

**Power relations in advocacy approaches in family group
conferencing with children and young people**

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Abstract

Independent advocacy to support children and young people undertaking a Family Group Conference (FGC) is commonplace in England and Wales. This approach is viewed as good practice when working with young people in promoting their rights, agency, and participation in statutory social work meetings and processes where decisions are being undertaken that directly affect them. FGC provides a forum that allows statutory social workers to work in partnership with children and families where there are identified welfare concerns. However, the use of advocacy approaches within the FGC model researched in this study differs from the successful original processes developed in New Zealand. The study uses interviews with FGC participants, both users and practitioners, and an analysis of legislative and policy documents. It suggests that adapting the FGC model by changing its core processes of advocacy and coordination has had a variety of consequences, many unforeseen and negative as well as positive and affirming for young people and their families. The study found that empowerment, collaboration, and participation, all major precepts and objectives for FGC and advocacy approaches, were at times disrupted and diffused. This undermined rather than enhanced the experiences and the outcomes for service users with many feeling disempowered rather than empowered through the process. Hence the exercise of power through the processes of FGC Advocacy is held up to critical scrutiny and its impact both positive and negative on the FGC participants is discussed in depth.

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Glossary of abbreviations

CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
ECM	Every Child Matters
FGC	Family Group Conference
FGM	Family Group Meeting
FGDM	Family Group Decision Making
FRG	Family Rights Group
PCP	Person Centred Practice
RGF	Research Governance Framework
RJ	Restorative Justice
TA	Thematic Analysis

Chapter 1 INTRODUCTION

Context of the Study

This is a study of advocacy in family group conferences. The empirical component of the work documents and analyses the practice of independent advocacy from the perspectives of services users and practitioners in England.

My interest in Family Group Conferences (FGC) began while studying in British Columbia, Canada. It was there that I was introduced to a First Nations community organisation that utilised a Restorative Justice model of FGC when working with Aboriginal young offenders. In addition, I had previously used a local authority FGC service when working in a 'child in care team' addressing the needs of young people where there were child welfare and safeguarding concerns. In each case, a different model of FGC had been employed. Each model had the same broad, philosophical approach but how, where and when each had been deployed was significantly different. One model, the 'Wagga' approach, is used only for youth justice matters. The other, based on traditional New Zealand Maori community decision-making practices, is deemed to have broader utility and, although predominately deployed with welfare concerns, may also be used for justice matters.

My Masters research (Fox, 2005) was a qualitative, small scale, comparative study focussed on the similarities and differences between the use of the 'Wagga' model for youth justice matters across Canada and in England and Wales. My study identified significant variations in practice and outcomes and also concluded that the Wagga model could be disempowering for young people. My knowledge of the New Zealand FGC model led me to wonder if the New Zealand model might be less disempowering as it is seen as a collaborative and empowering approach to working with children and

families. In Canada, the Wagga conferences were facilitated by either community-trained volunteers or civilian employees of the police. In England and Wales, it was employees of the police. Similarly, the coordinators for the New Zealand FGC welfare model used in England and Wales for social work clients are not required to be social work trained. The potential therefore for variations in practice relating to the model used and the professional background of the coordinator or advocate involved in the conference appeared considerable.

Over time, I became more aware of the variations between FGC models and where and how they were deployed in terms of legislation, systems, service user groups, and facilitators/ coordinators. These aspects of FGC and their fit with social work practice, ethics, and values led me to hypothesize about their potential to influence the experiences of the conference participants (Fox, 2008; Fox, 2009).

The next logical step seemed to be to compare the New Zealand with the Wagga FGC model, seeking to assess the variations in approach and effects, with a close focus on whether or not young people were more or less likely to be disempowered. Given the emphasis of the New Zealand model is on partnership and collaborative working, my hunch was that this model might be a more empowering experience for the service users (Gill et al., 2003; Adams and Chandler, 2004). I was also beginning to wonder if the latter model should be used in all conferences, both welfare and justice, as it might be more likely to foster young people's participation in its processes.

From these beginnings emerged my initial research focus and question for this study. However, in the meantime in England, central government cuts to services had drastically changed the landscape for the use of FGCs across welfare and youth justice systems. By the time I had received university ethics approval to commence

fieldwork, the local authorities that had agreed to participate in the study were few in number and many of these rapidly withdrew. This was especially true for youth justice settings using the Wagga model, with one eastern county service ceasing operations completely. A practitioner from a Youth Offending Team in the North of England said that they were not undertaking any conferences for the foreseeable future (Personal Communication, 24.08.2011). Two of the three local authorities I had contacted in the East, South East and South West of the country also withdrew from participating in the study due to staff constraints and timescale concerns. I concluded that I would no longer be able to compare FGC models used in differing settings and in varying geographical locations. At that point, I had no way of knowing how cuts would affect services or whether any of the services that had agreed to participate previously would ever return to the same level of functioning.

It was, therefore, fortuitous that an interview with an independent advocate associated with the remaining local authority identified significant variations in the approach taken to support young people through the FGC process. My previous research experience of comparing Wagga models suggested that variations in advocacy approach could have implications for the processes and effects of the New Zealand FGC model used by the local authority, particularly the experiences of young service users. Although the model being deployed was based on the traditional New Zealand model and not the Wagga model, the interview with the advocate made it clear that advocacy was being practised in this local authority in a way that could interfere with one of the key aspects of the model's approach, namely 'family time'. This element of the conference is considered 'professional free' allowing for the non-professional participants to establish a plan to address concerns raised by statutory services. This suggested that the local authority was using an amended New Zealand model and that

the way advocacy was being practised within the intervention contravened the best practice guidelines for advocacy within FGCs (Walton et al., 2005; Family Rights Group, 2009). Furthermore, I was aware that, within the New Zealand model, the roles of advocate and coordinator were normally combined; however, in the New Zealand model examined in this study, these roles were practiced separately. Therefore, how advocacy was exercised and used to support young people in the conference process was potentially different. These two variations in how the New Zealand FGC model is used seemed to hold major relevance for the experiences of the participants, especially the children and young people.

It seemed to me that these alternative ways of using advocacy would inevitably impact upon participants. This culminated in the final research question “What are the implications of using specific advocacy approaches with young people in FGCs and how do the processes of these two interventions impact the participants involved?”.

Two sub-questions were encompassed in the final research question:

1. Is advocacy practice in the New Zealand model of FGC consistent?
2. If advocacy is not consistent in the model, does this inconsistency create a disparity in terms of how participants of FGC experience the process?

Ten significant elements reflecting gaps in the research literature and also legislation, policy, and guidance discourses were identified. These assisted in framing the data analysis from the interview data. Six initial themes relating to 'Pre' and four relating to 'Post' FGC processes emerged as significant and were examined using the theoretical framework identified in Chapter 4. Once these initial elements had been analysed, they were refined into six core themes: variations in advocacy approach; contrasting emphasis on ‘wishes and feelings’ and ‘best interests’; contrasting focus on young people and family; the impact of pre-conference questions; advocacy and empowerment; and the roles of extended family and community culture.

A qualitative research design was chosen as the most appropriate approach given the nature of the subject area and the opportunities available for study. In my study of the Wagga model (Fox, 2005), I had been given permission by participants to sit in the conference as an observer. While this would have been my preferred option for this later study, I was not given the opportunity by gatekeepers. The Wagga conferences I had attended had been organised for adolescent males and females who had committed minor offences and were considered as less vulnerable: my participation was therefore seen as non-threatening. However, conferences using the New Zealand model to address welfare concerns were regarded differently. Specifically, the researcher's presence was regarded as potentially disruptive during the family decision-making aspect of the conference known as 'family time'. These FGC processes are discussed more fully in Chapter 2. This time is protected and seen as essential in ensuring a successful outcome. Given I was unable to observe conferences, I decided to employ semi-structured interviews with participants before and after the conference (Bell and Wilson, 2006; Mutter et al., 2008). The rationale for methodological design and methods is presented in Chapter 5.

Concerns about empowerment are central to both the New Zealand FGC model and to social work. Both embrace the paramountcy principle that the welfare and protection of children are the key concerns when considering decision-making in relation to children and young people's lives. "A key aim of family group conferencing is to support the retention of the child within the kinship network whenever it is safe to do so" (Morris and Connolly, 2012: 46). This principle is embedded in child protection legislation around the world and relevant for this study in the statutory obligations of social workers in England and Wales (Children Act 1989; 2004). The paramountcy

principle is discussed fully in Chapter 2. As a practising social worker I am similarly aligned to the paramountcy principle and the need to promote empowerment.

Family Group Conferences and Advocacy

FGC was legislated for in New Zealand approximately 25 years ago. It is based on traditional Maori problem-solving techniques and has been used to address both welfare and youth justice concerns with Maori children and young people. Various models of FGC have evolved from the original New Zealand conference model; these are currently used in different ways with various service user groups. For example, the 'Wagga' model is used solely with offenders in the justice system and uses a very formulaic approach to address presenting issues. Others are used to address welfare concerns with a broad range of service user groups. The terminology may vary from place to place; for example, in North America, Family Group Conferencing has become Family Group Decision Making (FGDM). Currently these terms are used interchangeably although, historically, this was not always the case (Heino, 2009; Morris and Connolly, 2012). FGDM was initially used in a more restrictive manner with a more prescribed participant group than in its current incarnation (Burford and Pennell, 1994; McCold, 1999). The role of advocacy is also different within the various models and its application can vary even within the same broad FGC approach.

FGCs are widely used in social work across many western countries particularly focused on interventions with young people, especially where there are child welfare and youth justice concerns (Ashley and Nixon, 2007; Fox, 2008). The FGC process is seen as empowering families to work in partnership with statutory services addressing

these concerns. One of the core precepts of the intervention (discussed in the following chapter) is the role of advocacy in supporting individuals (young people and possibly other vulnerable participants) with the aim of ensuring that their voices are heard in decisions that directly affect them (Action 4 Advocacy, 2002; Dalrymple and Burke, 2003).

FGC is a “decision making and planning process whereby the wider family group makes plans and decisions for children and young people who have been identified either by the family or by service providers as being in need of a plan that will safeguard and promote their welfare” (Family Rights Group, 2007: 1). The aims of FGC are varied and at times contradictory, reflecting a number of theoretical and practices tensions (Frost et al., 2012b). For example, FGC is seen as a voluntary, collaborative, and empowering and partnership led process, involving families and young people in the statutory decision-making process. It provides a holistic, problem-solving and power-devolving intervention in which the aim is for all participants have their needs met. On the other hand, tensions persist as FGCs are also required to meet the procedural aims of the criminal justice and welfare systems in terms of addressing recidivism, rehabilitation, protection, assessment and planning (Morris and Shepherd, 2000; Leadbetter, 2002; Harris, 2003). This conflict is perhaps most evident in the child welfare system as these tensions “address but are also constrained by paradoxes in the child protection system about commitments to protecting children and to family autonomy”(Mayer, 2009: 10).

Some countries such as New Zealand have legislated for FGC to be the primary intervention when dealing with concerns that focus on young people (Doolan, 2007; Morris and Connolly, 2012). In other places, for example, the Yukon, Canada, territorial legislation has been enacted, putting FGC in the forefront of engagement

with families (Yukon Health and Social Services, 2013). However, in England and Wales, the use of FGC is not legislated, but is considered an important process and supported by policy to encourage its deployment in many situations where potentially life-changing decisions are made regarding young people (Downs et al., 2008).

FGCs incorporate many core social work attributes and principles and the role of advocacy is particularly relevant within its processes. The practice of employing an independent advocate has become the preferred option of delivering advocacy across England and Wales (FRG, 2009). 'Independent' advocacy has become a staple provision in supporting children and young people through a variety of statutory meetings, reviews, and conferences where decisions are being made about them and their future (NCAC, 2012). The role of the independent advocate is to support young people and other vulnerable individuals to ensure that their voices and opinions are heard in these decisions-making forums.

Using an independent advocate deviates from the traditional FGC approach used in New Zealand where both roles are undertaken exclusively by the FGC coordinator (Doolan, 2010). Some independent advocates in England and Wales have been encouraged by their agencies to stay in 'family time' - the protected element of the conference process that is assumed to be a family only decision-making point in the meeting and therefore a 'professional' free arena. This is a variation from the FGC approach in New Zealand (Gill et al., 2003; Adams and Chandler, 2004). It became clear to me that practices have evolved, specifically, the division in the role of FGC coordinator and independent advocate and that this division could impact on young people and their families.

In a climate of evidence-based practice (EBP), and with the introduction of the Public Law Outline (PLO) 2008, which placed FGC as a primary consideration for child welfare and protection concerns, the EBP criterion to understand “what works with whom, according to whose definition, and under what conditions” (Marsh et al., 2005: 44) was never more salient. The EBP criteria provided an initial frame of reference to address variations in the use of FGC and associated practices.

Aims of the Study

International literature (Chapter 2) often provides a conflicting, ambivalent and incomplete picture in relation to the successes and failures of FGC, appearing to be based on practice wisdom rather than empirical research data (Doolan, 2010; Morris and Connolly, 2012). While the popularity of FGC as an intervention is not in question, it has, as yet, not been rigorously evaluated. There is evidence that not all FGCs consistently work toward empowering children and families in the decision-making process (Morris and Connolly, 2012). Although this evidence was not specifically concerned with advocacy, it led me to wonder if differences in advocacy practice might affect the experiences of the participants involved in terms of empowerment.

There has been relatively little research on how FGC practices achieve the desired outcomes of empowerment for service users (Aziz, 2007). Participation, collaboration, and empowerment are viewed as key aspirations (Family Rights Group, 2003; Mirsky, 2003) for both advocacy and FGC approaches. The ‘family time’ element of FGC is regarded as particularly important in realising these aspirations. The essential feature of this time is that it is a professional free zone and therefore the family, extended family members, and friends create solutions unhindered from

professional agendas. The originality of my research is its focus on the role of independent advocates. Informal discussions with FGC practitioners suggested that on occasions independent advocates encroached on family time. From this realisation, my interest in the role of advocate grew, particularly in how the advocate's presence and role in this arena could affect participants' experience of the process and possibly the outcomes. The study, therefore, provides an insight into an area of family decision-making that had hitherto been off limits. It is therefore of substantial interest to practitioners and researchers seeking to establish how 'independent advocates' work as a pivotal aspect of the FGC process.

The theoretical framework developed in Chapter 4 was established to critically analyse and assess how power may be transmitted through FGC and related advocacy processes. A combination of Foucault's analysis of power and Goffman's sociological theory of interpersonal interaction are applied to the interview data. Emergent themes were identified and compared with those that the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) had identified from the legislation and policy literature in Chapter 3. This study contributes to the social work knowledge base, especially the relationship between social work theory and practice by enhancing our understanding and awareness of FGC Advocacy within the FGC process and how variations in practices may impact service users. Social workers may not be involved in these interventions themselves (other than as information givers) but may refer service users to a FGC and need research evidence to evaluate the efficacy of FGC in its various forms.

The study uses a qualitative research methodology; 23 semi-structured interviews were undertaken with young people and their families who had experienced or were about to undertake a FGC. In addition, eight independent advocates and an FGC

coordinator were interviewed to obtain different perspectives on advocacy within FGC processes.

Structure of the Thesis

Chapter 2 documents and explains the literature search strategy and subsequently reviews the literature nationally and internationally regarding advocacy and FGC approaches. It also identifies how this study was shaped by specific research and practice experience considering these two processes. The different types of advocacy and their application in supporting young people in statutory decision-making forums are discussed with specific focus on their application within the FGC process. Models of FGC and the evolution of distinct roles within its processes and structures are also examined. Issues and concerns surrounding the concepts of 'paramountcy', 'best interests', 'wishes and feelings', 'participation' and 'empowerment' are problematized and critically discussed using the framework of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and Hart's (1992) ladder of participation.

Chapter 3 identifies the legislative and policy guidance frameworks that establish the provision for FGC and FGC Advocacy practices¹ to take place in England and Wales. CDA was applied to these frameworks and also to FGC promotional material, and key elements of the discourse were identified for comparison with the themes that emerged from the interview data.

Chapter 4 elaborates the theoretical framework used to analyse the research data. Foucault's 'technologies of power', the 'government of the self by the self', 'dividing

¹ I have used the expression 'FGC Advocacy' to denote the use of advocacy specifically within FGC.

practices', 'protocolisation' and 'normalising judgements' were applied to the interview data and assisted in identifying how FGC participants could be empowered as well as disempowered through the process. Intersectionality and specifically the concept of 'intercategorical complexity' was used to identify the potential for categories of disempowerment to be played out within and between the members of the study group. In addition, Goffman's sociological theory of inter- and intra- personal interactions in relation to 'dramaturgy', 'ritual interaction', and 'stigma' were key precepts used to show how power is transmitted between individuals in the FGC.

Chapter 5 describes and discusses the methodology and the techniques of data collection and analysis. Specifically, decisions regarding which type of interview and sampling strategy would be most appropriate for the study, along with a discussion regarding ethics and establishing validity and credibility are also undertaken. The outcomes of the pilot study and the development of the research schedule and questions along with the evolution and changes to the study are also explained. The reasons for using Thematic Analysis (TA) as the analytical tool to analyse the interview data are explored.

Chapter 6 is the first of two findings chapters. It presents the demographics of the research participants and explores the pre-conference stage of the FGC process. Six specific concerns from this stage of the conference were identified from the interview data, documents, and gaps in the literature. These concerned research background and referral process, gatekeeping; best interests and wishes and feelings; evolution of FGC: division of roles; engagement and participation; and questions. Citing examples from the interview data and FGC service literature, these key areas are critically analysed and the theoretical framework applied to explore their impact on the FGC and FGC Advocacy process.

Chapter 7 discusses the findings in relation to the conference process itself and post-conference planning and follow-up. Four key areas are identified: timeframes; attendance and focus; family time; the plan and follow-up. These are used to assist in identifying variations and disparities in practice and how these may impact on the experiences of the FGC participants, particularly the inclusion and sometimes exclusion of children and young people from the FGC process.

Chapter 8 concludes the thesis by identifying and critically discussing six research themes: variations in advocacy approach; contrasting emphases on ‘wishes and feelings’ and ‘best interests’; differing focus on young person and family; the impact of pre-conference questions; advocacy and empowerment; and the roles of extended family and community culture.

These themes are then reflected upon in relation to the literature, and implications for social work policy, practice, theory and further research are identified.

Chapter 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter puts the study in the context of relevant literature and analyses research in the fields of Family Group Conference (FGC) and the practice of advocacy within it. It will critically examine best practice and, more specifically, explore the role of independent advocacy within the New Zealand model of FGC used for child welfare matters in England and Wales. The review will explore how variations in the deployment of the FGC model may shape the provision of advocacy services and, as a result, may affect the experiences of the young people and their families concerned. After discussing the literature search strategy, the chapter reviews literature regarding the key concepts of Family Group Conference; Advocacy; Advocacy in FGC; and Children's Rights, Protection, Participation, and Empowerment. Then, the New Zealand Family Group Conference model is described and analysed. The four main aspects of the model considered by Merkel-Holguin (1996) as essential elements in ensuring successful outcomes are then discussed; these are coordination, family time, community, and FGC Advocacy.

Literature Search Strategy

The literature included documents collected from official sources, an extensive range of available books, papers, articles, electronic articles, and Internet databases. I mainly used the EBSCOHost, ProQuest, WorldCat and the Social Care Online research databases as well as paper copy articles and books. Key word searches undertaken from university electronic library databases included the creation of an 'alert' system to allow for the most up-to-date literature to be flagged and reviewed. The key words initially generated broad results that were refined to align specifically with the main topic areas for the study, for example, 'family group conference',

‘family group decision making’, ‘advocacy’, ‘participation’, ‘children’s rights’, ‘critical discourse analysis’, ‘research design and methodology’, ‘research interviews’, ‘sampling’, ‘data analysis’, ‘research ethics’ and ‘empowerment’. Boolean operators ‘AND’ and ‘OR’ along with a combination of search terms were used to assist in narrowing the large number of potential resources into those that could specifically inform the research study. For example, using the terms FGC ‘AND’ family time helped reduce the number of identified sources to allow for only those that were applicable to particular models of FGC. Literature was also gathered from local authorities and NGOs such as the National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS) and the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC). Studies were also reviewed regarding their use of power in relation to the researcher - participant relationship. For example, some researchers aim to work with service users as co-researchers (Lundy et al., 2011) while others maintain a more traditional stance in terms of the distribution of power. In the studies reviewed within this chapter, researchers had used the traditional approach. The issue of power relations and the impact of the researcher on the research is discussed further in Chapter 5.

I drew on my previous Master’s comparative research study (Fox, 2005) relating to the use of the Wagga FGC model in two different countries along with my own subsequent publications which have explored best practice and the theoretical underpinnings of FGC. I also used my own practice experience as a mental health counsellor and social worker in youth offending and child care teams in England, where FGC interventions were implemented to assist in sharpening the literature review. The literature search revealed that much of the literature was quite dated, mainly published in the late 1990's and early 2000. This coincides with a time when FGC drew a lot of academic and practice attention, as it was a new and potentially

creative alternative to established child welfare interventions. This is confirmed by Frost et al. (2012b) in their recent comprehensive literature review.

Research studies on FGC appear mainly to have been process evaluations employing client service user satisfaction scales. These have focussed on 'process' in relation to how the intervention is structured with additional anecdotal evidence regarding outcomes from the participants (Sundell and Vinnerljung, 2004; Crampton, 2007; Morris, 2007; Berzin, et al., 2008; Mutter et al., 2008).

A review of the literature established that variations in FGC models and process, advocacy and FGC Advocacy approaches and children's rights were all areas that could impact on the experiences of the participants of FGC. These elements, along with a detailed examination of the structure and process of the New Zealand FGC, are now presented under a number of sub headings.

FGC Models and Process

Earlier studies by McCold (1999) and Mirsky (2003) do not identify the particular models used. In contrast, later studies have been much more careful to define the model employed. For example, Mutter et al. (2008) specifically champion the use of the New Zealand FGC model in their study and clearly distinguish between different models in terms of their use of private family time. An international review of research by Burford et al. (2009) cites the New Zealand FGC model as an effective method to achieve family involvement in decision-making and suggests that family networks can positively influence outcomes for young people.

Lack of attention to which model is used has a number of significant consequences. For example, where the New Zealand model is deployed there will be a role for advocacy as one of its core processes, and therefore empowerment of young people

will be seen as one of its outcomes. However, research on the role of advocacy and the related empowerment of FGC participants is sparse.

The Family Rights Group (FRG) is a charity in England and Wales that has promoted the practice of FGCs in supporting families where their children are involved in children's services because of welfare concerns. The FRG describes a FGC as a "decision-making and planning process whereby the wider family group makes plans and decisions for children and young people who have been identified either by the family or by service providers as being in need of a plan that will safeguard and promote their welfare" (FRG, 2007: 3).

The Children Act (1989) and (2004) provide the legislative framework that underpins the child welfare system in England and Wales. Social service departments and social work practitioners enact the legislation. Typically this would mean investigating reports of possible "child abuse and neglect; providing services to families that need assistance in the protection and care of their children; arranging for children to live with kin or with foster families; and arrang[ing] for reunification, adoption, or other permanent family connections for children leaving foster care" (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2014: 1).

FGCs have been employed in the resolution of child welfare issues (although not replacing statutory child investigation and protection practices) in social services and voluntary organisations in England and Wales since the early 1990s (FRG, 2003; Liebman, 2007; Morris and Connolly, 2012). According to the NSPCC (2009), FGCs play a supporting role to child protection services by becoming a planning mechanism (after initial abuse investigations have been investigated and assessed) which allows the wider family group a greater input into the child protection plan. The literature

indicates continuing use of FGCs in England and Wales. Brown (2003) notes that, between 1999 and 2001, 55-57% of local authorities were either using FGC or were considering its use. In 2009 the number of local authorities in England and Wales using some form of FGC increased to 69% (FRG, 2009). One worthy statistical note in terms of geographic location that is especially relevant to this study is that the FRG found that "within England there is significant regional variation from 100% in the East of England to 50% in the North East" (FRG, 2009:4). Therefore, it was assumed that access to FGC services and research subjects would be easier given the greater volume of programs in the area where the study was undertaken.

FGC is viewed by the FRG (2003:1) as "a mechanism that enables the formal state systems to work in partnership with informal family and community systems, recognising the knowledge and expertise of family and informal systems and recognising the knowledge and expertise of professional systems". This partnership between statutory and family systems is seen as essential as it draws on the strengths of both systems, and therefore is fundamental to achieving successful outcomes for young people. FGCs developed and evolved from the broader spectrum of Restorative Justice (RJ) interventions which seek to resolve conflict and repair harm (Frost et al., 2012b). In New Zealand where FGC originated, a single model of FGC is deployed for both welfare and justice concerns with some slight internal process variations according to the type of issue addressed and legal safeguards for participants in the justice setting (Doolan, 2010).

Frost et al. (2012a) in their literature review identify that research on New Zealand model FGC's used in welfare cases has been undertaken internationally, encompassing both quantitative and qualitative paradigms and using numerous data collection methods. Research studies specifically focussing on the use of FGC in

England in addressing child welfare concerns found the following positive outcomes: successful family engagement and the production of agency agreed plans; high levels of satisfaction by attendees; employment of cultural sensitivity; and the empowerment of young people (Lupton and Stevens, 1997; Simmonds et al., 1998; Smith and Hennessy, 1998; Merkel-Holguin et al., 2003). These positive findings in relation to cultural sensitivity and empowerment are of particular relevance to my own study. Other international studies have reported reduced concerns regarding subsequent abuse or maltreatment and also greater family involvement for various family members, especially fathers, which has resulted in the strengthening of family ties and relationships (Kiely and Bussey, 2001; Holland et al., 2005; Koch et al., 2006; Falck, 2008). These studies, while few in number, all identify that the process of FGC is generally seen as positive and empowering for those participating. What hasn't been examined is how changing aspects of the conference process such as the provision of FGC Advocacy impacts both positively and negatively on the level of participation and empowerment. This became the key focus of my study.

Clarke and Hughes (2010) identify a number of methodological concerns about previous FGC studies. In particular, they criticise studies for their inability to grasp the complexities of family decision-making. Many small-scale evaluations of FGCs are seen as having been unable to cover the scope and range of the work, or satisfactorily attend to longer term outcomes (Brown, 2007; Clarke and Hughes, 2010). I will now go on to analyse the most relevant studies, identifying gaps in our knowledge and why these were significant in terms of my own study.

Given Clarke and Hughes's (2010) view on the need to identify the longer term outcomes of FGC, longitudinal studies possibly offer the greatest opportunity to view the success of an FGC intervention. However, this type of study is often undertaken

over a number of years which makes them expensive and complex to manage (Gomm, 2008). The longer the time period of study, the more susceptible the data is to numerous different variables being introduced or perhaps reduced, making accurate analysis of what has worked over time a difficult process (Fox, 2008).

Three longitudinal studies of note on FGC are those of Sundell and Vinnerljung (2004), Berzin et al. (2008), and Morris (2007). These studies reach divergent conclusions; the first two are both quantitative studies which challenge the notion of FGC as a positive intervention, while Morris (2007), a qualitative study, advocates the use of FGCs with children in relation to welfare issues.

Sundell and Vinnerljung (2004) report on a three-year longitudinal study in Sweden. It found that young people exposed to FGC showed a higher re-referral rate when compared to established child protection services (more often due to further abuse) and more time in out-of-home placements compared to young people using traditional assessment and intervention services. The authors acknowledge that many young people and their families referred to the FGC project had more initial serious difficulties than standard child protection cases and that this would have had an impact on the success of the FGC. The negative outcomes in Sundell and Vinnerljung (2004) study may also reflect the point at which the FGC was deployed. In Sweden, FGC appears to have been used as an alternative to established child protection interventions. Berzin et al. (2008) and Morris (2007) studies refer to the reduction of subsequent concerns, possibly because FGCs appear to have been undertaken as a secondary intervention, once protection issues had been resolved.

Morris (2007) undertook an evaluation to identify the strengths and weakness of one FGC service in England regarding child-related intervention data held by the same

local authority. The evaluation assessed the short and long-term outcomes for children who were involved in the FGC service and also sought to evaluate what might have been the outcomes if FGC were not employed. Comparisons were also made between family-generated plans and the outcomes for children in relation to the Every Child Matters outcomes (Children Act, 2004).

Morris (2007) retrospectively analysed agreed FGC family plans from 2001 - 2006 involving 117 FGC's and 205 children overall. Given the nature of FGC interventions, obviously the majority of young people who attended did so for child welfare-related reasons, such as being a child in need, family support, kinship care, and permanency planning away from the family (Morris, 2007). Families and FGC or Social Service professionals were contacted by telephone and using a semi-structured interview schedule were asked about the progress of the child involved and, if possible, alternative outcomes had the FGC not taken place. In addition, 11 'in depth discursive interviews' were undertaken with family members or a professional involved in the conference. Lastly, a meeting was held which families were invited to attend and further information was gathered at this point.

Methodological difficulties persist in understanding why the same type of longitudinal study established differing outcomes; one explanation could be that different research paradigms were used. This reflects the complex debate surrounding evidence based practice (EBP) which is especially salient in the area of social sciences, where a number of contentious issues arise around what constitutes valid evidence (Trinder and Reynolds, 2000; Glasby et al., 2007). The literature reflects a hierarchy of methods and evidence which place quantitative methods and research, especially systematic reviews and meta analyses, as the pinnacle of reliability (McNeece and Thyer, 2004), and which view qualitative studies as the least reliable (Marsh et al.,

2005; Denvall, 2008). In reviewing the research designs undertaken previously concerning FGC, it became apparent that while seen as less scientific, a qualitative approach would be the most appropriate for my study. For example, in the Swedish study, Sundell and Vinnerljung (2004) used a quantitative approach to their research, applying multivariate statistical methods to assist with data collection and analysis. Berzin et al. (2008) undertook a similar multivariate study in America which also identified FGC outcomes for young people in a welfare setting as less positive and at best the same as if FGC were not used. These two quantitative studies aimed to establish success in terms of statistically identifying positive outcomes for the young people and children involved in welfare conferences, focussing on child safety and placement and permanency issues.

However, Sundell and Vinnerljung (2004) and Berzin et al. (2008) reported difficulties in using a quantitative statistical approach. In the American study, changes occurred during the study in terms of assessment and referral criteria, for example, definition in what constitutes family support, allowing youth to participate in the process and sample size (Berzin et al., 2008). Broader structural issues were identified and included budgetary constraints, implementation of the study within wider agency contexts, and program integrity in terms the absence of a 'post' conference phase or review meeting to identify progress or additional support needs. An acknowledgement of the impact of external and internal variables within the process is observed by Sundell and Vinnerljung, (2004: 281) when they state that "there are no robust theoretical models of what background factors to control". In relation to social work and the social sciences, authors such as Sempik et al. (2007) assert that the classic scientific experiment and systematic review can be the least useful to practitioners and

that rich qualitative insights into the lives and needs of service users are far more useful.

The multivariate studies established that a quantitative approach could not measure the impact of the FGC process on families, only the outcomes of the process. In contrast, the qualitative interviews employed by Morris allowed for the process of FGC to be examined and this identified that family engagement was enhanced by the FGC process (Morris, 2007). However, Morris (2007) does acknowledge that some difficulties were encountered due to the nature of her research methodology. The use of a retrospective study reduced the number of respondents to be interviewed, as many families could not be found because they no longer were in contact with social services. So the sample was not representative of the total number of participants involved. Overall, however, it provided some longer term data regarding service development.

A more time-limited qualitative study undertaken in England by Mutter et al. (2008) researched 30 youth justice and welfare FGC over a 15-month period using strengths and difficulties questionnaires (SDQ) to interview participants at three established points during the conference process. A modified SDQ was employed prior and post conference and then on average 6 months later, to assess any changes in the impact of the FGC on the young person's psychosocial profile or wider influence on the subsequent participants. A slightly altered questionnaire was deployed for use with the other participants. The study focused on the outcomes of recidivism and psychosocial changes that occur within the young people. It gathered service user feedback along with participant questionnaires and therefore provided a broad range of data material. The conclusions that the authors drew suggest that the positive impact of FGC should influence the further develop and incorporation of the approach

more widely with young people and their families (Mutter et al., 2008). However, SDQ are used to predict child psychiatric/ psychological disorders and although modified for this particular study, their association with the medical model and the potential pathologising of offending behaviour is of concern to some (Goodman, 1997; McGuire, 2004). In addition, the focus on outcomes potentially suppresses the experiences and perceptions of the young people, their families, and other significant participants of the conference process, and this continues to offer something of a challenge in seeking to identify 'what works' in the process of FGC intervention.

Berzin, et al. (2008) found that in their study, the two American counties researched used two different versions of a conferencing model, each one a variant of the original New Zealand model of conferencing (Crampton, 2007; Thurman-Eyer and Mirsky, 2009). One research site used the 'family unity' meeting model which emerged out of a case work audit conducted by one particular state office for Children and Families. The other used a blended approach incorporating the family group conferencing model based on the original New Zealand model and the unity model (Berzin, et al., 2008). Despite acknowledging that there are variations between the models, the authors state that the basic tenets of collaboration and partnership working – cultural respect and sensitivity, children's rights, empowerment, and extended family support – were the same. The New Zealand model examined in my study was adapted from the original version and used with young people in the English context. Therefore it was interesting to see if the conclusions of Berzin et al. (2008) that variations in the model did not change outcomes would play out in the same way for the participants in my study.

Berzin et al. (2008) also identified concerns with the frequency of conferences undertaken, for example, in one county conferencing occurred only once with a

limited intervention time of a maximum of six months, while the other county offered numerous conferences and provided support until the case was closed (Berzin, et al., 2008). This data is relevant to my study as it identifies an inconsistency in how young people are engaged or potentially excluded through the FGC process. Mutter et al. (2008) identify the New Zealand FGC model and use of private family time as essential to the conferencing process. Unfortunately, this study does not identify gender or ethnicity differences within the group studied.

To gain a better understanding of variations in practice assists in the examination of whether attendees have specific motivations and therefore expectations of the process prior to the conference taking place. Morris's (2007) retrospective study by its nature did not ascertain expectations or motivations 'pre' conference and this may be particularly salient in welfare case where children may believe that family reconciliation is possible as an outcome of the conference and this in itself could influence attendance. Additionally, the potential of having the matter returned to court to be dealt with in another fashion can be seen as motivating; however, given the underlying principles of FGC, state coercion would be at a variance with its perceived aims and objectives (Lupton, 1998; Frost et al., 2012b).

There is debate in the literature concerning coercion and empowerment and how they are not necessarily mutually exclusive and can co-exist (Gordon, 1986; Adams and Chandler, 2004). The focus of the welfare system will inevitably involve elements of coercion as it seeks to protect vulnerable individuals and re-establish social norms and behaviours acceptable to society. However, the justification of using a restorative intervention such as FGC, which is underpinned by notions of voluntarism and equitable participation and whose virtues are extolled as service user empowerment, anti-oppressive and anti-discriminatory practice, and power sharing, may be

somewhat undermined in its practice application (Corby et al., 1996). These virtues would be seen as exemplary examples of good social work practice; however, practitioners working within a statutory framework may find it difficult to achieve these aims when charged with the responsibility of first and foremost protecting the interests of the young person.

Despite the positive outcomes of Morris's (2007) evaluation it is fair to say that in terms of the EBP agenda she reinforces, to some degree, the positivist argument concerning the unreliability of qualitative research (Marsh et al., 2005; Denvall, 2008). This is perhaps most emphasised in the first of the core research questions: 'What were the short-term and long-term outcomes for those children who have been the subject of a family group conference and what might have been the outcomes without the FGC?' (Morris, 2007:2). The first part of this question is appropriate and very useful; however, the second part, 'what might have been the outcomes without the FGC', becomes purely subjective conjecture. It is perhaps this inability to establish a direct correlation between FGC, its initial perceived successful impact, and longer term outcomes for participants that leaves it somewhat a marginal, or complementary, intervention rather than a convincing alternative to current approaches in addressing child welfare concerns.

Holland and Rivett's (2008) study examined the connections between the processes of family therapy and FGC. They studied 17 New Zealand FGC's in Wales used for welfare concerns and identified a number of similarities in the process of undertaking a FGC and family therapy interventions used by family therapists. Of particular interest for my study were the demographics of the participants. The study stated that it involved a cross section of Welsh society; however, the findings established a contradictory outcome, as the families were all white and mainly from a lower income

background. The children were aged between 6 and 18 years of age (some with learning and physical disabilities) and all the conferences were welfare focussed. The age range, disabilities, and social status of the families involved in Holland and Rivett's (2008) study were potentially pertinent to my own study. Although the focus of Holland and Rivett's (2008) article is to draw attention to the similar processes involved between FGC and family therapy, the research underpinning it relates more the outcomes rather than the experiences of the individual family members. What the study lacked was a robust critique of how empowering the process may be for individuals and families. In addition, there was not acknowledgment that although FGC and family therapy may be similar, many families who are involved with social services could feel pressured or coerced into attending the conference as the consequences could be potentially negative.

Although Holland and Rivett (2008) acknowledge that the process of FGC inherently incorporates an element of pre-conference preparation and therefore pre-engagement and expectation, this does not appear to be identified in many studies. The preparation stage of FGC is a necessary, if time consuming, element of the FGC process.

However, few studies, with the exception of Mutter et al. (2008), have interviewed participants 'pre' conference. In their study, of the 12 young people interviewed at the 'pre' conference stage, 9 knew what was required of them, 7 disagreed with the statement 'it was up to me if I wanted to take part', and 5 disagreed that they felt 'well prepared for the conference' (Mutter et al., 2008: 265). It appears that a significant number of young people felt unprepared in undertaking the conference and whether they felt coerced is a matter of conjecture. This is not a new concern; as early as 1992 evidence that established that children were not being adequately prepared emerged; few felt they were able to participate or had a clear understanding of the problems or

processes involved (Mittler, 1994; Thoburn et al., 1995). This finding is important for my study, as the role of advocate in FGC involves these elements of preparation and support and the level to which these are implemented in a conference will impact the degree to which young people are empowered through the process.

One needs to be cautious about evidence produced from these particular quantitative methods since the structure and processes of FGC may not easily be amenable to comparative experimental evaluation, particularly in relation to the lived experience of the young people and their families and other participants, which are variables that cannot always be controlled (Witkin and Harrison, 2001; Glasby, et al., 2007; Zeira et al., 2008). These studies focussed specifically on identifying outcomes rather than on the experiences for young people and their families undertaking the process.

One qualitative study that did look at the experiences of young people who had undertaken a FGC was Bell and Wilson's (2006) evaluation study. The authors retrospectively interviewed family members and young people to ascertain their views of conferences that they attended six weeks previously. They found that advocates were not routinely available, so practice was patchy. Therefore, in my study, I wanted to know whether advocates were participating in FGC and, if so, what impact this might have on the conference processes. Bell and Wilson focused on the participants' broader experiences of FGC whereas my study examines advocacy practices solely. I chose to do this through a number of different perspectives including the views of the advocates themselves. Also, while family time was not mentioned in Bell and Wilson's work, in this study I decided to examine how advocates could influence this particular part of the FGC process, given that it is key to establishing a plan and therefore outcomes for young people.

Morris and Connolly's (2012) international review of family involvement in decision-making demonstrates the capacity of FGC to empower families while additionally identifying some contradictory findings concerning 'family time'. Connolly's (2006a) study suggested that family time was seen as regulating family behaviour and therefore was productive. In a different study, there was little engagement between family members and therefore family time was felt to be unproductive. In addition, the review makes no mention of advocacy and the role of advocates. However, it concludes that the agency of young people should be a central concern in the FGC depending on their ability to participate regarding age and capacity. The core components of agency are distinguished, acknowledging that attendance is not necessarily participation and that being listened to is not the same as having influence over decisions. These two findings concerning agency, along with the suggestion that advocates require special skills to support young people, were especially relevant for my study (Holland et al., 2005; Laws and Kirby, 2007).

The literature reviewed above has highlighted that the research of FGC is limited and that there are contradictory findings, apparently linked to differing methods of inquiry. Quantitative studies focussed on outcomes while qualitative studies tended to examine the process of the intervention and therefore experiences. The quantitative studies were useful in alerting me to the possibility that variations in the FGC model used may influence some of its processes. Also Berzin et al. (2008) identify in their study that the frequency and number of meetings for FGC participants could be factors to explore in my own research. The demographics from Holland and Rivett's (2008) study forewarned me of the possibility that conferences may be used more often with specific social groups. This would be another area for exploration during my interviews. The sequencing of interviews used in Mutter et al. (2008) qualitative

study appeared to offer the potential for gathering information pre and post conference; however, the use of a standardised questionnaire appeared to limit the scope of information gathered. Bell and Wilson's work identifies that very little research attention has been given to the role of advocacy within FGC and especially in family time. My study sought therefore to address these under-researched areas and specifically to explore how the advocate's role within the process might shape the participants' experiences.

Advocacy

In England and Wales the promotion of advocacy in its many forms was, until recently, undertaken by the Action 4 Advocacy organisation. This group was a support and resource agency for the entire advocacy sector and provided a range of information, training and capacity-building services across many professional fields including mental health, health, and children's services. Due to central government funding cuts, advocacy services have now been devolved away from one central information point (Advocacy 4 Action) and back into individual service domains (Coyle, 2013). Despite the closure of the organisation, its influence is still felt through its role in promoting and developing an advocacy charter and standards for the professional. Therefore Advocacy 4 Action's definition of advocacy remains relevant:

Advocacy is taking action to help people say what they want, secure their rights, represent their interests and obtain services they need. Advocates and advocacy schemes work in partnership with the people they support and take their side. Advocacy promotes social inclusion, equality and social justice (Action 4 Advocacy, 2002: 2).

Advocacy falls into two main, if somewhat broad categories: 'individual case' and 'cause based' advocacy. The former is the most prevalent in child welfare and is concerned with matters raised by individuals. It is also sometimes referred to as 'issue based' and the latter (which is often generated by the former) extends individual issues to those that address systemic concerns (Pithouse and Crowley, 2007; Boylan and Dalrymple, 2009; Action 4 Advocacy, 2011).

The model of advocacy most commonly used within child welfare and protection cases and with parenting issues is issue based advocacy (also known as 'short term' or 'crisis' advocacy). Two key precepts of this particular approach to advocacy provision are that advocates with specialized knowledge and experience can be deployed to assist service users (young people) and the relationship between service user and advocate will end once the specific issue has been addressed. The empirical aspect of this study is concerned with issue based advocacy.

Issue based advocacy can usefully be viewed in terms of Hodgson's (1995) continuum of 'passive' to 'active'. Hodgson suggests that, while still requiring protection, children and young people can be perceived as active citizens and participants. This is extended by the work of Jenkins (1995) who suggests that passive advocacy constitutes speaking up for someone else and is often used in relation to young people (and protection concerns) who by the very nature of their vulnerability should be given special consideration and additional support. Active advocacy, as the name suggests, seeks to enable an individual to speak up for his/ herself. It is seen as empowering, fostering independence, and underpinned by a liberationist rather than protectionist view of young people. In practice, both active and passive approaches may be evident in relation to the advocacy roles undertaken by "health and welfare professionals" (Boylan and Dalrymple, 2009: 126). This distinction has relevance to

this study because aspects of passivity and activity were seen to be present in the interview data gathered from young people. While these two aspects of advocacy were identified in my study, Henderson (2007) rightly cautions us to be aware that the range of advocacy practices is very broad and that an accurate definition of advocacy has still yet to be agreed.

Advocacy is inextricably linked to notions of empowerment, enabling the service user to have a voice in terms of expressing their rights and having choices in the services they receive (Adams, 1990; Beresford and Croft, 1993; McCold, 2007; Mullaly, 2007). Both ideas emphasise the devolution of power away from the organisational and professional 'expert' towards the sharing of power and control with all parties. As suggested by Burke and Harrison (2002) this shift in power links with anti-discriminatory practice and anti-oppressive practice, as advocacy and empowerment seek to address the abuse of structural power that affects people's lives at the macro (organisational) and micro (individual) levels of society.

With the emphasis on working 'with' rather than 'for' the service user, advocacy and empowerment interconnect with user involvement, participation, and partnership working (Banks, 2006; Cleaver, 2006). This shift toward power sharing is seen by some as definitive of both advocacy and of empowerment (Leadbetter, 2002). Such principles manifest themselves in the person centred practice (PCP) approach. Sanderson et al. (2004: 14) define this approach as one that highlights the service user as central to the decision-making process as it is considered "a radical way of gathering information about what is important to someone, what they want for his or her future or what support he or she needs".

Advocacy is concerned with power and how it is shared and therefore connects with the underpinning concepts of empowerment and disempowerment for young people using advocacy services. Feelings of powerlessness are often raised by children and young people in relation to decisions made about them by professionals and their own families (Boylan and Braye, 2006). Advocacy aims to mitigate those concerns and to ensure that children and young people can participate fully. Authors such as Barford and Wattam (1991) and Boylan and Dalrymple (2009) have explored the far-reaching negative effects of oppressing children by silencing their voices. They have also discussed how this ‘adultism’ or ‘childism’ can be played out in familial and professional decision-making forums. Parton (2006) extends this concern by suggesting that while young people have undoubtedly become more central within social welfare policy and practice than ever before, they have also become subject to ever greater control and regulation, which may inhibit and deny their agency.

The prevalence of issue-based advocacy provision in the child welfare system should allow young people to be more active participants in decision-making forums, depending on their circumstances. The more active a young person's advocacy participation, the more empowering it should be for them. The alignment of advocacy with empowerment should in principle establish a practice where service users can exercise their rights and express choice in the decision-making processes about them.

Therefore, how advocacy practice should support young people undertaking a FGC and any differences in how they experienced this provision would be of significant interest to my study. If ‘issue’ based advocacy did not achieve its aims or in fact had the opposite effect of its intention, disempowering rather than empowering young people in this decision-making forum, then concerns would be raised about the efficacy of advocacy in this intervention and other interventions with young people.

Advocacy in FGCs

There are advocate roles in which an informal or ‘natural’ approach is undertaken where a family member or friend (sometimes with training) can support the young person during the FGC. Alternatively, there is a more formal approach in which the advocate is trained to perform the role and is seen as independent from the family and other professional groups such as social workers (Horan and Dalrymple, 2003). The FGC coordinators role is first to find out if an informal advocate is available and, if this is not the case, to appoint an independent advocate. The advocate role is clearly delineated from others at the conference in that the advocate’s focus is one of ensuring the young person’s voice is heard; therefore, he or she must not have any additional agenda for attending the FGC. For the informal advocate, this task can be impossible as he or she may wish to have their thoughts and views heard along with those of the young person they are supporting (Horan and Dalrymple, 2003). Equally ‘independent’ advocates may be seen as biased and/ or somewhat detached and focussing only on the needs of one participant. S/he may also be seen as an ‘outsider’, which may change the dynamics of the process. Additionally, given the short time period that the advocate has to engage with the young person, s/he may not have a sufficient relationship with the young person to represent them adequately at the conference (Laws and Kirby, 2007). This is a significant theme for this study because the ways in which advocates engaged with young people were variable in practice. This variability in turn had implications for the ways in which young people were represented in the meeting, on their experience of the process, and possibly on the outcomes of the conference for them. The variations in the practice of advocacy and its potential to influence the outcomes of the conference therefore become the key focus of my study.

The decision about which advocate to appoint to which young person or participant is often left to the FGC coordinator. Good practice dictates that the decision will be one undertaken by the coordinator in partnership with the young person. However, this decision will be influenced by who is available at the time. For example, it may not be possible to appoint an advocate with specific characteristics (in terms of age, gender or ethnic background) simply because they are not available. This has the potential to impact both positively and negatively on the dynamics of the relationship between the young person and their advocate and therefore may also influence their experience of the process. Horan and Dalrymple (2003) suggest that although a FGC coordinator will attempt to find an informal advocate, in practice this is rarely possible and an independent advocate will normally be appointed. This was certainly my experience of the advocacy provision provided to young people in my study.

Independent advocates may be 'in-house' or may come from outside social services. Barnsdale and Walker (2007) and Boylan and Dalrymple (2009) identify that in England and Wales, many advocacy schemes (from which independent advocates come) are a mixture of social service and voluntary provision and this in itself contradicts core principles of the delivery of advocacy services. For example, many service providers who use independent advocacy services, such as Daybreak and the NSPCC, follow the principle that advocacy services should be distinct from the statutory systems that children and their families are involved with (Laws and Kirby, 2007; Becker, 2011). It is this neutrality that gives credence to the principles of partnership and collaborative working and highlights an alignment with service users to establish a trusting relationship.

However, impartiality and independence are difficult to achieve in practice when many advocacy services are located within or are funded by statutory organizations

such as local authorities (Becker, 2011). The ability to extricate a service from the broader powerful government discourse and agenda concerned with ‘protection’ over ‘rights’ is an obvious dilemma, and one that is not unique to FGC and has often plagued the social work profession. Pithouse and Crowley (2007: 11) found that respondents saw the “advocacy service funded by a local authority as lacking in independence because of this financial relationship”. They also found that independence was important for many young people and that, although in-house provision may strive to be independent, this may not necessarily correlate with the perception of young people as service users.

Since the 1990s, advocacy has become a professional sphere in its own right with its own training frameworks, policy guidance, legislation, charters, and codes of practice (Action 4 Advocacy, 2002; 2006; Boylan and Dalrymple, 2009). Increasingly, it is recognised as a distinct profession underpinned by particular theories and practices (Payne, 2005; Barnes, 2012). In England over the last five years, the Office of the Children’s Commissioner (OCC), the NSPCC, and Ofsted have published reports in relation to advocacy and its provision for young people in care. The OCC undertook a scoping report and outcomes were generally viewed as positive, as “the overwhelming majority of young people felt that the process of having an advocate had been very valuable” (Brady, 2011: 35). However, there were some concerns regarding access to advocacy services. The Ofsted (2010) research report focused on children’s views on advocacy and found that many young people were unaware of what advocacy was (20%) or of how to get hold of an advocate (30%). Given that advocacy services have been reduced by central government cuts, one would assume that service quality would be affected and therefore it is interesting that the number of children making complaints has not increased, but greatly reduced from “43% in 2008 to 25% in

2010". While it is hoped that young people are more confident in addressing issues for themselves, it may be more the case that they are not given sufficient information to make decisions about advocacy provision available to them and or how to access it (Ofsted, 2010). Becker (2011) in her research for the NSPCC found that choosing their own advocate rather than having one imposed upon them was important to many young people interviewed. Like Ofsted, the NSPCC emphasised the importance of consciousness-raising and ensuring that young people knew of their entitlement to advocacy support (Becker, 2011: 11). This was also acknowledged in a National Children's Advocacy Consortium report (NCAC, 2012) which identified a number of obstacles to young people accessing advocacy services. One of particular relevance for this study was "a lack of national consistency in the level and quality of advocacy provision". It was recommended that a regulatory framework be developed and effectively implemented to monitor advocacy provision (NCAC, 2012: 8). Given variations in advocacy practice may influence how empowering or disempowering the process is for young people, a regulatory framework may alleviate the concerns raised regarding awareness of advocacy provision and choice in terms of representation.

This section has established that issue-based advocacy is the prevalent approach used with young people in the child welfare system in England and Wales. Also, there are both formal and informal approaches to providing advocacy. The former is undertaken by a professional advocate, while the latter is an individual from within the family network; the positive and negative aspects of each approach have been discussed. As stated above, the formal approach is the one most used with young people undertaking social service interventions in England and Wales and this was consistent with the experiences in my study. The development of independent advocacy and its voluntary and statutory associations have also been examined. The

lack of monitoring of consistency in practice and therefore variations in advocacy provision was also identified as a concern and an area for improvement. This issue is discussed further in Chapters 6 and 8.

Children's Rights

The call for child-and-youth focused advocacy is prevalent in the literature (for example Pithouse and Crowley, 2007), not only concerning FGC but wherever significant decisions are made. The notion of 'advocacy' is linked to 'children's rights' and is associated with seeking to achieve the broad aims of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in promoting young people's rights, participation, and empowerment in decisions made about their lives (Barnes, 2012).

Children's Rights are framed by the declarations and commitments made within UNCRC which is underpinned by the fundamental requirement that the child be recognized and fully respected as a human being with rights. In addition to the rights available to all people (i.e. basic Human Rights) the UNCRC establishes rights that apply only to children. Therefore, the UNCRC seeks to promote specific rights in relation to protection concerns and the unique needs of children. However, although the UNCRC states that all the articles are indivisible, it is the foundational principle that creates "the tension between the public duty to protect children's welfare and the tradition of allocating power over children to the private realm of family life. This tension is most apparent when comparing Article 3, the best interests standard, with Article 12, the right of the child to be heard in judicial proceedings" (Stahl, 2007: 805). This is contradicted by the Children's Rights in Wales organization, which clearly states that: "There is no tension between articles 3 and 12, only a complementary role of the two general principles: one establishes the objective of

achieving the best interests of the child and the other provides the methodology for reaching the goal of hearing either the child or the children. In fact, there can be no correct application of article 3 if the components of article 12 are not respected. Likewise, article 3 reinforces the functionality of article 12, facilitating the essential role of children in all decisions affecting their lives" (Children's Rights in Wales, 2014).

Such tension around Articles 3 and 12 indicates the complexities of advocacy, participation, and empowerment for children and young people in the decisions that are being taken about them. These two articles provide context for discussion later in this chapter on how some advocacy approaches appear to work for either 'best interests' (Article 3) or 'wishes and feelings' which relate to levels of participation established in Article 12. Articles 3 and 12 also reflect the difficulties inherent in maintaining the divisibility of these two aims in social work practice where the paramountcy principle acts to divide these two principles, establishing the 'best interests' of the child as of greater importance than participation due to the legal (and moral) obligation of keeping children safe from significant harm (Children Act, 1989).

The separation of 'best interests' and 'participation' and, therefore, the level of agency a young person may have in terms of expressing their 'wishes and feelings' in a decision-making forum in relation to child welfare practices is a critical issue. According to Stahl (2007: 825), "in England, there is someone to protect the child's best interests but no-one necessarily to advocate for the child's wishes". But the growth of independent advocacy has sought to address this gap. Clearly there are difficulties in attempting to focus entirely upon the child's wishes. This may be especially apparent where social workers (involved in the same case as the advocate),

undertaking their legal remit in terms of child protection duties, have to make decisions focusing mainly on best interests. This difference became apparent in my study in terms of the variation in training ethos and practice focus of the FGC and national agency advocacy trained advocates. The division in advocacy approach reflected a position undertaken by the advocate which emphasised either a 'best interests' or 'wishes and feelings' stance. This in turn impacted how the young people were supported through the FGC process.

The discussion above concerning UNCRC articles and the notion that they are indivisible has been undermined to some extent by the tension between Articles 3 and 12. Variations in FGC Advocacy training ethos and subsequent practice reflects either a 'best interests' or 'wishes and feelings' stance undertaken by advocates. This establishes a divisibility rather than indivisibility between Articles 3 and 12 and creates a tension in how advocacy is practiced with young people. In understanding how an advocate has been trained and therefore will practice advocacy with young people becomes especially relevant for my study as it reflects a variation in how advocates engage and support young people through the process.

Although advocacy is presented in many English social work key texts as a core component of social work ethics, values, education, and practice (for example: Payne, 2005; Banks, 2006; Adams et al., 2009), it does not feature in the profession's international or national definitions or mandates or in the Health and Care Professional Council (HCPC) standards of conduct, performance, and ethics (International Federation of Social Work, 2012; BASW, 2013; HCPC, 2013). This perhaps suggests that, although theories associated with advocacy and social work practices overlap, social workers and advocates have distinct priorities. Hence, according to Hardwick (2013: 14), there has been a "realignment of professional

boundaries and territories of practice for social workers - a realignment characterised by loss of role" when it comes to their duties and interventions with children and young people. This change in role could be seen as the differentiation between statutory social work practice and non-statutory work with young people and, has resulted in a social work focus on more serious statutory protection concerns and, other roles such as advocacy becoming professionalised and undertaking perceived less serious welfare interventions. Frost et al. (2012) cite Lupton and Nixon (1999) as they refer to these tensions as a balance between rights and responsibilities and participatory decision-making that reflect a welfare system that struggles to protect children and respect family autonomy simultaneously. For example, Social workers are obliged by law to attend to 'best interests' (Children Act, 1989) while, in contrast, advocates are expected (Action 4 Advocacy, 2002) to focus on expressing the voice of their clients regarding their 'wishes and feelings' (Becker, 2011; Barnes, 2012; Hardwick, 2013). Barnes (2012) suggests that social work may be extinguishing the voice of the child if it conflicts with broader protection issues, especially where the paramountcy principle takes precedence, and advocacy is denigrated for not considering wider protection concerns by solely focusing on the young person's wishes and feelings. Therefore while diminishing the child's right to be heard and acting in their best interests is often valid in terms of a social work response to some serious protection concerns, the same practice in less serious child welfare decision-making processes such as FGC and independent advocacy can infringe the child's right to be heard and may itself amount to oppressive practice.

Hardwick's (2013) realignment in role can be seen to centre on the notions of participation and empowerment, both key underpinning principles in advocacy and social work approaches to working with service users (Department of Health, 2002;

BASW, 2013; HCPC, 2013). Frost et al. (2012b) suggest that social work practice involving higher levels of participation and empowerment reflects a shift in perception of social workers seen as 'expert' and knowing how best to solve a family issue, to one in which practitioners work in partnership with service users and advocates. The role of advocate and their ability to influence the level of participation and empowerment were key areas to explore in my interviews with young people regarding their experiences of the process.

Participation and empowerment are commonly understood as being on a continuum of incremental stages that reflect the level of participation that the child or young person has in any given decision-making setting. Hart (1992) uses an eight step ladder to describe the range and variations in level of participation from 'non-participation' to 'complete participation' for young people. The ladder is used by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) to assist governments in identifying the level of participation required under its protocols.

Diagram 1: Hart's (1992) Participation Ladder

8	Child-initiated, shared decisions with adults	Complete Participation
7	Child-initiated and directed	
6	Adult-initiated, shared decisions with children	
5	Consulted but informed	
4	Assigned but informed	
3	Tokenism	Non Participation
2	Decoration	
1	Manipulation	

The aim of the ladder is to provide a tool to assess children's participation in projects and systems. The first three rungs of the ladder: manipulation, decoration and tokenism are seen as non-participation, as the involvement of children and young people is limited or symbolic. According to Hart (1992: 9), non-participation reflects "a strong tendency on the part of adults to underestimate the competence of children while at the same time using them in events to influence some cause; the effect is patronizing". It has also been stated elsewhere that participative activity initiated by government tends to be on the fourth (assigned but informed) or fifth (consulted but informed) rungs of the ladder, occasionally moving to the sixth rung (adult-initiated, shared decisions with children) (Scottish Government, 2012). Hart points out that 'genuine' or true empowerment begins from the sixth rung and that, although the "projects at this level are initiated by adults; the decision-making is shared with the young people" (Hart, 1992: 12). Obviously, the aim is for rung eight to be achieved where possible as it denotes the pinnacle of participation with children and young people. However, anywhere on the continuum between rungs six and eight is viewed as satisfactory. My study explores the degree to which the aims of FGC and advocacy provision connect with the notions of participation and empowerment. Hart's ladder was used as a tool in the analysis of the level of participation of young people in the FGC process.

Empowerment involves building on the strengths of service users, acknowledging their voice and wishes in choosing the services they receive. Unlike advocacy, empowerment is a major concept identified within both the national and international definitions of social work (International Federation of Social Work, 2012; BASW, 2013). According to the Arnstein (1969), empowerment is the outcome of participation, and rungs six, seven, and eight on Hart's ladder reflect the levels of

empowerment experienced by children and young people in any given decision-making process or forum. Participation and empowerment also intersect with the notions of 'best interests' and 'wishes and feelings'. The Scottish Government (2012) suggests that the inclination of governments and, therefore, the provision for young people's participation in projects or decision-making arenas that impact them directly relates to the fourth (assigned but informed) or fifth (consulted but informed) rungs of Hart's participation ladder. These two rungs and those ranked below them appear to reflect the potential of a 'best interests', paternalistic approach to working with young people, whereas rung six or above adds the potential for the 'wishes and feelings' of the young person to be considered and to have weight in the decision-making process; this, in turn, reflects a greater level of empowerment. Hart's ladder was useful in my study as it provided a framework to assess the level of participation and therefore potential empowerment of young people in the FGC process.

If the definition of participation is meant to encompass a young person's involvement in decision-making through "a range of processes, levels and activities", it should permeate across multiple layers of interaction and relations of power (Kirby et al., 2003: 21). Research evidence suggests that participation by young people in decision-making, rather than exacerbating the level of risk, in many cases resulted in better decision-making and enhanced effective safeguarding (McNeish and Newman, 2002; Pithouse and Crowley, 2007). As FGC is a secondary intervention undertaken after protection concerns have been addressed, and it is considered a participatory process in itself, it was assumed that the experiences of the young people interviewed in this study would have reflected higher levels of participation and more effective planning. This is explored in terms of the outcomes of the FGC in Chapter 7.

New Zealand FGC Model

In the New Zealand model, professionals from different fields such as social services, police, and mental health attend the conference for information-sharing purposes and to ensure that any agreements made during the process fulfil statutory requirements.

In England and Wales and many other European nations, conferencing is not a statutory requirement and has no legal obligations attached to its outcomes (Shaw and Jane, 1999). Nevertheless, the introduction of the Public Law Outline (PLO) in England and Wales reflects the procedural mandate of FGC and established it as a policy (therefore optional) rather than a legal consideration when addressing child welfare concerns (Downs et al., 2008).

Following Merkel-Holguin (1996), the structure of the New Zealand model has four main phases: (1) referral, (2) preparation and planning, (3) the meeting, and (4) follow-up planning. While advocacy in the New Zealand FGC model is dealt with in a separate section below, the process of advocacy permeates across all of the four main phases. Given that variations in advocacy were identified and that these may influence the experiences of the participants across all phases, it is important for the reader to understand these main elements individually so that the impact of advocacy on any phase is more easily understood.

Referral

The referral to a FGC service, and therefore for independent advocacy support, comes from a social worker in relation to a range of identified child welfare concerns (Nixon and Ashley, 2007). In some jurisdictions outside England and Wales, this is a mandatory process for certain cases, especially where there are child protection issues (Doolan, 2010; Yukon Health and Social Services, 2013). However, in England and

Wales, the referral is generated by the social worker once any initial protection concerns have been highlighted and addressed. The referral goes to a lead independent coordinator who contacts the social worker to discuss the welfare concerns raised. The case is then allocated by the lead coordinator to another coordinator to undertake the work for the conference. Family members who can provide information and or support are contacted to discuss attendance, timing of the meeting, venue, cultural preferences, and whether interpretation services are required to identify further family or friends who could be a potential resource or support. The welfare concerns are highlighted, along with the aims of the conference. Also the possible exclusion of certain family members due to safety concerns or historical family difficulties is discussed. There are often time-frames stipulated for this process, especially if the matters to be addressed relate to court appearances (Nixon and Ashley, 2007). In this study, the independent coordinators who had been allocated a case and who had already met with the young person and their family assessed the suitability for referral to the research study.

Preparation and Planning

In terms of preparation and planning, FGCs require a great deal of preparatory work which is both time-consuming and resource intensive (Liebmann, 2007). Preparation is necessary to ensure that the attendees are willing to participate in the process and also to ascertain the family's motivation to comply with the conference process and outcome. Time to plan is also required in order to draw together as many participants (usually family members) as is practicable to participate in the conference. This time may help to identify potential resources and increases the chance for successful outcomes. There are two major aspects of preparation time. The first is that it is used to ensure the safety of the participants, especially children, young people, or other

vulnerable attendees. Discussions between the coordinator and the referring social worker are undertaken and assist in identifying family or extended family members whose participation may be unsafe or volatile. The second factor is the requirement of the 'no new information' rule. This rule ensures that, on the day of the meeting, no new information regarding the case is introduced into the forum, so as not to disrupt the aims and objectives of the conference. This rule regulates the process and ensures that all participants know in advance the exact meeting purpose and discussion points and, therefore, keeps individuals prepared and focused on the reasons for the meeting (American Humane Association, 2010). The meeting brings together all parties with an interest in finding a positive solution to the presenting child welfare concern. The FGC coordinator (in consultation with the referring social worker) invites appropriate participants to the meeting. The coordinator facilitates the meeting and makes sure that family time is implemented. Follow-up planning is the final phase of the process and makes sure that any agreements or plans made by the family in family time are written up and distributed to all participants. The coordinator would also keep in contact with the family to monitor and evaluate progress and decide if a meeting to review the plan is required.

Resource allocation, attendance, venue, timing of the conference, and the 'no new information' rule are all aspects associated with the preparation and planning phase of the FGC process and were identified as key issues for this study.

Within this four-phase structure, coordination, family time, community involvement, and advocacy are seen as essential elements in ensuring successful outcomes and these are outlined below. As mentioned previously, it is important for the reader to have a good understanding of these essential elements as differences in advocacy

provision impacted how young people and their families experienced each aspect. I will explain the four essential elements of the process under separate subheadings.

Coordination

The role of coordinator is of paramount importance and should be as non-partial as possible (Mirsky, 2003; Essex County Council, 2004; FRG, 2007; Doolan, 2010).

The coordinator role in the New Zealand model as used in New Zealand incorporates both coordination and advocacy. However, in England and Wales these roles are kept separate and children and young people are offered an independent advocate to support them through the process. This is recognised as good practice in seeking to ensure young people have a voice and, specifically, a say in the decisions made about them (Horan and Dalrymple, 2003). The rationale for the division of roles undertaken in this approach is less clear. Doolan (2010:8) suggests that the reason may be financial, acknowledging difficulties in “sustaining the resource commitment to this [FGC] process, particularly the provision of an independent coordinator”.

Family Time

In the New Zealand model, once an incident has been discussed, the issues identified and acknowledged, families, extended families, and friends involved in the conference are given the opportunity to discuss and devise a plan to address the identified concerns (Mirsky, 2003; Fox, 2005). This is known as ‘family time’, where the coordinator and any other professionals involved leave the room. Once a family plan has been decided upon, the professionals are recalled to resume the conference and listen to the family's plan to resolve the issues identified. The plan is then negotiated until the family, community, and professionals are satisfied with the terms and that it meets with the coordinator's and social worker's approval and any statutory

obligations required by law. This ensures that the process is one that includes the views of the community, family, and victim in order to guarantee the focus returns to the family decision-making process and does not simply address a professional/statutory agenda. The literature identifies family time as key to the whole FGC process (Mirsky, 2003; Nixon and Ashley, 2007; Doolan, 2010). Family time is seen as being empowering as families and their friends plan ways to assist their kin. Plans and agreements made by families regarding their own members are seen as having more potential for success as the investment is greater than where ideas or interventions are imposed by professionals (Axford, 2007).

Despite the centrality of family time, some advocates are encouraged by their organisational training ethos to remain in this traditionally professional-free aspect of the meeting. This study is crucially concerned with this phenomenon, particularly how the presence of professionals might affect the dynamics of the process, potentially undermining the empowerment of the family. Some advocates appeared to place emphasis on 'best interests', others on 'wishes and feelings', while at other times these two emphases overlap and complement each other. These differing priorities are important as they may change who is most supported in the process, and this may disrupt rather than enhance empowerment, collaboration, and partnership working especially when there could be tensions within the family group. Because some advocates will give greater emphasis to the child's wishes and feelings, his or her practice may be at odds with the paramountcy principle. This problem is somewhat mitigated in England and Wales as conferences only occur once any child protection concerns have been addressed (Working Together, 2010).

The advocates' approach to providing advocacy underpinned by either a 'best interests' or 'wishes and feelings' focus establishes a variation in advocacy practice

which impacts the level of support a young person receives in the conference. This, in turn, may influence the level of empowerment or disempowerment the young person experiences through the process, and therefore understanding the focus of the advocate was pivotal for this study.

Community

Community involvement is another key element in the conferencing process as it may provide an additional resource to address safeguarding concerns identified for children and young people (FRG, 2007). In its broadest sense, FGC is both a process and a location where professionals and the community can come together to work for the goal of stronger community and provide space for the family to communicate their concerns and establish plans to safeguard their young people from further harm.

The community, when involved in problem solving, can help find creative solutions concerning the incident and this is deemed a more productive response (Sarnoff, 2001). This is reinforced by community development theory, which holds that community members, when mobilised, can work together to achieve goals and aspirations that benefit their community. This collaboration is especially effective when people feel that, through their collective actions, they can have a say and have more control; they are thus more likely to feel empowered to influence events and decisions affecting them and their environments (Ife, 2002). In this study, community is seen as the young person's cultural link to a travelling community, where there appeared greater bonds between the young people and their extended familial and community networks. The extent of these bonds and their potential to increase the success of the FGC are explored in Chapter 7.

Mirsky (2003: 1) argues that “when families are empowered to fix their own problems, the very process of empowerment facilitates healing”. The young person benefits from having their community and family included in the proceedings and in creating a plan that directly affects them, and the hope is that they will take on more responsibility for their future. However, as Morris and Connolly (2012: 46) point out "countries that have a nuclear family focus may find processes involving extended families more challenging, raising issues relating to cross-cultural application". This has particular pertinence to my study given its setting in England, which has an especially strong regard for the nuclear family.

Advocacy in the New Zealand FGC

FGC Advocacy (issued based and independent) is associated with the ‘strengths based approach’ to social work which seeks to establish an individual’s positive attributes over their perceived deficits. This approach acknowledges that individuals, families, and communities all have strengths which can be drawn upon to address particular social welfare issues. It is seen by many as “going right to the heart of relationship building with clients and challenges social workers to examine their position and roles in helping relationships” (Munford and Sanders, 2005: 159). Strength based approaches seek to empower, nurture, and support relationships, not only between service user and carer but also extended to include professionals, families, and community (Munford and Sanders, 1999; Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2006).

Saleebey (2002) has highlighted five key principles that underpin the strengths-based approach; these are: “(1) that every individual, group, family and community have strengths; (2) trauma, abuse, illness and struggle may be injurious but they may also be sources of challenge and opportunity; (3) assume that you do not know the upper

limits of the capacity to grow and change and take individual, group and community aspiration seriously; (4) we best serve clients by collaborating with them; and lastly, (5) every environment is full of resources” (Saleebey, 2002: 12-18).

An integral element of the strengths-based approach is the involvement of “family, community, and neighbours” or what Munford and Sanders (1999: 158) call the harnessing of “informal and naturally occurring networks”. With reference to advocacy this approach can be seen in terms of identifying a ‘natural’ advocate (family member or friend) who can support or represent the service user (Pranis, 2000; Horverak, 2009). In England, these networks may be stronger in particular cultures or subcultures that are more community rather than individually focussed and therefore a natural advocate may emerge more easily from particular cultural groups. As community support is seen as an essential component of a FGC it is also possible that these specific groups may offer more opportunities for support to young people and therefore increase the chance of success.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the research literature and explored the development of FGC Advocacy approaches and processes. Gaps in our understanding have been identified and these assisted in providing the basis for the interview questions undertaken as part of my study. These gaps all relate to the experience of taking part in a FGC and include the potential for adapted FGC processes to impact positively and negatively on the experiences of those attending the conference. For example, the frequency, timing, and location of where the conference takes place can exclude some attendees, especially the young people who are the focus of the intervention. For example, how the inclusion of some advocates for the entirety of private family time

impacted on the dynamics of the problem solving and planning potential of this aspect of the process. This influenced the level of disempowerment and empowerment the participants experienced during the conference. Lastly, how gaps in our understanding of gender, ethnicity, disability and age had a bearing on which service user groups, FGC and therefore FGC Advocacy was provided to. The literature also identified that a qualitative research design using semi structured interview questions appears the most appropriate way to frame my work.

The evolution of the provision of advocacy within FGC has been discussed identifying the core elements of the conferencing process and emphasising the weight given to advocacy. Of special significance is the appointment of an independent advocate to support young people through the FGC process, a role still undertaken by coordinators in New Zealand and other jurisdictions that remain true to the core tenets of the original FGC model (Yukon Health and Social Services, 2013). The aim of my study was to research the role of the independent advocate and to ascertain its impact on the empowerment/ disempowerment of the conference participants.

The provision of advocacy within FGC is inconsistent and this has rightly caused much debate amongst proponents and critics alike, especially given its wholesale deployment with some of society's most vulnerable children, young people, and their families. The evidence base is sparse and carries contradictory messages regarding the use of advocacy and family time. Variations in practice may manifest themselves in supporting either a 'best interests' or a 'wishes and feelings' agenda.

In addition, the voluntary nature of the FGC process that seeks to empower children, young people, and their families appears to have been compromised by the potential for coercion and oppression, through an unequal distribution of power. While the

New Zealand model has an explicit aim to empower, there are question marks regarding how effective it is in this respect.

Family time and advocacy are two key aspects of the New Zealand FGC process and experience. My research study explores these aspects alongside the potential for the transmission of power within these processes in shaping the experiences of the participants.

The research questions were developed to explore if FGC and FGC Advocacy achieve their stated partnership and collaborative aims when working with young people and their families. Can they always ensure the participation and empowerment of all young people in all cases? At times when there are protection issues, do these concerns curtail the level of involvement and influence a young person has in the decision-making process? Do these potentially dichotomised positions reflect a division in which advocacy provision may be practiced from either a 'best interests' or 'wishes and feelings' perspective? Does FGC and FGC Advocacy have the potential to disempower young people as well as empower them through their processes?

Therefore, to reiterate, the primary research questions were: what are the implications of using specific advocacy approaches with young people in FGCs and how do the processes of these two interventions impact the participants involved? The two associated sub-questions are: Is advocacy practice in the New Zealand model of FGC consistent? If advocacy is not consistent in the model, does this inconsistency create a disparity in terms of how participants of FGC experience the process?

Chapter 3 **CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSES OF DOCUMENTARY SOURCES**

Introduction

This chapter discusses and then applies my own adapted Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) tool to the legislation, policy, and procedural frameworks along with relevant FGC promotional material. The use of this tool allowed for an in-depth analysis of how far significant discourses derived from the documentary material in this chapter may relate and/ or do not relate to the themes that emerged in the transcribed interviews found in the two findings Chapters 6 and 7.

I will now go on to discuss the formal and informal documentary sources, such as legislation and policy, and also the FGC service promotional material that establish the practice of FGC and FGC Advocacy. I will also discuss CDA and the core precepts of this approach that were applied to analyse the documentary sources.

Legislative, Policy, Procedural and Guidance Framework

Advocacy

In England and Wales the Children Act (1989) and (2004) are the two main pieces of legislation that underpin the child welfare system. This legislation functions to safeguard and protect the welfare of children and therefore are the main focus of the CDA undertaken in this chapter. In addition, there are a number of pieces of legislation and statutory guidance that place responsibility on local authorities to provide advocacy services for children and young people. These include the Housing Act (1996), Secure Training Centre Rules (1998), Children (Leaving Care) Act (2000), Adoption and Children Act (2002), Mental Capacity Act (2005), Mental Health Act (2007), and Children and Young Person Act (2008). Many legislative

provisions such as the Care Standards Act (2000) and Children and Young Person Act (2008), along with a number of statutory regulations such as Care Planning (2010) and Care Leavers (2010), have made amendments or additions to the Children Act (1989) that has resulted in an increased provision of advocacy for young people. The Quality Protects Initiative (Department of Health, 1998) provided for 'looked after' children and their carers to be more involved in decisions affecting them, and funding was made available to provide advocacy in these circumstances. The guidance issued under Working Together to Safeguard Children (2010, 2013) also emphasises the importance of involving children in decision-making and acknowledged that children may need advocacy support to assist them in understanding and participating in child protection processes. Additionally, Child Protection (2010; 2013) guidance allows the young person when attending a child protection conference to bring a friend or advocate to support them. National Minimum Standards (2010) relating to Fostering Services and Children's Homes along with a new provision in section 20 of the Children Act (1989) regarding accommodation for 16 and 17 year old young people who may be homeless and/ or require accommodation, all seek to ensure that young people can access advocacy services to support them to have their voices heard in major decision forums (NCAC, 2012).

All of these statutory instruments make reference to a child or young person having an entitlement to be supported by an advocate. However, it continues to be the case that "there is no universal right to advocacy for looked after children and children and young people only have an entitlement to advocacy in certain circumstances dependent on their care status, their health and whether they are in secure accommodation" (Brady, 2011: 16). Thereby advocacy entitlement once a child or young person has become 'looked after' by the local authority is recognised in

legislation, policy, and guidance. The young people interviewed in this study would be seen as either ‘in need’ or requiring ‘protection’.

Family Group Conference

According to Huntsman (2006) there are three types of mandate for FGCs: legal, procedural (policy), and practice. What is clear is that the legislation in England and Wales that underpins welfare interventions only allows for FGC to complement rather than act as an alternative to existing child welfare practice, especially in relation to child protection conferences (Davis and Duckett, 2008; Working Together, 2010). In the 2010 version of Working Together to Safeguard Children, advocacy is mentioned and encouraged to support young people when they are attending a child protection conference and this would apply to attending a FGC, if that is deemed appropriate. However, in the 2013 version of the same document, while advocacy is still prominent in the text, FGCs are not mentioned specifically. This perhaps reinforces the point that in some cases where children cannot be protected by their families or within their home environment, FGC's are unlikely to be appropriate (Morris and Shepherd, 2000).

Therefore, although not legislated for directly, the use of FGC is identified in policy guidance, giving it a procedural mandate in England and Wales. For example, the Public Law Outline (PLO) is a policy directive concerning the use of FGC in the reduction of court-sanctioned care proceedings and to expedite those proceedings that are necessary. According to the FRG, recent legal policy revisions undertaken regarding the PLO 2008 seemed to correlate with an increase in FGC services in England and Wales (FRG, 2009). The PLO initially emphasised engaging members of the wider family (where possible) in the assessment of children where there are

protection and support needs or concerns in relation to children's care and court proceedings. The PLO makes specific reference to the use of FGC, in paragraph 3.8 stating that:

A family group conference (FGC) can be an important opportunity to engage wider friends and members of the wider family at an early stage of concerns about a child, either to support the parents or to provide care for the child, whether in the short or longer term.... In presenting a care plan to the court in any application for a care order, the local authority will be required to demonstrate that it has considered family members and friends as potential carers at each stage of its decision making (Downs et al., 2008).

This statutory guidance strengthens the pro FGC argument for the expansion of FGC in the welfare system. Barth (2002: 201) suggested that "the assumptions of family group conferencing are so compelling that variations on this practice will undoubtedly continue to develop without evaluation endorsements". These assumptions may rest on a compelling, but as yet not convincing, knowledge base concerning FGC capacity to deliver on its longer term aims (Sundell and Vinnerljung, 2004; Crampton, 2007). More recently, concerns have been identified that although the PLO has enhanced the practice profile of FGC this "may cause tension as a consequence of its essentially negotiated and radical practice heritage" (Morris and Connolly, 2012: 43).

I will now go on to discuss and apply the approach used to analyse the documentary sources.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

CDA developed from a broad range of discourse analysis approaches which, although similar, are distinct qualitative research approaches that have been adopted by social

constructionists (Fulcher, 2005). CDA highlights how power is exercised and negotiated in discourse, recognizes that discourse constitutes and in turn is constituted by society and culture, that discourse is historical and does ideological work. In addition, the link between text and society is mediated; discourse analysis is interpretive and explanatory and is a form of social action. With its focus on social and political issues, CDA's principal aim is to "uncover opaqueness and power relationships" (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997: 279).

Thus the application of CDA allowed for a detailed examination of the dominant discourses that are relevant to FGC, especially those operating within the welfare system and advocacy provision. Park (2005: 11) identifies discourses as "central modes and components of the production, maintenance, and conversely, resistance to systems of power and inequality; no usage of language can ever be considered neutral, impartial, or a-political acts". Many discourses are at play within the welfare system: some derive from the political, social, and legal knowledge that underpin and propel thoughts, actions, and practices within welfare work.

It is important to note that where discourses converge, they establish discursive frameworks which mediate and produce "truth like statements to the exclusion of others" (Pennington, 2011: 2). In other words, as Cheek (2000: 23) points out, "at any point in time there are a number of possible discursive frames...and not all discourses are afforded equal presence". I will now explore the various potential discursive frames – critical and otherwise – which can be derived from reading relevant legislative, policy and procedural and guidance materials as well as FGC promotional material.

Language and power

For Fairclough (2001), CDA examines the relationship between language and power (and struggles for power) and also language and ideology. Language is seen as a social practice that is socially determined. For Fairclough, language and society are not separate entities but are inherently connected, forming and shaping the social landscape. It is this interconnectedness which establishes language as initially social practice that is also political in nature. Language can assume many various forms in the way it becomes a social process. Society is a myriad of varying types of social phenomena, incorporating an array of language activities. I thereby focused on using linguistics or 'text' in terms of analysing the key legislation, policy, and FGC promotional documents that surround FGC and advocacy which comprise one strand of the 'whole' social sphere (Fairclough, 2001: 19).

The discourses concerning and surrounding the referral criteria for families, and the implementation and processes of the FGC and FGC Advocacy all needed to be considered. For example, the Children Act (1989) and (2004) and subsequent policy and procedures place a responsibility on social service departments to focus on children deemed as 'in need' or requiring 'protection'. Despite O'Hagan's, (2006) view that these definitions are somewhat contested, the relevant points from the Children Act (1989) are that the child's welfare is of paramount importance, local authorities where possible must seek to allow young people to live with their families and should work in partnership with parents and families to achieve this aim (Children Act 1989). The duties placed upon local authorities include assessments of children in need and subsequent provision of support services for parenting and care. The Children Act (2004) increased significantly the role of partnership working and monitoring of outcomes between children's services and agencies. It also introduced

the five principles of the Every Child Matters agenda aiming to prepare young people for adulthood; these are as follows: be healthy; stay safe; enjoy and achieve; make a positive contribution; and achieve economic well-being (Children Act 2004; Children's Society, 2012). Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child enshrines the right of the child to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceeding affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, thereby reinforcing the provision of advocacy for young people (UNCRC, 2012).

These statutory and policy frameworks establish the dialogue that surround child welfare practice and therefore impact on the provision of FGC Advocacy. Although these provisions are not specifically legislated for within the statutes in England and Wales, the suggestion in the literature is that they seek to encourage the involvement of young people in the decision-making process rather than enforcing this through legislation (Advocacy Resource Exchange, 2012).

National Standards for the Provision of Children's Advocacy Services (Department of Health, 2002) provided a framework for the planning, review, and evaluation of advocacy services. The standards set out what children and young people should expect from professionals providing advocacy services. There are ten standards, including the role of children and young people in advocacy, the policy context, equal opportunities, confidentiality, publicity, accessibility, independence, and complaints procedures. The Adoption and Children Act (2002) places a duty on local authorities to provide advocacy services to looked after children and 'children in need' (including disabled children) who wish to make a complaint or a representation under the Children Act (1989) procedures (Advocacy Resource Exchange, 2012).

Legal dialogues identify and construct children and young people as ‘at risk’ or ‘in need’ and they dominate the policy and legislative frameworks concerning child welfare and associate practices such as advocacy. The categories of vulnerability can at times define and enforce delineated boundaries that seek to protect, while also possibly marginalising particular young people. The discourses that established young people as having agency and that allow for advocacy also highlighted a discursive framework that seeks to empower young people through the welfare system and FGC process. However as outlined above these are discourses that are not afforded equal presence (Cheek, 2000). Discursive practices, for example, the statutory obligation to address child protection concerns, referral criteria to, and the processes of, the FGC program and FGC Advocacy provision “mean an engagement with rather than to the subject” and this creates the space that potentially allows for the positioning of young people to emerge within FGC and social work professional and statutory discourses (Kumar, 2000: 86). This in turn may define how these discursive practices shape, constrain, or restrict each individual’s role or roles within the process either as professional, participant, young person, or care giver.

These discourses manifested themselves in both written and spoken text and in pictorial forms within the FGC promotional material and the legislative framework. Text analysis requires the dual examination of the ‘process of production’ along with the ‘process of interpretation’ (Fairclough, 2001). Embedded within the text will lie indications of how it was produced while concurrently there are clues which assist or guide its interpretation. How an individual views these processes is based on what is called either ‘members resources’ or mind control (van Dijk, 1997; Fairclough, 2001). These are cognitive processes based on the internalised assumptions, views, values, beliefs, and knowledge of language that people draw upon when interpreting texts.

These internalised processes are shaped externally by socially produced practices often through discourses seen as authoritarian (therefore legal), trustworthy, or credible sources, such as scholars, experts, professionals, or reliable media (Nesler et al., 1993). This interplay seeks to ensure that the social production of knowledge is internalised by societal members shaping how they understand texts and thus reproducing and reinforcing this understanding at an individual and subsequently societal level.

This was particularly relevant to this study as the young people and their families who attended the FGC may have had pre-established internalised ideas about themselves derived from their social positioning and from discourses externally generated via intervening professionals such as police officers or social workers. This may establish expectations as being ‘deserving’ and/ or ‘undeserving’ associated with their perceptions of themselves as victims or socially deviant.

In summary, CDA seeks to make a critical reading of the text: i.e. to uncover any potential ‘clues’ that may lie within the text regarding how it was produced and how it guides interpretation (Fairclough, 2001). I will now discuss Fairclough's three-stage model of CDA.

Description, interpretation, and explanation

Fairclough (2001: 21-22) identifies three stages in the application of CDA – description, interpretation, and explanation – and discusses that the nature of the analysis changes at each stage. At the initial stage of description, the analyst seeks to identify and label “formal features of a text in terms of a descriptive framework” across three main headings: vocabulary, grammar, and textual structures (Fairclough, 2001: 22). As one would expect, this stage establishes the wording in legislation and

policy as authoritarian and directive; therefore, interpretation of these texts and their meaning identifies them as less discretionary and more instructional, requiring adherence without question. I compared these statutory texts to the language of the FGC provision from its written form in promotional leaflets distributed to young people and their families by the coordinator and social workers. The language used in the promotional leaflet initially appears as less directive and more participatory.

For example, the FGC service leaflet is a bright and colourful document with a number of pictures, mainly of happy smiling children and also adults depicting what appear to be content family lives. All the children and adults seem to reflect a stereotypical view of white middle class families. An interpretation of this leaflet using a CDA 'description' lens would seem to portray a very positive view of FGC and its outcomes. The pictures and the text downplay the reasons and or seriousness of the conference and may connect to individuals' internalised ideas regarding social services. Thus, they may view FGC as positive and less intrusive and more traditional social work interventions as invasive and punitive. Once again, the promotional materials from the FGC service leaflets may reinforce this to some degree:

Sharing what everyone knows

Everyone talks about why they are at the meeting and shares what they know. The family can ask questions of the people who work with them (e.g Social Worker or Health Visitor).

Time on your own

The people working with the family and the Co-ordinator then leave the room so that your family can have a private talk, agree a plan for your

child and talk about how you will make it work.

This wording may frame the interaction in less confrontational and in more partnership and participatory terms. As the practice of conferencing is seen as a special and different intervention, the criteria for referrals and subsequent assessment deem the family as somewhat unique and distinct from those families that are not seen as suitable.

The next stage of analysis is interpretation and examines the relationship between text and interaction (Fairclough, 2001: 21). The text is seen as an outcome of the process of production and a resource in the process of interpretation (Fairclough, 2001: 21). How a text is interpreted is an important issue to be addressed. This is relevant in terms of how FGC is perceived by children, young people, and their families. This is reflected in the promotional materials:

What is a Family Group Meeting?

A Family Group Meeting is a meeting of family members and friends who come together to find out what is happening in the family and to talk about how to sort out any problems.

When do you use a Family Group Meeting?

A Family Group Meeting can be used when there is a risk of a child/young person going into care because of problems in their family or to help them leave care to return to their family. It can also be used to support positive changes to a child or young person's family life or to stop a child or young person being harmed.

These words carried a vastly different content and context than those of many social work or statutory processes which reflect laws, coercion, imposition, and the ultimate sanctions of removal of children and prosecution. The softer voice and sense of the FGC approach may not correlate with service users' views and their cognitive associations with previous experiences of possibly punitive statutory approaches. These 'members resources' may reflect internalised assumptions by service users of how they perceive the welfare system to work, and the social positioning of their families and their children. It could also reinforce the perception of FGC as an alternative and less oppressive option than traditional social work interventions, thus reproducing it as a practice at a societal level (Nesler et al., 1993; Fairclough, 2001; Frost et al., 2012b). Families may feel they are working together in partnership with professional people and instead of being told what to do, they are being asked for their input.

The explanation stage examines the relationship between interaction and social context and highlights how discourse is part of a social process, social practice and "is determined by social structures", and then how discourse can affect these structures (Fairclough, 2001: 135). For Fairclough, the explanation stage establishes social structures as the focus of relations of power, and social processes and practices reflect social struggle (Fairclough, 2001: 135). This is reinforced at the structural level where the FGC possibly functions to enable discriminatory and oppressive practices to be enacted in relation to the most vulnerable and marginalized citizens of society with the aim of re-socialising non-compliant families and family members (Smale et al., 2000; Hornby, 2003; Cunningham and Cunningham, 2008).

Application of CDA to the documentary sources

I will now give examples of how of Fairclough's three-stage model of applying CDA was useful in my study. The quote below is again from the FGC promotional literature:

When do you use a Family Group Meeting?

A Family Group Meeting can be used when there is a risk of a child/young person going into care because of problems in their family or to help them leave care to return to their family. It can also be used to support positive changes to a child or young person's family life or to stop a child or young person being harmed.

Applying the description stage to an analysis of the vocabulary used in the FGC promotional materials assists in identifying key words. For example 'will' is a modal verb that in this sense expresses obligation. Using the interpretation stage 'text to interaction' the word 'will' becomes the text and the obligation placed on the family becomes the interaction. When applying the explanation stage, obligation for the family to come up with a plan suggests a pressure being placed on them to solve the issues identified and this thereby reflects a connection between the 'interaction and social context' (Fairclough, 2001). Therefore the framework to this intervention may highlight the weight of coercion of not undertaking this process, which may result in more punitive sanctions for the non-compliant family. As Frost et al. (2012a: 9) stress, there is need to "understand the relationship between FGCs as an empowering model within the context of state coercion".

The standard format of the FGC process includes the following features: an emphasis on preparation (which is the point in which the promotional materials are distributed)

and the use of a list of pre-defined questions that the family must answer to the satisfaction of the professionals involved. The outcome of a plan is one that the family must administer and take responsibility for. Therefore, adherence with the process and the outcomes, which are often defined before the meeting takes place, highlights how the perceived compliant family undertaking this process may sometimes be coerced and manipulated into practices that potentially fulfil the ideological intentions of government. They may believe they are willingly undertaking a process that is in their best interest and less punitive than the statutory interventions they have been possibly exposed to in the past. This process appears to seek to address societal concerns about deviant behaviours and re-socialise the family and the individuals within it. From a critical perspective all these features could be potentially interpreted as part of a social process that may – wholly or in part – be determined by social structures defined by powerful welfare discourses, the sort of discourses discussed earlier in the chapter. From such a critical perspective, the power to coerce and manipulate families into malleable ‘good’ clients and ‘compliant’ citizens might be conveyed in the notion of family as expert in solving their own issues. Such a notion could easily imply that the responsibility for normalising behaviour has become an internal family matter. This, in turn, would then avoid having to acknowledge the potential impact on the case of structural social and political factors (Thompson, 1993).

Similarly, referral procedures that establish who is deemed suitable for FGC and the subsequent processes within the intervention itself could allow for the examination and interpretation of service users’ cognitions (member’s resources) that may have reproduced negative views that they held of themselves (Fairclough, 2001). These cognitions could then be analysed and explanations considered about how these textually produced interactions (referral criteria and pre-defined questions) may shape

and create social practices (the provision of advocacy within a FGC) within some social structures (legislation, policy, and procedural frameworks).

At the point of referral to a FGC, independent advocacy services (and this appears to represent an external professional rather than a natural advocate provision) can be suggested or provided for the young people – and can also be deployed for other family members if ‘need’ is identified. The advocacy discourse therefore allows for one or more individuals within the conference setting to be supported to have a voice and venture their wishes and feelings.

The lack of legislation concerning advocacy services or FGCs does not impede the creation of powerful discursive formations associated with both those phenomena. Although not directly associated, they are strongly influenced by welfare statutes and practices that make both appear detached from regular social work interventions by providing a perceived alternative route for families involved in statutory processes. At the same time, they are attached to more established structures and practices possibly working for their benefit and potentially achieving the same aims and objectives had more punitive avenues of intervention been undertaken.

From a critical perspective on the social work profession, the practice of child welfare social work has been interpreted as governed by dominant discourses that seek to intervene and protect young people within a framework of disempowerment and oppression (Parton, 2006; Gilbert and Powell, 2010). Within that perspective, the practice of social work is seen to struggle with providing a role to young people that is at once in their ‘best interests’ and acknowledges their ‘wishes and feelings’. Again from a critical perspective, this is despite the stated professional ethics and value base of social work. The critical discourse on social work also suggests that the profession

has problems in adopting a nurturing approach towards young people whilst also ensuring that their wellbeing and safety is promoted in an anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive manner. For instance, the notion of 'best interests' has been criticised for providing the mechanism by which interventions and sanctions have been imposed on young people and their families representing a benevolent paternalism (Taylor et al., 1979; Cohen, 1985). Similarly 'wishes and feelings' is another term that can be interpreted as adding value to the experiences of young people. On the other hand, from within a critical discourse on social work it could be interpreted as once again diluting the notion of empowerment: the critical argument is that the concept is often influenced by adults and adult agendas including those of the professional (Hart, 1992; Mantle et al., 2006).

The two themes of 'best interests' and 'wishes and feelings' (explored further in Chapter 6) are good examples of the way different discourses on social work and welfare can provide very different interpretations about actual impacts on practice. Here again, Fairclough's three-stage model can be applied to assist in identifying how power may be transmitted. At the description stage, the language and text used could have a very positive meaning connected with empowerment and inclusion. The interpretation stage would identify the relationship between the text and interaction and seen in this as the process for giving young people the opportunity to participate in the decision-making forum. At the explanation stage, FGC and FGC Advocacy are interactions that become established social practice. In contrast, an alternative interpretation of the text at the description stage could invert the literal meaning of these terms: i.e. it would suggest that they imply incapacity and inability. Thereby, at the second stage, interaction is more negatively influenced and participation may be seen more as attendance or just being informed of the outcomes. Therefore FGC and

FGC Advocacy remain interactions at the explanation stage and they still become established social practice; however, the process at the second stage would be less empowering for the young participants involved. Within CDA, these negative meanings may also establish verbal devices that can then permeate throughout service user interaction with the welfare system – or the FGC system in this case – representing a deficit approach to addressing difficulties (Morris, 1974). Therefore, the contestation over the meanings of concepts is very important to this study. A critical assessment of ‘best interests’, ‘wishes and feelings’, ‘capacity’, and ‘agency’ and their relation to empowerment and participation from within different discursive frames concerning welfare and social work suggests such concepts are categories and signifiers with particularly vital implications and constructions for the topic of this study (Park, 2005). Therefore they constitute one of my foci that assisted to frame the analysis of the interview data in Chapters 6 and 7.

The nature of involving social services in familial life is complex and at times may stigmatise those involved, as it can identify families as deviant and reinforce perceived internal and external beliefs regarding an inability to provide adequate care or look after themselves and each other (van Pagee, 2003). This, in turn, may sometimes reinforce a societal view that certain families are dependant, in ‘need’ and requiring assistance in the form of social work intervention to re-educate, re-socialise and re-establish them as independent, functioning members of society. As Hudson (1987: 152) suggests, “identifying needs amounts to listing reasons for intervention”. Within a critical social work discursive frame, such ideas about normalising family and members of society can be interpreted as conforming Foucault’s belief that “the power to punish is not essentially different from that of curing or educating” (Foucault, 1975: 303). Once again, it was therefore important that this critical

discursive framing of social work was explored through my interview data to identify how far the discursive formations within the interview material matched or did not match with the findings from this documentary analysis.

The same applies to the situation of the young people themselves. Within the practice of the FGC, young people become a subcategory, different to the family, albeit still dependent and requiring intervention. However, by the dint of being young people, they may be seen as more vulnerable and lacking in capacity and agency and therefore requiring more intervention. In acknowledging that children and young people apparently require an advocate and were offered an advocate as a matter of FGC procedure, it is possible that this may sometimes contribute and confirm the belief that young people are incapable and unable to act on their own behalf. Moreover, as discussed, the practice of FGC and the sub practice of advocacy may establish it as a process that can potentially influence families and young people and re-produce perceptions and expectations that service users have of themselves. What is interesting is that the FGC promotional literature is silent on the use of advocacy and or the use of independent advocates. Its exclusion from the text is of concern especially when advocacy provides such a pivotal role in the support of the young people involved in the process.

With the notion of FGC coordinator and advocate as expert in solving family concerns and with the influence and weight of credibility given to the welfare system, it would be difficult for families to view the FGC process as anything less than positive. The perceived notions of empowering the family and with the 'wishes and feelings' of the young person catered for and protected by an independent party, the process is likely to be initially viewed by service users as empowering and establishing positive expectations.

By contrast, and within a more critical discursive frame, the actual aims and objectives of the conference could be interpreted as more likely influenced by social services agendas aligned with the requirements of the statutory body rather than of service users, whether adult or child. For instance, such a critical stance might view the outcomes as often being agreed through processes that were coercive and manipulative through the practice of preparing all the participants in advance. Again within this more critical perspective, if the outcomes result in a successful plan then the conference has worked, reinforcing professional validity and that the intervention was correct. If there is a failure to identify a plan, then powerful professional discourses come into play, highlighting the alleged lack of ability and capacity within the family to address the concerns.

Conclusion

An adapted CDA tool was applied to the statutory documentary sources and FGC service promotional material to analyse and compare how differing discourses shape the practice of FGC and hence FGC Advocacy. Therefore, the legislation, policy, procedural and guidance frameworks that allow for the provision of advocacy to take place within the practice of FGC in specific circumstances in England and Wales were reviewed. It identified that there is no universal right for children to be provided with advocacy support and for many young people, this type of support is situational depending on their care status. In addition, while FGC does not have a legislative mandate, it does have a procedural and therefore policy mandate in England and Wales, for example, the PLO and the Working Together to Safeguard Children. These directives establish FGC as secondary supportive welfare intervention deployed once initial child protection concerns have been addressed.

Fairclough's three-stage application of CDA was applied to aspects of key legislation, policy, procedure, and guidance and FGC promotional material. It identified that while the tone and sense provided by the promotional material was less directive and authoritarian than the statutory documents, from a CDA perspective it still held considerable weight to coerce young people and their families into undertaking FGC and abiding by its process and outcomes. The examples of 'best interests' and 'wishes and feelings' were used to show how dominant discourses that create and construct the roles of children within the child welfare system and create practices that allow for advocacy to occur within a FGC can result in different interpretations of practice. This highlights that in England and Wales where an adapted FGC model is used, variations in processes and inconsistencies in practice implementation may have negative implications for participants.

The CDA analysis identified discourses that assisted in providing provisional categories of interest regarding FGC and FGC Advocacy practice that could be compared with the lived experiences of the FGC participants gathered from the interview data.

Chapter 4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

Introduction

The focus of this research concerns how variations in advocacy provision within FGCs may empower, as well as potentially disempower, young people and their families involved with the intervention. Therefore theories associated with understanding power and its exercise are appropriate for the analysis of the findings. A Foucauldian analysis of power, Goffman's sociological theory of inter and intra personal interaction and intersectionality are discussed to illuminate the exercise of power at both the structural and interpersonal level. Structural power explains how macro social arrangements influence individuals and group behaviours, while at the interpersonal level, power reflects an individual's ability to act independently.

As we have seen from the previous chapter, FGC and FGC Advocacy discourses have the potential to exercise power both positively and negatively in terms of how the intervention is practised with young people. For example, undertaking the FGC may have very favourable outcomes in terms of the support offered for the young person and their family. Alternatively, regardless of outcomes, participants may feel coerced into attending and complying with the FGC process and therefore the experience is negative.

Theories of social power are thus clearly relevant for underpinning the analysis in this study. Foucault's analysis of power and intersectional perspectives present the two most obvious approaches in exploring how power may be employed to serve particular interests at the expense of others at the structural level. Perhaps less obvious is how Goffman's theoretical approach also pertains to power. However, the readings and interpretation of his work have identified his approach as a body of work that

"offers many insights into what power is and how it actually workswe ought to think of Goffman as a significant theorist of power" (Jenkins, 2008: 157). The combination of approaches was used to provide an over-arching theoretical frame for the study that would allow for a critical examination of power across and within multiple layers and sites in society.

Here I will discuss each theory in turn.

Foucault

The Foucauldian perspective illuminates how power is exercised through the deployment of professional knowledge and expertise, such as that of FGC advocates. Foucault was committed to transforming and disturbing the accepted norms of understanding. He established the notions of 'archaeology' and 'genealogy' in which he delved beneath the layers of established knowledge and practice, seeking to discover its origins. He examined practices close up, making accessible what was hidden or overlooked in everyday interaction. He examined macro and micro levels of institutional and individual discourses and their interplay and how these practices created the person and their social identity. Using Foucault's concept of 'archaeology', discourse is explained as 'dispersion' that focuses neither on narrative nor personal experience but on the processes that enable an individual to take up a particular subject position (Foucault, 1972).

For Foucault, archaeology was the analysis of discourse aiming to describe, not interpret discursive formations. Foucault (1972: 36) states that the unity of a discourse is not based on the object itself but on the 'space' in which the objects emerge and are transformed and therefore does not seek to address an individual's social circumstances or their social position. Foucault's perspective differentiates discourse

from ‘logic and linguistics’ with the view “that discourse may include but is not reducible to, language” (Garrity, 2010: 196).

There is, however, some debate in the literature regarding what constitutes ‘discourse’ with some authors arguing that its meaning has become so diffuse that it has become removed from its original understanding (Garrity, 2010). In much of the literature associated with social work, ‘discourse’ is used interchangeably with ‘language’ or considered a set of ‘language practices’ (Fook, 2002; Healy, 2005).

As Foucault considers theory as social practice, this enables discourse to traverse the theory/ practice divide (O’Farrell, 2005). In addition, statements must connect with a subject, and the relationship between the two establishes the position that the subject must take, which highlights how social behaviours and practices create individuals and groups (Garrity, 2010). This suggests that service users and professional groups such as social workers and advocates are potentially created through their roles and practices, which, in turn, are constructed by legislative frameworks and reinforced by professional education and knowledge bases. As such, professionals become both “products but also producers” of power within their relationships with service users (Gilbert and Powell, 2010: 5).

Foucauldian analysis of discourse focuses on the relationship between power and knowledge, including how ‘disciplinary technologies’ may operate to oppress individuals (Turner, 1997). Some Foucauldian social work writers identify and explain disciplinary technologies in relation to social work as specific techniques and associated practices, i.e. referral process, assessment, and care planning that are deployed to repress individuals in the exercise of power (Gilbert and Powell, 2010). An understanding of the use of disciplinary technologies is important for my study in

analysing the professional discourses (especially advocacy) that surround the FGC process.

Foucault was committed to transforming and disturbing the accepted norms of understanding; this is beneficial in seeking to examine how historically we have accepted certain beliefs and practices, such as those relating to child protection. These ‘normalising judgements’ are processes that society, in a sense, imposes on individuals and groups to establish, regulate, or compel them to conform to a normative ideal (Chambon et al., 1999). In terms of social work, those not adhering to these ‘norms’ become subject to the scrutiny and attention of social workers (Epstein, 1999; Gilbert and Powell, 2010). Through the process of applying disciplinary technologies, for example assessment (which includes the accumulation of documentary evidence), individuals are seen as deserving or risky, and subsequent practices and interventions are invoked to discipline and re-establish ‘normal behaviours’. These processes in turn have a regulating mechanism that disciplines and monitors professional activity (Chambon et al., 1999; Gilbert and Powell, 2010). In addition to these processes of objectifying individuals, Foucault identified the concept of ‘subjectification’, where individuals engage with practices that he likens to the confessional; these include self-assessment, counselling, reflection, and professional supervision (Rose, 1999; Gilbert, 2001). These processes work to regulate individual behaviour along with professional practices. The continuous enhancement of surveillance techniques associated with the use of information and communication technologies create new spaces to establish ‘meaning’ within the field of social work and service users (Salvo, 2004; Garrett, 2005).

Families who fall within the purview of social services departments may undergo experiences usefully analysed via Foucault’s concept of ‘governmentality’, which is

an examination of how processes, techniques, and procedures achieve the regulation of moral choices by individuals, effectively establishing the government of the self by the self (Miller, 1993). The practices and procedures of the welfare system are focused on the regulation of moral choices of individuals, both parents and children. These practices work to influence and persuade families that their actions are not acceptable and through the process of intervention, professionals seek to convince and coerce them into regulating their behaviour, and therefore achieving a normative ideal. This process establishes a classification system of norms which compares individuals' behaviours "enabling small transgressions to become the focus of disciplinary attention and ... examination" (Gilbert and Powell, 2010: 7). This attention establishes 'dividing' practices which, when viewed from a Foucauldian perspective, identifies how young people as subjects are divided through classification as a welfare recipient in 'need' or requiring 'protection', and in turn are divided from the general population of their peers (Chambon et al., 1999). These 'dividing' practices are both 'social' as they identify difference in particular social groups and can also be 'spatial' by physically separating people from the social group for exhibiting difference. These modes of partitioning individuals can be seen in the child welfare system where young people are categorised as different from the general population and their differences are exacerbated to reinforce the division. The actions of 'dividing practices' are tolerated and justified through the mediation of science (or pseudoscience) and associated practices such as assessment which reinforce the power of professional claims. When the influence of normalising judgments fails to regulate behaviour, then the ultimate sanction of intrusive interventions such as the possible removal of children from the family environment, is deployed.

Referrals to welfare FGC and subsequently for an advocate to 'support' a young person through the process can be seen from this perspective to be a 'disciplinary technology'. For example, assessments are undertaken, referrals made ('deserving and undeserving'), the willingness to comply with the process is sought, 'risky' families or individuals are screened out, and then the intervention can take place. From a Foucauldian perspective, the FGC intervention appears to seek to discipline deviant families, re-socialise behaviour, and establish social stability by ensuring either anti-social behaviour or welfare concerns are monitored by the participants themselves. This process reinforces Foucault's idea of the government of the self by the self and also includes elements of the confessional in that individuals and or family members involved in the process will all need to admit responsibility or be accountable for their deviant behaviour. Social workers may be seen as persuading and influencing service users into acknowledging that the social worker is correct in their assessment of them. For Munro (2004) and Rothstein et al. (2006) this is achieved through a process of 'protocolisation' where more and more formal procedures are introduced to regulate practice establishing the 'correct' way to deal with a case. The use of FGC and FGC Advocacy demonstrates how families and especially young people can be objectified and protocolised through these processes. For example, the assessment for and participation in a conference appears to perpetuate notions of perceived deviancy that can divide young people further from their peer group. From a Foucauldian perspective, these procedures could be used to frame the family's problems and elicit an agreement from them to undertake a process to eliminate the problematic areas of their lives.

Foucault understood that the exercise of power is not all negative as it establishes forms of contestation or 'oppositional power'. Power is both a creative and repressive

force and resistance allows for individuals to develop strategies to resist the imposition and exchanges of power (Foucault, 1990). In relation to social work, this can be seen in terms of levels of discretion (the spaces where meaning is created) by the worker through her/ his interactions with service users and in relation to individual or family resistance to disciplinary technologies (Foucault, 1988; Gilbert and Powell, 2010). The opportunities for resistance occur in the assessment and referral processes where social workers can influence the notions of deserving and undeserving recipients of services and subvert power relations. In terms of FGC this may therefore occur once the young person has been offered an independent advocate to support them through the conference process. Also the one-to-one engagement of service users offers the opportunity to work with individuals without the technologies of surveillance impinging on the process (Gilbert and Powell, 2010).

So, the role of advocacy is understood here as disrupting the normative ideal of adult and paternal decision-making discourses imposed on young people by providing a mechanism that allows children and youth a voice (and therefore a resistance) in the process. These ‘other’ adults (advocates) have a different focus to those professionals seeking to normalise and curtail perceived deviant behaviour as they seek to devolve power and level the decision-making authority to a point in which children and young people’s views are held in equal regard.

The attention given by FGC and social work practitioners to re-socialising the whole family through a disciplinary process such as FGC and also the welfare and protectionist discourses that create the practice of FGC, are clear examples of Foucault’s conceptions of governmentality and the regulation of self. The advocate aspires to establish a space for the young person to feel empowered and enter the discussion and decision-making forum on more equal terms.

Garrity (2010) advocates a purist application of Foucault's ideas to social work literature and practice, while identifying a number of concerns with this approach. She suggests that elements such as the focus on the structural processes and functions of power are more valuable than its applicability to the individuals who are just seen as by-products of the systems of knowledge and power (Fook and Askeland, 2006; Garrity, 2010). By contrast Gilbert and Powell (2010) maintain that a Foucauldian analysis provides a critical approach to the dynamics of knowledge and power and how these concurrently impact and produce the practices of FGC professionals and advocates. I agree with Garrity that Foucault's ideas are more suited to understanding structural power and while appropriate for use in my study, additional theories were required to establish a more robust framework that allowed for an examination of how power also impacts on the individual. This is explored later in this chapter.

An understanding of how discourses shape and create the space for the subject positions of young people and advocates to emerge in FGC assisted in analysing how power is transmitted through the processes of FGC and FGC Advocacy. This also resulted in identifying a number of disciplinary practices that were explored using Foucault's 'technologies of power', the 'government of the self by the self', 'dividing practices', 'protocolisation' and 'normalising judgements'.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality has primarily evolved from feminist and critical race theory and methodology. It is an approach for understanding the complex and often contradictory interaction of multiple dimensions of power relations occurring simultaneously within various layers of society. It can be seen as a theory, a reading strategy for analysis, and a heuristic approach – or a combination of any or all of these (Davis, 2008).

Some commentators view it as a major theoretical contribution to women's studies, a crucial step in promoting social justice and fairness, and therefore an invaluable tool for analysing the experiences of identity and oppression (McCall, 2005; Nash, 2008).

Intersectional analysis aims to reveal multiple identities, exposing the different types of discrimination and disadvantage that occur as a consequence of the combination of identities (Women's Rights and Economic Change, 2004: 2).

Initially focused on race, gender, and class in relation to the oppression of black women, intersectional analysis has developed and is applied to analyse multiple forms of marginalisation, for example, ethnicity, religion, age, nationality, sexual orientation, class, geography, and disability. It refers to the interaction between these categories of 'difference' in individual lives, social practices, institutional arrangements, and cultural ideologies and the outcomes of these interactions in terms of power (Davis, 2008). It seeks to identify how these complex factors or a combination of these elements interrelate or intersect to shape identity and create systems of oppression that operate at both the interpersonal and structural levels in society (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Aspects of the often cited example of asking the 'other question' reflects this:

When I see something that looks racist, I ask, 'Where is the patriarchy in this?'
When I see something that looks sexist, I ask, 'Where is the heterosexism in this?'
When I see something that looks homophobic, I ask, 'Where are the class interests in this?' (Matsuda, 1991: 1189).

Intersectionality theory assisted in providing an understanding of the complex forms of oppression experienced by young people in the practice of FGC Advocacy during the FGC. Intersectional approaches identified that many young people, children, and

their families who undertake an FGC were from marginalized groups in society (Smale et al., 2000; Hornby, 2003; Cunningham and Cunningham, 2008).

Intersectional perspectives provide a lens through which to examine how individual aspects of oppression may combine and interact with structural and institutional factors. 'Asking the other' question is a useful approach when examining FGC from a structural perspective. It assisted in the exploration of who accesses FGC Advocacy support through the referral and assessment procedures. After ascertaining which families and individuals gained access to FGC Advocacy support, I sought to determine whether elements of patriarchy, sexism, heterosexism, and classism were apparent. The demographic information given to me at the time of referral to the study allowed for an initial analysis of interaction between categories of difference. In this study, it was especially important to interrogate the issue of age regarding the young people who may undertake this intervention to bring potential elements of childism and ageism in to the picture.

A concern raised regarding the use of intersectional perspectives as an analytic tool related to how and where to use the approach as a research tool (McCall, 2005; Verloo, 2006; Yuval-Davis, 2006). McCall identifies three different intersectional methodologies that could have been used in my study: 'anticategorical', 'intracategorical', and 'intercategorical' complexity. Firstly, anticategorical complexity deconstructs analytical clusters and assumes that categories, including race and gender, are too simplistic to capture the complexity of lived experience (McCall, 2005: 1776). Secondly, intracategorical complexity views marginalized intersectional identities as an analytic starting point "in order to reveal the complexity of lived experience within such groups" (McCall, 2005: 1774). Intracategorical analysis focuses on the dangers of categorization, yet does not necessarily reject the categories

themselves. Intercategorical complexity exposes the relationships between inequality and the categories themselves, and to use categories strategically in the service of displaying the linkages between categories and inequality.

Although each category could be relevant to this study, intercategorical complexity proved particularly relevant as it starts from the observation that “there are relationships of inequality among already constituted social groups, as imperfect and ever changing as they are, and takes those relationships as the centre of the analysis” (McCall, 2005: 1784-1785). Since young people and their families who undertake the FGC are typically from social groups experiencing multiple social deprivations, the intersectional perspective of intercategorical complexity was used to examine the relationship and links between these elements of difference. The initial analysis undertaken from the demographic information identified that some young people were from more than one marginalised group. For example, being young and female allowed for the relationship between these two categories to be examined and to assess their impact on the FGC process.

A combination of Foucault’s analysis of power supported by the intersectional perspective of ‘intercategorical complexity’ contributed to developing a greater understanding of how structural power impacts on the experiences of the participants involved in FGC. Intersectionality helped to illuminate the interaction between categories of possible difference and the consequences of these interactions in relation to power (Davis, 2008). Intersectionality was an appropriate choice of concept as it articulates with Foucauldian perspectives on power in relation to the “dynamic process and deconstruction of normalising and homogenising categories” (Davis, 2008: 71). The intersectional conception of ‘intercategorical complexity’ and Foucault’s ‘dividing practices’ assist in identifying potentially oppressive factors

within the social group exposed to FGC and FGC Advocacy. This, in turn, should establish how these factors could have led to continued marginalisation and exposure to disciplinary processes that potentially oppressed and disempowered the group further.

However, neither Foucauldian nor intersectional approaches provide an analysis of individual agency, nor how the characteristics of oppression, discrimination, and thereby power impact upon the individual. The former approach identifies the discourses and discursive formation that allows the space for roles and objects to emerge, and the latter identifies how complex inter personal and structural factors form and generate systems of oppression. Therefore, further theoretical conceptualisation is required to establish connectivity between these two perspectives and provide the frame for a more focussed exploration of the impact of advocacy on the individual and families involved with FGC.

Goffman

Goffman's sociological approach is associated with aspects of social interactionism, though it differs from this perspective substantially. Whereas social interactionism views the interplay between actors (individuals) as creating interaction and interpersonal communication, Goffman envisages an actor entering into a premade scenario and then reacting to it (Branaman, 2001). This approach concentrates on the role of intra and interpersonal interaction. It also suggests that social structures and institutions define situations and shape meanings "which individuals attach to the situations they find themselves in" (Keating, 2002: 204). Goffman was very sparing in his use of the word 'power', but it is apparent that within these situations, power conflicts are played out between individuals and the structures they are reacting to.

According to Jenkins (2008: 159) Goffman's perspective can be summarized as follows: “power/ efficacy depends on the availability of resources; resources come in many forms, which often offer different ways and means to achieve ends; resources vary from context to context, and can only be understood locally, in context; and individuals and different groups of actors will have access to differing resources in differing degrees and in differing combinations”. It is the notion of resources and its associations with individual power that young people and their families have access to during FGC and FGC Advocacy which is essential for this study. The availability of resources socially, physically, and emotionally and their impact on the interviewees in this study is explored in Chapter 7.

These resources are often subtle nuanced applications of power and can be seen in Goffman’s use of everyday language and the analogies of "drama and theatre to describe the actions of people” (Poloma, 1979: 148). This ‘dramaturgy’ perspective can assist in highlighting the intra and interpersonal exchanges and dynamics between individuals and was defined by Goffman (1959: 15) as “the reciprocal influence of individuals upon one another’s actions when in one another’s immediate physical presence”. This approach concentrates upon the verbal and non-verbal communication between individuals which occurs in what is termed ‘focused interactions’. This is where people agree “to sustain for a time a single focus of cognitive and visual attention, as in a conversationor a joint task sustained by a close face-to face circle of contributions” (Keating, 2002: 199). Goffman sought to find ways of assessing and describing these practices and processes of social interaction using a number of core concepts. The main premise of this theory concerns the individual and not the broader structures of society and analyses the “nature and dynamics of interpersonal

encounters, especially from the point of view of the actors involved” (Layder, 1994: 172).

For Goffman there is an occasion or event that is comprised of numerous individual acts. The entirety of the event is considered a ‘performance’ with others involved in the situation being either observers or co-participants (Goffman, 1959). The theme that runs through Goffman’s work is that of ‘ritual interaction’ – the examination of how social routines, practices, and rules of daily “social interaction are used to maintain social order” (Branaman, 2001: 97). For Goffman, ritual interaction requires the ordering of events such as daily social practices that occur within social situations. These are ‘face to face’ in nature and follow particular rules that organise the communication and interaction between parties, ensuring certain actions and behaviours are undertaken (Goffman, 1959). Ritual interaction was important in analysing the potential for the questions designed before the FGC and asked at the event in shaping the process and outcomes for the young person.

Goffman’s (1967: 5) notion of ‘face to face’ work where the “social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular [social] contact” is useful in understanding the interactions associated with FGC and FGC Advocacy. For example, how a young person feels about themselves during the FGC, possibly as victim, would be reinforced by how others view them in the interaction. Goffman states that “each person, culture, and society seems to have its own characteristic repertoire of face-saving practices” (Goffman, 1967: 13). To ‘maintain’ or ‘save face’ or alternatively to ‘lose’ or to be ‘shamefaced’ may have specific resonance for service users attending a FGC or receiving FGC Advocacy support. According to Goffman (1967) these emotional responses associated with ‘face’ are attached to feelings and could, in the case of service users in this study,

reflect the positive nature of support (FGC Advocacy) and thereby be considered 'saving face'. Alternatively, the possibly negative connotations of being a social service client could result in becoming 'shame-faced'. These aspects of Goffman's theory are particularly significant because the advocacy process within FGC appears to create interactions and social practices. These, in turn, could possibly be used to re-educate or re-socialise young people and their families to normalise their 'deviant' behaviour and therefore maintain social order. How the participants felt about their experience of FGC Advocacy within the FGC is extremely relevant to this study.

As with all theatrical performances there is a front region and a backstage. The front region establishes the individual's performance which includes the setting, appearance, and manner, referred to by Goffman (1959: 123) as "impression management". The successful presentation or performance of the role is not reliant only on the individual's personal qualities such as confidence and skills. It also draws on social resources or props such as possessions, attire, accent, and manners and clearly relate to one's social position and ability to access opportunities connected to one's social status (Keating, 2002). These elements of the performance setting, appearance and manner convey the role that the individual is presenting to others while guiding and controlling the impression others form of them. For example, in terms of the FGC performance and the roles played by the social worker, advocate, or coordinators, the 'setting' would normally be a building chosen by staff from the social service department, which reinforces the statutory and professional nature of the process. The 'appearance' element relates to the performers' social status – how the FGC coordinator or advocate involved are dressed, along with other associated accoutrements, for example a diary or files etc. 'Manner' is how the person conducts her/ himself; it would be expected that the coordinator and advocate would be calm,

professional and self-assured, reinforcing the professional's role in the process (Poloma, 1979). According to Goffman (1959: 48), the notion is to present an idealized version of the role (thus advocate) to the audience (the observers or co-participants) who would in this case be the young people and their families. This would include disguising or hiding aspects of themselves that are not compatible and deemed unprofessional (personal or background information) which could undermine the audience's view of the role of the professional. At the same time, the advocate as performer reinforces the 'special and unique' relationship that they have with the audience. In the case of FGC, this relationship is one of a powerful professional and this special and unique association can be viewed in terms of specifically supporting the young person and as such can have a major effect on the outcomes of the process.

The backstage is a region where the professional can relinquish their role and performance and allow themselves to relax. This arena is one where only other colleagues may see them and is off limits to the audience or service users. Goffman (1959: 79) observes that most routines or performances are not enacted alone; there is a team of fellow 'designates' who assist in presenting a routine. This could reflect the collegiate approach of professional colleagues presenting a united stance in relation to a family's difficulties and possibly predetermined outcomes to an intervention.

Poloma (1979) argues that loyalty, discipline, and circumspection (determining in advance the best way to stage a show) are three essential attributes that a team must embrace to perform their roles well. The notion of backstage collegiality and how to stage the show most effectively was important in assessing which young people were deemed as suitable for referral to the FGC service. As FGC and FGC Advocacy have broad but defined aims and objects, examining the roles and performances of young

people, their families, advocates, and FGC coordinators assisted in understanding how specific roles influenced the interaction and therefore reinforced social order.

From Goffman's perspective, young people and their families would be seen as undertaking a performance when involved in the FGC process. Front of house may be a cohesive representation (involving the team or family member designates) of the ideal family. However, many families involved in social work interventions may not have access to the necessary accoutrements required to support the act (Jenkins, 2008). The social resources mentioned above may not be readily available to families whose social status is more diminished than those of the professionals involved. With the professionals as audience, many families could struggle to convincingly play the roles they wish to convey. The backstage area for the families involved in FGC may well be more exposed and it is often those elements of 'off limits real selves' that is the focus of professional scrutiny and intervention. This concept is reflected in Goffman's notion of stigma "where limited access to resources and power will seriously undermine the control that an individual has over the images they portray" (Keating, 2002: 203). This limitation was especially relevant for young people and their families in my study who generally lack both access to resources and power. Chapter 7 further explores this phenomenon.

Stigma relates to Goffman's (1963) notion of the 'spoiled identity' that often results in discrimination faced by individuals. Stigma can be attributed to and associated with a physical appearance such as disfigurement or disability, or social elements such as their secret hidden lives which they attempt to conceal from public view to avoid these being identified as deviant. The spoiled identity represents a 'master status' for the individual which defines how others see them and influences how those around them behave toward them (Poloma, 1979; Keating, 2002). Goffman makes a

distinction between the physical and social elements of the spoiled self with the former being seen as 'discredited' as there is nothing an individual can do about how they appear to others physically. The latter group is seen as 'discreditable' as they actively seek to conceal from 'normal society' their stigmatising secret lives. Using this perspective, the young people and their families involved in FGC could be seen as discreditable, as their hidden behaviours have been exposed as deviant and therefore subject to the process of stigmatisation (Goffman, 1963). The concept of stigma was useful in assessing how young people may have felt during the FGC and in exploring ways in which advocacy could possibly impact positively on the process. In relation to FGC, the individuals involved will have their roles "determined by and partially in reaction to structural constraints" (Goffman, 1961: 4) such as welfare, social services, and advocacy practices and policy. According to Goffman, roles are 'the basic unit of socialisation' and through them societal tasks are "allocated and arrangements made to enforce their performance" (Goffman, 1961: 77). Legislation defines deviancy and establishes the roles enacted within the FGC process such as those individuals or families deemed discreditable, while the policy and practice establish the roles of the professionals involved which ultimately is to seek to re-socialise the miscreant service users.

The focus so far has been on the family and the professionals involved in the FGC in their broadest sense, thereby looking specifically at the role of advocacy in this scenario, it clearly has the potential to unsettle and undermine some of the major elements of Goffman's theory. The advocate would have quite a different role to the other professionals at the meeting and, although the situation is pre-arranged, the way the advocate reacts would reflect their unique positioning in the scenario. Advocacy does not fit neatly into Goffman's front-of-house or backstage roles, as 'impression

management' would initially portray this role as one of 'colleague' with other professionals in the conference. However, in this instance, they would not necessarily be seen as collegiate with other professionals nor aligned with family. The impression that the professional services would want to portray to the family and vice versa are possibly disrupted. Therefore, the views that the advocate belongs to a particular group and the young person is associated with their family may be disordered, possibly undermining the effectiveness of the interaction in achieving its aims. Instead, the advocate could be viewed as separating the young person from their family role, and subsequently the master status possibly accepted by the family would no longer apply. In this case, both the advocate and the young person would now inhabit different roles, ones that overlap with their initial status group but are distinct. In this scenario, the role played by the advocate may have some element of Goffman's discrepant role of 'service specialist' attached to it. This role is not an actor in the sense of being a performer, but rather as an audience member or outsider; nonetheless they would have access to "information and regions we would not expect of them" (Goffman, 1959: 153). They are considered similar to team members as they have access to the secrets of the show and move easily between front and backstage. Goffman (1967: 153) explains that the service specialist learns the secrets of others, but does not reveal secrets about themselves and thus does not share "the risk [or] the guilt.....of presenting before an audience the show to which he has contributed". Discretion also plays a part in the role of service specialist, as they would have access to service user secrets which could 'give away the show' if delivered during the FGC performance. The "over communication of some facts and the under communication of others" is often the way that performances are sustained using a combination of information control and discretion (Goffman, 1967: 141). In this way, the specialist's

role is seen to remain separate, distant, and most importantly independent from others involved in the act. It was important when interviewing advocates that I explored how they perceived their role in an FGC, as differing training approaches and personal views seemed to shape the degree to which an advocate may inhabit the service specialist role.

One should not assume that the role of the advocate and of advocacy is necessarily always positive. The outcomes can appear tokenistic and negative if the young person is able to make themselves heard but subsequently their opinions and views are not valued. Therefore, examining where an advocate positions themselves in terms of their approach to advocacy and also preferences in terms of taking a ‘best interest’ or ‘wishes and feelings’ stance in how they support young people was especially relevant for my study. Although there is potential to disrupt the socially constructed FGC, the advocate may actually play a deceptive supporting role with other professional colleagues that could undermine the process. If this is the case, then the event could be seen as a prime example of Foucault’s dividing practices through classification and stigmatisation. From this perspective, the FGC would be a disciplinary technology seeking to reinforce the normalising judgement to re-socialise the family and the young person.

Conclusion

This chapter critically discussed the theoretical framework developed for the analysis of the interview data generated during the data collection stage of this study.

Foucault's analysis of power and specifically the concepts of ‘technologies of power’, ‘government of the self by the self’, ‘dividing practices’, ‘protocolisation’, and ‘normalising judgements’ all explore how structural power may be exercised through

the FGC and FGC Advocacy processes. The analysis of power allows for a greater understanding of how discourse helps shape the practices of FGC and FGC Advocacy and how empowering or disempowering the practices may be for the participants. The intersectional concept of ‘intercategorical complexity’ provided a critical tool to explore the dimensions of inequality associated with the characteristics of the young people in this study, for example, how the categories of age, ethnicity, learning disabilities, gender, class, and poverty may impact individually or in combination with each other on the experiences of the young people attending a FGC. Aspects of Goffman's sociological theory were used to explore the micro interactions of individual power exchange between the participants and professionals within FGCs at the individual level. The use of dramaturgy and especially ‘impression management’, ‘front and backstage’ roles, and ‘service specialist’, were helpful in examining the way that advocates presented themselves in their roles supporting young people at a FGC. Ritual interaction explored the construction and delivery of the FGC questions and examined if particular social routines could define FGC practices. Goffman’s notions of stigma assisted in exploring how young people and their families felt during the FGC and FGC Advocacy processes and whether there were ways to reduce feelings of stigmatisation that may occur during the intervention.

These aspects from each theory were combined and provided a robust framework to analyse the data generated from interview transcripts. The next chapter identifies how the study developed and describes the methodology and methods used to undertake the research and collect the data.

Chapter 5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

This chapter discusses the rationale for the qualitative research methodology that underpinned the study along with the methods used to collect the data. The chapter is divided into three parts: methodological approach, methods, and thematic analysis dealing respectively with the design, how data was collected, and how the data was analysed.

Methodological Approach

The particular qualitative methodological approach adopted in this study draws on the perspective, described by Sarantakos (2005: 35), in which reality is constructed through “culturally defined and historically situated interpretations and personal experiences”. Construction of meanings is particularly relevant for this study which explores the role of advocacy within FGC processes through the accounts of those taking part, one way or another, in those processes. In gathering this data, the author undertook interviews with children, young people, and family members along with advocates and one family group conference coordinator who had participated in, or were about to attend, a FGC. The field work took place in a local authority in the East of England across a five month time period, May - September 2011.

The Agency of Children and Young people

Acknowledging the voice of children and young people and listening to and valuing their opinions has rightly attained more prominence in social work research, and this was the core principle in this study. However, there are established concerns when seeking to interview children and young people, especially in relation to age-related competency, rights, informed consent, and confidentiality (Thomas and O’Kane, 1998; Lewis and Lindsay, 2000). These issues were initially discussed with the FGC

coordinators at the FGC service team meetings prior to referral and subsequently by telephone with the adult carers of the young people approached for this study. There are also broader concerns regarding the researcher's perception of children and how this affects how children are possibly listened to (Punch, 2002; Grover, 2004). Issues regarding a child's understanding of the research procedures, the right to withdraw from the process, along with the strong influence that the social context has in terms of 'decision-making' on a child's autonomy, especially on younger children, have been identified (Helseth and Slettebo, 2004). Ondrusek et al. (1998) suggest that many (although not all) of the concerns outlined above are age related (9 years old seemed the changing point), and the impact of age became more apparent in terms of understanding potential harm, right to withdraw, the purpose of the study and related benefits. The giving of information regarding procedures was not seen as age related. In relation to this study, none of the referred participants to the study withdrew, and during discussion at the start of each interview, all of the young people stated that they were aware of their rights regarding the above issues.

The ages of the young people interviewed in this study ranged from 5 -17 years and thus an understanding of developmental frameworks for communication and comprehension was required. McNamee et al. (2003) suggest that normally the age that a child can communicate and be understood verbally is around five years old; by the age of 10 children can talk and be listened to (although what is said is not necessarily given credence to by practitioners) and more often it is teenagers whose voices are listened to and their opinions given weight. Given that some interviewees were on the youngest end of the scale, I needed to monitor my own biases and ensure that extra time and support was given so that the voices of younger children would be heard and validated. I was also aware that older youth could be seen as more

competent and more able to communicate and again, I was carefully not to assume that being older meant having more capacity to answer the questions.

Following the basic tenets of social work practice (International Federation of Social Work, 2012; BASW, 2013), this study starts from the premise that all young people have agency and are capable of involvement in decisions that concern them (Alderson, 2000; Smith et al., 2003; Mantle et al., 2006; Economic and Social Research Council, 2010; BASW, 2013). Placing young people at the centre of the study was not only consistent with but also essential to the aims and objectives of the research, since it sought to understand how this particular group in society experienced interventions associated with statutory services that are imposed upon them. I sought to ascertain as far as possible whether the young people felt able enough to make decisions regarding their participation in the study. In recognising that age and cognition can inhibit the ability to fully understand a situation or process, the research study information and consent forms were explained to the young person and their carers by me in person (Appendices 4 and 5). Given that the language used on the forms was necessarily quite formal, I wanted to make sure that all participants fully understood the terms used and their implications. This also ensured that all the participants had all of the information and the opportunity to discuss it with me prior to the interview.

Given the welfare concerns involved, this study group of young people was composed of sensitive and difficult to reach participants; this resulted in a high level of resistance from the FGC coordinators in referring service users to the study. Where young people were referred, they were often older youth seen as more competent and the issues that needed to be resolved were related to placement rather than any other significant welfare concerns. Thus, despite recognizing the agency of young people

and their competence as active individuals rather than passive objects who have no understanding of their actions or their consequences, issues in accessing the service user group persisted (James et al., 1998; Mayall, 2002; Corsaro, 2005).

Children were not the only vulnerable group involved in this study. The principles espoused above were obviously extended to all the adult interviewees – family members, advocates and the FGC coordinator. This was particularly important in relation to Parent P who had a learning difficulty. After discussing the situation with him and his wife, I was told that I only needed to provide additional time for him to complete the interview as his learning difficulty meant that he may get stuck on specific issues and find it hard to move past them.

Being careful and supportive when asking the questions and giving younger participants and those with learning difficulties more time to answer proved successful in gathering sufficient data. As a consequence, some interview transcripts were initially longer to transcribe and thus more time consuming; however, they were very rich with insights into how the FGC and FGC Advocacy processes impact on these particular individuals.

Methods

Research methods are the techniques used to gather the data. In collecting the research data I used audio taped, semi-structured interviews with children and young people, family members, advocates, and a FGC coordinator.

Active participation or observational roles that required my presence within the conference were not appropriate for this study. The social service managers and FGC coordinators in initial meetings felt that my presence in the FGC proceedings would impede the process and potentially limit success. Lack of access by researchers to the

FGC process, especially family time, is commonplace and has previously been addressed by using interviews pre and post-conference with participants (Bell and Wilson, 2006; Zernova, 2007; Mutter et al., 2008). Accordingly, this study adopted the same strategy. As one FGC service provider website explained, the opportunity to observe the FGC first-hand and to record the proceedings is often confined to training videos and FGC coordinator training to ensure the confidentiality of the participants within the process (Day Break, 2008). One participant (Young male 6) from this study felt it may have been useful to have a record of events and outcomes to refer back to at a later date.

Although social workers were the main referral source to the FGC service they were not interviewed as part of the sample group for this study. The rationale for this was that the FGC provided a subordinate support function to mainstream social work responsibilities. Therefore, the role of the social worker in relation to their statutory child protection duties had been completed at the point of referral. However, at times some social work practitioners attended the conference to give information before withdrawing completely from the decision-making aspect of the process. The social work perspective on the process was gathered from advocates and the FGC coordinators, many of whom were qualified social workers although not working in a statutory capacity. Therefore, statutory social work practitioners were not key in understanding how independent advocacy approaches were used in FGC interventions. Their role as potential gatekeepers to these processes and their information about outcomes of FGCs would be a very useful subject for future investigation.

The interviews with participants were conducted face to face in the interviewee's home. All the young people interviewed had their parent or significant carer with

them or in close proximity throughout the interview. As protection concerns had been addressed prior to the FGC taking place, I was able to telephone and ascertain from the young people before meeting them, where, when, and with whom they would feel most comfortable with when undertaking the interview. Given it was the school summer holiday, it became apparent that they were most comfortable at home with their carers. Alternatives such as local fast food restaurants and coffee venues were offered but were declined. It is acknowledged in the literature, especially when interviewing young people, that the home environment can offer challenges. For example, the researcher is often considered a guest when entering into the young person's home "which in principle should maximise the young person's control of the situation" (Heath et al., 2009: 93). Of course, home can have potentially negative connotations. Carers or parents who have had negative experience with statutory services previously may perceive the researcher as a member of that professional group and therefore they may influence their children's responses either prior to or during the interview itself. Parents and other occupants, although not directly involved in the interview, may interject at times, which could influence the willingness of the young person to answer certain questions on certain topics (Heath et al., 2009). The researcher would also need to ensure that they were never left entirely on their own with a young person as this, too, would be inappropriate. At times the seating arrangements were such that in ensuring that the young person was safely monitored by their carer, it meant that their presence may have impinged on the young person's ability to freely answer the questions. This meant that while I sought to ensure that the interviews take place in the most appropriate and ethical fashion, I also had to acknowledge that these would not be ideal or perfect. It appeared that the young people were comfortable sharing their experiences with me, and in my opinion,

this was because their parents and carers were also part of the FGC process.

Advocates and the FGC coordinator were interviewed either at their home or in their place of work.

Each interview lasted between 30 - 90 minutes, with the younger children more often taking the least time to participate, and older respondents, especially adults, taking the most time. This may have been a result of how comfortable or uncomfortable the younger interviewees felt in the interview either with the process, with the questions, or with me as interviewer. I had no sense that participants were uncomfortable although two young people were a little shy initially but continued to answer all questions. Equally possible is that these younger children were less involved in the FGC process and subsequently had less to say. Older interviewees had more to say, with carers especially wanting to explain the history of their family's involvement (and their frustrations) regarding social services.

The final topic guide encompassed six open-ended questions, three to be asked prior to undertaking the FGC and three post conference (Appendix 1). The questions were designed to explore the expectations of young people before the FGC and then their reflections on their experiences after the meeting and whether the initial expectations were met. For example, in exploring the implications of using specific advocacy approaches in FGC, the topic guide asked questions relating to the levels of support received pre and during the conference and also whether the experience was positive or negative. This allowed me to explore consistency in approaches and disparities in participant experiences.

However, as the study developed, the sample group was adapted and extended to include adult family members and professionals. This meant that the questions had to

be revised to allow for the exploration of young people's and their families' experiences of 'independent advocacy within the practice of FGC' and possibly both pre and post conference (Appendix 2a/b). This meant a redesigning of the question structure; however, the focus on support and consistency remained. In addition, different questions were designed and asked of the advocates and the FGC coordinators as their perceptions of independent advocacy within FGC would be different. The topic guide questions sought to explore their roles which were more active (as they are part of the facilitation), and also the process of the conference and level of support given to the participants (Appendix 3). Britten (1995) suggests that interviews should be loosely structured to allow for an initial understanding of the respondents' views, in this case of the FGC process and then to also provide opportunity to further explore interesting ideas or insights regarding the independent advocacy support they received.

Interviews

There are numerous and diverse interview techniques available to the researcher. There are effectively three types of face-to-face interview: 'structured', 'semi structured', and 'unstructured' (Grinnell, 1997; Trochim, 2002; Sarantakos, 2005). Structured interviews, whilst having the virtue of consistency (with the interviewer asking the same questions in the same way for all respondents), does not normally allow for spontaneity or further exploration of any answers given. The need to be compliant and prescriptive was too mechanical and clinical considering the aim of this study. The use of unstructured interviews would have been an option for this study. These interviews have few restrictions and allow for a much higher degree of flexibility on the part of both interviewer and respondent in terms of how questions are asked and how answers are explored. As Sarantakos (2005) points out, questions

are seen as a guide rather than a rule: this in turn affects the structure of the approach and potentially its focus. I didn't use this type of interview as I wanted to have the option of both structure and flexibility, so I had a guide but also the ability to explore answers further if need be.

Semi-structured interviews were chosen for this study as they allow the interviewer to address specific topics while having the freedom to be flexible and probe beyond the answers, and to clarify and elaborate on certain aspects or issues within the interview process (May, 1997). Semi-structured interviews provided an element of structure to the approach in terms of topic areas covered while offering the opportunities to explore the responses in more detail (Humphries, 2008).

The literature also identifies picture interviews as another suitable tool when working with some younger children (Heath et al., 2009). Lahikainen et al., (2003) study with five and six year olds suggested combining semi structured and picture interview methods simultaneously. Given the potential for interviewing younger children in my study, I initially designed a draft picture interview question template which would have allowed for pictorial aids to support verbal answers given to me as the interviewer. However, although two of the young people in this study were under the age of six, they were able to articulate their answers very clearly, and therefore, the use of pictorial aids was not required.

The interview topic guide was age appropriate and developed in consultation with FGC coordinators who reviewed the guide and gave feedback for revisions where required. I was aware that some of the language used in the guides may be a little formal or advanced for some young people, therefore I was prepared prior to each interview to re-word the questions using softer and more appropriate language

especially for younger participants. Consideration was given to potential discriminatory factors such as age, cognitive ability, physical and emotional developmental issues, cultural awareness, language, physical disabilities, and mental health concerns (Heath et al., 2009). In taking such considerations into account, the timing and location of interviews was at the interviewee's convenience, in order to minimise any financial costs in respect of employment or travel. Also, where young people required potential support during interview, for example, in the case of the two young males with learning disabilities, I ensured that carers were on hand should the interview process become too difficult or stressful.

While a good match between the background and characteristics of researcher and respondent may be optimal in the interview process, the reality is that this is not likely to occur in many situations. The influence and impact of the researcher's identity on the interview and therefore data will depend on who is being interviewed and the nature of the topic (Sarantakos, 2005). In a small scale study such as this one it is acknowledged that there are limitations of what can be done about this as "age, gender, ethnic origin, accent and occupation cannot be changed" (Denscombe, 2010: 179). Therefore, I approached each interview with an awareness of the potential for my social status, age, gender, and ethnicity to impact both positively and negatively on the research process. I also recognised that the interviewee may not wish to discuss the topic being researched and this along with the other characteristics mentioned previously may result in the interviewee not participating as willingly or honestly as intended. However, the FGC coordinators contacting and preparing the young people and their families about the research in advance of my approaching them did allow for some forewarning regarding the focus and aims of the study and especially their choice not to participate. Many of the older youth were responsive to

the questions and engaged in the interview very well. One young person was quite monosyllabic in his response; despite my use of open-ended questions, his responses were closed, one-word answers for the most part. There were times when one other older youth and the two younger children lost focus and interest and had to be reengaged using other topics of conversation, often about other aspects of their lives before I was able to refocus them on the interview questions.

As the use of face-to-face interviewing requires good moderating skills, as a good researcher I needed to be attentive and sensitive to the feelings of the interviewee, be able to tolerate silences, be adept at using probes and prompts including paraphrasing and summarising what has been said, be non-judgemental, and be respectful of the rights of the interviewee (World Health Organisation, 2004; Denscombe, 2010). As mentioned above, most of the older young people were able to communicate well and articulated their thoughts on the FGC and FGC Advocacy processes very clearly. The main problematic aspects of the interviews with some of the young people in this study resulted from their lack of interest. Using prompts and diversions to refocus them and get them to answer the interview questions (sometimes reworded in a different way) became an essential skill. As the study sought to enquire about process and practices and not to investigate forensic child protection concerns, the use of the above skills seemed adequate.

Interviews with the young people and their families took place after formal information had been provided by the FGC coordinator and then either prior to or after (for two young people this occurred both pre and post conference) the conference had taken place. This allowed for participants to reflect on their experiences of both the FGC and the advocacy support they received before, during, and after the meeting to assess if their initial expectations had been met. The

advocate and coordinator interviews took place across a five to six month period with questions (Appendix 3) focussing on the process, the roles within FGC and FGC Advocacy practice, and how advocacy provision was provided to support young people who either were about to undertake or had undertaken a FGC.

Sampling

I contacted numerous local authorities for access to the service user groups, but these initial contacts resulted in only three local authorities expressing an interest to participate. Each authority has its own Research Governance Framework (RGF) to protect service users' rights and to ensure that research, if sanctioned, is carried out ethically.

Despite the number of organisations and services that proffer the use of family group conferences in numerous ways with a variety of clients, nearly all refused to engage in the study with most either not responding to initial enquiries or excusing themselves from further participation in the study on first contact. Where there was communication, the reasons given for not participating were lack of capacity, time, resources, staff, etc. These may be understandable given central government cuts to social services and were reflected in one case by the service ceasing to exist entirely, while another stated that they were not actually undertaking the work stated by their governing organisation (Personal Communication, 24.08.2011). This impacted negatively on the number of services able to participate in the study and over time the number of local authorities initially agreeing to take part was reduced from three to just one.

While waiting for referrals to the research study, I interviewed an advocate from one of the organisations used by my initial referral source, and was very surprised to hear

that many of this organisation's advocates were allowed into the FGC private/ family time. In the literature and most of the frontline practices I have encountered, this time is robustly safeguarded by the process and FGC coordinator, as it is deemed essential space for the family to take responsibility for the issues raised and subsequent solutions identified without any professional input. This was an exciting discovery, as it potentially allowed for an insight into the previously hidden processes and dynamics within the FGC and the decision-making processes of the family themselves.

This discovery established a new, potentially highly original focus for the study. After consultation with my supervising team the aims of the study were refocused, from seeking to understand the experiences of children and young people undertaking a FGC in its broadest sense, to critically examining the specific role of independent advocacy and how that may impact on FGC processes. I therefore engaged with one local authority family group conference provider and the reduction in research sites allowed for a more in-depth examination of the provision of independent advocacy services that occur within the practice of FGC.

Access and availability of children and young people to interview prior and then after a FGC had taken place continued to be very limited and, despite numerous attempts to engage with colleagues in other East of England local authority FGC programmes, very few referrals were received. I met with the FGC service team in the participating local authority and explored the reasons for the lack of referrals for the study from their service. I was told by a number of coordinators that they had forgotten to refer and/ or the families/ young people were not appropriate. One of the main reasons given was that the children were 'pre verbal'. However, I had previously been informed that there was a turnover of approximately 60-80 cases over a three month

period and it is highly unlikely that most of these cases would have fallen into the ‘pre verbal’ category. Although not stated as a reason for non-referral, the two-week window from initial referral to actual conference date may have been an underlying factor.

Given the reticence of coordinators to refer service users to the research study prior to their undertaking the FGC, I decided (in consultation once again with my supervising team) that young people who had already been through the process should be contacted as well. In addition, I increased the range of interviewees for the study to include family members to explore how they also experienced the advocacy process. I also interviewed a number of advocates and a family group coordinator to elicit their views on the practice of independent advocacy and its potential impacts on children and young people, especially regarding ‘family time’. With the new focus agreed, an adapted sample frame (Table 1, page 136) that included a broader range of respondents proved very successful in substantially increasing the numbers of individuals engaging in the study and also the numbers of children, young people, and their families. At the end of the allotted time frame for data collection, I had interviewed my target number of 8 advocates from 5 different organisations, 2 parents, 1 grandparent, 1 FGC coordinator and 9 young people (two interviewed pre and post conference) totalling 23 interviews.

Demographic information from the participating local authority on how many children, young people, and their families took part in FGC and used independent advocacy services, along with the characteristics of the advocates themselves, was examined using an intersectional approach to provide broader contextual analysis. These are discussed more thoroughly at the beginning of Chapter 7. Given the focus of this study, non-probability sampling was the most suitable strategy to employ in

identifying the study group. Purposive or judgemental sampling is one of the most common types of this approach, involving samples based on the judgment of the researcher, and which are related to the purpose of the study (Gomm, 2008: 153). Therefore, the young people, their parents and carers and the professionals involved were "chosen deliberately because they have some special contribution to make, because they have some unique insight or because of the position they hold" (Denscombe, 2010: 181). Discussions with the FGC coordinators undertaken at their team meetings generated the sample group. The focus of the study was to explore the experiences and perceptions of the young people and their families who had used or were about to have the support of an independent advocate as part of the FGC process. According to Berg (2001), employing purposive sampling would be appropriate as the study group was defined by particular assessment and intervention criteria, and not all service users are deemed appropriate for this intervention. The strength of this approach was that it was extremely useful in exploring attributes such as age, ethnicity, learning disabilities, gender, and class which were particularly relevant to this study (Sarantakos, 2005). The attribute that connected all of the young people was age. Exploring how age impacted on the experience of the young people in this study was important as it allowed reflection on whether the intervention is suitable specifically for a certain age group. Understanding the ethnicity of the participant group was also significant, given that the success of this intervention in other countries resulted in its use with the indigenous population. Therefore, as FGC and FGC Advocacy is used with young people from the general population in England, how and why this attribute may impact on the process and outcome was vital. As some of the participants in this study had learning difficulties, appreciating how these difficulties effect their ability to engage and understand the process became

another important element to explore. I had initially assumed that more young females would be undertaking a FGC; this, however, was not the case in this study. An equal divide between the genders meant that referrals appeared to be based more on age and issue to be addressed at the conference. These two aspects appear connected as the issues focussed mainly on future accommodation concerns, and older young people were more able to articulate their feelings about this. Class links to socioeconomic status and the limited ability of families involved with social services and FGC to draw on material resources that would assist in supporting their own family members. This, in turn, will impact on the overall experiences of the FGC process and that of independent advocacy.

However, one weakness of this sampling approach was that FGC coordinators were the gatekeepers to the sample group, which was problematic because at times it frustrated the research process. In this study and as reflected in the literature, gatekeeping is often a significant challenge for researchers, especially when young people are involved in statutory services (Heath et al., 2009). It also states that my relationship with these gatekeepers would be essential for the potential success of the study. Therefore, as the researcher seeking to undertake the study in the most effective and proficient fashion possible, I had to acknowledge that the relationship with the referring agency was going to be fundamental to the success of the study (Denscombe, 2010). This relationship is explored more thoroughly in the pilot study section.

Data Collection

According to Baker (1994: 111), issues are often “confronted in data collection, for example, in monitoring the confidentiality of the data, in gaining access to the field,

and in avoiding deception”. In this study, I felt that deception may manifest itself in the interview process with young people and their families. Some young people may have felt compelled to answer questions in a specific way and so ensure that I had the answers I was looking for. Also, both young people and their carers may have thought that I could influence their claims for particular services from the statutory organisations (they were involved with) or support their expectation to achieve specific outcomes. The former occurred to a degree with Parents P and L, as I felt that I was drawn into their dissatisfaction with social service support. The latter could be seen with the wish of two sisters (Young females 1 and 2) wanting the outcome to be one of reconnection with their estranged father rather than just addressing accommodation issues. The topic guide questions also reflected an approach to avoiding deception as the structure of the questions, while flexible, they assisted in focussing and refocussing the interview narratives back on to the topics of the study.

Access to the participant group as stated previously was at times a challenge. It appeared that regardless of the views about the agency of young people in terms of age appropriateness and competency, my informal conversations suggested that many practitioners and managers regard a specific age range (the ‘early teens’) as the appropriate group to engage with. This reflects the findings of McNamee et al. (2003) that this age group are listened to more often and their voices/ opinions carried more weight. Also, one FGC manager informed me that it is doubtful whether I would be able to engage any young people – especially adolescents – as they tend to resist the process entirely and therefore I may only be able to interview family members and the conference coordinator. This was borne out to some degree as the number of young people referred to the study was limited and did fall into the teenage range with only two young people aged less than 10 years old. In addition, the study was extended to

encompass a broader range of interviewees including parents, FGC coordinator, and independent advocates. The reasons for disengagement by young people may be more complex than initially suggested, and therefore may reflect service or practitioner resistance as well. This is explored more fully later in this chapter. In addition, I did not experience the resistance mentioned above and all the participants referred engaged sufficiently with the interviews, allowing for adequate data to be collected.

Ethics

Voluntary and informed consent, respondent anonymity in recorded data, and confidentiality and security of recorded data have to be guaranteed to minimise any potential harm to the research subjects or liabilities for the researcher (Baker, 1994; Bryman, 2001; Trochim, 2002; Miller and Brewer, 2003). Issues concerning consent were addressed in a twofold fashion. Initially, the FGC coordinator spoke with the young person and their family about the study and gave them a copy of the consent form (Appendix 5) and the research participant's information sheet (Appendix 4). Once access was established, verbal and written permission was sought from all individuals involved in the process. Names were changed to ensure confidentiality and anonymity, ensuring that no participant could be identified. An anonymised list of names was securely locked away in an office and kept separately from the transcripts.

All the young people who participated in this study were asked to give their consent as a matter of principle. Parents or those with Parental Responsibility were approached to give their consent on behalf of the children under 16 years of age. Young people of 16 years of age and over were asked in their own right to consent and were given all relevant information regarding the study and asked to sign a consent form before engaging in the research process. The limitations of

confidentiality in line with other ethical considerations were also outlined, especially in relation to the disclosure of information which may be harmful to the interviewee or others, such as issues of abuse and undisclosed criminal activities (Heath et al., 2009).

Information was also given explaining what the study entailed, what its objectives were, and what happens to the data during and after the study (Appendix 4).

Interviewees were given the opportunity to receive a copy of the transcript of their interview and a timeframe for any amendments to be made was also offered. Once the timeframe had lapsed, it was assumed no changes were required. It was established that engagement in the study was voluntary and that the interviewee could withdraw from the process at any time. Any traceable or identifying information will not remain on the data files; audio taped information will be kept for 5 years and stored securely in a locked filing cabinet (Greenstein, 2006).

A number of safeguards and ratifications were established prior to interviewing the respondents, namely successfully being granted ethics approval for the study from the university's Research Ethics Committee, gaining permission from the local authority's research governance committee, and the researcher undertaking a criminal records check. While somewhat time consuming, none of these processes resulted in any concerns being raised about the focus of the study.

Because "research participants are at risk of significant harm in many qualitative research studies, either to their psychological or emotional well-being or to their professional or even legal position" (Murphy et al., 1998: 162), caution was exercised when working with this respondent group due to the age ranges and potential levels of vulnerability involved. As such, more care in asking questions, and more time and

support was offered to all young people involved in the study. In most cases I was not informed of the reasons for the young people being referred to the FGC; however, I was cognisant that these reasons would have been for child welfare concerns.

Therefore, I was tactful in asking questions of their experiences, remaining focussed on their specific involvement in the FGC and advocacy processes. Where issues relating to initial referral did arise, I was mindful to ensure the young person knew how to access support services should they need them (Appendix 4). Throughout this process I was aware that the notion of agency of children and young people is one that reminds us that the capacity of the participants to engage with the process should not be underestimated or diminished regardless of their life experiences. Given these concerns, a criminal record check was undertaken on the researcher to establish a level of safety for the young people and to reassure parents and colleagues.

As Smale et al. (2000), Hornby (2003), and Thompson (2007) remind us, the characteristics of the individuals and families that comprised the sample group for this study were typically from among the most marginalised and oppressed in society. These families were potentially in crisis and many either had a history of non-engagement or were suspicious of interacting with a statutory organisation or its partner agency. I had to ensure that from initial contact, the families were aware that I was not part of the statutory services and that my role was that of independent researcher. I was reliant on the FGC coordinators to reassure and confirm my status as independent from the FGC service when discussing my research study with young people and their families. This had implications in terms of potential engagement with interviewees, issues of consent, and the form of data gathered as these areas were beyond my influence until after the coordinators had obtained agreement from the participants for me to contact them directly myself.

My intention was to interview children, young people, and their families individually both before and after the FGC to ascertain how they experienced the process and whether their initial expectations of the process were met. Having discussed some of the possibilities for engaging families with social service colleagues, it was clear that the timescales from referral to conference are very time sensitive, often between 2-6 weeks from initial referral to FGC meeting. Given the amount of preparatory work that needs to be undertaken prior to the conference (which is considered essential in ensuring a successful outcome of the process), I was informed that this may therefore impact on the number of referrals made to the study due to these limited timeframes. The awareness that these restricted timescales might impact negatively on my interview topic guide and subsequent data collection led me to undertake a pilot study to assess the feasibility of undertaking pre and post-interviews with the service users.

Researcher Bias

The influence of the researcher on the respondents and the data collected from them is a critical methodological issue. The researcher rarely has the same personal or social characteristics as the interviewees, and the researcher's presence and how it can affect the interpersonal dynamics of the process means they are viewed as the 'outsider within' (Smith, 2001). In maintaining a transparent acknowledgement of my own position as researcher throughout the study, I endeavoured to try to avoid my own perspective on FGC and FGC Advocacy shaping the findings. I tried to achieve this by being reflexive and by internally monitoring how my assumptions, age, values, beliefs, life stories, social/ economic status, emotional connection (with interviewees), and physical location can all impact on the interview process. One difficulty I encountered was when the young person disclosed that they had been abused by their mother's boyfriend and it seemed that she was receiving little support regarding her

allegation. My professional role as social worker became at odds with that of researcher, as I felt the need to intervene and support her emotionally, rather than refer the young person to support services. I had to take a moment to reflect on the severity of situation, check with the young person what support had been offered, and only once I was sure that more support had been offered than I initially understood was the case, could I continue in the role of researcher. I also needed to be aware of the potential implications of my being the same or similar age as that of the parents and carers of the young people interviewed and, in the case above, possibly, the alleged abuser. These reflections allowed me to consider what the Research Design Review (2012: 1) suggests is the "asymmetrical relationship and speculate on the ways the interviewer-interviewee interaction" may have been exacerbated by additional concerns such as issues of self-disclosure, issues not uncommon with many social service clients. In the case mentioned above, the identified counselling service was offered; this also occurred on one other occasion with a different young person. In both situations, the services were declined as the young people and their carers felt the matters were being addressed within the current level of social work or family support that they were receiving.

The issue of dishonesty within the research study was hopefully minimised as trust and understanding were established by being as honest as possible as regarding the aims of the study. I also ensured that I had informed the interviewees of their right to participate or withdraw in the study and how confidentiality would be respected. These assurances aided in building respectful working relationships between the interviewees and myself (Miller and Brewer, 2003).

Even if one establishes a good relationship with those taking part in the study, the relationship might still shape the data via the so-called 'Hawthorn' or 'Reactivity'

effect which suggests that changes in behaviour can occur caused by the “effect of being studied” (Oakley, 2000: 183). For example, the use of audio recording may impinge on the respondents feeling completely free to give their responses. However, initial self-consciousness, where obvious, appeared to recede and interviewees seemed to forget that the tape recorder was being used once the interviews were underway. Some of the interviewees may have felt conscious of being interviewed and their responses tape recorded, although this was not apparent and did not appear to cause distress or impact on the interview process itself. Tape recorded interviews may have concerned advocates and the FGC coordinators less, as these techniques appeared as part of their training (Day Break, 2008).

While accepting that professional training videos are very different to those that record real life client conferences and outcomes, I would argue that they are equally beneficial, albeit in very different ways. There are obvious benefits for professionals in training in seeing the dynamics of FGC and FGC Advocacy in action. In addition, in situations where tape or video recording equipment is used in a FGC, it would give tangible confirmation of the outcomes of the meeting.

However, self-consciousness was a secondary concern compared to the benefits of using audio recording in relation to ensuring an enhanced quality of data accuracy. The audio recording allowed me as interviewer to take fewer notes and concentrate more on “probing beyond important questions” (May 1997: 228). This ability was especially useful in terms of exploring what young people’s expectations were of the upcoming meeting and whether these were met afterwards. It also allowed me to refocus young people when they lost motivation and direction during the interviews without losing valuable data.

Validity and Reliability

The most relevant forms of validity for this study are ‘face’ and ‘content’ validity. ‘Face validity’ concerns whether the methods used relate adequately to the topics, concepts, and issues to be studied. This was achieved by initial research of the topic area, speaking to practitioners and experts in the field, informally interviewing FGC service managers, along and the use of a pilot study (Sarantakos, 2005). ‘Content validity’ concerns whether the methods used for the study are able to cover the multitude of potential answers. The flexibility of using semi structured interviews allowed the participants to give a broad range of answers. In addition, utilising non-directive questions permitted the participants to answer as honestly as possibly with the least pressure to feel that they must get the answer ‘right’ (Heath et al., 2009: 82).

Reliability is concerned with questions of stability and consistency in measurement and data collection. Stability relates to the consistency of the methods used regarding how reliable they are over time. The methods used in this study represent those used by others researching the same/ similar topics and also different studies and other groups (Bell and Wilson, 2006; Mutter et al., 2008), and thus can be seen to have been reliable and representative over time. In addition, equivalence/ consistency relates to whether all of the aspects of the methods used can be consistently applied to other studies. For example, the topic areas covered in the topic guides and the use of semi-structured interviews could be used in another study (Sarantakos, 2005). The methods undertaken to gather data in this research study intersected across aspects of both face and content validity. The combination of a pilot study and initial information gathered from experts in the field, and the use of semi-structured interviews established a level of reliability that correlated with the size of the study. Reliability is important because

the size of this study is relatively small, and greater reliability would allow for a larger study using the same methods to be undertaken in the future.

Pilot Study

Pilot studies offer the opportunity to undertake a small-scale version of the full study to trial the instruments to be used and to assist in uncovering potential problems or difficulties and assessing the overall feasibility of the study. The trial assisted in identifying possible weaknesses in the research plan and method and also allowed time to practice and become familiar with the research environment. The pilot study helped to highlight potentially discriminatory views and practices relating to children by adults, often referred to as ‘childism’ or conversely ‘adultism’ (Barford and Wattam, 1991; Alderson and Goodwin, 1993). These views were subsequently explored through the interview data to assess the levels of empowerment and disempowerment the FGC participants felt they had experienced. Pilot studies also assist in identifying the duration of the study and levels of diversity in the interviewee population (Sarantakos, 2005). These were important issues to explore as the study was necessarily time limited due to university and research site commitments. Also, it appeared that there were particular aspects of diversity within the research group, such as age, disability, ethnicity, class, and gender that would be significant in understanding who is referred to FGC and therefore exposed to FGC Advocacy approaches. The most significant outcome of the pilot study would be assessing the impact of access to respondents and therefore subsequent concerns with sampling. This was reflected in the FGC coordinators gatekeeping access to young people and their families, resulting in fewer than expected referrals to the study, and more often of a similar age (teenagers).

At the end of the month-long pilot study, two young people and one grandparent had been interviewed prior to the conference and arrangements had been made to interview them again once the meeting had taken place. In addition, only one lead FGC coordinator had been interviewed to assist in my understanding of the process of advocacy provision within the FGC service.

The limited number of referrals led to a meeting with the FGC coordinators and an appeal for them to identify additional potential interviewees was requested. Once again, the FGC coordinators reviewed their caseloads to identify suitable children and young people who had been referred and were about to go through the FGC process. They would then contact them and introduce my research, send them the participant information sheet, and gain initial permission for me to contact them. I would then contact the family and the young person to arrange a suitable and convenient location to meet.

The pilot study identified difficulties with access to the research subjects which, in turn, resulted in changes in direction and content of who was interviewed, numbers, timings, and focus. Contact with children, young people, and their families was difficult, with local authorities rightly being reluctant to allow access to vulnerable groups. This impacted whom I could interview, when, and at what points in the FGC process. As I broadened my focus from just interviewing young people to encompassing a wider range of FGC participants, this in turn changed the focus of my study. The role of advocacy became more central to understanding how the processes of FGC and FGC Advocacy shape the experiences of those undertaking the intervention.

Thematic Analysis

As with the informed choices made concerning the research design and type of interview along with the focus for the questions used to collect the interview data, decisions were also required regarding an appropriate data analysis theory. The interpretation of data and subsequent identified themes for further analysis (using the theoretical framework discussed in Chapter 4) are obviously influenced by the choice of analytical tool. Therefore, considerable thought was given in assessing which approach to use for this study and which theoretical framework would provide the most operational functionality in assisting in answering the research question.

Given the qualitative nature of this study, 'thematic analysis' (TA) was used to assist in identifying, examining, and reporting themes or patterns that emerged from within the interview transcript data. TA is the most common form of analysis undertaken within qualitative research and is seen as effective, flexible, and relatively easy to use (Holstein and Gubrium, 1997; Braun and Clarke, 2006). This flexibility allows TA to be associated with, but significantly different to, other approaches such as 'grounded theory' and 'discourse analysis'. The reason for this is that TA is not wedded to any pre-existing theoretical framework or significant technical knowledge and therefore can be used with numerous different theories.

TA's association with discourse analysis is useful, since significant discourses identified from the CDA of the documentary sources in Chapter 3 helped to frame which themes could be more important than others from the interview transcripts. TA's flexibility as a method allows it to align with constructionist methodology as it "examines the ways in which events, realities, meanings, experiences and so on are the effects of a range of discourses operating within society" (Braun and Clarke,

2006: 9). Therefore thematic analysis moves beyond "counting explicit words or phrases and focuses on identifying and describing both implicit and explicit ideas within the data" (Guest et al., 2011: 10). This is suitable for this study in seeking to explore the levels of empowerment and disempowerment for users of FGC and FGC Advocacy approaches.

Deductive approaches to analysis are theory driven (Crabtree, 1999) and according to Braun and Clarke (2006: 12) a "theoretical thematic analysis would tend to be driven by the researcher's theoretical or analytic interest in the area, and is thus more explicitly analyst-driven. This form of thematic analysis tends to provide less a rich description of the data overall, and more a detailed analysis of some aspect of the data". I had chosen ten prominent discourses identified from the legislative and policy frameworks to reflect specific questions for a detailed analysis that I wanted to explore in the interview data. These ten discourses were research background and referral process, gatekeeping; best interests and wishes and feelings; evolution of FGC: division of roles; engagement and participation; questions; timeframes, attendance and focus; family time; the plan; and follow up. These were initial themes relating to the research question and thereby were explored through the interview transcripts to establish consistency or disparities with what FGC and FGC Advocacy was intending to achieve from the participant's perspectives. More involvement and researcher interpretation is required when using TA, especially as coding is seen as part of the analysis and thus the organization of the significant discourses formed a continuum of meaning, from initial documentary analysis through to correlation in the interview data (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Tuckett, 2005). Guest et al. (2011: 11) suggest that the researcher needs to be mindful that "reliability is of greater concern

with thematic analysis ...because more interpretation goes into defining the data items (i.e., codes) as well as applying the codes to chunks of text". This was a consideration when following the premise of a theoretical thematic analysis as the ten discourses were coded for a very specific research question (Braun and Clarke, 2006) to allow for specific features to be identified within each discourse. As suggested by Guest et al. (2011: 10), the codes were "developed to represent the identified themes and applied or linked to raw data as summary markers for later analysis".

The level of analysis within TA is an important consideration as my approach would be seen as examining the data at the 'latent' level, meaning that I have moved beyond a general description of a theme to examining the underlying ideas, assumptions, conceptualizations, and ideologies (Boyatzis, 1998). Latent themes, according to Braun and Clarke (2006: 14), connect with a constructionist perspective as they "seek to theorise the socio-cultural contexts, and structural conditions, that enable the individual accounts that are provided". These themes correlate with the focus of this research study as they sought to identify the socially produced and reproduced experiences of the FGC participants.

Braun and Clarke (2006: 35) provide a useful six phase model of undertaking TA. The six phases are familiarizing yourself with your data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. As the CDA of the documentary sources informed which significant discourses may reflect important potential themes in the interview data, the use of the six phase model was not followed in its entirety. However, it was used to cross check that phases one to five had been achieved before the last phase of producing the report was undertaken.

In summary, the strengths of TA are that it is an ethical approach to analysis, it has breath of scope and flexibility (in its utility to incorporate theoretical frameworks), and it is transparent (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Guest et al., 2011). There have been a number of limitations identified with using this approach. TA should be used within an existing theoretical framework as it may have limited scope in terms of the level of interpretation. For example, in relation to discourse analysis, it does not allow the "researcher to make claims about language use, or fine-grained functionality of talk" (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 28). It is recognised that TA is widely used within the qualitative research paradigm and yet is not particularly known nor has it received a great deal of acknowledgement (Guest et al., 2011). It is the lack of academic status that may undermine its use in more sophisticated studies and see it categorised as a simplistic approach to analysis that does not reflect its true potential.

Conclusion

This chapter has identified the methodology, methods, and data analysis tool, TA, used in this research study. It establishes a robust rationale for their application and highlights the utility of qualitative methodology and taped semi-structured interviews, non-probability purposive sampling, and TA as flexible, reliable, and credible approaches to gathering and analysing the research data for this study. It discussed other research methods and tools available that could have been utilised and provided the reasons why they were not used. In addition, the difficulties of access and its subsequent impact on the sample size in relation to the respondent group and the resistance in referring young people to the study that required amending the initial research focus were also explained and discussed. As the emphasis shifted away from exploring the broad experiences of young people regarding FGC to a specific focus on independent advocacy provision within the process, slight alternations were required.

The interview questions needed some revision when the respondent group was broadened to encompass adult family members and other associated FGC professionals; however, the rest of the study's structure remained intact. Appendices 1, 2a/b and 3 reflect the development of the study and show the efficiency of the approaches and methods chosen.

Chapter 6 FINDINGS FROM THE ANALYSIS OF INTERVIEW DATA: PREPARATION PRE CONFERENCE

Introduction

The next two chapters explore the findings from the interview data and will present them from four sources: young people, family members, advocates, and a FGC coordinator, all of whom had experienced or were about to experience a FGC. A Thematic Analysis (TA) was applied to the interview transcripts and the emergent key themes will now be presented. Key discourses identified by the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of the documentary sources in Chapter 3, along with the theoretical framework developed in Chapter 4, are used to assist in the analysis of the key themes.

The interview data examines three of the four core components of the FGC: preparation and planning, the meeting, and follow-up planning and events as identified by Merkel-Holguin (1996). The fourth element not explored is that of the 'referral' to the FGC service, which in itself is beyond the scope of this study. Assessing cases once they have been received by the FGC organisation and subsequent allocation is explored. The three areas were chosen as they represent and overlap, in my opinion, the core spheres in which power and its influence can potentially be seen to operate both negatively and positively for, against, and by the FGC participants. It also identifies the role of advocate and the process of advocacy as possibly pivotal in its exercise.

Firstly, the pre-conference preparation stage was identified as significant as it covers the preparatory work that implicitly involves the provision of advocacy. Core aspects of this stage of the FGC are discussed and explored using aspects of the theoretical

framework and the adapted Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) tool. These are presented under a number of sub headings to aid the reader. The second stage is constituted by the conference itself in terms of a facilitated process that has specific structure and form. Here I will specifically focus on the verbal and written agreements including the use of questions developed to address the welfare concerns of the young people involved. These agreements are assumed to reflect a participatory and collaborative decision-making process. This stage can be viewed as a conduit between the pre and post stages of the process. The final stage is post conference; here the focus is on assessing what provision was undertaken in following up and supporting the young person in terms of planning that addresses the concerns of the meeting. FGC Advocacy is inextricably linked to the FGC process and weaves through each of these central areas, and therefore it is the role of advocacy and the advocates who provide these services that will be the mainstay of Chapter 7.

In this introductory section I now also outline and analyse the demographics of the FGC participants. While the focus of this study was on the provision of advocacy within FGC practices, it is useful to identify some of the quantifiable data characterising the participant population involved.

Interviewee Demographics

In total, 21 individuals were interviewed and 23 interviews undertaken and transcribed, comprising 11 interviews with nine young people, one of whom was interviewed pre conference, two who were interviewed pre and post-conference and the other six who were all interviewed post conference. One grandparent was interviewed twice, once before and once after the FGC, while two other parents were just interviewed after the conference.

Table 1: Profile of FGC Participants*Children, young people and their carers*

Child and Young person	Age	Ethnicity
Young female 1	17	White British
Young female 2	15	White British
Young female 3	5	White British
Young female 4	16	White British
Young male 5	16	White British
Young male 6	14	White British
Young male 7	5	White British
Young female 8	10	White British
Young male 9	15	White Irish
Total number of young people	9	

Regarding children and young people, four were male and five female. Two young people were under six and the others aged 10-17 years.

Carers

Grand parent/ Parent and or care giver	Related to	Ethnicity	Gender
Grandparent T	young females 1/2	White British	M
Parent P	young males 5/6	White British	M
Parent L	young males 5/6	White British	F
Total number of carers	3		

As outlined above, 2 parents and 1 grandparent were also interviewed.

Advocate and FGC Coordinator information

Advocate	FGC or agency trained	Advocate for	Ethnicity	Gender
Advocate 1	FGC	NA	Black British	F
Advocate 2	FGC	NA	White British	F
Advocate 3	FGC	NA	White British	F
Advocate 4	FGC	NA	Somalian	M
Advocate 5	Agency	NA	White British	F
Advocate 6	FGC	NA	Asian British	F
Advocate 7	Agency	NA	White British	F
Advocate 8	Agency	Young females 1 / 2	White British	F
Total number of advocates	8			

FGC Coordinator	Professional Background	Ethnicity	Gender
LC1	Social Worker	White British	F
Total number of FGC Coordinators	1		

Eight advocates (five independent and three employed by a nationally recognised advocacy organisation) were interviewed along with one FGC coordinator. This was to provide as holistic a picture as possible regarding adult perceptions of young people's experience of advocacy provision within the FGC process.

When viewed from an intersectional perspective the multiple layers of difference characterising the lived experience of the service user participants constitute a mosaic of oppressive and discriminatory factors. Two young people (both male) experienced

learning difficulties on the autism spectrum. There were two younger children, one male and one female, who were under six years of age. The other five young people comprised of four females and one male, aged 10-17 years. Seven of the young people were identified as coming from working class family environments in which social service involvement had previously occurred or continued to occur. It might be assumed that ethnicity and gender would be significant characteristics of the participants referred to the FGC service given the overrepresentation of Black Minority Ethnic (BME) groups within the welfare and justice system. However, similar to the findings from Holland and Rivett's (2008) study in Wales, this factor was not disproportionately represented and in fact homogeneity was evident in the participant group. In terms of my study, initial analysis could possibly reflect that the demographics of the sample group were families or individuals from a predominately white British background. This in turn reflected the general population of that geographical area in the East of England where the study took place. This homogeneity may of course also be associated with gatekeeper bias in terms of who was referred to the service and subsequently the research study. What was significant, however, was that the advocates in my study who were also interviewed about their experiences of FGC were from a broad range of ethnic, cultural, and professional backgrounds and also worked in both rural and urban locations. Although not a specific interview question, the ethnicity of the young people the advocates supported during the FGC process was often brought up and discussed in relation to the advocate's experience of FGC. From the interview data, advocates from the area where the research took place reflected that the families they had worked with were:

Just white British, but I do not have a lot of experience (Advocate 5).

I have not had anything other than white British (Advocate 8).

White. But I think that's more about our area, more than anything else
(Advocate 7).

Advocates from larger, more culturally populated urban centres stated similar findings as they worked with:

All kinds of families across the board (Advocate 4).

I just get to work with such a cross-section of families (Advocate 1).

and again most advocates felt that ethnicity and culture:

Largely follows the demographics of the area (Advocate 3).

And this would also sit in line with some areas where children services has a big under-representation on their records as well in certain cultures and communities for whatever reason that might be (Advocate 2).

In addition, most of the advocates stated that there was an almost equal gender split in the numbers of young people that they had provided advocacy services for:

I think it's quite an equal split really (Advocate 3).

It's about the same, really (Advocate 4).

50/50 (Advocate 5).

Not really a significant difference (Advocate 7).

In this study sample, the gender divide was almost exactly equal. This correlated with the recorded statistical information provided by the FGC service.

Therefore, from the advocate's perspective and the sample group of FGC participants that I interviewed, it became apparent that as themes, ethnicity and gender were not

two areas on which to focus significantly.

In addition, given that the study focussed on the provision of advocacy support in FGC processes rather than individual or familial participant characteristics, poverty was also not a pervasive theme in the findings. This again is an interesting finding, as it is well recognised that families involved with social services are predominantly from lower-socio economic backgrounds (Jones, 2002). Issues linking poverty to the FGC process may be seen where potential participants who could have provided support in addressing the issues raised in the meeting were unable to attend for lack of funds or opportunity due to the timing and location of the conference. The literature identifies that poverty impacts individuals and families in a plethora of ways.

Importantly for this study is the way poverty impacts on housing and the potential increase in social isolation (Walker and Walker, 2009). Therefore poverty may be seen implicitly in the findings of this study where the levels of access of many families to broader familial networks and therefore greater levels of support are greatly reduced. In addition, families with greater financial means can be seen to have more access to resources to accommodate, clothe, and feed their kin in difficult situations than possibly other families with less means. Choice is therefore a product of having financial means; having less wealth in a family impacts the choices they are able to make for themselves and for their broader family networks. Therefore, local authorities in England and Wales who provide FGC services may need to review access and support services for lower-socio economic families undertaking the process, as any support plans agreed for young people may be undermined if there isn't the financial aid to ensure they are viable.

In transcribing the interviews, it became apparent that certain discourses surrounding FGC and therefore the use of independent advocacy were more dominant than others.

These appear to define how structurally these processes were formed and how interactions occurred at the individual level. Ten categories that are interconnected have been identified for further analysis using a combination of Foucault's analysis of power, intersectional perspectives, Goffman's micro-level oriented sociological approaches, and aspects of a Fairclough-inspired CDA.

Questions relating to the characteristics of the advocates and the young people who were the users of the advocacy services identified above reflect the geographic demographics of where the services were located. It is therefore no surprise that the client group reflects that of social services and where there is a more diverse culture than the young people reflect this. However one advocate mentioned:

What we do know is there's a massive under-representation of some of our communities with FGCs (Advocate 2).

The demographics suggest that advocacy continues to be a middle class, female dominated profession, and although geography plays a part in deciding the ethnicity of the advocates, the individual characteristics of practitioners as analysed in the work of Dalrymple and Burke (2003) (relating to the class, gender and professional standing of advocacy and advocates) appear to remain static and entrenched. For example – and it has to be accepted that this is not necessarily representative of the broader population within this study – only one of the advocates was male and this was reflected similarly within the FGC coordinator group. In addition, most of the advocates interviewed had a professional or semi-professional background in education, social work, or a range of legal specialisms. The characteristics of the young people and their families reflect a matrix of potentially oppressive and discriminatory dimensions that can be explored through an intersectional lens: for

instance in terms of age, ethnicity, learning disabilities, gender, and class. Each of these dimensions reflects a social group where inequalities are often prevalent, and using ‘intercategorical complexity’, the relationship and links between these elements of difference can be examined. For example, the age ranges of the young people were used to establish part of the criteria for contact during the interview process. This is explored later in this chapter.

Having established the profile of the research participants, the remainder of the chapter examines, through my data, the three key stages of the FGC process outlined above.

Preparation (Pre conference)

This next section explores the pre-conference stage of the FGC, ‘preparation’ regarded as the most time-consuming and essential part of the process. This stage provides the context and regulation of what is to be addressed, who will attend, the venue, how it will proceed, and how to ensure that all participants are aware of the concerns raised that require attention and solution (Ashley and Nixon, 2007). Given this is the most important aspect of the process, it also requires very close examination and thus the chapter is divided into six specific areas: research background and referral process, gatekeeping, best interests and wishes and feelings, evolution of FGC: division of roles, engagement and participation, and questions.

Research Background and Referral Process

This section reflects on my experience relating to the challenges of engaging with the research site and the difficulties in obtaining referrals, and how these factors impacted on the study more broadly. Therefore, this section does not rely on interview data per se.

The social service welfare team who were the major referral source for engaging advocacy provision for young people called itself a family group meeting (FGM) rather than conferencing service. I was initially informed by the service manager of the team that this was due to the negative connotations associated with child protection conferences. Also that the service wanted to be seen as separate and distinct from social service colleagues and their statutory responsibilities. This distinction concerning service provision is seen as an essential structural prerequisite in the New Zealand approach to providing FGC, as it is suggested that service users may have encountered negative experiences with statutory services in the past (Doolan, 2010; Frost et al., 2012b). The team itself comprised of various professional groups, mainly from education and social work. Once again, this was identified as reinforcing separateness from established social work practices. The FGM service was situated within a distinct team in the social service offices and although they did not undertake the statutory work of social workers, the FGM service does provide interventions with young people who are social service clients. Therefore, the FGM service can be seen as undertaking social work practice in its broadest sense. One major perspective on the societal role of social work – a perspective which of course is open to debate (Cruickshank, 1999; Eagleton, 2007) – suggests that it potentially allows for the ideological views of government (that young people and their families are re-socialised, re-educated, and reformed to comply with the established social order) to be enforced and enacted through its processes (Smith, 2008). From a CDA perspective, ideology can be understood to be “any version of structural or culturally imposed dominating/ subjugating power that functions to construct unequal identities – whether based on gender, race, culture and or other inscription of power” (Park, 2005: 16). These inequities therefore have resonance with the ‘service user’ groups

who participate in the FGC and subsequently have access to advocacy services. In turn, this reflects the fact that these identities of difference assist in maintaining and reinforcing ideology. There are multiple dimensions to marginalised identity and these can be analysed using intersectional perspectives – in particular via the concept of ‘intercategorical complexity’ – to identify how inequalities in and between each group are established and played out.

When discussing service users in relation to this study, one is reminded that the inscriptions of power mentioned above are very apparent and specifically defined. If we take Fairclough’s (2001) view that power relations reflect class struggle and extend this to the myriad of additional oppressive dimensions that can impact on young people and their families at the individual and structural levels, then we can begin to understand where the participants of FGC are positioned societally. Research suggests that the dimensions of marginalisation that may impact on social service clientele include among others poverty, ethnicity, class, disability, and mental health concerns (Cunningham and Cunningham, 2008; Cree, 2010).

Fairclough’s concept of members’ resources is useful in assisting us to understand how such structural dimensions relate to individuals’ experiences and understandings of lived, day-to-day oppression. He suggests that cognitive processes based on internalised assumptions are produced and perceived through authoritarian sources, and these in turn influence how people subsequently interpret texts (Nesler et al., 1993). These internal conventions regarding the social production of knowledge are assimilated by individuals and shape their understanding of text (written and verbal), thus reproducing and reinforcing this understanding at an individual and societal level. This understanding allows us to comprehend how service users may interpret their experiences based on their knowledge, expectations, and socialisation. It also

reminds us that when researchers interpret ‘texts’ such as interview data, they must acknowledge their position in society, the role of scholarly endeavour and how these influence interpretation (Meyer, 2001). This reflexivity enables the researcher to retain a level of critical reflection regarding their research. It is of importance that the researcher provide an honest account of their involvement in the study along with an acknowledgement that they as a researcher have had an “impact on the meaning and constructions emerging from the research but also the ways in which [their] own behaviour and beliefs are [also] influenced by the experience” (Humphries, 2008: 144). Therefore the privilege that being a white, middle class professional male affords me in terms of my interaction and potential influence over other social groups has to be acknowledged. This is especially relevant in terms of the interviewer - interviewee relationship and how my social privilege influences the way I may interpret social situations and therefore meanings derived from them.

A Fairclough-inspired analysis allowed for the documentary data to be examined with an appreciation of how internalised cognitive processes potentially impact on the material. In addition, this also allowed the relationship between socially produced practices and established social structures to be explored. The views of the young people, their families, and other participants taken from the interviews were analysed using a Thematic Analysis and compare with the CDA to identify how their perceptions of themselves and expectations were influenced and reproduced by the process itself.

Although the focus of the FGC process fulfils a broadly defined child welfare remit, i.e. to address child welfare concerns, the distinction as stated previously is clearly reflected in the statutory nature of traditional, legislated social work interventions. This distinction manifests itself in terms of social workers’ practice being guided by

legislation regarding the paramountcy principle compared to the perceived less intrusive and more flexible approaches of the FGM team and also the advocates who are not required to meet mandated outcomes. This provides an interesting dynamic, highlighting the dichotomised arguments that identify the constraints surrounding statutory social work practitioners in relation to their official role and those of other professional colleagues who are not so limited by regulation. It is the legitimisation of the authority of the social work professional that establishes its powerful remit and subsequent limitations. However, it must be acknowledged that the duties and constraints on the social work profession are often vulnerable to the political objectives of the serving government. Parton usefully explores this in relation to policy direction changes which have resulted in alterations in terminology relating to practice, for example, from ‘risk’ and ‘protection’ to ‘safeguarding’. Although the terms changed, the focus of the work remained the same and in fact increased state intervention. For example, it has given rise to a broader scope of state focus encompassing what constitutes “harm to children and what the role of professionals and official agencies should be in relation to this” (Parton, 2011: 855). In addition, Parton reminds us that although policy and practice are hugely influenced by the political agenda in terms of children and their families, the emphasis and importance of protecting children remains a highly sensitive and political issue (Parton, 2011). This reminder can assist us in identifying child protection discourse as very dominant and one that establishes social workers as powerful professionals. This power and its transmission can also be seen to create the spaces for other professionals to work toward the same goals and ideas in a perceptually less intrusive and more inclusive manner (Gilbert and Powell, 2010). In this context, one could view FGC as a partnership and collaborative approach to addressing the ideological aims of the

government; advocacy, in turn, may be perceived as legitimising that understanding and supporting its endeavour. The construction of social work as a role and the exercises of power it performs can reinforce the claim that it can be seen as an oppressive caring profession (Dominelli, 2002).

As seen in Chapter 5, the denial of access to young people for interview, in my opinion, could be a defensive stance undertaken by practitioners with regard to having their practice examined. This, in turn, can be justified by the legitimisation of power bestowed on the social work profession by law in terms of safeguarding children. The resistance that many social workers have to using FGC in England and Wales and elsewhere is well documented (Morris and Shepherd, 2000; Walton et al., 2005; Doolan, 2010). This appears to reflect the balancing of a lack of belief by practitioners that families have the capacity to address the protection concerns regarding their offspring, and the workers' obligations under the statutes. This could also reflect that practitioners do not want to relinquish their professional power. They may therefore feel threatened by such a perceived empowering approach that seeks to devolve power away from the 'expert' and redistribute it, especially in terms of decision-making, back to service users (van Pagee, 2003). However, another determinant may reflect a stance where practitioners who are proponents of FGC may seek to protect the integrity of the process by denying access to those who may be seen as a threat to its success.

Moreover, the perceived protectionist and paternal discourses that surround social work identified in the previous chapter can be seen to be deployed in many instances in denying contact with youth and families. The referral numbers to the service were ample, the referral process in place was effective, yet the involvement of young people and their families was minimal. This reflects the impact that gatekeeping has

on the research process. This impact is explored in the next section.

Gatekeeping

The participants referred to a study shape the process and potential outcomes of the research, and therefore gatekeeping is pivotal to how a study develops. This section looks at the configuration of staff at the FGM service and how these roles may establish a gatekeeping function that potentially impacts on the referral allocation to the study (Heath et al., 2009; Denscombe, 2010).

During my initial discussions with the FGM team and their manager, emphasis by the coordinators was placed on the engagement of young people. It was felt that any interference from external influences, such as a researcher, may undermine the motivation of the young people and their families to agree to take part. It was deemed essential that the meeting take place and that nothing should be allowed to interfere with that in a detrimental fashion. The addition of another adult or perceived professional into the FGM service's relationship with clients was felt to overwhelm the process for the non-professional participants involved. The incentives for the FGM practitioners to ensure the conference takes place were unclear. Their motivation may have been financially driven, with many coordinators being paid per conference, and/ or the result of statutory pressures placed on the service management, and/ or due to the fact that practitioners were protective of the FGC process or possibly did not want their work scrutinised. When discussing the referral process with one of the supervising family conference lead coordinators, this latter issue became more significant than initially imagined. I was informed during my interview with her that there was a service manager and two lead coordinators who were all employed full time by the local authority and a number of sessional FGM

coordinators who were all paid on a per FGM basis. The role of the lead coordinator was clarified as a potential gatekeeping and supervisory role:

We supervise the other coordinators. So, as well as doing the family group meetings exactly the same way as other coordinators, meet with families and chair the meeting, L (other lead coordinator) and I also take referrals from social workers to the service and supervise colleagues, that's the difference between the roles (LC1).

This raised some concerns regarding the issue of access to services and whether the lead coordinators provided a gate keeping function. This resulted in a somewhat contradictory response:

We're not gate keepingThere's a criteria set for referral to the service and that changes according to how much work we have got.

So there is no gate keeping in terms of whether they are urgent or not. Well, I suppose there is to an extent because social workers tend to contact us directly since July and then make referrals. Then we have a conversation of what it is about and I guess that now we've got to this place where we will be saying we can't take this one and we can't take that one (LC1).

It appears that over time the pressures on the service have resulted in a narrowing of the interpretation of the referral criteria and that emphasis is placed on more serious child welfare concerns and less on preventative work that was once the staple of the FGM service. This shift was also reflected in a conversation that I had with another service manager in a different local authority whose experience was the same. He identified that the FGC service in his county was currently only dealing with court-ordered referrals and serious child protection cases. This change in intervention focus

may be a reflection on the success of the Public Law Outline which increased FGC's practice profile, therefore possibly increasing referrals to FGC services that consequently results in a rationing of provision (Morris and Connolly, 2012: 43). Some countries, such as New Zealand and some regions in Canada, have legislated for FGC and therefore it becomes the standard of practice in these places rather than a possible aspirational ideal. The legislated versus procedural mandate of FGC (Huntsman, 2006) in some jurisdictions may result in broader issues such as financial cuts not impacting in the same way as they do for services in places where FGC is not legislated for. In the latter kind of situation, FGC is often seen as an add-on service, thus making it more vulnerable to political interference and funding considerations (Doolan, 2010).

The interview with the FGM lead coordinator also established how cases are referred to the sessional staff:

We don't allocate them that's not how this teams works, once we take the referral, they are not allocated by us to the team we just send emails out to them (sessionals) then they decide which ones to take. Then the coordinators also decide which ones to take themselves (LC1).

It was established that the sessional coordinators have quite a lot of autonomy regarding the workload they carry. However the lead coordinator did state that:

L (other lead coordinator) and I undertake the ones which are urgent (LC1).

Although somewhat confusing, it appears that there is a criteria for referring young people and their families to the FGM service and depending on the seriousness of the case the lead coordinators would either take the referral themselves or email colleagues who would randomly pick cases to undertake. I was also informed that one

of the sessional coordinators was from a traveller background and therefore any cases where travelling families were involved were allocated specifically to her.

Culture and community connectedness have long been seen as a major component of success of FGC. Where FGC services have been most successful are in countries such as New Zealand, Australia, U.S.A, and Canada where the process has been used to address concerns predominately associated with Indigenous populations and where family, extended family, and community bonds are strongest and commonplace (Doolan, 2010). There are a number of correlations between travelling and Indigenous cultures, for example community ties and the importance of extended family, traditional matriarchal leadership, resistance to conventional education, nomadic lifestyle, and healing practices (Fournier and Grey, 1997; Ward, 2001; Cemlyn et al., 2009). In acknowledging that culture per se is a contested notion (Brah, 1996) the similarities between First Nations and Travelling cultures reflect a number of shared concerns and negative experiences that are worth further comment. They both share a history of discrimination, oppression, and exclusion from mainstream society and associated problematic social behaviours such as alcohol and drug misuse and heightened domestic violence and child protection concerns (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996; Cemlyn et al., 2009). Gypsy and Traveller along with First Nations groups traditionally prioritise family-based experiential education and learning in which children learn skills at home or with respected elders within the community; these may include economic and social responsibilities (Smith, 1997). In addition, many of these groups have fought against the notions of state schooling, which has been perceived as assimilation and re-socialisation by many parents whose own experiences were negative (Smith, 1997; Power, 2004).

The young people referred by the FGC coordinator with a travelling background

experienced the process very positively. The younger person, when asked what was good about the meeting, stated that lots of people attended the conference and:

I got to tell everyone about my feelings (Young female 3).

The other young person, when asked if it had been a positive or negative experience and what if anything could have been improved, said:

It wasn't bad, it was really good actually and ... I don't think there would be anything to be changed actually (Young male 9).

There are some inferences that can be made regarding these referrals being from a travelling background. The first was that the young person mentioned:

We went to go in a caravan cos it was probably 10 minutes we had to stay there for 10-20 minutes (Young female 3).

Also the numbers of people who attended the meeting appeared to be significant and may reflect a level of community and family connectedness that non travelling families did not have. The characteristics of the young people involved in the research were not systematically explored and therefore the role of specific backgrounds and their impact on the FGC or advocacy processes was not explored to their fullest extent. However, this example does suggest the relevance of cultural connectedness and its impact on the process. First Nations people's acculturation to western societal beliefs whilst seeking to maintain their own identity correlates with the experiences of many travelling communities (Sinclair, 2007). In addition, the "degree of cultural connectedness will correlate positively with indicators of well-being, and will negatively correlate with indicators of mental health problems and suicidality" (Davis, 2012: 2). Although beyond the scope of this study it is an area for further exploration.

Employing an intersectional perspective to the dimensions of difference highlighted above assists in emphasising that gender, age, and also cultural inequalities may be experienced by the young people interviewed. Research suggests that discrimination and oppression are particularly prevalent in specific marginalised cultural groups including Gypsy and Travelling communities (Clemlyn, et al., 2009). Therefore a process that utilises support from community (where those broader networks are viewed as so essential) to address child welfare concerns and that seeks to diminish overly controlling statutory intervention would have considerable potential in enhancing the empowerment of service users in these situations.

If we assume that FGC participants are an already constituted social group then we can use the concept of ‘intercategorical complexity’ as a tool for identifying the dimensions of inequality of the young people involved in the study (McCall, 2005). Gender, disability, and perhaps the most obvious dimension of age have reflected areas of inequality in the provision of advocacy services for this particular group (Pithouse and Crowley, 2007). This can be extended to include parents and significant carers who in many ways are the least prepared or supported through the FGC process as most do not have access to the additional support of an advocate (Morthorst Rasmussen, 2003).

What was highlighted through conversation with all the FGM team members at two team meetings was the number of opportunities where cases could have been referred to this research study. However, I was informed at the second of these meetings that many of the coordinators did not ask whether the young people wanted to take part in my research study before the conference took place. Most of the sessional staff responded that they had forgotten or that the case was too sensitive (welfare issues or the child was pre verbal) to ask whether the participants wanted to be interviewed.

When the focus changed to interviewing children and young people after the event, then there was more motivation but this did not produce any more referrals. It was only when the focus was on the advocacy service and the advocates who were separate to the FGM service that names of families and young people were offered. Once the gaze was removed from the coordinators' practice to that of other professionals, then resistance to the study lessened dramatically. This again may be a reflection of anxiety for the coordinators in relation to having their practice examined or the potential for a loss of earnings if the interview process in some way hindered the referral achieving its successful outcome. What constituted success for the FGM service was that a meeting was facilitated and the concerns were addressed. If, however, the issues were not resolved, the staff were still paid; therefore, success was multifaceted depending on one's positioning within the service. The local authority-employed staff would potentially have more invested in the outcomes than in the meeting itself, as success would define the rationale for sustaining the service. Although this could also be said for sessional staff, it was to a lesser degree. Success in terms of FGC can be seen on a continuum; it is multi-layered and somewhat of a contentious issue. For example, social services, the FGC coordinator, the advocate, the young person, and their family may all view success in similar or widely varying ways. Depending on your view, the family actually meeting and working with social services, or creating a plan that outlines how the welfare concerns will be addressed and or the long term outcomes of a plan that remain successful over time can all be measures of success. Although FGCs are employed after initial protection concerns have been assessed and addressed by the referring social worker, caution may still be needed by professionals involved in both the FGC and advocacy processes. For example, Littlechild warns us about disguised parental compliance and the 'rule of

optimism' in possibly clouding judgements by professionals in assuming that families are ready to protect their children when this may at times be a false belief (Littlechild, 2012). Therefore at the preparation stage, FGC coordinators and advocates may encounter families who provide a convincing 'front of house performance' leaving the practitioners wishing to believe they are ready to provide support for their kin when this may not be the case (Goffman, 1959). Thus FGC practitioners need to be aware that although risk has been assessed by the referring social worker before referral, they should continue to monitor the FGC interactions for signs of potential disguised compliance.

As discussed in Chapter 2, outcomes for FGC provided an incomplete picture of success, especially over the longer term. However, that should not diminish the persuasive research evidence derived from experiences in New Zealand and other countries which consistently point to positive outcomes over the last 20 years (Doolan, 2010). The resistance to introducing another person into a young person's life may be understandable from the FGM coordinators' perspective. However, one might have thought that the principles underpinning FGC – such as participation, collaboration and empowerment – would have supported the idea of an additional process (such as this research study offered) that allows young people to talk to someone external to the process and give their views on what was happening. On the other hand, if one follows the logic of ideological protectionism (as outlined above) which emphasises the re-socialisation of families and their members, then the exclusion of the researcher makes some sense. One example of this can perhaps be detected in interviews which were carried out with a young person both before and after a FGM. The reason for the referral was to place the young person and her sister with extended family after an allegation of abuse against their mother's new partner.

Once the child protection investigation had been concluded, the FGC became about finding accommodation for the sisters. This left the young person feeling that the focus was not about the allegation or even about her but:

Getting more help, erm relieving grandma and granddad from the stress of looking after me and (Young female 2 her sister).....

The meeting was about who would do what, who would like to try to set us up seeing dad every two weeks but that's not worked (Young female 1).

The FGM was arranged in this case with family and extended family to see if the grandparents of two teenagers could be supported to look after them for the foreseeable future. The support in this case, however, was from the family itself with very little commitment from social services. The grandparents felt pressured into offering a place to stay by other extended family because social services were not going to intervene since the assault was unproven. The grandfather said:

The reason the girls are here is because my son and my daughter were absolutely incensed at the thought that they were going to have to continue to live with my (other) daughter and her partner who we believe sexually assaulted young female 1, not proven. And so they put pressure on L (grandmother) and I to take them in. That sort of evolved. We never made a decision.

As the social work child protection investigation was unable to prove a case against the alleged assailant, the grandparents were left with the option of offering to look after their grandchildren or return them to a potentially abusive home. The focus of the FGC in this case was not to address the initial protection concerns but to work with the family to seek to address the accommodation issues for the grandchildren.

The unproven allegation has meant that no further support once the child protection investigation was completed has been offered to the young person who claims she was attacked. In addition, the grandparents feel unsupported by social services and their extended family. However, from an ideological standpoint, the family could be seen to have been re-socialised, reminded of their social responsibilities to provide the means for the young people to remain safe at little or no cost to social services. Using Fairclough's view on class and the areas of discrimination identified above, it is worth noting that in this case, the family were not previously known to social services, were middle class, and had access to their own financial resources. Given that patriarchal beliefs of male, heterosexual dominance lie at the root of gender-based violence, intersectional analysis would allow us to potentially view the experiences of this young female through a patriarchal lens. Utilising Matsuda's (1991) framework of 'asking the other question' would assist in identifying how her voice and agency could have been diminished and the voice of her alleged male abuser enhanced especially in relation to who was believed regarding the allegation. Being female and young could expose her to two very denigrating categories of oppression and may have resulted in this young person feeling powerless and unheard in concurrent situations of abuse and disclosure. It would be hoped that following the paramountcy principle, social services would have played a greater role in supporting the young person in terms of addressing her emotional and potentially psychological needs. However, according to the young person and her carers, this was not the case. Regarding my role as researcher, I was freely given the contact details by the FGM coordinator for the family, who were very approachable. Although when I initially contacted the grandfather, he was quite reluctant at first to allow me to interview his granddaughters, he changed his mind after I had discussed with him the purpose of

the interview.

In another case, the young person was interviewed where the focus of the FGM was on accommodation issues once she left the care of social services, which was imminent. In this case the young person was able to articulate what the meeting was for and why she was going to attend:

Family members erm getting together and discussing like what's going to happen to you and whether like there will be housing for you so if when I come out of care so they will basically know whether or not I'll be able to be housed or go into a hostel. They were saying about like what happens if I went into a hostel environment and stuff like that cos that was my original plan. they said it would be best if I was there and I got my own personal reasons, with my family I would only hear about it and I would rather hear for myself what they are going to say (Young female 4).

In this case the foster carer was going to act as advocate and supporter for the young person at the FGM.

In both these cases I interviewed the young person before the FGM and in the former case I was able to re-interview the young person after the event. In these cases the young people were over 16 years of age, female, and well supported by their carers. In the first case the family were not typical of social service clients as they were self-sufficient financially and were able to call on a range of familial supports. The latter case (young female 4) was closer to the more common profile of a service user. She had been in care for a number of years, she came from a difficult family background, she had lost contact with her mother and other relatives, and her father was in prison. Although the lives and circumstances of both these young people were very different,

one may view young female 4 as potentially more vulnerable, appearing more isolated and lacking in opportunities for access to a larger familial network of support than her peer. This may reflect her status as a user of social services and therefore more exposed to the negative impacts of poverty and exclusion (Walker and Walker, 2009). What was similar between these two young people was age and gender. Access to both of these young people was granted very easily and I wonder if that is because they characterized an age range deemed to be more resilient, perceived by the coordinators as not as vulnerable as other younger children and that in the case of the first young person the issue of abuse was unproven. Moreover, the reasons for the FGM might have been regarded as not so serious and therefore an outcome of success may not have been as important (Mantle et al., 2006). Alternatively, the outcomes in themselves may have been so straightforward that these cases would always have been 'successful' and this may have been the gatekeeper's rationale for referring them to the study. In the first case, the focus of the conference was to establish if the grandchildren were to continue to stay with grandparents; and in the second case, social services were obliged to assist in finding accommodation for someone to whom they had responsibility.

In these cases the focus of the conference was not on child protection but broader welfare concerns seeking to address how the young people could be supported by either their family and or social services. In reviewing the cases referred by the FGC coordinators; all nine young people had a conference to address either or both support or placement concerns and not any issues relating to potential protection that perhaps precipitated their involvement with the welfare system. This establishes the use of FGC in England and Wales as a secondary intervention undertaking, post child protection concerns as initially identified in the 2010 Working Together protocol.

This reflects the way protectionist and paternalist discourses may appear to dominate the child welfare system and can potentially be used to include and exclude individuals from the process in the exercise of power. If this were the case, as Pithouse and Crowley (2007) identify, then the process may deny young people agency in a number of decision-making forums and does not mesh with young people's own views about their ability to engage and influence decisions made about them even in serious matters such as child protection cases.

The potential exclusion of young people from decision-making forums where adults portray paternalistic views about allowing them to engage in serious matters appears in direct contrast to the research literature on the subject. Young people's ability to understand and contribute to decision-making reflects that in many cases their contribution can actually reduce risk levels and enhance safeguarding rather than increasing them (McNeish and Newman, 2002; Pithouse and Crowley, 2007). The inclusion and exclusion of children to decision-making arenas is linked to the core tenants of the agency and the rights of children to have their voices heard and participate equally in the decisions made about them (Hart, 1992). This is connected to notions concerning 'best interests' and 'wishes and feelings' which are explored in more depth in the next section.

Best Interests and Wishes and Feelings

This section looks at how advocates seek to support young people to express their own views during the FGC decision-making forum. It examines the concepts of 'best interests' and 'wishes and feelings' in relation to young people's agency and explores how these terms have potentially varying outcomes within the FGC process and thus on the young people themselves. Firstly, some ethical considerations and definitions

are discussed before shifting the focus to practice and some of the possible implications of the terminology mentioned above.

FGC appears, at first glance, as a utilitarian intervention seeking to achieve the ‘greatest good for the greatest number of people’, for example young person, family, community, and professionals, all having a say in the process and outcomes. This, in turn, reflects the FGC-trained advocates’ philosophy that the greatest good is achieved when the process reflects ‘family’ rather than ‘child’ level outcomes or ultimately ‘best interests’ for children and young people (Banks, 2006). By contrast, deontological approaches to ethical practice involve the study of moral obligation and are often associated with the work of Kant. For example, categorical imperatives establish that one is duty bound to tell the truth and or act morally at all times regardless of consequences, resulting in the notion that individuals should do the right thing even if the outcomes are negative or harmful. It could be argued that this Kantian ethical stance tends to relate to the national advocacy approach of focusing on the ‘wishes and feelings’ of young people and not the broader aims of the other participants, including those representing statutory bodies. Such an approach may also entail information-giving and awareness-raising as the national advocacy agency takes the position that they are doing the right thing for young people in giving them all the information, whereas the FGC trained advocates appear to censoring some materials (Banks, 2006).

The positions undertaken by the advocates are denoted as empowering, establishing a level playing field for all parties to interact in the same way. However, this may be interpreted as tokenistic; as Boylan and Braye (2006) suggest, why ask what is wanted if there is not much realistic scope to achieve it? Many advocates state that when given all the facts, many young people are able to fully understand why certain wishes

may not be fulfilled. This lack of comprehension may well be age related, with younger children unable to appreciate the nuances of expectations and it may also be shrouded in the paternalistic notion of protection, related to levels of understanding and potentially associated with developmental milestones. In many cases, young people are seen as too young to understand what is happening to them and their family, or perhaps not having the perceived emotional or cognitive capacity to cope with difficult and sensitive information. This perception assumes that young people live in a vacuum unaware of the familial issues presenting in their closest relationships. This assumption may deny opportunities to use advocacy and FGC processes as a method to address these problematic areas in a cathartic manner.

These assumptions are not unproblematic with some academic research identifying that children and young people did not ‘want their own way’ but did ‘want to have a say’ (Thomas and O’ Kane, 1999). More recent data reflected that “children want to have more control over situations than they often feel they have and they want to be more involved in decisions affecting them or their families” (Aldgate et al., 2006: 310). This encompasses the arguments concerning the participation rights and agency of young people and how much weight their views should be given in a decision-making forum (Hart, 1992). Many of the young people interviewed for this study for the most part were aware of the purpose of the FGC and what the role of advocacy was within it. They were also aware of the family dynamics that could be played out, as was reflected in a comment by one of the advocates:

I suppose my experience is I’ve worked with usually older young people, say 10 and upwards, who have quite a good idea about their families and what their families are capable of (Advocate 3).

The issues of agency, participation, and empowerment are perhaps emphasised most when viewed in conjunction with asking the young people about their wishes and feelings. This questioning is viewed as part of building a relationship with and moderating expectations of the young person and to establish the boundaries of the role undertaken by the advocate, as clearly emphasised in the information given to the children and youth:

Being very clear that I am independent, I am not part of social services, and that I am there to represent their wishes, feelings, thoughts surrounding the presenting issue (Advocate 5).

What our role is within family group conferencing for the young person which is basically there to help and support them to get their wishes and feelings across (Advocate 3).

And our job really is to go in and to support the youngster either to express their own wishes and feelings or to just to enable them to do that (Advocate 8).

One advocate clearly identified the philosophical separation and distinction between the notions of best interest and promoting the voice of the young people:

We don't work in best interests, we don't tell them what to do. We are there for purely wishes and feelings (Advocate 7).

Concerning the issue of 'wishes and feelings', they always seem to appear with the inevitable caveat of 'however', in that what the young people wish and hope for may not be achievable so therefore expectations must be curtailed. Realistic anticipation of the outcomes of the conference are enhanced and mitigated somewhat by advocates ensuring that young people understand the confines of their input and that they may

not get what they want. Once again, although all the advocates were proponents for expressing the wishes and feelings of the young people for whom they were advocating, there were variances in how this manifested itself in practice (Hart, 1992). This potentially resonates with the notion of ‘members’ resources’ in that the internalised assumptions and beliefs which are again in turn shaped by the social practices of advocacy and FGC assist in diminishing the expectations held by young people and their families (Fairclough, 2001).

The caveat regarding building expectations was also made very apparent through the conference process, as many advocates ensured that their service users were aware of the limitations of the process:

Yes, again that’s very important to explain to them during my meeting to tell them you might need that or you might wish that to change. I cannot promise 100% that is going to happen or something like that. So not to raise, you know, expectations about some things may not happen (Advocate 4).

So we do...we’re very, very clear when we’re preparing a child or young person that that is going to be, you know, that’s the case. We can’t promise them anything. So I don’t know. I think it’s about being honest, isn’t it?If you don’t face this, if you saying to the child or young person, “Give us your views, we’re going to take it into the meeting and the adults in your life are going to listen to that,” that might raise their expectation (Advocate 2).

They may say, “Well, ideally, I’d like this to happen, but I know that so and so doesn’t get on with so and so and that that may be difficult.” So not usually wildly unrealistic expectations (Advocate 3).

Expectation may resonate closely with the notions of participation and empowerment when viewing advocacy within the practice of FGC. The more a service seeks to achieve higher levels of agency in relation to participation, then one may assume the greater the level of expectation for the young person. Hart (1992) does not explicitly make the connection between participation and expectation as his focus was the level of participation and its correlation with empowerment. Although this would suggest that the greater levels of empowerment, especially where the decision-making forums are seen to engage with young people, would intimate an increased possibility for expectation to be enhanced (Hart, 1992). Therefore, the interconnectedness between best interests, wishes and feelings, levels of participation, empowerment, and expectations can be seen to be played out within the process of FGC and variations of advocacy. To view these connections from an ethical practice perspective is essential as these variations can possibly be seen to establish levels of conflict depending on how and where they may occur within the provision of services. The use of professional codes of ethics can assist in providing a contextual framework to analyse these concerns and allow for practitioners to identify areas of best practice within their work (International Federation of Social Work, 2012).

Evolution of FGC: Division of Roles

This section will explore how the role of FGC coordinator has evolved and changed from one that encompassed the tasks of coordinator and advocate to one that now views these roles as distinct and separate. I will also explore the differences in advocacy provision reflecting the differing ethos and philosophy in approaches to supporting young people.

The research findings outlined below reflect the fact that at an organisational/ agency

level, the role of advocacy differed depending on the focus of the advocate and whether they were self-employed or employed by a particular organisation. None of the advocates interviewed were associated directly with local authority statutory services. However they were indirectly financed either on an individual basis or through their employing organisation. There was a division in approach to supporting young people by advocates who were either trained as both FGC coordinators and advocates (self-employed) and those who were specifically trained as advocates (national agency organisation trained). I interpreted this as appearing to reflect a particular philosophical approach to advocacy that evolved historically and has been influenced by specific training and best practice approaches. This might be the outcome of a potentially 'purist' stance undergone by those individuals who had undertaken specific training in FGC as both coordinator and advocate (Laws and Kirby, 2007). The term 'purist' may be viewed as somewhat problematic. In this thesis, I have interpreted it as having the same meaning as that espoused by Law and Kirby (2007) in that it refers to the original or traditional approach undertaken in terms of a FGC regarding both process and model.

The data suggests that this divide in advocacy provision was also geographic in nature with many urban advocates having been initially trained as FGC coordinators (and possibly continuing to undertake both roles) by a particular London borough, whereas, the rural advocates were specifically trained as advocates by a nationally recognised advocacy organisation. This difference in training may be a significant issue as it reflects the evolution of FGCs over time from one where the coordinator undertook both the coordination role as well as that of advocate, to the current situation in which these roles have been differentiated. In countries where the coordinator position undertakes both roles, the coordinator appears to be more often a

qualified social worker, whereas in England and Wales this is not a requirement and coordinators come from a variety of backgrounds (Doolan, 2010, Yukon Health and Social Services, 2013). This practice reflects the professionalization of advocacy that has seen its ascendancy into a professional sphere in which it has its own training frameworks, policy guidance, legislation, charters, and codes of practice (Action 4 Advocacy, 2002; 2006; Boylan and Dalrymple, 2009). The literature concerning advocacy has also evolved establishing it as a distinct profession underpinned by particular theories and practices (Payne, 2005; Barnes, 2012).

In relation to FGC, Horan and Dalrymple, (2003) suggest that the initial use of independent advocacy during the conference was to diminish the impact of adult and or professional views on the decision making process.

As one advocate pointed out:

In the early days we never had independent advocateseither somebody the child knew, maybe from school, or a youth worker or another profession or someone who knew the family network (Advocate 6).

Advocate 1 identified the evolution of this division in roles:

It was (local authority) who initiated the training for coordinators to be trained as advocates, and then gradually, other boroughs also decided that it was a good idea to have advocates as well to work with the children and young people separately.

How the division and subsequent professionalization of advocacy has impacted on young people is difficult to assess. In New Zealand independent advocacy is not a consideration in a FGC as the family and extended family, friends, and community

members provide a network of natural support for young people and their family (Doolan, 2010). The differentiation of roles within FGC appears to be geographically located. In particular countries or even local provisions within countries, using a New Zealand FGC model with the combined coordinator and advocate role mitigates the need for a professionalised advocacy approach to supporting vulnerable conference participants (Yukon Health and Social Services, 2013). Moving from one individual who had the responsibility to ensure all participants of the process were engaged with and felt that their needs were being met, to just having one dedicated person whose role is to support young people through the process seems on initial reflection to be a positive move. This practice is possibly linked to how the New Zealand FGC model is used in England where time restrictions and limited resources do not necessarily allow for the essential preparation work to be undertaken in a comprehensive fashion.

Therefore the family networks may not be fully explored and utilised. However, the assumption that the family system will automatically generate supportive networks for the family and its members is not unproblematic. For example, problems can occur in societal contexts such as in England and Wales where family are potentially disparate and disconnected from one another possibly emotionally and geographically.

Tensions within the family could make it difficult to find resolution to the presenting issues and more importantly it may be unsafe for the young person to be placed back within those networks. This may in part give rise to the sense of legitimacy in narrowing the preparation work and the search for connected and viable familial support networks which appears common practice in England and Wales.

When family and supporters are identified, it would appear that on occasion the broader familial network may be unaware of the presenting issues or the severity of the problem identified. Therefore, the coordinator, when discussing the reason for the

conference, may divulge information that seeks to unite the family to find resolution that may have the reverse effect. As one parent stated:

I think the conversation that she (social worker) had with my mum actually has caused us problems and has caused problems in the relationship between me and my mum erm because the way that mum read what had happened, she heard what social services had said but she didn't then come back and talk to us and say what's the truth of this, erm and she made a lot of assumptions and there are things that we have said to her about the way that things are in the family, P (husband) problems, the problems with the autism (Parent L).

This may have more resonance with intra-family communication issues and is rarely seen as problematic by coordinators. As Koprowska (2010) identifies, advocates, social workers, and coordinators are trained to work with service user groups where difficult family dynamics and communication issues are commonplace. It may also relate to the personal philosophical view of the specific advocate and how and where they have trained that mainly impacts on the process and the young person. This will be explored further in the next section.

Engagement and Participation

In this next section, how advocates engage and participate in the FGC when supporting young people through the process will be examined. In addition, the role of national standards in providing safeguards for the participants involved will be discussed.

The division of roles between coordinator and advocate permeates the FGC process, through aspects of preparation and subsequent practice and service user experiences. As stated in the literature review, preparation of participants is time consuming, but

fundamental to the conference (Merkel-Holguin, 1996; Marsh and Crow, 1998). It is seen as essential to the successful outcomes of the meeting as it ensures that service users are aware of the aims and goals of the meeting and also what to expect during the conference. It was initially the role of the coordinator to prepare participants for the conference and while that remains somewhat the case, there are variations as highlighted in the quote below. As advocates meet with the young people more frequently, they explain what may happen during the process while they are engaging the young people to ascertain their wishes and feelings. Some advocates felt that the young people were not adequately prepared by the FGC coordinator, since they would find that many youth didn't appreciate what was likely to happen during the process and additionally at times have had an advocate imposed upon them. This lack of preparation for young people is a persistent and as yet unresolved issue having been identified as problematic in the literature as early as 1992 (Mittler, 1994, Thoburn et al., 1995). The national advocacy agency practice again reflected an inclusive decision-making process ensuring that:

The emphasis is on the family group meeting coordinator to explain the meeting to the young person. And then you let the person decide if they would like an advocate to support them at that meeting (Advocate 7).

When the role of independent advocate was initially developed it was felt that the role would not only effectively support young people to attend as well as have their voices heard, but also provide support for other vulnerable participants at the conference. This philosophical approach to inclusion may also have diminished in a time of severe financial cuts and was an issue for one parent who had learning difficulties. His wife outlined the experience of herself and her husband:

So that was quite difficult and it was particularly difficult for P (her husband who suffers from Asperger's) because he couldn't have an advocate and he really needed one erm so he keeps, he kept going round and round in circles on certain things (Parent L).

On speaking with the husband (Parent P) he was asked if the intention had been for him to be allocated an advocate:

They said they would. They said there was.

He appeared angry with the excuses offered:

I was supposed to have an advocate; it never happened..... It's just...oh, and then they start crying, "We haven't got the resources" (Parent P).

Also of concern is that two of their children had learning difficulties on the autism spectrum and although each was allocated a separate advocate, the relationship for one of the children with his supporter was somewhat adversarial. From the father's perspective:

The stuff that came out of that was so completely superficial, it was meaningless. The only way that you could get around that would be to have the advocates spending a considerable length of time getting to know the kids before the meeting (Parent P).

And the mother added:

I think it was quite, it was quite difficult that the children only met their advocates only the once. Yeah particularly if you have got children like Young male 5 and Young male 6 who are on the autistic spectrum, I mean

Young male 6 engages with people a lot better, erm Young male 5 he does, he really takes time to get to know people (Parent L).

The added complication for the second young person was the advocate he was allocated was someone who was not an impartial party and was from an agency that he had a negative relationship with in another capacity:

So he could have done with more time with his advocate and I don't know whether he mentioned it but he was very cross after the meeting when he realised that his advocate was actually the advocate from the C (Unit for youth with learning difficulties). And he said I have told her all those things and he doesn't want to talk to her now (Parent L).

This issue was evidently a concern for the young person himself who when I interviewed him stated very clearly:

I did find out later that she did work at somewhere called the C which was in my opinion is a bit of a bad place..... so I got a bit annoyed afterwards.....(Young male 5).

In exploring with the young person further whether it would have made a difference to him had he known that she was from the unit and would he have still worked with her, his reply was:

Yeah I wouldn't have said anything and no I wouldn't have wanted her as my advocate (Young male 5).

What was concerning is that the young person appears to have been misled regarding his advocate. He didn't know that she worked at the unit until after the conference and she made no attempt to inform him of her position prior to or during the meeting. The

rationale for using independent advocacy with this particular family where learning difficulties were prevalent highlighted the potentially problematical nature of a standard prescriptive practice of allocating or encouraging the use of advocates in all FGC cases. The requirement to identify an advocacy provision that could respond more appropriately to the additional requirements in this case may reflect that not enough consideration was given to allow both the parent and young person the opportunity to participate fully in the FGC. For the young person, his advocate appeared to have been chosen for her knowledge of learning disabilities rather than advocacy skills and this may account for her lack of understanding regarding a collaborative and partnership approach with the young person. A further potential interpretation might also be that the need to have an advocate present in the meeting was more important than the actual role or support they provide and may in some cases fulfil an agency requirement to meet this standard of practice. If this were the case, then it may reflect the fact that the process – and perhaps even more so the outcomes of the conference – are predominantly the main objectives of the meeting. Once again, this might highlight a somewhat paternal and protectionist welfare discourse. The interaction between advocate and young person does have a sense of dishonesty about it in that the young person participated in the process possibly with the assumption that he had an independent advocate of a similar nature as his sibling, when this was not the case.

The opportunity to engage with both parent and young person in a creative and partnership manner does not appear to have been taken. For example, one young person mentioned that it would have been good to have had the conference:

Taped or videoed taped so that I would be able to know who actually went and secondly I might have actually known mostly what it was really about (Young

male 6).

This may be especially salient for young people with learning difficulties and also where the young people could not or were not allowed to stay for the whole conference. Attendance will be explored and expanded upon later in this chapter.

If the young person wants an advocate and a 'natural' supporter from their existing network of relationships cannot be identified, then the FGC coordinator may suggest either a particular individual or agency who will provide an advocate. The understanding that these are 'independent' advocates assumes that not knowing the young person or their families in some way assists the advocate's neutrality in the FGC process. This was clearly not the case above and appeared to have particularly negative outcomes for the young person. Issues relating to funding and the level of non-partisanship of the advocate may undermine this presumption. The perception of service users that the advocate or their agency is connected by association with social services either through funding or service delivery has been highlighted as problematic as it affects and diminishes the service user's engagement with perceived statutory services (Pithouse and Crowley, 2007). Additionally, the impartiality of advocates to work in the most empowering way for young people can be questionable. Many of the advocates who originally trained as coordinators highlighted the importance of an existing and on-going relationship with the FGC coordinator. The significance of this was established with regard to good working relationships when identifying who may be the best person to work with a particular young person:

Because we know each other quite well, most of the coordinators and the advocates, we would have an idea of who we want to ask but it always has to go through the project manager..... For us to discuss who would be

the best person suited to be the independent advocate (Advocate 6).

Most of my work is through (local authority (LA) name) because I started with them when I first started so I have loyalty; (LA1, LA2). Usually, it's like I follow the coordinators, and it's the coordinators who've worked with me before. So wherever they are, whatever local authority they're working for, they usually kind of recommend me..... I get recommended and get referrals (Advocate 1).

The notion of neutrality is an interesting one to explore here. In terms of the practice of advocacy, the advocate should always be acting on behalf of their service user and therefore are never impartial or non-partisan. The Advocacy Charter identifies a number of times that an advocacy service should be structurally, operationally and psychologically independent to avoid conflicts of interest (Action 4 Advocacy, 2002). These three types of independence reflect the need to be separate from other organisations and service constraints including funding issues, policy, and practice issues that may compromise the provision of independent advocacy approaches. Lastly the ultimate goal is to ensure that the service provision remains focused and loyal to the advocacy needs of the service users. This does not address the issue raised in the quote above, where personal relationships may transcend or blur professional boundaries and codes and ethics of practice. That is not to say that there is anything unethical in identifying colleagues who understand the process and are good at their job. The somewhat insular relationships between coordinator and advocate may compromise the notion of loyalty to the service user and reframe this as loyalty to the coordinators and or the local authority and therefore a predefined and prescribed purpose and outcome.

The collegial relationship identified between advocate and coordinator mentioned above reminds us of Goffman's (1959) backstage roles where the professionals in this case present a united and trustworthy representation of their work with service users. An interesting dynamic is the evolution or the devolution in the division of FGC and coordinator roles that mirrors the subsequent division of advocacy roles within the FGC process. For example, initially the role of coordinator was that of both facilitator and advocate that has been divided into separate roles. Similarly, the role of advocacy has been subdivided into differing advocacy approaches in supporting service users that reflect particularly training positions undertaken by different advocacy agencies. The growth of these roles is viewed in the literature as a progressive development that meets the needs of, and for, young people to have independent representation and support of their views in an adult-centric decision-making forum (Dalrymple and Burke, 2003). Despite the rhetoric of advocacy being focused on the best interests of the child, the positioning of these roles from a CDA perspective could potentially be interpreted as being in line with an apparently more dominant discourse of welfare control. The role diversification would be portrayed as drawing on research and practice wisdom that is justified by scholarly credibility and interpreted by service users via their internalised assumptions regarding authority and therefore 'members' resources' (Fairclough, 2001). Thus children, young people and their families if told by a credible authority figure/ source and reinforced by personal experience may believe that they do require an advocate to assist them with the conference process. At an individual level the roles could be illustrated and enacted by Goffman's (1959) process of 'impression management' that would reinforce the professional role of advocate within the premade drama and structure of the FGC.

In the case above the advocate was a trained FGC coordinator and not a specifically

trained advocate and this may in some way define how the advocacy charter is interpreted and practised. This division of advocacy practice is highlighted by the child-focused nature of advocacy promoted by the national advocacy organisation through its charter and codes of practice. This can be compared with the recent move by the FRG, which in discussions with its national membership has decided to create national standards for FGC including the role of advocacy within the process. The FRG has led the development of core principles and practice standards in these areas and continues to promote with the support of the Department of Education an accreditation programme for FGC projects (FRG, 2013). However, the discord between approaches was identified very clearly by one advocate:

I think national standards are good because when I came into this kind of world that they call FGC and it sure did feel like that for me and I came in and there were a lot of FGC coordinators out there that were brilliant but there were some FGC coordinators out there that were really pitching, you know, using FGC to help families pitch against service providers. That is not the role, you know? Any service that works through families, they need to be helping family understand the importance of working cohesively with...particularly with children services (Advocate 2).

It is perhaps the notion of 'pitching against service providers' that may identify a specific split between the approaches as another advocate from an advocacy organisation said:

We abide by the National Advocacy Standards as a project. And I think that the good thing about abiding to standards is that people know what to expect from an advocate because we bear the standard that you should be.....

however the National Advocacy Standards don't specifically, if I remember, don't specifically mention family group conferencing (Advocate 3).

This once again identifies the difference in focus between the emphasis being placed on the family and the outcomes for the family, compared to advocacy that is specifically child centred, concerned with outcomes exclusively for the young person. Neither role seeks to be neutral and both seek to address potentially similar issues. The former appears to take a holistic approach to resolution while the latter does not necessarily seek to solve the problem just ensure that the young person is represented and their voice heard. This difference in focus here is complex and identifies a potential division between the needs of the family (mainly parents) and those of the young people involved. It may also reflect that given the power dynamics within the family network, a holistic advocacy approach that seeks to encompass family centred outcomes may in the process somewhat ignore the needs of family members with less power. This positioning of advocacy services with their differing approaches and focus can be interpreted from a CDA perspective as potentially serving the interests of one group over another and therefore servicing the intention of dominant government ideology over the interests of individual young people and their families (Janks, 1997).

Concerning self-employed advocates, the need for a good relationship with the FGC coordinator from a business perspective is obvious. To what degree financial remuneration is alleviated when advocates work for an agency rather than for themselves is beyond the scope of this study. Although none of the advocates interviewed were associated with an in-house service, whether users are aware of the subtle differences between self-employed or agency-employed independent advocacy approaches and their detachment from statutory processes is uncertain. However, the

relationship does highlight some issues concerning the roles linked with the FGC process, especially through the lens of Goffman's (1959) concept of 'impression management'. Using this frame of reference, the situation could be interpreted as one where the separateness of the role of advocate is reinforced by the individual. This, in turn, establishes the perception of independence that guides and controls this impression that others have formed of that role. Therefore, advocates may be seen by all other participants as separate from themselves since the role of the former is not one of statutory service provider or family member, but distinct in that they are there to solely support the young person. However, the degree to which their role is dissimilar to that of other service providers will depend on which particular form of advocacy they are fulfilling, FGC or national agency trained.

Those advocates who trained as coordinators provide more of an obvious example of collegiality regarding their respective 'backstage' roles in possibly establishing a united stance with FGC and social service colleagues (Goffman, 1959). The essential qualities of loyalty, discipline, and circumspection associated with impression management again may be more apparent in terms of how these particular advocates view their team role within FGCs. This is possibly reflective of their history as coordinators with shared training and FGC family-orientated goals. National agency-employed advocates appear to also have a collegiate focus, but one that deems the young person's wishes and feelings as being more of a priority to the exclusion of any other participant's views at the conference. This may allow them to provide a more effective and convincing impression of 'independence', as they may well convey to the young person that their allegiance is with them and not with the aims and objectives of the FGC. This may in many ways be a potentially more effective and believable 'performance' (in the Goffman sense of that concept) by the advocate to

the young person. The advocate could be considered a 'service specialist', as they are seen as "members of the team in that they learn the secrets of the show and obtain a backstage view of it" (Goffman, 1959: 153). However, in learning the secrets, the service specialist does not reveal secrets about themselves and therefore can maintain a separate role from others involved in the act. Nevertheless, it could be argued that the role is still one that enters into a premade constructed scenario which has predetermined goals already established despite the advocates' best intentions. One should also acknowledge that even if a 'natural' advocate were undertaking this role, the structured processes and socially construed nature of FGC would deny them any greater influence or impact than either of the two independent advocacy roles identified above. Although a natural advocate could have greater familial ties or understand the dynamics of the family members better, this may have little bearing on the substance of their role as it is one that could possibly be intended to assist the potentially more powerful discourse of achieving a child welfare-related outcome. When the focus is one that appears to initially reflect a child's safety, it suggests a more serious concern and therefore the paramountcy principle outweighs the lesser priorities of agency or advocacy for the young person or the family themselves.

If the New Zealand FGC approach is applied in its purist form, one can see how the model and its processes reduce the power imbalances to some extent by devolving decision-making back to family members. This, in turn, allows them to take responsibility and be accountable for the concerns raised. However, the FGC model, when not applied in the same fashion as the New Zealand approach, potentially disperses the notion of family decision-making and/ or may deny it completely (as in some models in the USA) and returns power back to the various professionals in the room (Heino, 2009).

The discussion with young people regarding whether they require an advocate has many facets, the first of which is the implied belief that the young person is unable to act or convey their own wishes and feelings. Some advocates state that:

It's very hard to expect a young person to sit there in front of family and friends and say what they want to say, without feeling slightly supported. I mean...you know if there is nobody there the backlash from the family could be anything and affects that young person (Advocate 7).

While others recognise that this ability is often age-related and situational with many young people saying:

"No, I don't need that.", "Yeah, I'm fine. I'm okay," but on the day, it's very different, very different (Advocate 1).

At other times, however, adults, either parents or professionals, decide for them:

If they don't decide to come, sometimes, it's through their choice, sometimes, it's through their parents saying to the coordinator, "I don't want so and so to be there" (Advocate 1).

At times, even during the meeting, the adult participants would want time to discuss issues that they do not want their young people to hear:

They went out because we want...I wanted to be able to talk quite freely without hurting their feelings sort of thing (Grandparent T).

These adult views did not seem to coincide with those of most of the young people I interviewed:

I am happy to talk for myself and not worried about the meeting at all (Young

female 4).

I could speak for myself and it was easy (Young male 9).

Some young people asked to take part in the FGC may already feel stigmatised and ‘discreditable’ through association with the behaviours of their family that are deemed as deviant and consequently required the intervention of social services (Goffman, 1959). Asking if they need a family member or complete stranger to speak on their behalf or support them at a family meeting may reinforce this ‘master status’ of disempowered victim, lacking in agency. This process could act as a divisive practice, in a Foucauldian sense, as the young people are already disconnected from their social peer group in having to undertake the intervention (Foucault, 1990). Advocacy from this perspective could act as alienating practice as it divides these youth from family or extended family members and established ties, while reinforcing the denigrating appearance of lacking the ability to help oneself. This may in turn strengthen an internalised notion of blame within the young person who may feel responsibility for exposing the family and or individual members to the scrutiny of statutory services.

This was potentially the case for the young person whose allegation of abuse against her mother’s partner appeared to become a secondary issue compared to establishing a support network for her grandparents. When asked why she thought a conference had been arranged she said:

It’s my fault, if I hadn’t said anything about what happened to me we wouldn’t need to go through this meeting (Young female 1).

Alternatively from a positive standpoint, independent advocacy could be seen to separate the young people from their familial role and thus reduce the negative impact of their ‘master status’ and the deleterious effects of stigmatisation and a ‘spoiled

identity' (Goffman 1959). In so doing, advocacy may disrupt the potential order of power relations within FGC. For example, if the collaboration of young people and advocate results in effective and acknowledged agency by the young person to articulate wishes and feelings and have their views accepted unreservedly, then the established power relationships have been unsettled. This is somewhat dependent on the emphasis of the meeting which in the case above did not focus on the welfare concerns of the young person but more the accommodation issues raised as a consequence of an allegation of abuse.

These power dynamics would need to be viewed differently if the FGC were based on the traditional New Zealand model, as these questions would be somewhat alleviated. However, at the same time, such alleviation would only be exchanged for other troubling questions concerning the potentially authoritarian stance undertaken by the New Zealand Government requiring the use of FGC at all decision-making points. The statutory obligation in New Zealand to convene a conference where decisions concerning the welfare of the child are addressed is seen as a necessary structural step in ensuring that social workers conform to practice standards. This subsequently does not allow for discretion to be exercised by social workers in not referring the case for a FGC. In other jurisdictions such as England and Wales, practitioner discretion to refer or not has been seen as problematic as it has been interpreted as negatively impacting on referral numbers and therefore undermining the success of the FGC service and ultimately the outcomes for young people (Doolan, 2010). However, it can be argued that discretion is a core element of reflective practice as it allows for flexibility in approaches to working with individuals and families. Also, without the option for discretionary practices (within the bounds of statutory obligations) the outcomes may result in a 'greater amount of State intervention' (Pickford, 2000: 11).

Therefore, the model of FGC used, the legislation and policy developed to implement the approach, along with the views of practitioners and their subsequent practices, all contribute to the possible power dynamics associated with this intervention which could lead to the transmission of power across multiple sites.

The questions used in the FGC process may assist in the service of power, and this potential will be examined in the next section. This section also bridges the two findings chapters as it reflects the practice of FGC and how the questions connect the preparation stages of the process (Chapter 6) with the meeting itself (Chapter 7) and how both aspects of FGC influence and are influenced by the questions in terms of structure, process, and outcomes.

Questions

An essential part of the preparation for FGC is that of establishing what the issues are that need addressing. In achieving the goal of alleviating these issues, a number of questions are formulated and explored with the children, young people, and their families prior to the conference. This section will look at the way the questions are formulated and the role they play in potentially designing the social interactions that surround the FGC process. Aspects of power and its exercise through the questions will be explored using elements of CDA, Foucault's analysis of power relations, and Goffman's micro-sociological theory of interaction.

Part of the engagement by an advocate with young people undertaking a conference concerned a review by the advocate of the questions that were sent to the young person outlining the focus of the meeting. Often these questions appeared in a standardised fashion with the first few questions linked to the young person's wishes and feelings, and a number of additional questions focusing on the emphasis of the

conference itself, such as contact and access issues.

The questions therefore form part of the relationship building between children/young people and the advocate, as the first meeting provides an opportunity to discuss the questions and negotiate how the advocate will represent them at the conference and possibly in family time. There are a number of considerations to take into account. One of these reflects the short-term nature of the advocacy work that often appears to be either crisis or specific issue-based, and this can be seen to detrimentally influence the possible development of a valuable relationship (Boylan and Braye, 2006). Another consideration may relate to funding issues. For example, self-employed individuals paid to undertake a specific piece of work (which will be time limited) and also advocates (whose organisation works to budgetary requirements set out by the local authority or other funding bodies) are both constrained by organisational economic considerations. Therefore the number of meetings undertaken during a FGC referral varies although all the advocates acknowledged that there are at least two meetings, one before the FGC and also the conference itself. The variations were quite substantial, as two advocates state below:

I want to meet with them at least two or three times. To have some sort of rapport, going in, so they (young people) feel comfortable enough. But it's not always ideal because with all the cuts....with the third one, we've got to get consent from the project manager (Advocate 6).

We try to do two visits beforehand. We then attend the conference and then we have a feedback session and then we diary in for the next review to go out for one visit beforehand and then it's attend the conference (Advocate 3).

Another was clear that additional time was often required but sometimes was an

unrealistic goal:

And sometimes that time is not available and you may not have time to do that..... you might have just two (meetings) one to familiarise you with the young person and the other one to get the information from them (Advocate 4).

While the young people interviewed had little to say on the matter, parents were adamant that in many cases the number of times an advocate met the children was inadequate:

Whereas I think they needed more meetings with the children to get a better overall picture of what they felt and what they were into and what concerned them. And I think maybe had they met with the advocates two or three times there would have been a better picture of what the children really feel (Parent P).

No matter what the intention might be, the fact of the matter is that kids don't open up absolutely everything to people who are still basically strangers. It takes quite a long time to get to know someone well enough that they're going to do that and if you don't give the time, you don't get the results (Parent P).

One advocate identified a referral meeting with the coordinator as essential for them:

I always like to have the referral discussion so that I'm clear what the bottom line is. I always like to have a joint visit. When I meet with the child or young person, I always like to go with the coordinator first (Advocate 1).

Meeting with the young people appeared to be a contradictory process as some advocates wanted to create and build a relationship prior to the conference while

others view this very differently, for example:

I think it...it helps build the relationship with the young person and that's what we're there for (Advocate 7).

What we don't want to do is create dependency. You know, this is a very specific role. Very, very short-term and you know, our whole role within the family is very limited, very short so the advocate needs to be the same with the child (Advocate 2).

There is a wide diversity in how advocates engaged young people and although it is a principal quality associated with the process, there appears a lack of understanding from some of the advocates about the importance of this element in their work. The literature highlights that many young people view their relationship with their advocate as an informal one of friendship rather than a formal professional intervention like those linked with social work:

Our research into young people's well-being shows how important relationships are to young people, not only their relationships with friends and family, but also with adults in their community (Children's Society, 2012).

While appreciating a conscious need to be aware of the implications of dependency on advocates by young people, there is a requirement to acknowledge the powerful role that advocates play and the perceptions of their interventions by children and young people. "The vast majority of young people, having met the advocate, wanted them to fulfil an on-going role" (Boylan and Braye, 2006: 243). These expectations may be raised as mentioned above and need to be addressed in a sensitive manner. The young people in my study for the most part remember having an advocate with some having a better recollection of the role they played during the FGC than others.

This may have been to some extent a reflection of the time elapsing from the meeting to the interview date:

Yeah I remember her (Advocate 8) she wrote down a load of notes about the meeting about who would do what, who would like trying to set up trying, to set up like seeing dad every two weeks (Young female 1).

She (Advocate 8) gave advice and stuff and she said erm that she would, she would like read out the thing that I could have read out (Young female 2).

She (the advocate) said all my wishes and my feelings in the meeting so then they know how I feel like (Young female 3).

On the other hand, there were four young people who could not remember who their advocates were or what they did.

The general sense I got from my interviews with the young people was one of apathy: they could not remember what the advocate did, and the advocacy was not especially important to them. This may be related to the young person's level of participation and engagement within the process and also the conference outcomes. Where the conclusion was positive, young people could perhaps remember it more than when the decision made was seen by them as negative.

These meetings effectively provide an opportunity for initial relationship building with advocates reminding young people of the FGC process and then deciding and planning how they will use the advocate at the conference. This relates to the meeting process as well as family time and ensures that the young people are represented in both elements of the conference:

We go through our standard stuff, so our confidentiality policy, our recording

policy, and then our stuff about, you know, if you don't want to work with an advocate, you can say so. If you'd like to try a different advocate, you can say so as well (Advocate 3).

So the young person might say, "Well I want to do the talking myself, but I want you there next to me," or they might say, "Well I want you to do the talking, but I want to sit next to you" And you know, so all of that is negotiated and that's the advocate's role. It's the advocate's role to negotiate with the young person when they want to have their voice heard and that might be an information giving or it might be in private family time (Advocate 2).

There are also some practicalities related to this process. Some experienced advocates explained that the referrer may ask closed questions and they would re-word to allow for a more open discussion. When I explored who decides what questions will be asked one advocate states:

The family group meeting coordinator, in partnership with the social worker or the referrer, not necessarily a social worker (Advocate 7).

In terms of question content and structure it appears that many FGC coordinators craft these:

We might be working with a new referrer and they might feel a little bit daunted by the whole prospect.... So they might be looking for the guidance from the coordinator. And very often what we find is the referring agent might ask very closed questions....But what we want is very broad questions. So they might come up with a question and we might want to rework it a little bit. And so, again, that would be the coordinator's role to negotiate that and talk

about that with the referring agent (Advocate 2).

The propensity for language to convey a variety of meanings along with a transmission of power is well documented (van Dijk, 1997; Fairclough, 2001; Park, 2005). Any process that changes or influences elements of interaction, such as questions, must therefore be examined to identify the potential for manipulation and steering language to address or meet particular aims and objectives (Fairclough, 2001). For example, one advocate stated that:

You have to look at each individual referral but less is more for most of the questions because you want to keep it as open as possible for the family to be able to think freely and imaginatively. As soon as you start getting too guided, then actually, you are moving the family to a very guided process (Advocate 2).

A balance seems to be required in ensuring that coordinators find the appropriate wording to allow for an empowering and engaging process, while safeguards are also necessary to avoid regulation that can establish a prescribed process to meet preconceived outcomes. One advocate mentioned that the questions are developed from the social worker's report on the family and as such the conference is:

The social worker's agenda, isn't it? These are the questions they want the family to answer (Advocate 1).

This interviewee's comments that establish the process as one that reflects the social worker's agenda or seeking to identify the 'bottom line' as seen by the advocate's comments above, may imply value laden and professional perspectives that underpin the reasons for the conference referral. It also appears to reflect practices that may, despite the intentions and rhetoric of the practitioners, possibly create FGC and the

role of advocacy as guided processes. The positioning associated with the wording and construction of the questions led to an examination through the use of the three stage CDA framework encompassing description, interpretation, and explanation of the text to analyse 'which' or 'whose' agenda was being extended and or maintained through the creation of particularly defined questions. The positioning of the words and the structure within the questions can also influence the answers, possibly maintaining a subtle coercion which supports particular agendas. For instance, it may sustain a government control agenda and manifest itself as a paternalistic approach to children and their families involved in the welfare system. Who asks the questions and how they were delivered was also a variable practice: one young person received them by email; others were informed of the questions by the advocates rather than the FGC coordinator or social worker. The intentions and choices made to potentially neutralise language within the questions used may in effect allow for a dominant welfare discourse to prevail. What is possibly significant is that many of the FGC services follow a similar pattern in terms of ensuring questions are asked that potentially meet a prescribed aim or outcome for the process. In New Zealand, unlike England and Wales, no questions are sent out; a verbal discussion with participants regarding the focus of the meeting is undertaken. It does appear that in New Zealand although questions are not in a written form, the process concerning preparation deemed particularly relevant for successful outcomes will have the content of the questions conveyed to the participants in a verbal manner instead. The differences in approach possibly reflect less preparation time in the English and Welsh context and therefore the written questions can be a time-saving mechanism. In other countries the coordinator spends a considerable amount of time preparing the participants to ensure that they are aware of the process and agree to work on specific issues (Doolan,

2010). In Foucauldian terms, the questions could be seen as a technology of disciplinary power as they could be geared toward surveillance through ‘probing techniques’ from which “an individual is established as a ‘case’ and may be judged, measured, compared with others’ and then ‘trained, classified, normalized, and excluded” (Powell, 2009: 674). This can also be seen as a division in emphasis between process and outcomes. For example, while in the New Zealand and England and Wales's FGC model the desired outcome is the same, it appears that the traditional New Zealand approach seeks to engage with people in a more person centred and collaborative way. For example, one young person identified that:

I got a list of questions that she has emailed to me (Young female 4).

This reflects a continuum of approaches to informing the young person of the questions that are going to be asked. In the model of FGC used in England and Wales, these depend on the age of the young person and the severity of the presenting issue. In the case above, the young person was an older teenager and the concerns were about future accommodation. However, younger youth where there were welfare concerns may have the questions read to them by the coordinator and again at times by the advocate. There are, therefore, a number of variables in how the young person and their families are prepared for the conference. But in all cases, the participants will have seen or been told what the purpose is of the meeting, and what the issues are that require addressing. One may view the rationale for the preparation of questions prior to the meeting as one that ensures the focus of the meeting is maintained and the needs of the young person are met. It could also be interpreted that the questions seek to ensure that the conference through its written and verbal processes reflects an interaction where language constructs subjectivity in ways that are socially specific, such as the FGC process and FGC Advocacy approaches, and ultimately reinforces

these as social practices (Weedon, 1994; Fairclough, 2001).

One of the major principles of FGC concerns the ‘preparation’ of the participants prior to the conference and part of this often lengthy process is to ensure that ‘no new’ information is introduced on the day of the conference for which participants are unprepared (American Humane Association, 2010; Yukon Health and Social Services, 2013). The introduction of new information is seen to divert or subvert the process away from the identified presenting issue and therefore disrupt the course of the meeting. In England, the lack of preparation time may undermine the ‘no new’ information rule as individuals may attend the conference with little understanding of the procedures. However, the fact that the questions are already prescribed before the conference takes place may mitigate the potential to disrupt the FGC process somewhat.

Within my data, the practices concerning the development of the questions are variable. For instance, there are questions that all the young people appear to be asked prior to the conference and this sometimes forms standard practice. However, at other times the process is more wisdom and ritual orientated, depending on the advocacy agenda and the individual advocate. For example, one advocate stated:

I don’t think we have like a pro forma of set questions, but I think once you’ve done a few family group conferences and you know the general idea of why the conference has been convened, there are a few kind of standard questions that you ask a young person (Advocate 3).

They went on to add that:

There seem to be some standard ones plus specifics for that conference (Advocate 3).

I actually make contact with the family group meeting coordinator and she will give me some feedback and background on the case and then email a list of questions and I will take these when I go to meet the young person in the first instance, but generally, it just tends to be the first two questions, what they want to know, what is good in the person's life, what isn't so good, who do they like being with, which adults, and who do they not like being around? (Advocate 5).

The FGC plan is developed around questions and we keep it to as minimum questions as possible (Advocate 2).

The questions are then sent to the young person and advocate and then form the basis of the young person's interaction during the process:

So, I would say, the main part of the ritual is the questions (Advocate 6).

Goffman's concept of ritual interaction and Foucault's concept of normalising judgements can be used here to interpret these prescribed questions as social practices that seek to maintain social order thereby reinforcing concepts of stigma and dividing practices. In the former case the questions represent a ritual interaction where the routine and practice of asking questions of all the young people involved in the FGC may be interpreted as potentially seeking to maintain social order. Goffman's (1959) analysis of interaction order involves face-to-face activities that also include others in social situations often within organised structures such as the welfare system. The questions make up part of the 'interaction order' and follow certain rules and continuity that allow the social interaction of FGC to proceed within a specific ordering of actions and behaviours. In addition, the authority given to the questions as part of the social ritual helps to create a successful front stage performance by

coordinator and advocate (Goffman, 1959). The broader purpose of the questions may also permit for the saving of 'face' or the presentation of self, as portrayed by the young person and their family. In this case, this opportunity presents itself through the medium of FGC where the young person can address some of the negative associations attached to being involved in the process. The questions may allow for a potential shift in self-perception. For example, a shift from the stigma of being seen as 'deviant' and 'wrong faced' and therefore inferior and ashamed by one's actions or the actions of others, to one where the presentation of 'saving face' is one of confidence and assurance could occur. Therefore the use of the questions allows the young person to participate in the FGC in a way that "he feels that he can hold his head up and openly present himself to others. He feels some security and some relief" (Goffman, 1967: 8).

From a broader structural perspective and using Foucault's notion of disciplinary technologies, the questions can be potentially viewed as a specific technique and practice repressing young people and their families in the exercise of power (Gilbert and Powell, 2010). This may enhance the potential for these processes to lead to the occurrence of subjectification where the questions have a confessional-like quality ensuring that young people and families speak the 'truth' about themselves and their deviant behaviours. The level of self-knowledge generated with the aid of professional intervention or manipulation may assist the family to find ways to self-manage and eliminate the perceived problematic behaviours. This correlates with Foucault's normalising judgements as the questions in themselves could then become processes that regulate and compel individuals to conform to a normative societal ideal. Therefore the questions may act initially as a 'dividing practice': i.e. they may be primarily used for particular individuals who require disciplining and re-education,

to socialise them back to undertaking 'normal' behaviours – in this case young people and their families.

Therefore, the standardisation of the initial two or three questions from the referring social work agency could be seen to establish a somewhat tokenistic rhetoric. Thereby the perceived agency of the young person is potentially set against a framework of consecutive questions reflecting the protectionist concerns of the welfare agency (Wood and Hine, 2009). This overlaps with criticism levelled at attempts to involve service users in participatory forms of governance, whereby initiatives often appear to reflect “anything from manipulation to user control, including nonparticipation, varying degrees of tokenism or degrees of power” (Forbes and Sahsidharan, 1997: 482). Participation can appear as little more than a mechanism by which state agencies give their decision-making processes legitimacy, often excluding voices that are not deemed acceptable (Hart, 1992).

The division of the written questions between a focus on the young person's wishes and feelings and the second part of the process, the main aims of the conference, identify it from a CDA perspective as potentially reflecting social conflict and social struggle within a relational framework of power (Fairclough, 2001). Struggle and conflict are terms that Fairclough (2001) used to explain the engagement of different social groups, where one group is seeking to dominate and exploit the other. In this particular example, one might assume using this interpretation that it is the statutory services that are looking to exercise dominance and power over the young people and their families through the use of these questions. This suggests the converging discourses that form discursive frameworks allow for certain actions and processes to be established while others are excluded. This in turn may reflect the dominance of certain practices over others, such as welfare ideology compared to advocacy and the

agency of young people (Cheek, 2000). If this is the case, the process establishes a hierarchy of discourse: i.e. statutory and authoritarian welfare discourses may be ranked more highly than both those associated with advocacy (which in England is not legislated for) and also the relatively weak discourses that surround the notion of agency for young people. In relation to the questions, one advocate stated:

To be honest, the questions have positives and negatives. The positive is it helps you focus. As an advocate when we go and see a young person, we don't know any background information and that's how we want it to be. We want to meet the young person at face value. But the questions are focused on what's going to be asked at the meeting. So it'll be questions like, "If Johnny can't live at home, who he would like to live with?" So we can help focus that. The negative is, obviously we can't get the broader picture. And we cannot help the young person explore the broader dimensions (Advocate 7).

Therefore in this interview at least there appears to be a duality in the use of the questions: to establish wishes and feelings from the children and young person and then to elicit their views in terms of the rationale for the conference. This seems to relate somewhat to notions of agency for young people, albeit within a framework that is pre-established: the roles are predefined and the interactions of the professionals and family are socially constructed (Goffman, 1959). The boundaries of what constitutes agency and its potential consequences or outcomes are also debatable. The value and weight given to the voice and participation of the young person need to be assessed within these parameters. Just saying what you want does not necessitate agency, especially if there is no realistic hope of achieving what you wish for. The ability to interact on an equitable basis is one of the precepts of agency and reflects the broader arguments concerning the oppressive and discriminatory nature of

adultism (Barford and Wattam, 1991; Alderson and Goodwin, 1993). An example of this was when young people were either not invited to the meeting or were asked to leave at specific times. The rationale given for what can be interpreted as exclusionary practices was framed in a fashion that might be seen as protectionist: the adult did not want to give any information in front of the children and young people that they felt would be upsetting for them. In my material, there does appear to be elements of conflict within some of the advocates' roles at these potentially pivotal decision-making moments. For example, some advocates espouse the belief that children and young people should have all the facts and should be present wherever possible throughout the entire meetings, then proceed to be in conferences where the young people are asked to leave and do not intervene on their behalf. The inconsistency in service provision was highlighted when one of the advocates from the national advocacy organisation gave a mixed message concerning their mandate and then contradictory intervention. The advocate explained that their training identifies that the advocate cannot be party to any information that the young person does not receive. However, the interview data reflected that in practice a colleague trained in the same advocacy ethos stayed in family time even when her clients had left:

Yes she stayed in the room yeah it was only me and (Young female 2) that left (Young female 1).

She stayed in through the whole time (Young female 2).

I think she stayed (Grandparent T).

They were all in the meeting (Parent L).

Thus, in this example, the national agency, which states that it prioritises the agency of young people and working solely on their wishes and feelings, appears to engage

on occasion in a variation of service and therefore a variation in support and agency. The FGC trained advocates, who appear to focus on family-centred outcomes, appear for the most part to adhere to the belief that family time is a nonprofessional time, or keep to the practice of only entering the space for 10 minutes as stated in the practice guidance. The standardisation of aspects of the conference process could allow for a more equitable approach to the provision of advocacy services.

Consequently, an inequitable approach to agency may mean that expectations are created when determining wishes and feelings, thereby allowing the young person to expect that their views will receive the same priority as those of others at the meeting. One young person, when asked if she had some thoughts about what she wanted from the meeting, said:

I wanted dad to be more involved that was it really and when that didn't happen it was a bit disappointing (Young female 2).

However, for the most part the young people interviewed had been prepared sufficiently by coordinators and advocates to understand that although they could express their views, these in themselves may not influence the outcomes of the meeting. These outcomes were both negative and positive and the views expressed by the young people reflected this. Where the outcomes were negative, there was, in my opinion, a level of resignation in the responses from the young person:

I was quite realistic from the start what would happen. It hasn't really helped, we said, we said from the start that it would be a waste of time and its turned out to be a waste of time because no one's committed to what they said (Young female 1).

Whereas if the outcomes were good then the response was more upbeat:

Yes, definitely, quite a lot of stuff has changed for the better (Young male 9).

One may therefore suggest that the responses can actually reflect a level of expectation that is raised in the participants prior to the conference: being asked what you would like to happen may well lead to expectations. When this occurs and the hopes are met or somewhat met then the outcomes are good. When they are not achieved there is acceptance or denial that these were even possible. In the conference where the focus was on finding support for family members to care for two sisters, one of whom had alleged abuse against her mother's partner, the younger sister who had not made the allegation was more disappointed than her older sister. This may suggest that the older sister's experiences of not being heard or her allegation possibly not seen as important enough to follow up on, was more resigned to the outcomes being negative. In addition to her experiences of the statutory and police services, the 'we' in Young female 1's comment could relate to intra familial conversations where expectations or assumptions were presupposed or predetermined. This acknowledgement by the family may reflect the internalised notions of 'members' resources' with the family understanding through prior experience and social expectation that they would need to address the concerns themselves (Fairclough, 2001). In addition, Goffman's (1959) concepts of 'front of house' and 'stigmatisation' may also be useful for interpreting the scenario above. In this case, the family may wish to present themselves as united in addressing the concerns and given their social position, they may have more access to the social resources, such as the ability to fund alternative accommodation options for the young people to be able to do this. These types of resources are required to support this unified act and therefore the family are more able to portray the semblance of a socially acceptable 'normal' family. The 'act' of presenting the family in a cohesive representation to an external audience of

professionals may be a way of addressing the associated social elements of the ‘spoiled self’ and stigma. If, as Goffman suggests, the family and its members are seen by broader society as ‘discreditable’ as they have family secrets that must not be exposed to public scrutiny, then the successful representation of the family to external audiences could reduce the negative impact of these labels (Goffman, 1959). In this example, the family were not regular social service clients; they had access to a range of broader familial and financial resources than is often the case for many families involved in the welfare system. The means or props to allow for a better act or impression to be portrayed externally reflect the ability of the family to address the concerns themselves (Goffman, 1959). However, if the family are able to portray an act that represents a cohesive and functioning family performance, then consequently the seriousness of the impact of the presenting issue i.e. the possible abuse of the young person involved, may also be hidden away from public scrutiny.

Concerning expectations and rituals, many advocates insist that the young people should know all of the matters that will be addressed at the conference. Moreover, despite not necessarily having any input on these, many advocates also hope that the young people are at least aware of what the situation is. Many other advocates will censor some of the questions based on their own feelings and/ or the views of the referring social work agency regarding the young person’s capacity to understand the often serious nature of the potential outcomes of the meeting. Again the diversity in approach within my material appears to reflect prior training and agency philosophy, as most FGC trained advocates appear to favour a more protective stance, for example:

I didn’t show her the social work report because there’s information on there that’s quite sensitive (Advocate 1).

I don't go necessarily through the questions or the report in there because sometimes, you don't want children to, because sometimes there are, you know, serious information in there, wherein you don't want to share that serious information with the child. So we need to be very sensible about what we are going to share with the child (Advocate 4).

So, for the questions, with young people especially, I would say, between 12 onwards, it's really important that they understand what the questions are and they would be able to be vocal enough to be...even younger children, candid. But sometimes, when they're really young children, it's about what their wishes and feelings are. Although, you know, you would want to go through the questions as well, as much as you are able to, depending on the age of the child, it usually is about what it is they want out of their situation. How do they feel? Whether they want to stay. That kind of question. And, what are their wishes and feeling? How is it like for them? Those kinds of questions. But it all depends on the age of the child. But young people are really quite harder to engage (Advocate 6).

The national advocacy agency advocates all believed in ensuring that the young people had all the information that was available to them concerning the rationale for the conference and what were the initial aims and objectives:

I go through all the questions that are going to be at the meeting. And I go through them all, even if they're not questions for them because they have the right to be aware of the questions the family is going to be asked going especially if they are going to be there (Advocate 8).

You need to tell them (young people) the other questions that are going to be

asked. Then you know what to expect in the meeting. So nothing is a shock.

An advocate cannot be privy to information that the young person is not privy to. We have a duty to share that with the young person (Advocate 7).

Therefore it appears that the national agency trained advocates follow the principles of children's agency in terms of their capacity to participate, supporting them to have a voice and to have all the information that other participants (adults) have to ensure an equitable process. On the other hand, the self-employed FGC trained advocates seem to follow an established developmental framework that reflects a standardised social work agency stance and is more closely aligned to the paramountcy principle. This is applied in a systematic fashion and while its focus is on the young person's best interest this can at times appear to somewhat disempower and oppress young people of particular age ranges (Mantle et al., 2006). From a Foucauldian perspective, the former discourse may be seen to create spaces for the subject position to form, thereby allowing young people to engage with the process more equally, while the latter may diminish this potential (Garrity, 2010). As such, some forms of advocacy can be viewed as a positive and creative use of power since it allows for strategies of resistance to emerge that aid in mitigating the exchanges of power through the FGC process (Foucault, 1990).

As seen above, the questions are formulated and clarified by the coordinator after a meeting with the referring social worker. If Fairclough's descriptive framework is used to analyse how language and discourse influences and defines social practice we can view the standardised specific questions asked of young people and their families as creating and outlining how the practice of FGC Advocacy is implemented. In applying aspects of the questions one can see that the FGC coordinator and independent advocate dominate the FGC and advocacy processes. Although the

agency of the young person is seen as vital to the interaction, the level of agency is at times variable and contextual, and this identifies a concern regarding whether the processes are what they seem. From a critical perspective, one might assume that the FGC and independent advocacy approaches are manufactured conventions that, through the use of established and predesigned questions, seek to normalise perceived socially deviant families and individuals (Fairclough, 2001). This is of major relevance for the way that young people are initially engaged in the process, with advocates playing a pivotal role in mitigating some of the authority that the verbal and written interactions embody.

Janks (1997) refers to this interaction as questions ultimately pertaining to one particular party's interests over another. This is reflected in how the texts are 'positioned' or 'positioning' and therefore how they impact on the meaning and understanding that is conveyed through their design. One may reflect on whose interests are served or negated through the provision of advocacy within the FGC approach and what the consequences of this positioning are. In relation to this study, the interests served by these questions do not appear to be those of the young people, as the exercise of these seems to be tokenistic. On closer inspection, one may view these questions as self-serving, working in the interests of government, potentially focussing on the requirements of the statutory bodies and professional practices to fulfil an ideological remit (Jones, 1983). Young people's wishes and feelings, although asked for, are possibly at times given little significance or weight to influence some of the decisions made. Horan and Dalrymple (2003: 6) suggest that the role these questions play is to find "answers that adults want". These therefore may shape and predesign the interaction and also control the participation and engagement of young people and the other conference participants, thus negating their

interests while serving the interest of advocacy and FGC processes (Janks, 1997; Horan and Dalrymple, 2003). FGC Advocacy may therefore play a major role consciously or unwittingly in endorsing the dominant practices of FGC. This may appear in terms of supporting and guiding young people to answer the questions designed by the coordinator and agreed by the social worker to ratify predetermined outcomes that could reinforce dominant paternal discourses or as one advocate called it 'being clear about the bottom line' (advocate 1).

Conclusion

Thematic Analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis identified a number of areas for analysis and reflection in the preparation stage for FGC. These areas offer the opportunity to explore how the social practices that are formed from the discourses that surround FGC and FGC Advocacy, along with key emergent qualitative themes, shape and define the intervention and therefore impact the experiences of the young people and their families exposed to it. The evolution of the role of coordinator impacts on the process at a number of referral and intervention points and the division of this role into two distinct domains reflects a shift that supports the notion of agency and participation for young people in matters that directly concern them. Whether this role distinction or its effect on the process has had a positive impact is questionable, especially if the questions that are formulated are examined critically to identify the role they play in defining the focus and process of the meeting. Some of the ethical considerations concerning practice have been explored, as have been the consequences of the terminology associated with child welfare practice, especially those of 'participation', 'empowerment', 'best interests' and 'wishes and feelings' on the FGC process and young people themselves. The questions that are asked of all participants have been examined critically using aspects of CDA, Foucault's

framework of power analysis, and 'intercategorical complexity' to reflect on how these textual processes assist in defining the preparation stage and subsequent practices and how these in turn may shape the experiences of the service users involved in the meeting. In addition, Goffman's 'interaction order' and Foucault's 'normalising judgements' were instructive in understanding how the questions asked at the conference may form a ritual interaction that establishes a particular social practice that seeks to maintain social order. Service user experiences will be explored further in the next chapter.

Chapter 7 FINDINGS FROM THE ANALYSIS OF INTERVIEW DATA: THE CONFERENCE

Introduction

Applying a Thematic Analysis (TA) to the interview transcripts and drawing on elements of the theoretical framework, this chapter explores the role of the advocate and their engagement with and support of young people involved in the conference stage of the FGC process. There are a number of variations in how advocacy provision is provided, how relationships are developed with the young people, and the subsequent impact these disparities may have on family time and possibly decision-making. These variances will be explored in relation to the issues raised and potential resistance to aspects of the meeting, for example who decides who is invited, the location and timing of the conference, and consequently how these possibly affect young people's experiences of the meeting. The success of the family plan that has been developed by the FGC participants in family time is subsequently discussed and the extent that young people and their families were involved in the creation of the plan will also be explored. The chapter is organised into four key themes that emerged from the TA of the interview transcripts: timeframes, attendance, and focus; family time; the plan; and follow up.

Timeframes, Attendance and Focus

This section explores the practical application of timeframes concerning the overall length of time a FGC should take from start to finish. In addition, the practices concerning the timing, venue consideration, and who is or isn't invited to the meeting are examined to identify the impact these may have on the process. The participant's own views are then explored on whether the focus of the meeting was as intended in

relation to themselves (the participant), the issue affecting their family, or as a method to ensure the aims of the statutory services were met.

Many conference services have a policy that defines the timeframes concerning how long the process should take from beginning to end. The referral is seen as the start and the initial conference (and therefore the creation of a plan or agreement) as the final piece undertaken during the encounter (Yukon Health and Social Services, 2013). These procedures take between 6-8 weeks and depend on the coordinator's ability to contact and meet with the young people, individuals, and family members to ascertain the suitability of attendees and the potential to identify enough participants to make the process viable (Family Rights Group, 2009). Given the backdrop of young people's rights and the view that youth should participate in the FGC process, it would be assumed that all the young people interviewed would have attended the meeting. Although seven out of nine young people attended the conference, all of these were asked to leave the meeting when either specific information was being transmitted or during the decision-making section 'family time'. In both situations, this was detrimental in the sense that they were excluded from having a say in the decisions made about them. The timing of the meeting coincided with the school day and this meant that some young people only attended the conference in the morning until lunch and then returned to school, whereas others did not attend the meeting at all. In one case, the meeting went on for so long that the young person left to go to school and then came back to the conference later in the afternoon. One can see how the timing of the FGC may inhibit the level of participation of the young people in the conference, potentially reducing it to the point of tokenism (Hart, 1992). One young person, when asked if they attended the whole conference or just part, stated:

First part cos we had to go to school (Young male 6).

Relating her experience of the conference, one young person who stayed for most of the meeting said:

No they erm they talked about me and Young female 2 and then me and Young female 2 left the room (Young female 1).

When asked whether their advocates stayed during all or part of the meeting:

She stayed in through the whole time (Young female 2).

Yes she stayed in the room yeah it was only me and (Young female 2) that left (Young female 1).

This was the experience of two other young people who also stated that their advocates stayed in the entire meeting, including family time (Young males 5 and 6). These advocates were identified as having been trained by the national advocacy organisation (one specifically trained to work with young people with learning difficulties) and were therefore predisposed to staying throughout the process to ensure the young people's voices remained heard and were acknowledged in any decisions made. There appears to be contradiction between the stated ethos of the advocacy service, where the belief is to not receive more information than their client, and the practice of the advocates, who stay in the meeting after the young person has left. What is highlighted through these brief narratives is that the meetings were arranged around times that appeared more convenient to the FGC coordinators and social service practitioners than family or advocates. The scheduling of the meeting was not only problematical for families, but especially the young people and even at times the advocates themselves. This has been identified in the literature as a concern relating to who drives the decision concerning where and when FGC's occur (Merkel-Holguin, 2007). An online survey by Nixon et al. (2005) established that both

statutory services and families were equally part of this decision-making process. However, there were concerns when families asked for meeting times that were outside of regular business hours that social service departments were not flexible enough in terms of service delivery to accommodate these. In relation to the young people interviewed, I did not get the impression that they were particularly involved in these decisions and when asking two young people if they had been asked their opinion regarding times and venue they stated:

It was more this is what's going to happen (Young male 5).

Yeah it just happened (Young male 6).

This therefore may be interpreted as adult decision-making that suits an adult participation agenda rather than that of the young people involved, who it is claimed are the focus of the meeting. This not only contradicts the principles of FGC and FGC Advocacy but also the Government's guidance on implementing the Children Act (1989).

There appeared some level of justification (even if contrary to agency ethos) for staying in family time by the national agency advocates when the meetings were arranged at times that meant the young people could not stay and attend. This gave rise to the argument that if the young people could not attend, at least the advocate was there to ensure the young person's voice was heard. It is therefore more understandable that the parents who were part of the entire meeting were able to comment more accurately on whether the advocates remained in the whole meeting.

One grandparent, when asked if the advocate (who was representing two sisters) stayed in the meeting, confirmed:

Advocate 8 in a capacity of sort of representing the girls views stayed there throughout the meeting (Grandparent T).

In another conference where two of the children had learning difficulties, multiple advocates were used especially as the meeting took place during school time:

Most of the meeting different ones had to go at different points I think one went at lunch time and we lost another one at about three o'clock erm cos we didn't finish until about half four erm I'm not sure, I think the last one stayed to the bitter end (Parent L).

This perhaps once again identifies that the desire or service standard to use advocates manifests itself very differently in practice. These variations were quite apparent in the two cases above. For example, one can see that the two sisters were perceived as having a level of capacity and therefore only one advocate was used for both of them. In the other case, as learning difficulties were identified, each young person had a separate advocate and this appeared to take place without any obvious assessment of need being undertaken to verify the level of support required, if any. However, one would assume that the referring social worker would have assessed the level of need in these cases and would have conveyed any concerns to the FGC coordinator at the point of referral. During their individual interviews with me, the young people labelled with learning difficulties were able to articulate their thoughts and feelings without any parental or advocacy support. Therefore, one may question the requirement of advocacy services in these two cases. However, it is right to be cautious with this assumption as an individual interview is obviously not the same as a meeting with numerous adults. Of concern and in conflict with the underpinning aims of inclusion, participation, and empowerment was that the consideration of

advocacy support was not extended to the father, who also had a learning difficulty.

The scheduling of the meeting became an issue for families regarding who was and who was not able to attend; this impacted on participants and also any support that they may have been able to provide:

Yeah we had several who couldn't make it who actually even erm if they didn't have a lot practical to offer, they had a lot of insight to offer. Erm we have got a friend whose erm she's been Sunday school teacher to some of the children she's a specialist teacher in H. specialises in autism erm and has a really good understanding of the children. We've got P (husband) cousin who I am very close to as a friend erm who would have loved to have been there and is going to make the next one a priority but said of all the days that I couldn't do it was between two holidays he was coming back from Brighton and then going to ... going up north and he said of all the days that I couldn't do that was the absolute worst for me (Parent L).

The New Zealand FGC when applied in its most pure form enables FGC coordinators to cast their net widely and apply the maximum flexibility in terms of ensuring those who have been identified as a potential support or providing solutions to address the concerns of the meeting can attend the conference unhindered. In Norway, for example, FGC's are called 'network conferences' and draw heavily on the family's (or the individual in adult conference cases) ability to identify participants who can provide the most emotional or practical support (Horverak, 2009). In Canada and New Zealand, this manifests itself through financial support regarding travel, fuel costs, and accommodation. The rationale here is that these short-term expenditures will have major benefits if the problem is resolved without long-term involvement of

the welfare system. This was reflected in the FGM informational literature as stated below:

Financial assistance may be given for travel and child care.

Not providing this initial baseline support to ensure the conference takes place is also seen in the literature as undermining the potentially positive outcomes, as key supporters would be excluded from attending (Doolan, 2010), as appears the case highlighted in the interview data below. The lack of support could also be viewed as discriminatory practice against families who do not have the financial means to choose to attend the conference in person and therefore not be considered as a potential support or resource to assist in addressing the concerns (Walker and Walker, 2009).

This is especially relevant in England where family and or community networks appear to be more fractured or diminished. Or, where identified, they are possibly not explored or supported enough to attend the conference. The families interviewed in the study did identify a lack of financial and familial support networks (for a variety of reasons) and this impacted negatively on the potential outcomes of the conference. One carer identified that:

Social Services give us £100. We've asked them for a little bit more for a bed for Young female 2, but that's fallen on deaf ears (Grandparent T).

While another stated:

I mean, the facts of the matter are nearly everyone at that meeting had travelled from mostly the other side of the country to get there so how much actual value anything that they can do is going to be is, well, I mean it's a bit

tenuous to say the least (Parent P).

The fact is that nobody lives close enough to us to offer temporary help that's to say if for any reason L and I need to be away from the home. Well, yeah, there's no plan because no one can help (Grandparent T).

It could be seen that the lack of statutory financial or service support reflects Kiely's (2003) comment that these types of intervention are seen by statutory bodies as 'welfare on the cheap'. This may undermine the FGC process and reinforce the notion that these interventions are placing additional burdens and responsibilities on families to address the concerns that affect them.

This was reinforced by Grandparent T's comment:

The chances are we're saving them an absolute fortune.

Another theme that appeared from the research data was that of conference 'focus' with some participants feeling the meeting was not concentrated on them or their family but was purely social service focused. The literature identifies that FGC is a process to allow families and statutory agencies to work together to address the needs of young people. The way this is achieved is seen as empowering the family to work with statutory services in a holistic manner that is identified as good practice, respectful to all parties, and reflects a high level of participation (Ashley and Nixon, 2007):

It was very much focussed on social services, what social services wanted to achieve, very little interest in what the children wanted to achieve. I don't think it was a child friendly, child centred as it should have been as I say it was very much focussed around what social services wanted to see happen

(Parent L).

Social services have just washed their hands with us pure and simply because it was a family decision for the girls to come here. Legally, they've played it straight down the middle, it's a family decision and we've got to live with it (Grandparent T).

A possible aspect of the experience of two of carers involved was that the FGC may have reinforced the ideological notion of families being responsible for the re-socialisation of their members. As a consequence the responsibilities of the statutory services are subsequently transferred to the family. When discussing the options for him and his wife if they at some point couldn't look after their granddaughters I was told by one carer that:

There isn't an alternative for them and they would have...I would have to find foster, you know, a foster parent, a foster home for them (Grandparent T).

The other carer stated:

It got all the family running around saying, "Oh dear, there's a threat the kids are going to be taken into care". We've got to bust a gut to try and do all sorts of things to help them" (Parent P).

It does seem that through a process in which some serious concerns had been identified the family in these cases see themselves as responsible for specific areas of work that are the domain of social services.

In the case where the young person had made an allegation of abuse she felt that the conference was to provide support for her grandparents who were looking after her and her sister. The family, although troubled about the claim, appeared to recognise

that the FGC was to provide support rather than intervention for the young person. With this focus in mind, the advocate provided support for the young people (both sisters) to have their voices heard in relation to answering the question of where they would live and thus the intended focus of the meeting. This emphasis perhaps in some ways deflected the focus away from addressing any emotional issues resulting from the possible abuse itself or the way the accusation may feel as less important or potentially interpreted as unheard. This creates the potential for dividing practices or stigmatisation (Foucault, 1990; Goffman, 1959), in which the young person is seen as different to others, including her sister, through her experience, which may serve to alienate her further. One could argue that this may lead the young person to embrace a master status of victim, and this status in turn defines how others see and interact with her (Goffman, 1959). If the mother did not want to believe her daughter's allegation, the police and or the social workers were unable to substantiate her claim, and then the conference to address issues possibly ignores the most significant one for her and thus the master status may be sustained. From a Goffman-inspired perspective, these interactions could establish her as 'discreditable' and therefore determine how her experiences are potentially viewed and dealt with. This, in turn, may give more regard to the issues affecting the wider family than anything she may have encountered personally. This could be associated with the precept of social interaction being seen as a series of individual acts that make up the overall performance (Goffman, 1959). It is quite possible that the young person would feel isolated and rejected by the networks that needed to protect her.

This scenario identifies a problem with issue-based advocacy in that the focus or the issue advocated for may not be the one that is of interest or concern to the young person.

One nationally trained advocate stated:

Our advocacy service is issue-based so we deal with the one issue and when that issue has been resolved or ceased we withdraw (Advocate 7).

As stated in the literature review, issue-based advocacy does little to address systemic or structural concerns. This approach does not follow Hodgeson's continuum of passive to active advocacy where the young person can require protection and still be an active citizen and having a voice in the decision-making process. Hodgeson's approach also embodies the scale of participation in the process itself from a 'passive' stance where an advocate may speak on the young person's behalf to 'active' advocacy where the young person speaks for themselves (Hodgeson, 1995). Boylan and Braye (2006: 239) identify that the use of one particular form of advocacy maybe an attempt to seek to have some control over the provision of advocacy in general and that this in turn establishes "the parameters of speaking out [and how these] are increasingly shaped and controlled".

For example, in the case of the young person mentioned above, although the sexual abuse allegation was unproven, this does not mean that there is not residual emotional impact from the incident. However, the singular nature of 'issue'-based advocacy means that this concern is marginalized and left unattended for the young person. Therefore, structural issues surrounding the issue of male oppression and patriarchy are left unchallenged. Whereas 'cause'-based advocacy or a combination of 'cause' and 'issue'-based advocacy in this case could have been deployed to address both individual and broader systemic concerns that impacted the young person (Pithouse and Crowley, 2007; Boylan and Dalrymple, 2009).

Family Time

This section examines the process of ‘family time’ which, during an FGC, is a professional-free zone that allows for the FGC participants (family, extended family and friends etc.) to discuss the issues at hand and develop a plan to address the concerns.

Family time is seen as pivotal to establishing positive outcomes for young people involved in the FGC process (Mirsky, 2003; Mutter et al., 2008). It is essentially seen to empower families and broader familial networks to draw on their own resources as well as statutory service supports to create a plan that provides a solution to the issues presented regarding the young person. These can include a broad range of welfare concerns where the safety of the young person is the primary focus. It may be identifying contact arrangements for estranged parents, future accommodation plans for teenage service users, foster care provision, or even adoption plans. Whatever the reason for the conference, the validity of the process in terms of maintaining the integrity of family time is deemed paramount. The time allotted for the family to address the concerns raised by the social worker is fundamentally a professional-free zone. Although various individuals representing a number of professional fields (including social workers) may attend the conference to give information, the coordinator ensures the purity of family time by removing themselves and other colleagues once all the pertinent information has been presented. When asked to explain family time, one advocate stated:

I think people sometimes don't understand private time. What I always do is explain. But as much as you explain, on the day, you have to explain again.

And then, you're going to get private time.....Some families are just not used

to that type of, I don't how to say. Just not used to being together to know, have a discussion about the issue whatever the issues are.... Often you can see, oh, they're feeling comfortable with it. But yet, you still say to them, now you have to be private. Oh, we don't need private time, they'll say, we don't need private. It's okay, we know. Just have a bit of time. Just encourage them to have that. Sometimes they don't want to have a discussion. And you know, you just go in there after that 20 minutes just to check out how they're doing, and nobody is talking to anybody. The coordinator says, oh are you ready? And I have to sometimes prod. Oh, did you, have you looked at the questions? Did you have a discussion? Sometimes you get families having long, long, long discussions (Advocate 6).

Even though advocacy has a professional status many advocates continue to enter and or stay for the duration of family time. This is seen as a contentious issue within the field of FGC. Best practice guidelines identify that if the young person is going to be in the family time and wants support then the advocate goes into the session for the first five or ten minutes and then remains outside just in case they are required (Walton et al., 2005; Family Rights Group, 2009). If the young person is not present during family time, then the advocate enters the session, gives the young person's views, and then leaves. They may possibly return at the end to ensure that the young person's views were taken into consideration through the process and are part of any outcomes written up in the family plan. It appears that many advocates use a combination of personal boundaries, ethics, and their understanding of the situation when deciding on how or if they participate in family time. As identified below by the advocates themselves, there were three categories of attendance identified from the interviews regarding participation in family time. These are the standard practice of 5-

10 minutes at the beginning of the process (FRG, 2009), the case-dependent decision which would allow for flexibility regarding time frames, and the practice of attending all ‘family time’ in all conferences for the duration of the meeting.

These categories seem to be somewhat linked to what the young person would like from their advocate. However, as stated previously, these can be influenced by the advocate and professional assessments and views of the young person and their family capacity.

Advocates themselves identified the issues surrounding family time as controversial. It is a concern that continues to pervade the literature and perhaps more than any other issue illustrates the divide between the roles and types of advocacy provided for young people. Reinforcing the attendance categories established above, many advocates trained in FGC coordination reflected the best practice approach:

It’s a very sensitive topic about whether advocates...independent advocates should be a part of the family time. And I think there is a bit of a rule if the child or young person says, “I would like my advocate to be with me in my private time.” I kind of, I would sort of go in, which I did before. I would go in for about 10 minutes, 5 or 10 minutes (Advocate 1).

So we have a very clear policy that says if it’s in private family time, the advocate goes in.... It’s a guideline but what we say, 10 minutes and then they have to come out (Advocate 2).

Family private time is just their time (Advocate 4).

We have a very clear policy. Private family time means private family time (Advocate 2).

For other advocates, entering family time is dependent on whether the young person would like them to attend or is actually not able to attend the conference themselves:

I would say...go in for the first part and then leave the family to have some private time with themselves and then come back in at the end just to check that some of the stuff that the young person has wanted mentioned was still part of the discussion and still quite prominent in family time (Advocate 3).

I have been an advocate in family time and I will always plan to say to the family, you know I'll be there for the young person if the young person can't be there. But then, I would say, you still need your private time, you know, I can excuse myself. It's just my role as an advocate would be to make sure that the family's hearing what the young person has to say (Advocate 6).

The national advocacy agency employed advocates have a very different view of their role in this aspect of the conference:

We are part of the family time, if the young person wishes us to do that (Advocate 7).

Well, I have to sort of clarify it really with (name of agency) in that in family time, we're supposed to stay and interact with the young person (Advocate 8).

The introduction of a professional into the otherwise private family arena has implications for the young people, the family, and the FGC process. The degree to which an external person impacts on the goal of private family time and thus the plan for the family network to address the needs of the children or young people is difficult to assess. However, that it does change the dynamics of interaction and process is well

recognised (Connolly, 2006b) as was also reflected by advocates themselves in my data:

As soon as you get an outsider within that group, you change the dynamics of what will or might be spoken about within the group and there is some research that indicates when that happens, family might not talk about things they need to talk about and in which case, that might increase some of the risks (Advocate 2).

It does have an impact. Because I'm not a family member. And, that can change the dynamic (Advocate 6).

This can also be said of the 'natural' advocate, especially if that person is not a family member but someone identified by the youth or family to act in this role. This may reflect the natural advocate's background especially if they are a professional in a particular field. As one parent mentioned:

We were very blessed in having a friend from church who erm she's a senior lecturer in nursing down at H University so she actually kind of automatically took over chairing of the meeting erm but if she hadn't been there I think we would have really struggled to find someone who could chair and coordinate (Parent L).

One of the major concerns in having a professional advocate not chosen by the family in family time is the influence they may exert regarding the content of the family plan. This therefore may change the focus from a family-orientated approach to one in which the professional imposes their own beliefs on what the plan should entail. In terms of Goffman's concept of 'impression management', the role inhabited by the professional advocate could be viewed as one of expert by the FGC participants. The

advocate's successful presentation of the 'expert' role, the performance setting, their appearance and manner would all reinforce and confirm the impression the other FGC participants have formed of them (Keating, 2002). This could also establish the advocate as facilitator, wielding considerable power in what is supposed to be a process where power is devolved from the perceived authority of professional interventions. This phenomenon is reflected within my data, as for instance in these examples:

Everybody else leaves the room and then the whole family turned to you because you're the professional and they're expecting you to kind of lead the conference really and then you have to kind of say what your role is again.....if a family isn't particularly listening as well, when it comes to writing up the family plan, they do...on occasion, they have turned to the advocate for the advocate to write up the plan because either they're not confident about their writing ability or they're not very good at writing. So that has been a bit difficult (Advocate 3).

The advocate is here just to represent, not to write the plan which in fact you actually don't physically write it. But it is...oh, I would say impossible to sit there and not contribute, not to the actual, what goes into the plan, the way they write it except in the minority of cases. This may sound classist but the majority of families you get to the FGM are not professional people. And they're presented with ten sheets of A4 and they have been told to write it in detail, and they have no idea how to do it. You know, they don't write letters; they don't write reports (Advocate 8).

This statement on initial reflection identifies a number of discriminatory overtones

expressed by the advocate concerning class and literacy skills and potentially establishes the professional role of advocacy as paternalistic. It may more realistically reflect the demographics of the families involved with social services and the oppressive and discriminatory challenges that they encounter (Jones, 2002).

As one parent acknowledged:

It was quite difficult to be left as a group to chair and coordinate the kind of the bulk of the meeting ourselves (Parent L).

These concerns are not unusual and studies have shown that family members are often anxious about their abilities to manage family time and the responsibility placed upon them to create a plan based on their own and additional social service resources. For the most part, these initial worries were unfounded and early FGC research identified that most families negotiated this stage successfully (Lupton et al., 1995; Crow and Marsh, 1997).

The Plan

One of the measures of success for FGC is that the family develop a plan in family time that addresses the areas of concern raised by the statutory agency. The plan itself must be agreed with the social worker and establishes the role of the statutory worker as one who, according to Levine (2000), has the power of veto should the plan not meet the requirement of the department in ensuring the safety of the young person. However, the FGM informational literature suggests a more inclusive decision-making process than maybe the reality of the situation for the family. For example:

Agreeing the plan

When you have made the plan for your child/young person, the Co-ordinator and the people working with your family will come back to the meeting. The

plan will need to be agreed by everyone including the people working with the family.

The language here does appear to diminish the role of the powerful discourses that shape and underpin the FGC processes and establish the spaces for the roles of some of its players to emerge (Foucault, 1988; Gilbert and Powell, 2010). This appears especially the case for social workers and also advocates. The underpinning belief in relation to FGC is that family know themselves better than any professional could ever do and therefore could, if supported, find the solutions to issues raised within the family itself. The general tenet is that the plan should be agreed by the statutory agent unless this does not address or creates additional welfare concerns. If this is the case then the matter is referred to another decision-making forum such as a child protection conference or family court (Ashley and Nixon, 2007). This again identifies the FGC meeting as a secondary or support process where the referral for a young person is made to a FGC service once protection risks have been addressed. Risk in terms of disguised parental compliance, the rule of optimism, and therefore additional child protection concerns can be somewhat mitigated in FGC cases in relation to the social worker's power of veto. However, as Littlechild (2012) and, Dingwall (2013) suggest the rule of optimism can lead to a practitioner confusing parental and family 'participation' with 'cooperation' and, thereby 'optimism' in this context can result in poor judgement in decision-making that can lead to very serious consequences, for example in the Peter Connolly case. We are also rightly cautioned that sometimes a practitioner's wish to promote a strengths based approach with families to deal with the welfare issue themselves can cause them to lose sight of the potential risk of harm to the child (Littlechild, 2012). In balancing this tension, professionals working with children in all fields need to be trained to more effectively identify and assess the risks posed in the context of the rule of optimism by the relatively small number of

resistant and avoidant parents and carers.

Where the plan is agreed by all parties then a number of key determinants of success are then possibly established. It is envisaged that the family will be invested in the plan as they have more ownership and somewhat more control over its content; it is viewed as their agreement not the professional's plan that they must adhere to. There is potentially an emotional investment as the plan refers to a family member, and if it is not successful then it is those family members who are affected. The aim is for families to be responsible and accountable for the success of the plan and this is seen as assisting in making it more sustainable (Axford, 2007). However, this may need to be balanced and offset against the growing concerns that the FGC process will become over professionalised "with professionals continuing to exert power and control over developing the plan" (Holland et al., 2003: 34) and therefore undermining the principles outlined above. The level of control over the plan can be seen as a complex balance between allowing the family to take responsibility for their offspring and the concerns raised, and the moral and statutory obligations placed on practitioners to protect children and young people potentially at risk.

In the FGCs that the young people experienced in this research study, the scope of family participation was curtailed somewhat by lack of engagement by the family members themselves in supporting their relatives or offspring. It appeared to me that many of the families felt responsible for addressing their own concerns without any social service assistance. It also seemed that there was recognition and possibly an assumption that family and extended family networks were not available to help support the process or that coordinators did not search widely enough or could not support family members to attend the conference.

In addition, the influence of the young people on the content of the plan, in my opinion, was quite inhibited often due to their lack of attendance at either the entire meeting or during family time where the plan was drawn up. While there was an acknowledgement of a plan in existence when asked about the content of the agreement, the responses from the young people ranged from:

“I dunno”, “not really” and “the plan was to see certain people and for people to do certain things and they haven’t done it” (Young male 6 and Young female 1).

Once the plan is agreed, copies should be given to the family members involved; however, in some cases it was unclear to the young people if a plan had been developed:

I don’t know what’s on it but I do remember that they did go through it (Young male 9).

There was but some haven’t stuck to it (Young female 1).

Oh wait I think they said something like in a few months’ time or something we will have another meeting to see, I can’t remember I think to see if any changes have been made or something like that (Young female 2).

Other family members were less sure:

And in effect, you know, there wasn’t a family...there wasn’t in fact...any plan of action, you know, decided on, and certainly, no plan B (Grandparent T).

Another young person identified:

It's like a six month plan or something about what's going to happen (Young male 9).

Similarly one parent also had a copy of the plan:

Yes, we got sent a copy a couple of weeks after the meeting erm yeah and some of its been done (Parent L).

Parents viewed the content differently with one identifying some aspects positively:

Practical things like my mum having (the children) for a week during the holidays but then that was something else already on the cards erm one of the supposedly practical things that came out of it was my sister offering to be a home work mentor for the boys (Parent L).

While another carer stated that as the meeting had not been fruitful in establishing a plan:

The family were offered a review and we turned it down. [the review was offered] in the hope that we can come up with a plan (Grandparent T).

If the plan is seen as a measure of success, then assessing it through the eyes of the young people is difficult to undertake given the lack engagement they had with the creation of the plan itself. If the views of the parents are assessed, then in one case the plan was not undertaken, and in the other, some elements worked and others did not:

Some parts have worked but it has also created some difficulties as I say particularly between me and my mum and my sister (Parent L).

Therefore, perhaps a more appropriate measure of success might be the experiences of the young people and their families of the process itself. When asked if they would

recommend the FGC process to others, one young person said:

Yes, because there was quite a lot of food and it was very comfortable to sit in
(Young male 9).

While others said:

Don't bother (Young male 5 and Young female 8).

No I wouldn't say it's not a good thing to do, not a good thing to go and see
and stuff but in my experience it's not it hasn't helped at all (Young female 1
and Young male 7).

Err sigh sigh I don't know. Sigh pause erm I just don't know (Young male 6).

The young people's perceptions of the outcome of the conference and if subsequently
anything had changed for them since the FGC were also varied, for example:

Not really (Young female 1 and Young male 7).

Yes definitely quite a lot of stuff has changed (Young male 9).

Err I can't remember now (Young male 5 and Young female 8).

My interpretation of the situation based upon the thematic analysis of the data from
the interviews is that FGC and the involvement of advocates may be something that
was done 'to' rather than 'with' the young people. This in itself is not new
information and research has identified that a number of children felt this way in
relation to statutory child care review meetings (Boylan and Braye, 2006). What is
disappointing is that even with a more comprehensive and empowering approach such
as FGC, the agency and participation of children is still often curtailed. In the FGM
service where the research took place the practice of asking young people if they

wanted an advocate was so familiar to the FGC coordinators that it could have been interpreted by children and young people as the correct thing to do. Although advocacy provision is not stated in the FGM promotional and informational literature, it does appear to have become practice wisdom rather than policy or procedure. The FGM service may have seen this as following the good practice guidelines identified by Horan and Dalrymple (2003) in terms of offering an advocate as a way of potentially equalising the power dynamics within the adult dominated FGC forum. The possible association perceived by the recipients of the offer of advocacy support may connect with Fairclough's view of ingrained internal assumptions held by service users concerning their perceptions and experience of professional authority (Fairclough, 2001). Therefore, by the nature of their status, a professional suggesting that an advocate would be in a young person's best interests could implicitly have a huge influence over the decision-making of that individual or family in agreeing to the suggestion.

Follow Up

This section will now explore the experiences of the participants in relation to the support offered to the attendees subsequent to the conference itself and also regarding the plan that was developed to address the concerns.

The intention of providing advocacy for young people may have reflected good practice and something that the young people felt was the right thing to do; however, in reality it may have resulted in a lack of investment in the process. Boylan and Braye (2006: 238) identified in their research that "many young people did not feel in control of the meeting..... they sometimes felt that their own presence was tokenistic". If success is seen in relation to families taking ownership, responsibility

and being accountable for the safety of their kin then the lack of engagement with them by the statutory services and or advocacy agency after the conference may undermine this.

This could also reflect the fact that many young people and their parents had little or no contact with social services or the advocate since the meeting. One carer explained that:

We've had absolutely no contact. It's the first contact this morning. This was the first contact we've had with anybody since the meeting (three months on) (Grandparent T).

Many advocates stated that there would be a meeting after the conference to ensure the young people were aware of the outcomes:

The advocate will stay to the end, stay with the child towards the end of the meeting. When the plan comes out, it might be that the advocate might have arranged to go and meet with the child and go through the plan with the child. The advocate might also help the child fill in feedback forms (advocate 2).

What would happen if the young person isn't there, then I will always go and visit them and just give feedback (Advocate 5).

However, when I asked one grandparent whether the advocate had met the young people after their conference either directly after or at some point later, I was clearly told:

No, no. (Grandarent T).

Six of the young people interviewed did not remember hearing from their advocate

after the conference had taken place. It appears that there has been very little follow up with the young people and the outcomes, if any, had not been shared with them. Other studies have shown that young people may identify that “the need for an advocate was attributed to feeling alone, powerless and disillusioned” (Boylan and Braye, 2006: 244). Lack of contact after the conference and not sharing the outcomes may perhaps do more to reinforce these attributes, confirming advocacy within a FGC and the FGC intervention itself as dividing practices that categorise and stigmatise rather than empower young people (Foucault, 1990; Goffman, 1959).

Processes that potentially shape and define the practice of FGC do not necessarily involve all parties, all of the time, and may only involve certain actors at specific times. For example, some young people were given some or all the questions before the meeting and some were allowed to keep them. Parents and other family members were not. However it appears that it is common practice for young people, where possible, to see the questions before the conference. Therefore, the potential for these to influence the outcome through defining the practice either by limiting experience or input must be acknowledged. The questions define the process and present the objectives that must be achieved through the FGC if it is to be seen as successful.

This was emphasised by the young person sent the questions by email and the parent who felt the whole process could have been more productive if everyone had had a copy of the questions before hand. There was some implication that these two processes were linked and that the FGC intervention provides a conduit between them. For example, through the use of verbal textual practices, such as the questions, which potentially shape and create the social practices and associated societal expectations associated with the conference intervention:

If I had had a copy of the questions before hand I could have written a reasonable statement of what we could do and [that we also have a] family friend who is also the pastoral care coordinator for the church. So she could have taken those questions and rung round the people that she knows that we know and said are there things on this list that you could do erm whereas at the group meeting if a name had come up of somebody who could erm maybe have done something that was on the list we weren't allowed to then phone them and say this has come up can you do X,V Z erm so it is very much about who is there on the day and if you don't get the right people there on the day then you're a bit stuck (Parent L).

The powerful protectionist welfare discourse may give the perception that the identified objectives of the conference are so serious for the participants to address that this inhibits the possibility for the aims to be questioned or challenged.

A number of potentially successful outcomes were identified within the literature review; these were multifaceted and could mean different things to each of the parties involved in the FGC (Simmonds et al., 1998; Smith and Hennessy, 1998; Miers, 2001; Home Office, 2003). Success in this context can be seen purely in terms of outcomes that address concerns, or it may be viewed by how well the process worked by way of improving family members' relationships with each other (Johansen, 2012). Also, success may be seen as the family identifying that they do not have the resources internally to address the concerns and therefore placement of the young person outside of the family network is in the child's best interest. This could be a realistic recognition by the family that they are not able to meet the concerns raised and therefore are willing to view alternative non-family care options for their offspring. Being realistic also assists the family to appreciate what capacity they have

to achieve the aims of the conference. Where plans often fail is when the group commits to a plan to keep their children out of social service care that creates expectations of the family or the social service department that are unrealistic and unachievable and potentially set up families to fail (Doolan, 2010).

However, the family during ‘family time’ can be very creative and also realistic in determining the most effective way to deal with the presenting issues for the young person.

Conclusion

This chapter explored the variation in advocacy approaches to supporting young people through the conference stage of the FGC. It highlighted that advocates followed a number of differing modes of intervention that may reflect personal biases and agency ethos. Concerns regarding the type of advocacy undertaken were explored and reservations regarding the use of ‘issue’ based advocacy to the exclusion of other modes of delivery were discussed. How advocates negotiated family time and the potential impact on the family and the process were also explored against the backdrop of a number of varying practices and standards. Interview data illustrated young people’s and family members’ experiences of this process and the direct influence that advocacy support and/ or professional intervention had on the FGC. In addition, the role of the family and individual family members as essential in establishing a plan to address the concerns identified by statutory social services was discussed. This, in turn, reflects a collaborative and participatory approach between social services and service users and one that seeks to empower families by devolving the level of decision-making away from the professional and allows for the family group to take responsibility and be accountable for addressing issues that impact on

the group members.

The next chapter draws on the ten categories identified in this and the previous findings chapter and discusses them under six core areas for consideration.

Chapter 8 CONCLUSION

Introduction

This concluding chapter identifies and discusses the salient points that have emerged from this research study. The research question was “What are the implications of using specific advocacy approaches with young people in FGCs and how do the processes of these two interventions impact the participants involved?” In order to address the research question, a theoretical framework encompassing three distinct approaches was developed and applied to the main themes that emerged through the CDA of the documentary sources and the thematic analysis of the interview data.

These approaches were inspired by aspects of Foucault’s analysis of power, intersectionality, and Goffman’s micro-sociological approach to interpersonal interaction. This framework was deployed to assess how power is exercised through FGC and FGC Advocacy practices and therefore may potentially empower or disempower children, young people, and families to varying degrees through its processes.

The chapter is structured in three parts: reflections on core themes and findings, areas for future research, and implications for social work practice.

Reflections on Core Themes and Findings

Ten significant discourses emerged from the legislation, policy, and FGC promotional sources in Chapter 3 and were felt to be areas for further exploration and comparison with the FGC participant’s own experiences. The ten areas were research background and referral process, gatekeeping; best interests and wishes and feelings; evolution of FGC: division of roles; engagement and participation; questions; timeframes, attendance, and focus; family time; the plan; and follow up. A thematic analysis (TA)

was applied to the interview transcripts and these discourses assisted in developing the coding frame for the themes (Chapters 6-7) and in identifying a continuum of meaning from the initial documentary sources through the interview data (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Tuckett, 2005). The theoretical framework of a Foucauldian analysis of power, intersectionality, and Goffman's sociological theory was then applied to the ten areas from the findings chapters and this established six significant interconnecting themes for further investigation. These themes are variations in advocacy approach, contrasting emphases on 'wishes and feelings' and 'best interests', differing focus on young people and family, the impact of pre-conference questions, advocacy and empowerment, and the roles of extended family and community culture.

I will now go on to discuss and explain each of the theories separately and how they informed the analysis.

Foucault

Foucault's analysis of power was used to explore the discourses that surround and create the practice of FGC and FGC Advocacy. Foucault's concepts of disciplinary technologies, subjectification, and the government of the self by the self, dividing practices, protocolisation, and normalising judgements were all used to explore how power is exercised through particular advocacy practices within the FGC process. The structuring of the pre-conference questions and the conference process reflects a disciplinary technology. This technology seeks to judge and discipline service users with the goal of correcting unacceptable actions and establishing acceptable social behaviour. Examples of how the questions possibly shape the conference process are explored in detail in Chapter 7. In this context, participants are subjectified in

Foucauldian terms as these technologies require service users to acknowledge and admit (therefore confess) their behaviour is deviant and requiring professional intervention. This acknowledgement allows professionals, through practices such as FGC and FGC Advocacy, to encourage service users to regulate their own choices (government of the self by the self) with the intent of instituting conformity to the accepted norms of societal behaviour (Grandparent T, and Parent P, page, 215). From a Foucauldian perspective, the practice of FGC separates out specific young people and their families (seen as requiring intervention) from their peers (not deemed as needing intervention), and therefore this may be considered a dividing practice. The practice of FGC may also be validated through Foucault's notion of protocolisation, where more and more procedures are introduced to regulate and establish correct practice. Thereby, FGC is seen as an additional intervention to other standard child welfare practices, and advocacy, in turn, is another additional practice, each adding to procedures that endorse these practices as the correct way to deal with the matter. These processes may consequently reinforce a sense of disempowerment within the individual or family. This was apparent in the comments from carers and young people, especially regarding the timing of the conference and which participants were able to attend to support the family (Chapter 7). It was also reflected in some of the young people's comments regarding the efficacy of the FGC (Young females, 1 and 8 and Young males, 5 and 7, page 229). The practices mentioned here all seek to re-socialise young people and their families to acceptable societal standards (Grandparent T, page 156) and exemplifies Foucault's notion of normalising judgements (Powell, 2009).

Intersectionality

The intersectional concept of intercategory complexity provided a tool by which to examine the dimensions of inequality associated with many of the characteristics of the young people such as age, ethnicity, learning disabilities, gender, and class. In addition, issues of poverty impacted many families, limiting access to broader familial networks of support, if they or their kin were unable to be supported financially to attend the conference. This would limit the family's choices in how they develop a plan or agreement to address the presenting welfare concerns. The field data found that attendance at the conference was a difficult issue for some family members (Young male 6, page 208 and Parent L, page 212). This suggests that FGC Advocacy and the practice of FGC may be interventions which are focused primarily on specifically constituted societal groups, i.e. young people from lower socioeconomic groups (page 138). This concurs with the research and literature on the demographics of the users of social services (Smale et al., 2000; Hornby, 2003; Cunningham and Cunningham, 2008; Walker and Walker, 2009). Intercategory complexity also implies that age and gender were potential factors in establishing a negative outcome for one young person in one conference (Young female 1, pages 156 and 182).

Goffman

The Foucauldian concepts mentioned above, along with intercategory complexity, were used in concert with components of Goffman's theory of interpersonal interaction. Aspects of Goffman's social interaction, dramaturgy, service specialist, ritual interaction, and stigma were used to explore the micro-interaction between the socially constructed and premade roles of the participants and professionals within FGCs at the individual level. The use of Goffman's notion that social interaction is

similar to a theatrical drama was helpful in identifying the way that various socially constructed roles (front and backstage) shaped the FGC interaction for all participants (pages 179 and 194). In addition, the role of the advocate can be seen in terms of Goffman's service specialist. In this role, the specialist has relevant information about the FGC and participants, but they have discretion in how that information is shared, and therefore they can be seen as separate from the other roles in the interaction. Ritual interaction examined how questions were used in the FGC and FGC Advocacy interventions. The construction of questions and the order in which they were delivered to participants can be seen to possibly establish social routines that could define FGC practices, and therefore shape the experiences of young people (pages 193-194). Goffman's work on the detrimental effects of stigma assisted in exploring how young people and their families may have felt stigmatised, and therefore, disempowered through FGC and FGC Advocacy practices (pages 195 and 201). These aspects of Goffman's theory allowed for a closer examination of how FGC and FGC Advocacy could be considered premade social practices, with FGC participants as actors who react to its construction.

The theoretical precepts mentioned above were then applied to the ten emerging areas identified from the interview and documentary sources, and six core themes emerged:

Variations in Advocacy Approach

Before attending to the variations within advocacy practice itself, geography provides us with some interesting contextual information. As identified by the FRG (2009) in Chapter 2, there are regional variations in the provision of FGC. Therefore, as a young person in the East of England you would be more likely to be exposed to the practice of FGC and also FGC Advocacy than if you lived in the North of the country.

This would suggest that in regions where young people are more likely to undertake a FGC, the potential for subsequent variations within FGC Advocacy practices would be increased. Given this study took place in the East of England, one might assume more variations in advocacy provision and this would result in more variable practices. This also gives merit to the NCAC recommendation in its 2012 report that suggests a national regulatory framework be established to monitor consistency in advocacy provision (NCAC, 2012). I would recommend that a regulatory framework for advocacy encompasses more than consistency, I would suggest that it needs to identify best practice training approaches for advocacy provision. This would reflect best practice for providing empowering independent advocacy to young people, which balances service user rights and ensures their safety and well-being as set out in the UNCRC Articles 3 and 12. Therefore, advocate training, relationship building, clearly defined expectations of the parties involved, levels of interaction, engagement and support negotiated between advocate and service user are all essential aspects of the process when enhancing children's agency and participation in these forums and should be more closely regulated. Establishing the practice of advocates remaining in family time would allow young people's wellbeing to be safeguarded more thoroughly through this aspect of the conference process. Post conference support and careful consideration of healthy closure in the advocate and service user relationship is also required.

The data in this study has shown that inequalities manifested themselves in the provision of advocacy. For example, when the potential for harm has been reduced then practices such as FGC and independent advocacy can be used to achieve longer term welfare outcomes, which should more easily embrace both Articles 3 and 12 in its processes. However, while social workers may legitimately have to curtail a focus

on the child's rights during initial child protection processes, this study found that in some cases the way FGC and independent advocacy approaches were deployed also undermined the potential to promote a child's rights. How advocates were trained and the philosophy of the advocacy agency defined how they engaged young people (see Chapter 7). This led to variations in practice regarding the frequency and number of meetings across the FGC intervention cycle. In turn, this impacted how the advocate worked with and represented the young person at the conference and to what extent they were guided by his/ her 'wishes and feelings' and/ or 'best interests'. One national advocacy agency advised its advocates to always attend 'family time', the 'professional free' element of the FGC process. This national agency approach appears to allow the advocate to practice within a framework of promoting the 'wishes and feelings' of young people. The FGC-trained type of advocacy used FGC best practice standards with regard to family time, ensuring that an element of the process was protected. This approach reflected a 'best interests' stance by the advocates that appeared somewhat paternalistic, for example, denying young people full disclosure of information that was discussed at the meeting.

An additional area of concern for social work practitioners who have referred a young person or family to a FGC is the mitigation of risk within family time. Good social work practice would assume that apparent and obvious risk would have been assessed prior to referral to the FGC and any potential issues conveyed to the FGC coordinator. However, the possibility of disguised parental compliance and the 'rule of optimism' may be mitigated by having an advocate attend the entire conference including family time. This may suit national advocacy agency advocates who are trained to support young people in other statutory decision-making forums such as child protection conferences. As such their understanding of broader protection concerns may justify

their remaining in family time to safeguard young people in this somewhat unprotected aspect of the process. In terms of their advocacy ethos, this could contradictorily be seen as acting in a young person's 'best interest' when they state that they only act on young people's 'wishes and feelings'. Alternatively, the FGC trained advocates keep family time protected for just family, which may leave young people vulnerable in this unguarded setting. In the FGC-trained advocacy model there appears a level of contradiction in practice as well. This research study clearly shows FGC trained advocates are often very protective of the young people they support, denying them information or at times attendance at the conference (Advocate 1, page 181). However, the data from the advocates interviewed suggests that giving contradictory messages concerning remaining in family time was more the advocate's choice often based on agency or best practice rules. Therefore while one must be mindful of the potential for the enactment of risk in the FGC it appears that most practitioners, especially in non-child protection cases, believe that family networks will provide the level of safety required to support their kin. Good communication of assessment outcomes between the referring social worker and FGC coordinator would assist in identifying historical concerns regarding potential risk re-enactment. For example, if a risk assessment by the social worker in their referral to the FGC coordinator identified relationship difficulties between family members, it might be appropriate to seek pre-conference mediation between those family members where there is discord. This mediation may assist in addressing potential participant conflict which would obviously heighten safety concerns for the young people in the conference. If these issues are addressed pre-conference, this may allow for a greater number of family members to attend and to focus solely on the issues for the young person. However, in accordance with the Children Act (1989, 2004) and the

paramountcy principle, the FGC coordinator would not allow any family or extended family member to attend the conference if there were any risks identified to the child or young person.

The coordinator's facilitation skills should also assist in mitigating unidentified harm, as an awareness of group dynamics should enable him/ her to manage the process and risk more easily. The older the young person is, the more likely that they will be able to manage any concerns themselves, either through the use of their own interpersonal skills or by removing themselves from the situation. Family time may be where risk reveals itself more readily between family members, especially if all the professionals have left the room. This may reinforce the argument that a natural or independent advocate (who remains in family time) could protect other participants more effectively than an advocate who removes themselves from this part of the meeting.

Several advocates interviewed recognised that their presence as a professional at the conference, and in 'family time' in particular, could impact on the interpersonal dynamics of the process and therefore influence its outcomes.

Contrasting Emphases on 'Best Interests' and 'Wishes and Feelings'

The CDA of the documentary sources in Chapter 3 identified that Articles 3 and 12 of the UNCRC, while considered indivisible, created a tension respectively between the notions of working in a young person's best interests and ensuring their right to be heard (thereby having their wishes and feelings acknowledged) in judicial proceedings (Stahl, 2007). As outlined in Chapter 2, these two articles represent the tensions of undertaking advocacy and achieving empowerment and participation with young people in child welfare decision-making forums where the outcomes impact them directly. While focussing on the paramountcy principle may be understandable

in some serious child abuse cases, in less serious cases relating to child welfare concerns, issues such as those considered in this study, there remained tensions in interpreting a child's rights in decision-making forums. Several of the interviews reinforced this tension as variations in advocacy approach identified whether the advocate would be supporting a young person from either a 'best interests' or 'wishes and feelings' perspective (pages 201-203). The level of participation by young people in the FGC appeared to reflect which particular advocacy approach their advocate employed, with a best interests approach sometimes being less participative, as it could incorporate statutory obligations. For some authors such as Barnes (2012) and Hardwick (2013) the issue of best interests and wishes and feelings represents a change in the social work role. It reflects the differences between statutory child welfare work and the obligations placed on social work practitioners and the less formally constraining work with children, such as advocacy. Variations in advocacy training and philosophy also allowed for some advocates to enter private family time to support or represent the young people, while others were more constrained either through personal beliefs or agency standards. Again, these variations in support and attendance have the potential to either disempower or empower young people and their families through the FGC process. For example, several advocates identified the change in the dynamics of the meeting when they were in family time, even if this was for a limited time period (pages 220-221). They felt that family members would look to them to manage the decision-making element of the conference as the 'professional' in the room. Deferring to the professional was also accepted by some family members who felt it beneficial for the advocate to facilitate the family group, as they felt they did not have the skills to address the issues themselves (Parent L, page 222). This obviously undermines the nature of the process and the ability of the

family to address their own concerns, with implications for professional influence on the decision-making process. These are issues that have been identified in the literature (Lupton et al., 1995; Crow and Marsh, 1997; Connolly, 2006b) and continue to persist as ongoing concerns for FGC practice.

Differing Focus on Young People and Family

The variations in advocacy approach appeared to reflect a division in focus and attendance at the meeting. The interviews suggested that some independent advocates (those who were FGC trained) saw the meeting having a family or a statutory service focus, or both. This focus would often combine both the family and the social services desire for the young person to be placed back into a safe family environment. This approach links with the concept of ‘best interests’, which can appear paternalist but at the same time also encompasses the paramountcy principle. Thus decisions are made on behalf of the young person with the intent of keeping them safe. This approach also seeks to embrace the use of a broader range of participants (including wider family networks where possible) in addressing the aims of the meeting. In contrast, the nationally trained advocates were solely child centred, advocating only for the young person's wishes and feelings. This approach is focused on young people's hopes and aspirations for the conference and its outcomes, often to the exclusion of the views of other parties. Therefore, the particular stance employed by advocates shapes and defines the levels of participation and empowerment of young people, and also on what issues the FGC will focus on. Hart's (1992) participation ladder assisted in assessing the level of participation and also empowerment of the two FGC Advocacy approaches used with young people in this study. The ‘wishes and feelings’ perspective obviously embraces the core tenets of agency for young people to a greater extent. The terminology and wording in both FGC and FGC Advocacy

approaches embrace discourses of power and emphasis that limit and/ or facilitate service user participation to varying degrees. This illustrates how the positioning of language used in these types of intervention changes practice which is (self-perpetuating, self-reinforcing) accepted as the norm for certain professional interventions.

While parents and carers often wanted the same outcomes as social services (to have the young person cared for safely by family) their views on who the conferences were focussed on were often different to those of the advocates. Two carers felt that the conferences were focussed solely on meeting a social service agenda that did not address the family's or the young people's needs. These carers felt the main objectives of the meeting were met, but without any financial or practical support being offered to sustain the outcome (Parent L and Grandparent T, page 214).

Several interviews suggested that the meetings generally lacked broader family and community commitment, a key requisite for establishing a support network to aid in the success of any plan devised by the family at the FGC. This was likely to have been due to financial considerations for the services involved, as they may not have been able to support the attendance of participants who would need financial aid to travel to the meeting. This implies that a limited agenda was dominant in the process, which appeared to be limiting the potential for families from lower socio-economic backgrounds to draw on as many familial resources as possible in addressing the concerns identified by statutory services.

The timing of meetings was another concern regarding conference focus, as they would often be arranged to suit the professional attendees rather than wider family networks, i.e. on a working weekday. Such timetabling, on occasions, also had the

consequence of excluding some young people who were the focus of the conference from being able to attend, often due to school commitments. This suggests that in some cases the conference was not fulfilling its participative and collaborative objectives and was more focussed on meeting bureaucratic needs. This undermines the very ethos of FGC. Also, in some cases the conference appeared to be a tokenistic gesture by statutory services, reflected by a practice where the timing and venue of the conference is established for the convenience of the professionals and not the families or young people involved.

The Impact of Pre-Conference Questions

Prior to the FGC participants are asked a set of questions to identify how they will address the concerns raised at the meeting. These pre-conference questions (and their answers) is a practice that to some extent defined the structure, process, and outcomes of both the FGC and FGC Advocacy. The construction of the questions shapes how ‘wishes and feelings’, ‘best interests’, and the agency and participation of the young people are addressed.

There is no current practice guidance concerning the standardisation of the content or structure of the questions presented to FGC participants. However, most interviewees said that FGC coordinators and advocates presented the questions to young people in a standard format, with the questions often divided between what the young people wanted from the meeting and what the professionals were looking for. The no ‘new information’ rule for FGCs ensures that new knowledge is not presented at the meeting, and therefore does not allow for new input to deflect the aims and practice of the conference. This rule did not come up in the findings, and that is perhaps to be expected, given its role is to ensure that only prearranged questions are asked. If

interference does occur and new information is presented at the meeting, it may disrupt the FGC and derail the objectives for the conference, resulting in an unsuccessful outcome. Time, energy, and resources could be lost and a new conference would need to be rearranged. This rule therefore creates and supports a practice that does not allow for new information to be submitted and thereby ensures the group is focused on the task at hand. If, as with the data from this study, the questions are devised in partnership between the FGC coordinators and the social worker, then the potential for these questions to fulfil a state-controlled agenda may be very great (Advocate 1, 2 and 7, pages 189-190). While considered a participative and collaborative intervention between families and state agencies, FGC is not a completely cooperative alliance and only certain aspects of its processes fulfil this objective. This can be seen especially in relation to the fact that families are not asked to assist in defining the questions and are therefore not involved in setting the aims of the meeting, even though the intervention itself is seen as family orientated and building on the family's strengths. The submission of new information at the conference could be a positive rather than a negative factor, if it means that future support for the young people not previously identified, could be mobilised. The conference questions thus may be used to exercise power and dominance over the FGC intervention to manipulate the decision-making process of the service user group in what is generally supposed to be an empowering and collaborative intervention.

Advocacy and Empowerment

The notions of creating partnerships and working in collaboration with families and young people are associated with the basic premise of strengths-based intervention and empowerment. All of these ideals are linked to established social work and advocacy practices and are enshrined in many of the profession's code of ethics,

values, and practice standards (BASW, 2013; HCPC, 2013).

However, as the data from this study has shown, the intention to achieve certain practice outcomes did not always manifest itself in reality. This is illustrated by some examples from the interview data. Parents and carers in particular, but also some young people interviewed, expressed dissatisfaction with the process and outcomes. Hart's (1992) ladder of participation was useful in identifying that, in principle, FGC as an intervention rated highly on the participation and empowerment scale. However, the type of FGC Advocacy employed measured between tokenism (level 3) and shared decision-making with young people (level 6). These levels appear to reflect the level of information shared with young people, their attendance and participation in the meeting, how much support they received, and their involvement in the outcomes. More often, an advocacy approach that emphasised a wishes and feelings perspective rated higher than a best interests approach.

In terms of support offer, while the objectives of the meeting were often agreed by all parties, the lack of appropriate support during the meeting was problematic. For example, support was lacking or variable in empowering one parent and his sons who all had learning difficulties to participate fully in the process (Parent P, page 171 and Young male 5, page 172). There were also some financial issues regarding the lack of practical support options (once a plan had been discussed or agreed) which caused some frustration (Parent L, and Grandparent T, page 214). In addition, several young people felt that the experience of FGC Advocacy was not one that they would recommend to others (Young males 5 and 7 and Young females 1 and 8, page 229). One example was the case where the unresolved abuse concerns of Young female 1 became secondary to the placement focus of the FGC for both Young females 1 and 2 (page 156). In this case participation and empowerment did little to address the

potentially far-reaching consequences of the initial child protection concern. It appears, therefore, that providing advocacy for young people and their families in a FGC context may have, at times, the unintended consequences of disrupting rather than supporting participation and empowerment.

This results from the fact that both FGC and FGC Advocacy discourses are less powerful than those of the dominant child welfare system within which FGC and advocacy are located. There is sometimes a tension between child welfare/ protection and child agency/ empowerment discourses although it is not an inevitable outcome (Action 4 Advocacy, 2002; Becker, 2011; Barnes, 2012; Hardwick, 2013). In certain circumstances, these discourses and practices can be combined and effectively achieve the aims of both empowerment and protection. For example, there were cases in which the young people interviewed felt that their experiences with social services and FGC had been positive (Young female 3 and Young male 9, page 152).

Thus, when there are child protection concerns, then child welfare discourses may rightly seek to control and diminish interaction with and for young people. In a sense they may ‘outrank’ a discourse of empowerment which aims to allow power to be assumed by the individual or families. The more powerful child welfare system with its legislative remit may allow for other provisions – such as FGC and FGC Advocacy – to exist, albeit as a secondary or support intervention, but in so doing this curtails the influence that they have. FGC and FGC Advocacy provision can coexist on the periphery of the child welfare system. As some authors have suggested, the statutory process can be shaped by the views of social work practitioners and this may subsequently affect how FGC and FGC Advocacy provision is perceived and experienced by many of its users (Morris and Shepherd, 2000; Walton et al., 2005; Doolan, 2010). If this process does occur, then the notions of agency for young

people, giving them an equal voice in decisions made about them, may sometimes be a symbolic exercise in the pursuit of a top-down state discourse. This, in turn, may at times reflect a paternalistic and domineering view of child welfare exemplified by the notions of 'best interests'. The Foucauldian theoretical framework assisted in identifying how the use of language can reinforce social practices such as FGC and FGC Advocacy, and how they may be viewed as of lesser or greater importance in contrast to more powerful ideological discourses in terms of their impact on the participants of the meeting.

Empowering young people to participate fully in FGC with the aid of an independent advocate support is obviously very commendable but it may undermine the very processes it seeks to support. The adaptation of the internal process of the FGC model in this study suggests that at times subtle practice nuances in terms of differing FGC Advocacy approaches used may result in young people feeling disempowered through the process. As we have seen, issues such as the use of questions, level of FGC Advocacy support, timing, and attendance at meetings all potentially diminish the levels of participation and empowerment of young people experiencing the intervention. Providing support for young people and their families in a well-established intervention such as FGC with advocacy and empowerment as the major goals can sometimes be seen to be a somewhat paradoxical and inconsistent practice.

The Roles of Extended Family and Community Culture

There were some particular meetings where broader familial networks were referred to by the young people interviewed, and these networks were subsequently used to support the young person during and after the FGC (Young female 3, page 152).

These young people came from traveller communities, and therefore one may suggest

a tentative link between cultural contexts where community and family networks are strongest and the successes of FGCs. This suggestion is given some support by the literature, which is rich with examples of how FGC has been a successful intervention with indigenous communities in New Zealand, Australia, and Canada (Doolan, 2010). Traveller communities often have stronger familial and community networks than other sections of British society (Clemlyn, et al., 2009). An interesting outcome in this study is that while we can make cautious links between examples of FGC success with minority populations around the world, in England, FGC appears to be used with the majority population more frequently. If FGC success is based on the ability of families to draw on stronger familial and social bonds to help support their kin, one might question the rationale in England for using this intervention with the general population where social bonds are weaker. In this study and in Holland and Rivett's (2008) study, the groups undertaking FGC were predominately white working class families and youth. Therefore, one might critically reflect on whether using FGC in the English context is appropriate and may do little more than add additional responsibilities to families, setting them up to fail. Independent advocacy is seen as good practice in England and seeks to support young people who do not have broader family networks to draw on. However, while this is good in terms of FGC process, outcomes will not be family or young person focussed, as with little family support, any plan developed is likely to be ineffective. Moreover, to adapt the New Zealand FGC model to fit the English cultural context may not be the most suitable way to use this intervention. A one-size-fits-all approach has never sat well in the tradition of social work.

Areas for Future Research

Therefore, an area for further investigation would be to explore the effectiveness of FGC within traveller communities. The close cultural bonds of extended family that potentially make the intervention more successful with particular groups would be of interest in relation to its practical application, especially if FGC continues to be an approach of choice in working with children and young people. However, in circumstances where familial networks are fractured or non-existent, FGC may not be the most suitable intervention. If, as this study suggests, cultural connectedness (the support and nurturing one receives from one's cultural context and extended family and community network) often connects positively with indicators of well-being for recipients of the FGC service, then the level of connectedness and its influence on positive outcomes should be an area for further exploration.

This study has shown that the variation in just two advocacy approaches used with the New Zealand FGC model at times impacted negatively on the experiences of the participants involved. Therefore, given the number of additional variants in terms of FGC model, advocacy approaches, and focus, additional research is required to examine the potential impact of these variables on the experiences of FGC participants.

An additional area for potential future research concerns the 'referral' of service users to the FGC service provider. This was, as mentioned earlier, beyond the scope of this study. The FGC literature (refer to Chapter 2) identifies this part of the FGC process as one that is sometimes vulnerable to the vagaries of practitioners who may or may not be proponents of the FGC intervention. More specifically, there are concerns that if the referral process is not mandatory, then practitioners who do not necessarily

agree with the approach can choose to opt out of using the practice (Doolan, 2010). This may reflect Goffman's notion of backstage collegiality where practitioners covertly agree the criteria for referral to the FGC, and this identifies certain young people and their families as more deserving than others of the intervention. This approach may be at odds with agency or even government guidance, and is certainly not supported in terms of a best practice approach. However, a voluntary referral process allows for practitioner discretion and would assist in aiding social workers to make best practice decisions based on assessment and knowledge. While currently in England referral to a FGC service is not mandatory, if the authorities in England ever sought to follow the approach of other countries such as New Zealand, then arguments concerning discretion and obligation would need to be critically examined.

How families and/ or service users are assessed in terms of risk and suitability and then subsequently referred to the FGC process is an issue that would also benefit from further research. This would assist in identifying the impact of variables such as family dynamics and extended family networks. It could also explore whether certain families are deemed more appropriate, how such criteria are formulated, and how these criteria may impact upon the process and outcomes of the meeting. Moreover, how advocates are allocated and in what circumstances FGC Advocacy services are provided – and for whom – are also significant factors that could impact either positively or negatively on the experiences of the service users. The present study again potentially provides methodological, theoretical, and empirical inspiration for all these avenues of further research.

Implications for Social Work Practice

Given that FGC and advocacy are staple practice interventions for many English local authorities, an understanding of the nuances of each approach and how, in reality, they can sometimes lead to unforeseen and unintended consequences for service users and families is essential. The contrasting approaches to both FGC and FGC Advocacy practices within the conferencing intervention require the social work practitioner to reflect on the possible variations that could manifest themselves in practice and therefore subsequently in the experiences of the participants. There was also the lack of ‘follow up’ support for many of the young people after the conference (Grandparent T, Page 231). This appeared to reflect financial constraints placed on advocacy provision by central government cuts to public welfare services during the timeframe of this research study (2010-2012). Where there was contact after the conference, it was from advocates to the adult carers of the participants and not the young people themselves. If FGC and FGC Advocacy are to be supportive and focused on young people’s concerns and participation rather than tokenistic processes, then ‘follow up’ after the conference by FGC professionals is essential. The interview data establishes that most advocates spent a considerable amount of time preparing young people before the conference and this involved ensuring that they had realistic expectations about the process (Advocate 4 and Advocate 3, page 164). It is therefore poor practice not to inform young people about the outcomes of the meeting or just to inform their carers. This reflects another concern, that many young people who go through the FGC process have had previous negative experiences relating to carers and professional services. This may be reinforced if outcomes and additional support are not relayed to them after the event.

The literature generally commends the use of advocacy in its various forms with little

critical scrutiny; it is often framed positively as a method for empowering users rather than disempowering them. This study has shown that both types of advocacy are effective, but some of the outcomes of both can be negative. In some cases instead of empowering the service users, the advocacy approaches appear to support practices that actually disempower children and young people. Given the importance of advocacy to the social work profession, practitioners need to be much more aware of the potentially negative impact of these practices in some situations. The questions asked at the FGC are created from dialogue between social work practitioners and FGC coordinator and appear to be essentially designed to elicit specific responses from the conference participants. This therefore requires social workers to recognise how language creates or partially creates and reinforces certain practices and can transmit power relations which may disempower service users through the support and decision-making processes.

The study also strongly suggests that practitioners should reflect on their personal and professional ethics and values in terms of where they stand regarding the practice frameworks of 'best interests' or 'wishes and feelings'. This feeds into broader, more complex discussions about the statutory obligations placed on social workers compared to colleagues working with the same clients in non-statutory settings and roles. This study implies that social workers also need to reflect more deeply upon their own beliefs about whether FGC should focus on concerns and outcomes in relation to individual young people or on broader concerns related to the family. The practice of FGC and FGC Advocacy seem often to be characterised by a bifurcation of focus and aims. This appears to reflect a divergence in their procedures with one type of advocacy practice (national agency) giving prominence to the young person's views, in contrast with FGC-trained advocacy practice where the family and social

services concerns are seen as the focus.

Overall, this study has demonstrated that FGC and FGC Advocacy are sometimes inconsistent practice frameworks. Although both seek to empower their clients, it appears that on occasion the reverse effect is achieved. Each framework is supported by its own practice wisdom and underpinning rationale in terms of how young people can be supported, often manifesting itself in differing types of advocacy. These differences may appear initially harmless, but have potentially far-reaching implications for the young people involved.

FGC and FGC Advocacy, if left critically unquestioned, could perpetuate the negative exercise of power over service user groups subjected to their practices. Therefore, they may lose much of their potential for achieving empowerment, participation, and collaboration – which are, after all, the initial intentions and ultimate stated aims of both FGC and advocacy (individually and combined), and are highlighted as standards of proficiency by the Health and Care Professions Council for social workers in England.

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Appendix 1

Research Topic Guide for children and young people.

Hello my name is Darrell and we spoke earlier about me coming to talk to you about being approached to participate in a family group conference.

The Pre conference question:

I would like to know more about what you think a conference is?

Why do you think you have been asked to participate?

What kind of support have you been offered to assist you when you attend the meeting?

Post conference

When we last met on you told me that you thought the family group conference would be like

Was it like that, if not what was it like?

How were you supported during the conference process?

Were there good things about the experience and were there any bad things about the process?

Additional questions:

Were you offered an independent advocate, if so, were you told what an advocate was and how they might help you? How many times did you meet?

What was the role of the advocate in the FGC?

Was the focus of the FGC explained to you?

Did you attend the meeting and if so was this for the whole time of just certain parts of it?

Guidance notes:

How did the participants feel they were "met" by the staff?

The language used in the session (did they understand it, was it inclusive? Did it help them to feel they had some/ a lot of control over the situation?

Were the non-verbal's consonant with what was being said?

In response to all their answers ask why/how/please give an example etc)?

How could it have been done differently/better?

What did they most appreciate about the experience and why?

What did they least appreciate and why?

Appendix 2a

Research Topic Guide for children and young people.

Pre conference interview only

Hello my name is Darrell and we spoke earlier about me coming to talk to you about being approached to participate in a family group conference.

The Pre conference question:

I would like to know more about what you think a conference is?

Why do you think you have been asked to participate?

What kind of support have you been offered to assist you when you attend the meeting?

Post Conference only

Hello my name is Darrell and we spoke earlier about me coming to talk to you about your experiences of a family group conference that you recently attended.

The Post conference questions:

I wondered if you could just explain to me what the FGC was like and whether it was what you were expecting.

Also can you tell me about what your advocate did in terms of supporting you?

Additional questions if required:

Were you offered an independent advocate, if so, were you told what an advocate was and how they might help you? How many times did you meet?

What was the role of the advocate in the FGC?

Was the focus of the FGC explained to you?

Did you attend the meeting and if so was this for the whole time of just certain parts of it?

Guidance notes:

How did the participants feel they were "met" by the staff?

The language used in the session (did they understand it, was it inclusive? Did it help them to feel they had some/ a lot of control over the situation?

Were the non-verbal's consonant with what was being said?

In response to all their answers ask why/how/please give an example etc)?

How could it have been done differently/better?

What did they most appreciate about the experience and why?

What did they least appreciate and why?

Appendix 2b

Research Topic Guide for adult family members and or carers.

Hello my name is Darrell and we spoke earlier about me coming to talk to you about your experiences of a family group conference that you recently attended.

The Post conference questions:

I wondered if you could just explain to me what the FGC was like and whether it was what you were expecting.

Also can you tell me about what the advocate did in terms of supporting the young person or other vulnerable participant who attended the conference?

Additional questions if required:

Were the young people offered an independent advocate, if so, were you told what an advocate was and how they might help them?

How many times did they meet?

What was the role of the advocate in the FGC?

Was the focus of the FGC explained to you?

Guidance notes:

How did the participants feel they were "met" by the staff?

The language used in the session (did they understand it, was it inclusive? Did it help them to feel they had some/ a lot of control over the situation?

Were the non-verbal's consonant with what was being said?

In response to all their answers ask why/how/please give an example etc)?

How could it have been done differently/better?

What did they most appreciate about the experience and why?

What did they least appreciate and why?

Appendix 3

Research Topic Guide

Hello my name is Darrell and we spoke earlier about me coming to talk to you about your role in a family group conference.

The Post conference questions:

Can you tell me about your role regarding a family group conference?

Can you explain to me how the FGC process works?

What role did advocacy play in supporting the young person?

Additional questions:

Independent advocate: how many times did you meet the young person, at what points in the process?

Training and professional background?

As an advocate what is your focus in the FGC?

Did you attend the meeting and remain in family time? If so what is the rationale for this?

FGC Coordinator:

What are the criteria for referral?

How are referrals received and allocated?

Who decides if advocacy or advocate support is required for the young person?

Can you explain to me the FGC process from referral to outcome or review?

Appendix 4

Research Participants Information Sheet

Study Title: The practice implications of using specific family group conference models with children and young people in the Child Welfare and Youth Justice systems.

Invitation Paragraph

Family Group and Restorative Justice Conferences are considered to be a positive intervention for children, young people and their families across both the welfare and justice systems. However there is little research into examining how the participants of the conference experience the process and this is what the intention of this study hopes to achieve.

What is the purpose of the study?

The study is being undertaken as part of my PhD studies at London Metropolitan University. The aim of the study is to interview young people, children and their families to establish how they initially imagine what the process of the FGC will entail and whether after the event those expectations were met.

Do I have to take part?

Your participation is voluntary. We would like you to consent to participate in this study as we believe that you can make an important contribution to the research. If you do not wish to participate you do not have to do anything in response to this request.

What will I do if I take part?

If you are happy to participate in the research you will be interviewed by the researcher who will ask you a couple of questions about your understanding and experience of the Family Group Conference that you have been involved in. You will need to read this information sheet, sign the consent form and return it to the named researcher above. Arrangements can then be made to meet to interview you (and possibly your family members) before the conference and or after it has taken place.

What are the possible disadvantages and risk of taking part?

All information provided by you will be kept as confidential as possible. You will have the option to read the transcript relating to your interview with a one time opportunity to make changes to the data. All responses to the questions and information provided by you will be tape recorded and transcribed at a later date however all information will be anonymised i.e. no personal details relating to you or where you live or work will be recorded anywhere. Only the researcher will have access to the information you provide to me.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Whilst there may be no personal benefits to your participation in this study, the information you provide can contribute to a greater understanding of conferencing and possible improvements for future participants.

Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?

All the information you provide will be kept confidential. Only the researcher will have access to it. All data collection, storage and processing will comply with the principles of the Data Protection Act 1998 and the EU Directive 95/46 on Data Protection. Under no circumstances will identifiable responses be provided to any other third party. Information emanating from the study will only be made public in a completely unattributable format in order to ensure that no participant will be identified. Some of your answers may be used in the form of anonymised quotes in future written reports, articles books etc. Also that some of the data collected may be discussed by the researcher with his PhD supervising committee.

However if you disclose information that may result in you or anyone else being put at risk of harm then the appropriate authorities will have to be notified.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

All information provided by you will be stored anonymously. The results from the analysis will be available in one or more of the following sources; academic papers in peer reviewed journals; presentations at conferences; local seminars.

If at any time talking about your experiences upsets you and you want to talk to someone about your feelings either call this number 0808 802 5544 or go to this website <http://www.youngminds.org.uk/contact> alternatively speak to your Family Group Conference Coordinator and they will be able to help you.

Contact details

Should you wish any further information about the study or have any questions please feel free to contact either:

Researcher Darrell Fox d.fox@londonmet.ac.uk
Director of Studies Keith Pringle keith.pringle@soc.uu.se

Appendix 5

CONSENT FORM FOR RESEARCH STUDY

Title of Study: The practice implications of using specific family group conference models with children and young people in the Child Welfare and Youth Justice systems.

Name of Researcher: Darrell Fox. PhD candidate London Metropolitan University.

If you have any questions regarding the research study please feel free to contact :

Darrell Fox d.fox@londonmet.ac.uk

**Please tick
to confirm**

I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated for the above study. ☐

I have read and understand that the information / data collected from the interview will be stored anonymously and kept confidential in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998 and the EU Directive 95/46 on Data Protection. I also acknowledge that any disclosure of risk of harm to yourself or others will need to be reported. ☐

I understand that my participation in this research study requires me being interviewed by the above researcher and that some of my answers may be used in the form of quotes in future written reports, articles books etc. Also that some of the data collected may be discussed by the researcher with his PhD supervising committee. ☐

I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily. ☐

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason, without my legal rights being affected. ☐

I agree to take part in the above research study. ☐

Name of Participant

Date

Signature

Researcher

Date

Signature

When completed 1 copy for participant: 1 copy for researcher site file.