would be focussed on certain participants or have to make a choice about which participant or group to be with.

The participants had a wide range of abilities and motivation towards written forms of communication. Some were semi-literate. Others were avid diary writers. The same could be said of aural forms with vocal and quiet, and articulate and timid participants. This could present problems for observation as it leads to the possibility that some participants would be more 'visible' than others. This issue was of concern to the facilitators for pedagogic rather than research purposes and so was substantially addressed on an ongoing and often individual basis during each retreat. It was decided to use a wide range of techniques in order to provide a range of expressive forms of communication. These were adapted as the retreats progressed. This had the added advantage of providing methods that allowed individuals to explore and express an individual narrative as well as supporting the group in constructing collective narratives. Some techniques were pre-determined by the design team and proposed to each retreat group. These included one to one discussions with mentors before during and after the retreat, twice-daily whole group discussions, whole group discussions during follow up weekends, and creative art and symbolic ritual designed and presented by individuals and sub-groups. In addition individuals were invited to explore their experiences of the retreat in any other form they wished. It was then their choices as to whether to keep this to themselves, share this with the whole cell, or just their mentors or a facilitator.

This made it easy to integrate data collection with pedagogic practices. By ensuring that data collection documented all activities of this kind, data collection of the key events at which the meaning of experiences was expressed was comprehensive.

Whole and sub-group activities were conceived, designed and conducted in a mutual way, the facilitators attempting to give equal weight to all voices. In this respect the ethics of the facilitators and of this research were congruent. Participation in any aspect of the inquiry was always voluntary.

In the main I recorded data in what Simpson and Tuson (1995) call descriptive and narrative forms (p. 45-51). I would first create descriptive account of an event and then, on the opposite page, write a narrative account with my interpretation as close to the time as I could manage. This would typically be the evening of the day of the events at the latest.

Both of these sets of field notes were made available to the participants for comment and I drew on these notes for my contributions to the co-operative inquiry groups.

This gives the impression of a well-planned process. In the main it was. However, part of that plan recognised that many activities, some of them spontaneously generated on the retreats, could become a source of evidence in an unplanned way. The mentors, host community members and facilitators enriched the inquiry by acting as participant observers and feeding back their observations to whole or sub-groups or individuals. The facilitators were the only people expected to keep notes of this process as it unfolded. All these additional accounts were then available to this research through the co-operative inquiry groups.

*The First Retreat*

As explained in Chapter 5 the data collection began before the evaluation of this project was conceived. As a result of the evaluation of Camas I had interview and observation data about the beliefs and practices of Camas from the Camas Community, Iona Community members, the Camas committee and several visiting groups. I also had secondary evidence from the reports and minutes of meetings concerning Camas and its development. All this evidence has been used in the interpretation of Camas' pedagogic practices except for that drawn from visiting groups other than the Stoneleigh Group.

The first Stoneleigh Group retreat took place at Camas on the Isle of Mull in 2000. I was present as a participant observer in order to evaluate the work of Camas. This involved attending the retreat and assuming a role in the community life. Evidence for the evaluation came from observations of formal and informal events and conversations with each person present. These were recorded after the event in notebooks. I subsequently annotated these with my interpretations. My role as a researcher was known to everyone. All the participants had access to my notes and could propose additions and changes. Everyone gave their consent to my role and to the use of my notes in the evaluation and, later, the research study. In addition I collected secondary sources of evidence from Camas and the Stoneleigh Group.

I was also given permission to interview the participants in this group as part of the Camas evaluation, a task I undertook with the support of Frampton, an undergraduate student. My work for Camas included developing a rationale for their pedagogic practice as well as identifying the outcomes and benefits of participation (Loynes, 2001).

I was invited to evaluate the Stoneleigh Project before interviews had been conducted. Camas gave their permission for me to use the data collected on their behalf during the retreat to initiate the work with the Stoneleigh Group. Frampton and I were able to adjust our approach to the interviews in order to gain an understanding of the Stoneleigh Project as well as of Camas. Frampton interviewed the participants whilst I interviewed the mentors and facilitators. We argued that Frampton would get better data as someone of a similar age to the participants. By interviewing the adults I began the process of building relationships with key individuals in the Stoneleigh Project. This retreat and follow up weekend acted in some ways as a pilot that informed my discussions with the Stoneleigh Group about the task they wanted to undertake, its purpose and the methods they would like to use to undertake it.

***Interviews and beyond***

The co-operative inquiry was further supplemented by unstructured interviews at the follow up weekends and at other times, diaries and other writings that were offered to the data set, and telephone and e-mail interviews with all retreat members. In addition I conducted focus group discussions with the design team. These enabled me to make comparisons and connections between 'cells' whilst maintaining confidentiality where appropriate. I was able to attend some days during some of the retreats and most of the follow up weekends to support and observe the data collection. Although I attended with a role to play in the facilitation of these days the groups were made aware of my part in the evaluation. Briefings and question sessions about the evaluation were offered and often taken up.

I used an unstructured or, as Drever (1995) describes it, an ethnographic or ethno-methodological approach (p. 14), to encourage further the participants to decide on what events were significant and offer their own interpretations. Diaries, telephone and e-mail

interviews were also undertaken in the same style. E-mail exchanges were especially helpful with a number of participants entering into unsolicited e-mail accounts of their experiences during and after the retreats that, in several cases, lasted for four years. The telephone interviews began with a structured aural questionnaire in order to collect biographical data.

***Focus groups***

In the second phase of piloting focus groups were conducted within and across 'cells' and included participants, host community members and mentors as well as facilitators. They were designed to explore in depth specific questions about the pedagogy and curriculum content of the retreats. In this situation the approach taken was what Drever (1995) terms a group interview using a semi-structured interview method (p. 16). These were led by a person from one of the Stoneleigh Group's member organisations or me and took place during the follow up weekends.

In practice there were times during forum gatherings and management group meetings that were also managed in this way. Like the focus groups, they developed narratives and concepts of aspects of the Stoneleigh Project and were a rich source of evidence. For example, the Stoneligh Group forum held in 2001 included an hour long facilitated discussion about what the partners of the Stoneleigh Group thought spirituality meant to their organisations. This is a significant source of material that emerged from the management of the Stoneleigh Group rather than the conducting of the research. Reporting back and the subsequent questioning by members of the management team and the forums who were not involved in the retreats became valued by the design team especially as a way to clarify their thinking and values. On several occasions it identified new approaches to the data or raised new questions that could be fed back in to the next retreat group.

***Analysing texts***

Brewer claims that the analysis of ethnographic texts involves a number of issues of both a technical and a theoretical nature (Brewer, 2000). This section will describe the technical aspects of this research study. Key theoretical issues are explored in Chapter 6.

The principles guiding the analysis of the various texts in this study were as Brewer (2000, p. 106-107) identifies, to maintain a consistent, systematic and rigorous approach to the data. He goes on to describe a number of techniques that help to bring order to the data involving the organisation of texts 'into patterns, categories and descriptive units' (p. 108). As Brewer discusses, this process was a continuous task that, in some ways, can be understood to have begun with the formulation of the research questions and was constantly developing as early analyses began to inform further data collection and analysis. This, as Brewer claims, is partly explicit and partly implicit. The processes of the co-operative inquiry, feedback on my field and interview notes from the participants and reflexive techniques all helped to make some of the hidden organisation taking place in my mind visible. Inevitably this was, to some degree, partial.

The first stage of analysis in this research study was the descriptive coding of the data. This was done as soon after the data collection as possible and reviewed after each session in the field. All data was assigned a code that linked it to a date, an event, a participant and a format (see appendices 1 and 2). It was also coded for other categories including the venue of the event, especially in relation to the retreats, the cohort of the participant, the organisation to which the participant belonged (see appendix 1) and the role the participant took in the programme (for an explanation of the latter see Table 2 in Chapter 2, p. 24). Some data was also coded for age and gender though these were later dropped when they generated no apparent correlations of relevance to this study. These codes covered the factual aspects of the data.

The second phase of coding was what Brewer (2000) terms 'open codes' (p. 110). In the case of this study this coding was initially developed fairly loosely and refined, first by the co-operative inquiry process where this was relevant, or my own analysis and then by my own systematic review of the data after each round of the pilot. The themes of this coding related to the questions addressed by this study. Examples include the categories of pedagogy, curriculum, life story and policy. Under each of these a tree of sub-categories was developed. These were constantly changing, re-organising and clustering as the study unfolded.

A further level of analysis used in this study involved what Brewer (2000) termed 'focal events' (p. 111) though, in this case, these foci included focal people as well as events. The events involved were initially the formal recognised events of the planning, delivery and dissemination of the pilot programme. This was enriched by a more detailed coding related to the emerging themes of the study. For example, the contexts for pedagogic interactions of power were coded for the situations in which they occurred. This coding was a great help in developing my analysis of the interplay of power and knowledge on the retreats. Coding the focal participants also helped to identify the participants I invited to be case studies (see below) in the latter stages of the research.

The evidence lent itself to multiple analyses. As Arnett (2006) suggests, I found that the life stories of the young people revealed personal, social and public as well as structural influences on their trajectories. All the young participants describe ways in which their agency was enhanced by the retreats and the other elements of the programme. These included raised self esteem, new and enhanced social networks, increases in skills especially relational skills, an understanding of youth work practice, an increase in confidence, greater self awareness, values clarification, greater awareness of their social issues and a clearer view of their aspirations. An analysis of these factors would be of great interest and value and is, to some degree, provided in this thesis. For example, it addresses Rickinson *et al's* (2004) appeal for more research that considers the individual narratives of experiences of outdoor education. However, despite the diversity of pathways followed by the young people, I suggest that the emerging theme in relation to the questions posed by this thesis supports Evans' (2002) idea of frustrated agency as a defining characteristic around which clusters of stories could usefully be understood. This frustration was perceived as located in the social and public worlds of the young people as they attempted to put values into action. They did not generally perceive themselves and their intra-personal situations as limiting. As a result my focus became an interest in what the evidence had to say about these social and public factors that the young people perceived as frustrating their development and how they thought these were or could be overcome. I found certain theoretical frameworks to be helpful with this task.

Whilst social capital theories were of interest in exploring these ideas, especially the ideas that emerged concerning mobility, I found that, more specifically, it was certain aspects of what is considered to be social capital that were most relevant. As a result the analysis drew most heavily on Raffo and Reeves' (2000) social network categories, Furlong and Cartmel's (1997) concept of transition as a journey metaphor, many of Bernstein's (1971, 1975, 1996) concepts concerning the ideologies of education, citizenship and education, pedagogy and curriculum, Joas' (2000) concepts of values development, and Henderson *et al's* (2007) idea of mobility having more than an upward dimension. This has been the most detailed level of analysis applied in different ways to each of the foci of the study discussed in this chapter.

Brewer (2000) makes the distinction between categories and taxonomies (p. 114-115). In this study a number of the categories above were combined to create useful taxonomies of particular phenomena. For example, the ideological radicalism of the educational claims of the Stoneleigh Group was correlated with the pedagogy and the outcomes of the programme. Likewise, the aims of each member organisation of the Stoneleigh Group were correlated with the perceived trajectories of the young people.

The final stage in an ethnographic analysis, according to Brewer (2000, p. 117), is the search for negative cases. As with any aspect of this analysis this process was, in fact, ongoing. It was helpful not only in excluding certain themes and interpretations, but also in widening out the categories of analysis, especially in relation to critical incidents of power in the pedagogic practice of the retreats and in identifying the diversity of life histories and subsequent trajectories taken by the young people.

In practice, and in the field, much analysis takes place implicitly, in discourse with the participants and in following trains of thought initiated by what the researcher last observed, heard or read. The rigour of formulating categories for analysis and testing them for relevance and consistency turns what can be a confusing mountain of possible ideas into a rigorous and coherent narrative. This process continued long after the early interpretations of the data and through several reiterations of the writing of these chapters. In my experience the result is a deeper level of interpretation that stands up to documented

evidence and gives the claims made in this thesis their authority. Inevitably, another researcher will not be able to substantiate my claims, as, despite the documenting and coding that is available for inspection, the analysis as well as the interpretation is influenced by my own view and many undocumented influences at the time. However, it would be possible to understand the rationale that leads from the evidence to the claims that are made in the conclusion to this study.

**Focus 2: The Impact of the Stoneleigh Project on the Young People**

During the second phase of the Stoneleigh Project I expanded the use of unstructured interviews in person, by telephone or e-mail in order to explore biographically the experiences of a number of participants. These were mostly young people but included some participants in the roles of host community member, mentor and facilitator. These interviews were introduced to help me to explore the third and fourth questions of the research study. These concerned the perceptions held by young people and others of the impact of the programme and were developed to consider whether or not it had been successful at supporting young people in becoming agents of social change.

The interviews included a 100% sampling by telephone of the participants involved in the programme up until that date. This exercise completed the bio-metric data and extended the biographical data of past participants. An analysis of this data resulted in identifying a number of clusters of common situations based on some of the ideas discussed in Chapter 4, in particular the concepts of social networks and social capital (see Table 4, Chapter 10, p. 240).

At the same time the ongoing ethnographic study continued to collect data through co-operative inquiry and participant observation. In this phase I paid attention to the presentations and discussions reporting on the programme's progress, the meetings at which the development of the programme, and especially the retreats at new venues, were discussed and the follow up weekends. I also sampled all of the retreats and increased the visits to young people and their mentors after the retreats. With this second focus I paid increased attention to the narratives the participants told of their life stories and the processes that supported and influenced these narratives.

### *A Critical Approach*

The Stoneleigh Group had made claims that can be understood as taking a critical position in relation to certain aspects of society. The Stoneleigh Project was constructed as a pedagogy of resistance intended to support marginalised young people who shared these critiques in becoming agents of social change. From a methodological perspective the critical stance of the research set out to test the claims of the Stoneleigh Group and to document what took place when this programme advocated for the radical outcomes they claimed to be achieving in the wider youth work field. I was planning to observe power in society at work within the pedagogy of the programme and within the policy developments of the institutions of youth work.

At this stage the field notes for this research diverged more markedly from the field notes I was making that were shared with the evaluation work. This took the form of extra interpretations of my observations and interviews in the context of different theoretical frameworks that I was beginning to consider as a context for the analysis of the data.

### *Case studies*

In order to extend the longitudinal study and to seek a great depth of knowledge about the lives of the participants during and after the programme, I decided to treat a number of young people as case studies. I planned to follow their stories for as long as possible, partly through observation but mostly through continued unstructured interviews, diaries and e-mails.

The choice of the young people to be included in this aspect of the study was partly systematic and partly pragmatic. I reviewed the provisional categories of personal and social backgrounds identified by the analysis of the biographical data of the young participants up until that point (43 in total). This led to the identification of 3 categories of young participants (see Table 4, Chapter 10, p. 239) on 4 types of trajectory (see Diagram 1, Chapter 12, p. 290). I also sought to include samples from as many different Stoneleigh Group member organisations as possible and from as many different cohorts as I could. I then set this short list against those young people who had already attracted my attention in

observations and interviews as well as those who were actively involved in providing me with unsolicited data. The result was a good match. I expanded the number of young people slightly and invited them to be involved in this extension of the study. They all agreed. I took a systematic interest in their experiences and stories from then on. This group is represented in the 12 young people whose stories are documented in this thesis (see Table 4, Chapter 10, p. 239 and Table 5, Chapter 12, p. 287).

**Focus 3: A Critical Analysis of the Struggle for the Meaning and Dissemination of the Findings of the Stoneleigh Project**

The exploration of power in the pedagogic discourses between the Stoneleigh Group members and between the Group and other youth work institutions was a third and additional focus of the research. It was an interest that emerged from the data as the study examined the power relations of young people with society through this particular example of youth work practice. It became particularly visible because of the ideological positions of some of the Stoneleigh Group members and their aspirations to use the pilot as a basis to advocate for a more radical youth work curriculum.

For this focus I was able to use and extend the participant observation of meetings and events, conduct semi-structured interviews with this focus in mind and draw on a range of secondary sources that included letters, minutes, reports, proposals, presentations and publications. The secondary sources were illuminating for an insight into the ways in which different voices in this discourse constructed and reconstructed the reports from the participants in the co-operative inquiry. However, it was observations of the social dynamics of meetings and conversations at other events that gave the richest picture of the struggle that took place to define the established interpretation of the programme. It is regretted that I was inadvertently not invited to some of the meetings and conversations within this research study. These consisted of formal events such as consultations held by the spirituality in youth work working party and working meetings of The Foundation for Adventure and the Wrekin Trust. In addition a number of informal but important conversations occurred spontaneously as a result of chance encounters at meetings and events unrelated to this study but at which the same people were in attendance. The data in these cases relies on secondary sources and reported experiences that I did not observe

directly. I have treated it with less confidence as a result and the claims made for this part of the research must be treated with some circumspection.

**Ethical Considerations**

As well as the importance of gaining informed consent from all the participants in this study it was important to me that the process of collecting data was both of interest to the participants concerned and congruent with the overall purposes of the Stoneleigh Project. It was my hope that by providing narratives of their life stories and holding discourses about the pedagogy and curriculum of the programme the experience of the programme for the young people would be enhanced and the development of the pilot would be supported. The facilitators of the programme included the experience of being part of the research study in their annual review. The results were always positive and encouraging especially from the young people followed as case studies, the management team of the programme and from the facilitators developing the retreats. The outcomes of the research study in this regard are discussed further below.

The participants' confidentiality is protected in this study by the use of pseudonyms.

The member organisations of the Stoneleigh Group are identified by name in this thesis. This is with their consent. I considered making them anonymous in any case. However, the organisations concerned are readily identifiable from the published work of the evaluation project. It also makes the thesis an easier read. I have introduced anonymity for these organisations in Chapter 13 alone. This is my decision and it is based on the sensitivity of some of the material and the difficulty of confirming consent before publication at this distance from the events.

Consent for the research study was also provided by the member organisations. As well as informing the development of the pilot programme in which they were all interested it is hoped that the final version of this thesis will also be of interest to them in the development of both their pedagogic practices and policy development. The members of the Stoneleigh

Group directly involved in the advocacy work have already drawn on preliminary findings of this research. They expressed appreciation for this access.

Undertaking a combined evaluation and research study raises some ethical concerns. There are some benefits including a close involvement with the participants and organisations over an extended study and the effective use of resources and, in this case, access to additional resources for spending time in the field. Additionally, the questions addressed by the evaluative study were of direct interest to the research inquiry enriching the data and deepening the analysis both for the evaluation, as mentioned above, and research outcomes.

One concern was that, as discussed in Chapter 6, the data collected for evaluative purposes was undertaken through a co-operative inquiry yet the research took a critical perspective. As a minimum this required that the researcher was as clear as possible about the different approach taken by the research overlay and sought additional consent for this work. However, this issue seems to have caused little concern. I understand this to be because of the long-term nature of the study. This allowed for the development of close working relations with the participants and organisations and an active interest on the part of most of the organisations and the participants in the early findings of the research work. It has not been possible to keep the participants and organisations informed of the later findings of the research once the Stoneleigh Group was disbanded though some individuals have been informed at their request and have given feedback. This is less satisfactory.

In practical terms the evaluative study began before the research. This has meant that data I may have collected for research purposes, for example more detailed life histories from the participants prior to their involvement in the Stoneleigh Project, was not collected. Neither was it possible to collect data from young people invited to become involved in the Stoneleigh Project but who declined. This has limited the potential of the analysis in some areas. The long-term nature of this study has meant that, in other situations, it has been possible to return to participants with new questions for research purposes without this compromising the quality of the data.

Another concern was that that I would find concepts and claims made on behalf of the Stoneleigh Project for the evaluative study difficult to critique for the research. This was initially the case. The introduction of the new perspectives of Bernstein's (1971) theories after the evaluative study had been completed enabled the analysis to progress constructively.

**Reflexivity**

As Brewer (2000) and Silverman (2000) point out, an ethnographic approach that takes the position that the data being collected is an interpretation of experience on the part of the participant must also be aware that the researcher will also be interpreting the evidence in a partial way. In Chapter 1 I identified the professional and research interests that led me to take an interest in conducting this research. These included a sympathy for the ideological position of the Stoneleigh Group and the pedagogic approach of Camas. Alerting the reader to the potential prejudices and foci that the researcher holds is one step that Silverman (2000) recommends. I have referred above to several methodological strategies that were introduced to help to counter the tendency to emphasise observations of interest to me. These included asking for feedback from interviewees and those under observation. In my experience the co-operative inquiry method also counters this tendency effectively. Focus groups had the same impact often introducing new ideas or emphasising different areas to those I initially held.

In addition, adopting already established theoretical concepts with which to analyse the data helped considerably by introducing already tested frames of reference. This process helped me to notice and include a variety of observations that would otherwise have been left out of this research including ones that were counter to my own hopes for the Stoneleigh Project. Conference presentations both within the Stoneleigh Group's activities and in the wider youth work and outdoor education research communities also provided critical feedback.

Inevitably, some aspect of my own view will pervade this thesis. Brewer (2000) suggests that, rather than invalidating the evidence and its analysis, work of this kind maintains its validity through its usefulness. The benefits of this research are discussed below. A final

step I have taken is to provide a critical biography of the researcher (Appendix 3) that highlights personal and professional events that might influence my view. Readers who are concerned to explore further the potential bias of this researcher are invited to read this appendix in order to help their critical reading of the text. In my view holding a strong interest in and having considerable experience of the educational practices I was researching had many advantages, particularly the opportunities this gave to inquire more deeply into the evidence. From the subject's point of view, I think it was to their advantage for me to follow my interests. By doing this I was able to make best use of myself as a resource in their work. The same can aid of the benefits to the research outcomes. Additionally, the importance of maintaining a critical position in relation to the values I hold added overall to the degree of critical reflection applied to the evidence and, I believe, enhanced the analysis and my own learning.

**Benefits and Dilemmas**

One of the aims of this research was that it was useful to the participants who were involved in the case study. It is claimed that the undertaking of this research benefited the participants and partner organisations in the Stoneleigh Group. A number of concerns for the way in which the research impacted on the lives of the participants are also discussed.

***The participants.***

The Stoneleigh Project had the potential to support young people in their transitions to adulthood and to support youth workers in their professional development. It also had the potential to raise hopes and aspirations that were not fulfilled and so act in a counter-productive way. It could also initiate trajectories that were perceived as desirable but, in time, were experienced as dislocating or dissatisfying. For the Stoneleigh Group partners this is an ongoing dilemma to which their general response is that to do nothing for marginalised young people is worse and that experience tells them that their work is valued. In addition all the organisations have professional practices in place to support young people and staff in difficulty. These included the voluntary nature of involvement by young people, the ready availability and pro-activity of mentors, the open-ended life of each individual's participation in the programme and the support already in place for the volunteer. For the staff this included supervision and training.

These were the concerns of the Stoneleigh Group and its partners. The issues for this research were to ensure, as far as was possible, that the participants' experience of the research was one in which, if anything, it supported what were perceived as beneficial outcomes and did not cause distress at times of difficulty. It is my view that this was generally the experience of the participants. There are several instances during which young people who were tackling difficult personal issues reported that the opportunity to talk to or e-mail the researcher was helpful in thinking things through or coping with emotions. Actions by the researcher that helped were the voluntary nature of participation in the research, frequent reminders of the accessibility of the researcher and the presence of the researcher as a participant observer during most of the residentials and follow up weekends during which effective relationships could be established. This was further enhanced by the researcher's previous experience as a youth worker.

One case caused concern. This involved a mentor who, at the close of the Stoneleigh Project, resigned from his post and set off travelling. Whilst it is known that, as a result of his reflective involvement in the research, he had come to perceive that his work was tending in a direction he thought to be unsatisfactory, it is not clear if he perceived his resignation as a positive step or what happened to him personally and professionally after he left.

A number of youth worker participants claimed that being part of the research influenced their practice within the partner organisations and elsewhere. A number of young people also acknowledged the way in which taking part in the research supported there personal and professional development over and above the role-played by the Stoneleigh Project.

***The partner organisations***

I had two areas of concern with regard to my involvement in the partner organisations prior to the research. As outlined in Chapter 2, I have undertaken an evaluative study of Camas the year before beginning this research. In this case, I understand this earlier work to be guided by similar questions, methods and ethics as the Stoneleigh Project evaluation and research. The insight this gave me into the educational practices and beliefs of Camas staff were, in my view, an asset to the Stoneleigh Group and to this research. The evaluation

study at Camas was also concluded before the evaluation and research of the Stoneleigh Group began. This ensured that there were no conflicts of interest for me in interpreting the actions of staff at Camas in different ways for different contexts.

I am co-founder and was a trustee of Eden Community Outdoors, one of the Stoneleigh Group partners. Whilst this role overlapped with the life of the Stoneleigh Group it did not overlap with ECO's participation in the Project. They joined in 2003 once the retreats were operating in England. This was after I had ceased to be a trustee or have any active involvement in ECO. Concerns still remain that my sympathy for the approaches of ECO and the staff and young people involved could bias my interpretation of data. This is possible and was largely counter-acted on retreats by the co-operative inquiry method in which participants worked together to develop the interpretation of their experiences. Follow up studies required an extra degree of reflexivity to help redress any imbalance. Declaring my interest in ECO and my sympathies with its approach, and approaches such as those at Camas, I think, allows the reader to be aware of those processes and outcomes of the Stoneleigh Group that I consider to be 'good things' in youth work and to use their own judgements and contexts to assess the practices analysed in this thesis for themselves.

Throughout the life of the Stoneleigh Project the methods used for data collection were designed to support the development of the pilot programme. In the view of the Stoneleigh Group, it was of particular help in transferring the retreat concept from Camas to other venues.

The research was able to support a number of initiatives undertaken by the partner organisations. The initial stages of the research were used to help the Camas community successfully defend their approach to informal education out of doors to their umbrella body, The Iona Community. As a result the Iona Community has supported Camas by seeking substantial revenue funding. The buildings are currently undergoing a refurbishment to sustain its work for the foreseeable future.

However, counter to the aspirations of the partners in the Stoneleigh Group, the research has apparently had limited impacts on the practices of the partner voluntary youth organisations with a few exceptions. Two have recently adopted the retreat programme and continue to run it on an annual basis. The remainder made commitments to explore bringing the ideas developed from the Stoneleigh Project into community based rather than retreat based work. To my knowledge this has not taken place.

### *A contribution to dissemination and advocacy*

The Stoneleigh Group claimed that the research played a significant role in supporting the advocacy work. This, it was said, was achieved by generating ideas within the Stoneleigh Group, establishing credibility for the ideas during the advocacy work and supporting the debate through presentations and workshops at a number of conferences. The partner organisations interested in disseminating the practices developed by the Stoneleigh Project and advocating for spiritual development in youth work have been able to make extensive use of reports and presentations based on the research.

The Stoneleigh Group held two networking conferences to share their ideas. Eighty representatives of voluntary youth organisations as well as national policy makers attended each. Interim reports on the research findings were made at both events. Some of the findings of this research are still being used to inform current policy consultations regarding national youth work curricula.

In my view, the research largely achieved its aim of being of value to the participants in the research from their points of view, both individuals and organisations. It can be argued that conducting the research was also an educational process for all those involved.

## Conclusion

This thesis uses some evidence initially acquired for a somewhat different purpose. Managing the evaluation of the practices of the Stoneleigh Project and then adding to this evidence to take a critical perspective on the Stoneleigh Group in the context of the wider developments in youth work and youth transition was potentially problematic. In my view

it has worked well. This has been possible because of the methodological approach taken to the evaluation of the Stoneleigh Project. This led to a long-term study involving a close involvement with a stable group of youth workers and an increasingly stable group of young people. They worked hard to represent their knowledge, experience and views to me as fully and accurately as they could. That it was known from early on that I had two purposes in mind for the evidence meant that I was given much support for both. Interim reports for the benefit of the Stoneleigh Group drew on the research work as well as the evaluation especially in the latter stages. This input was valued by the management team as well as by the advocates working on behalf of the Stoneleigh Group. The conference papers also aided the advocacy work.

Whilst an interpretative approach remains founded on my understandings of the Stoneleigh Group and its work the co-operative inquiry approach gives the evidence considerable rigour. My interpretation has been subjected to several levels of feedback as a result including the public critique of my presentation at the final Stoneleigh Group conference by the participants of the last two years of programmes. As a result I feel confident that the voices of the participants are strongly represented in this study.

It is hard to generalise from a case study. However the in depth analysis over a long term has provided insight into the pedagogic practice of the Stoneleigh Project and the politics of youth and youth work in contemporary society that would not have been possible with a 'black box' approach to the experiences on the programmes or the interactions of the members of the Stoneleigh Group. This understanding has helped to inform the development of the practice of the Stoneleigh Project and so the practice of a number of youth workers and youth work organisations. As a result it has also helped the young people involved in their transitions to adulthood and, in some cases, careers in youth work. Through the advocacy work of the Stoneleigh Group it has also helped to inform the national debate on the role of values and spiritual development in the youth work curriculum. According to Brewer (2000) one criterion for a critical ethnographic inquiry is that it is useful to the subjects of the research. I believe this study has achieved that aim.