

New Practices for New Publics?

Theories of social practice
and the voluntary and
community sector

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Dave Adams – Community Works

Sara Bragg – University of Brighton

Alice Corble – Goldsmiths, University of London

Mary Darking – University of Brighton

Ceri Davies – University of Brighton (and Cupp)

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The book relates to a seminar series 'New Practices for New Publics', which ran between November 2015 and October 2017 (see [this link](http://blogs.brighton.ac.uk/newpracticesfornewpublics/) [http://blogs.brighton.ac.uk/newpracticesfornewpublics/]). Both the book and the seminars were funded by grant ES / N009398/1 from the Economic and Social Research Council.

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Acronyms

ABC – Attitudes, Behaviours and Choices

AS – Active Student

CEO – Chief Executive Officer

Cupp – Community University Partnership Programme. This was established at the University of Brighton in 2003.

CW – Community Works

ESRC – Economic and Social Research Council, UK research council and funding body

H&K (YP) – Hangleton & Knoll (Youth Project)

MEI – Monitoring, Evaluation and Impact Programme

MU – Mothers Uncovered

NFP – Not For Profit

NHS – National Health Service

NXL – New Cross Learning

REF – Research Excellence Framework

STS – Science and Technology Studies

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SPSN – Sussex Peer Support Network

TEF – Teaching Excellence Framework

TRJFP / RJF – The Real Junk Food Project

UoB – University of Brighton

VCO / VCS. We use the term Voluntary and Community Organisation in this book to refer to the civil society organisations with whom we worked, and Voluntary and Community Sector to refer to the sector as a whole.

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Introduction



[I'm thinking] just how inadequate the word 'seminar' is for this kind of event and whether we have any space, given our funder's preference for the word 'seminar', which is the problem that many of the community groups have too. Do we have space to use different language? Or how do we accommodate what the funders want us to do, which is this series of seminars, and do something more interesting and complicated in that space? (Participant feedback at first seminar, May 2016)

Setting the scene

This book is based on and emerged from the seminar series 'New Practices for New Publics', funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) between November 2015 and October 2017. The series centred on civil society organisations or what we refer to in the UK context as Voluntary and Community

Organisations (VCOs), working in partnership with academics interested in theories of social practice.

To say 'it centred' could imply that VCOs were simply placed in the middle of a series of meetings and talked about. This was not the case. Our efforts were very much led by a participatory ethos to which we aspired collectively, in our work and experiences in and outside of academia through our various practices of community engagement. Our efforts to work together were authentic, and built on a philosophy of collaboration, for instance in identifying bursaries to offer our community partners, and finding different routes by which others could engage with this project. Some of this engagement stemmed from our existing connections or awareness of each other which initially brought our relationships with The Real Junk Food Project, Community Works, Mothers Uncovered and Hangleton & Knoll Youth Project to the fore. For instance, Catherine Will was already aware of the work of Real Junk Food Brighton because it met at a community centre near her home and she had participated in their 'pay as you feel' lunches. In addition to the requisite teas/coffees/biscuits/pastries carefully sourced for each of the seminars, in our first event we also invited The Real Junk Food Project (TRJFP) to provide lunch. TRJFP started in Leeds, as an effort to reduce food waste by rescuing edible but out-of-date ('surplus') food direct from supermarkets and using it in community kitchens to make food offered to whomever wanted it, on a 'Pay As You Feel' basis. The initiative was initially given meaning through an appeal to sustainability (food waste as wasted energy) and an appeal to avoiding waste as a value in itself. This was a kind of care for food / for the planet / as well as for people. From the start, its emphasis on reusing skills and material resources (food, spaces such as community centres and churches) spoke to our engagement with practice, and we were interested in how this community activity could step across meanings that in the public sector might be kept distinct, e.g. between poverty reduction, sustainability and health.



At the launch event, community partner The Real Junk Food Project Brighton provided lunch from 'surplus' food

The series was also shaped by drawing on the work of the Community University Partnership Programme (Cupp), which has engaged the University of Brighton with the local voluntary and community sector (VCS) since 2003. This was important to us, and it meant that the seminar series could join, and in some small way contribute to, bringing academic recognition to processes of social change that a number of VCOs in Brighton and Hove had already begun. This as we know from our previous work is a need often expressed by VCO partners. For instance, since 2014 Mary Darking has been working with VCS partners to raise awareness 'community data burden' and how this is produced by the short-term, contract-based, performance-managed funding environments in which VCOs who receive funding do their work. Meanwhile Kay Aranda had already been working in close association with Maggie Gordon-Walker of Mothers Uncovered and with Mirika Flegg to support and to research peer support networks and Sara Bragg had had discussions with Helen Bartlett at the Hangleton & Knoll Youth Project about previous funding opportunities. It is worth noting the

dual role of Ceri Davies on the seminar series organising committee here, who was the Chair of Community Works, as well as working for Cupp at the University of Brighton and completing her own doctorate on community-university collaborations during the period the seminars were running.

Despite this mixture of existing experience and relationships, reaching VCOs and 'messaging' the work we hoped to do together in a way that would stand out as relevant to them was something in which we knew we needed to invest. We approached Community Works to be a lead community partner in the series. As the local 'infrastructure' organisation they have a membership of over 500 VCOs and staff members Dave Adams and Alison Marino in particular ensured that our aims offered mutual value, that scarce VCO resources and time were financially valued through bursaries, and that whenever possible, VCOs were 'round the table' when aims and agendas were set. They ensured that academics did not 'go off on their own tangent' although we all needed to respect the need to engage with the technicalities of our own practice settings at times. Even so we should acknowledge that there were significant gaps in our reach within local communities, particularly around minority ethnic communities in the city, and in the flexible nature of involvement that some projects and people had with the series, which meant that in its final form these representations and recollections are not complete. For example, not all of the VCOs we have worked with have contributed a case study (notably Brighton Housing Trust and Brighton Women's Centre), and some cases that feature here are from groups or people who joined in with the series mid-way through or indirectly (in particular Sussex Peer Support Network, New Cross Learning and Soul Food).

The relationship with a lead community partner also meant that some of the concerns in the seminars were shaped early on by this close collaboration – in particular those issues that form part of the experience of 'providing services' to support the welfare of people in the city. The language of service delivery was not one we wanted to

stay with as in our view it masks the values and distinctiveness of what it is that VCOs 'do', and it is to precisely this issue that we believe practice approaches, this seminar series and our collaboration make a contribution.

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The seminar series

Rather than try to share each seminar equally and ensure all seminar content spoke to both community and university we agreed to 'let each other lead' on different seminars whilst all the time imagining how the people we represented would understand the content and conversations we planned. Crucially, community partners led our 'launch event', 'Spaces to Care' (in May 2016, in Brighton) and as we hoped it would be, this was a significant moment that shaped the rest of the series.

On that day the morning sessions involved a range of different VCO groups giving accounts of their work and presenting their questions and concerns about being a 'provider' VCO. The 'use of method' was an important touchpoint for community and university. Previous collaborative work between Community Works and the University of Brighton had highlighted that whilst there was significant pressure on VCOs to 'demonstrate impact more effectively' for many this was not merely a question of adopting and implementing the latest monitoring, evaluation and impact methods. A far more significant issue had arisen over time, brought about in part through fragmented, contract-based funding streams and an intensification of performance monitoring. The 'problem of data' was one which the 90 VCOs who had participated in the broader 'Monitoring, Evaluation and Impact: Making Data Work' project, as well as many of the community presenters at the first seminar, sought to highlight and question. By the end of the morning of our launch event, the relevance of 'data practices' was clear. VCOs described trying to 'fit' data collection with the people they support into the time-limited and time-critical spaces and moments they referred to as 'encounters'. These were the moments and spaces

carefully crafted by them to reach people who had little trust that anyone could help, in which VCOs needed to offer support, advice and potentially build a meaningful relationship. They described the ethical unease they felt in doing this and the sometimes inappropriate nature of questions they were required to ask by funders and commissioners to 'evidence' that they were achieving contract-specific outcomes and could demonstrate 'impact'. In speaking about data collection and methods, community presenters had found an ideal audience in academics for whom research methodology and ethics are subjects that they live and breathe.

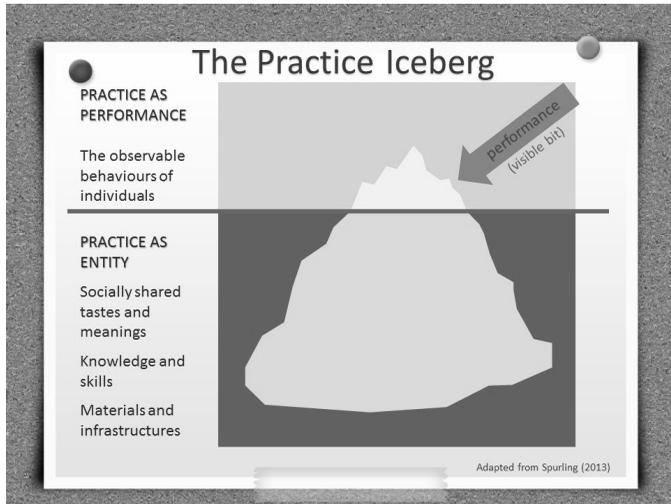
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At the launch event, we shared pieces of writing and diagrams from a range of academic authors who write about practice. These were printed out on large, laminated sheets and ultimately came to be displayed at every seminar – an insight into the role of materialities in the series. Some of these came from a presentation by Cecily Maller, with whom we had engaged when she was visiting the UK from Australia before the official start of the seminar series. The video of her seminar became an important resource for the wider academic and community groups involved. One particular diagram she shared, which we then adapted for our display purposes, proved particularly significant to us. It described the 'practice iceberg' in health and how conventionally, only the tip of the iceberg of practices that health promotion practitioners work with are visible. The rest are the myriad 'hidden practices' that shape people's wellbeing or lack thereof. The groups we worked with described 'most of what they did' as attending to these hidden practices and in the afternoon on that first day Vicky Singleton used the work of 'care practice' authors to describe how and why it is that care becomes overlooked and how to address this through use of 'method'.

An unintended consequence of our approach was that it gave us an insight into which diagrams, concepts, metaphors or arguments supported VCOs to articulate concerns that they had struggled to voice previously. Thus, the 'practice iceberg' travelled with us, literally to different seminars around the country, and metaphorically

as a concept that spoke to VCO concerns and indeed our own. It joined other words and concepts – including those of practices, care, materialities – that offered grounds for dialogue, shifts in orientation, and new forms of 'noticing'.

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The 'practice iceberg' proved an important shared concept for the seminar series

We allowed plenty of time at that event for mutual discussion and feedback, including a plenary session at the end of the day. Here, VCOs described themselves as 'feeling heard' and that the seminar itself had been a space where people had cared about what they were experiencing on a daily basis and how it detracted from their capacity to care, support and advocate for those people who needed those practices most. As one contributor said: "being given a tool to think with and being given some space and time to think, was really important ... how do we create spaces in non-research organisations and non-academic contexts to do the kind of slow thinking and

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making time for the kind of critical spaces that Vicky created for us this afternoon?". Others warned against too great a focus on monitoring and evaluation for fear that "practice theory might lead us back to concentrating on a fast look at outputs", remarking that we should "remember the complexity that we need to measure and the different ways in which we need to demonstrate the kind of caring we're talking about and not just back to numbers". This seminar therefore raised the question of ethics and publics: who will listen to VCOs articulating what they see as key issues, and what are the the politics of responding to policies critically?

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At the same time, community partners were able to air their dissatisfaction with issues such as impenetrable academic vocabularies, and question whether 'social practice' just described the 'person-centred' work they engaged in 'intuitively' and 'every day'. They also suggested that 'austerity' and to a certain extent 'neoliberalism' were missing in the theory. There is a large literature in social science arguing that neoliberalism (or what Somers (2008) calls 'market fundamentalism') is associated with the marginalisation or exclusion of particular groups of people (see for example Wacquant 2008), who suffer most in austerity (see Tyler 2013). Having deliberately left these 'bigger' concepts out these quotations (transcribed from the final plenary) indicate how VCOs brought 'austerity' (and to a certain extent 'neoliberalism') back in as important points of reference for people within the VCS:

Speaker 12: I wondered whether one of the things that maybe stayed a little bit invisible ... is the neoliberal context of austerity that we exist in, and how that is so much shaping everything that we do that it becomes invisible because it becomes the air that we breathe. So maybe one of the ways we might want to take this forward is finding ways to make that more visible and more recognisable. It's there but we almost can't see it because it's so all-pervasive, so for me that might be a useful thing.

S13: I want to echo everything that's been said so far and you just took the words out of my mouth around the austerity frame that we're all operating in. I thought as you said that that perhaps we need to turn the MEI [Monitoring, Evaluation and Impact] agenda on itself and monitor and evaluate the impact of austerity because that is very real. But for me this space that's been provided here has been a space to fit, in a very uncomfortable terrain.

S19: In terms of going forward, I think we really have to look at the wider context in which we're working. I had a few conversations where we've thrown out neoliberalism, austerity, etc etc. That is the context in which we're working, it is a reality. It's also what is used all the time for reasons *not* to do things, to pull back on things and I feel now is the time to push back.

S20: I personally found the space very caring and therapeutic. Coming from academia and, in a context of crisis and austerity and neoliberalism and attacks from everywhere, I find that there is a lack of caring, a lack of space for sharing and reflection and support, and also bridging the divides and the gaps between organisations and theory and academia.

S21: If we were not in a discourse, however legitimate that is on austerity, we wouldn't have many of the conversations of far stronger involvement of people with support needs or even user-led projects, peer-led projects. I think that is also an opportunity, and many people may not like that twist but that's very much what I think is the case.

S28: Ditto all the stuff about cuts and pushing back. It's very difficult to concentrate on this sort of ideas stuff when I feel like the voluntary sector might be about to go over a cliff edge on 31st March 2017.

One can see from the quotations that there is a debate about austerity within the VCS surrounding whether it is an opportunity, a curse, or both. Some contributors highlight the double-bind of having to demonstrate value while so many of the assets and resources creating that value are being stripped and cut. Speaker 20 suggests that austerity is not 'external' to the university, not something that 'only' affects a sector 'out there', but is an essential part of how universities are working; academics too have to demonstrate value and impact.

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Other speakers suggest that it might sow the seeds for certain kinds of positive change, or bring opportunities for people who have been doing certain kinds of work for many years already to be recognised in a new way. There is a rhetoric about how this is a good way of working, for example, within the context of place-based health economies integrating health and care as part of the Sustainability and Transformation Partnerships, asking VCOs to engage in new kinds of work, linked to debates about devolution, localism, the role of community. Speaker 21 above suggests there is already an existing dynamic sector exerting pressure from below, which brings about quite a different kind of narrative from an austerity-as-crisis one.

Thus, one of the central questions raised over the course of the seminar series concerned whether or how academic practice theories could address issues concerning the broader social, economic and policy context in which we all find ourselves. Speaking at our seminar in London Bente Halkier acknowledged that practice theory still had difficulty in including "macro-structures and institutionalisations".

At the same time, the debate about 'austerity' marks a potential area of disconnect between academic and community discourse, indicated here by a tendency to put the word in inverted commas. Academic thinking cautions against discussing austerity primarily as a *causal* factor, attributing it independent but rather mysterious agency in shaping new landscapes and bringing certain kinds of issues or voices to the fore. Part of the value of theories of social

practice is that they shed new light on questions of agency and encourage us to move from a top-down analysis that works with (or imposes) broader categories and abstractions, towards a more situated, emergent and bottom-up analysis in which austerity is seen as a set of practices in the way Somers (2008) analyses market fundamentalism.

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These questions were also addressed in our second seminar (in June 2016) which offered us some important theoretical tools for taking this conversation forward. Davide Nicolini from Warwick Business School explicitly tackled the question of whether the practice lens can address 'large' phenomena such as austerity, proposing ways to dissolve the distinction between 'micro' and 'macro' levels of analysis (see Nicolini 2017). Annouchka Bayley continued the theme of critically examining how we monitor and measure. Her account of a creative performance at Warwick and Copenhagen Business Schools (when she spent a day with a ruler in her hand, both measuring and documenting responses to measurement) was a disruptive and provocative approach to the issue that has echoes of Yolande Strengers' work, described in the next chapter. Her presentation thus spoke both to VCOs' concerns but equally to the omnipresent academic pressures of evaluation practices that university staff experience through REF and TEF (Research and Teaching Excellence Frameworks).

As the seminar series continued we probed more deeply into how questions of power and measurement interact in a range of different environments. We looked at questions of engaging the public in ethical debates about how consent for data collection and use is given, for instance, through Edgar Whitley's paper in our third seminar in September 2016. In the afternoon, presentations and group discussion between local commissioners and VCOs took forward the issues associated with monitoring and evaluation that had been shared at the first seminar. For us this was an example of the reflexive 'critical scalography' to which Davide Nicolini had introduced us.

As a funding body, the ESRC was active in shaping the practices of the seminar series (foreshadowing the emphasis emerging from some of our partner VCOs' accounts of how their practices too are shaped by and around funding rules and requirements). For instance, the seminars had to be spatially located around the country, not single-sited; at times this felt as though it disrupted our capacity to deepen local conversations, at others it helped us understand how practices and thinking travel or not, and indeed to journey with some of our community partners to new settings. Thus, the fourth seminar took place in Sheffield in December 2016, where we engaged with what we describe in the next chapter as 'stream-lined' practice theory, codified in ways intended to speak particularly to policy makers and issues of social change. Margit Keller from the University of Tartu, Estonia, and Matthew Watson and David Evans from the University of Sheffield recounted their uses of practice theory in relation to efforts and programmes to bring about social change. Interestingly Matt Watson took issue with our description, in publicity for the seminar, of practice-based approaches 'as aiming to help effect positive social change', arguing that the theory cannot in itself tell us what to do. Nonetheless, the afternoon workshop brainstormed ideas for a change programme that drew on some tools derived from practice theory (Vihalemm et al 2015). As we discuss in the case study on Mothers Uncovered, Kay Aranda and Maggie Gordon-Walker tried to mobilise ideas from this workshop in analysing MU's work and future directions (presented here in the case study on Mothers Uncovered).

The fifth seminar was held in January 2017 at the London School of Economics, with Judith Green (King's College London) and Bente Halkier (University of Copenhagen). It considered how practice theory might contribute to thinking about civil society organisations' work of campaigning, fundraising and advocacy through which they create particular but varied notions of 'publics'. The seminar explored what practice-based approaches can teach us about these activities

and this context, considering where, if and when practice theories might bring new understanding for the sector.

In coming together with community partners to write this book we do not claim to have learned all there is to know about the diverse body of academic work that concerns 'practice' and we do not claim to have engaged with all that might be understood as 'civil society'. However, we have formed mutually rewarding collaborative relationships over the course of the series and have enjoyed sharing our aspirations and concerns with each other amidst much translation, 'explaining what we mean' and acronym-busting. It is our hope that through the experiences and reflections we cover in the following chapters we also have something to say about our own 'community-university practice' that has been further shaped and understood through the series.

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New Practices

What is practice?

What's missing?

Shedding light on marginalised
practices

What is practice?

Different versions and understandings of 'practice' or 'practice theory' are in circulation and influenced the origins of the seminar series. As an organising group we had different disciplinary backgrounds and were influenced by different texts, but we came together from a shared interest in thinking about whether the concept of practice and the writings associated with it might act as a driver of renewal and innovation in relation to civil society and its organisation.

Broadly one might say that practice directs us towards a concern with the everyday, with 'what we do' *in situ*, emphasising the complexity of our daily routines, how these are resourced and the infrastructures that are associated with and shape them. Practice also often marks a move away from 'macro' level analysis towards the textures of everyday life and identities. Yet there are significant differences between different theories and writing. Here we can offer only a brief introduction, outlining the various strands of scholarship on 'practice' that we have found helpful in our own work, highlighting their key concerns and contributions, as well as how they relate to each other. In part because the academic team within the project includes many working on health, our account is particularly shaped by recent writing on health issues.

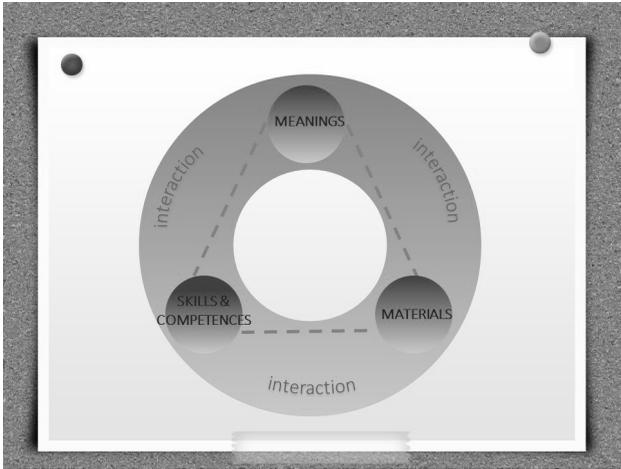
As Davide Nicolini underlines, following Schatzki, this is a diverse body of literature and "a unified theory of practice does not exist" (2012: 1), this poses both challenges and opportunities for

articulating the terrain of what practices can do for how we understand the social world. The family resemblances of practice-based approaches is a tendency to pay close attention to 'doings', 'sayings,' 'relatings' and the material elements of social practices, such as: bodies, technologies, tools and spaces. This work has more recently been understood as informing new theories of sociomateriality (Gherardi 2017).

One field of writing about practices is Science and Technology Studies (STS). Some of this work has focused on practices of producing knowledge through scientific work. For example, Latour and Woolgar's classic work (1979) on laboratory studies. Other work, particularly in feminist STS, explores the politics of everyday encounters with technology in 'private' domestic spaces, like stoves, microwaves, shavers and personal computers (Wajcman 1991 and 2004). There is a tendency among social theorists to divide the world up into social relationships, materiality and language which authors who write about sociomateriality try to resist. Karen Barad, for example, speaks of 'material discursive practices' in an effort to keep materiality, language and agency within the same analytical frame. Arguably, when we do this, different practices come to light as we are able to bring, for example, allotments, wellbeing and campaigning into the same analytical frame. This holds implications for 'what we say is in the world' (ontology) which holds implications for 'what we can know' (epistemology). Theoretical choices are therefore not trivial and Barad along with other 'posthuman' authors would say that these choices have ethical implications, affecting how we are able to respond to the world or in her words how we can be 'response-able' (Barad 2014). Our responses shape who we are and include how we choose to know the world. This becomes an important theme when we look at some of the challenges that present themselves when we try to know VCOs and what it is they do.

Another way in to practice is through consumption studies, which shares a concern with everyday life. Work by Alan Warde (2005) and Mika Pantzar (Shove and Pantzar 2005) fed into what is

now called 'practice theory', since elaborated by Elizabeth Shove and colleagues. This has been conceived as a 'slimline' version of practice theory tailored for a policy audience, and figured in our series through the presentations by Matt Watson and David Evans, who both addressed the Sheffield workshop, the fourth in our series. Watson, Evans and others working with Shove use a tripartite analytical frame drawing attention to 'meanings', 'competences' and 'materials'. This highlights the materiality as well as the everyday performance of practices, and how what people and organisations do is shaped by routines and tools as well as by conscious choices and values (Shove et al. 2012).



The three elements of practice (adapted from Shove et al. 2012)

This challenges conventional individualistic or over-rationalistic explanations, which Shove (2010) has referred to as the ABC of policy-making. By this she means in part the acronym of Attitudes, Behaviours and Choices as the focus of government's attempts to work towards more sustainable outcomes. But it also comments on the the oversimplifications and inadequacies of the 'ABC' and

dominant 'behaviour change' programmes as a response to such a pressing issue as climate change, obscuring how far governments and social and material arrangements themselves structure options and possibilities.

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Though as Matt Watson told participants in the fourth seminar, "state, civil society or commercial institutions are sites of practice as much as are households", the Shove iteration of practice theory has been seen as particularly relevant for trying to change ordinary domestic or household practices, particularly (to date) in relation to energy consumption, climate change and sustainability (eg Shove et al. 2012, Watson 2012, Evans 2012) and more recently, public health (e.g. Allen 2014; Maller, 2015; Blue et al. 2014). Despite achieving some visibility in government for this purpose David Evans reminded us that while some aspects "intuitively made sense to policy makers", other more ontological commitments might be ignored as not politically viable, and the impact of practice theory could be quite varied. For example we might observe that while social scientists might be most struck by the rediscovery of materials, Evans found that for policy makers the greatest effect could still be summarised as "taking the social context a bit more seriously".

Though relating theoretically to Shove's work, writing in Australia, Strengers and Maller have also worked together and developed their own particular style of writing about practice (Strengers & Maller 2013, 2014). Another recent presentation of this set of theories has been a book by Vihalemm et al (2015) which offers advice on how to use practice theory insights to effect social change, from the perspective of voluntary sector or public sector organisations, for example concerned about alcohol consumption or road safety. As one of the authors of that collection Margit Keller explained in her presentation in the fourth seminar, such toolkits have supported productive collaborations between sociologists, communications workers and other groups such as sports scientists, though the contents and ways of working may be unpalatable for psychologists.

Differences exist between versions of practice theory that are 'useable' or codified to speak to policy-makers (e.g. Shove 2010, Vihalemm et al. 2015) and others that aim to be disruptive. Yolande Strengers who has worked with Cecily Maller across the cases of sustainability and health describes in an interview on our blog how she talks to policy makers and industry using "provocative concepts that disrupt their way of thinking". An example she gives is 'resource man': a highly rational, knowledgeable energy consumer, whose improbability challenges fantasies about the impact of smart metering practices and shows how removed they are from daily practices.

In a distinct and unrelated development of sociomaterial engagement with practice, Annemarie Mol and collaborators develop a discussion of 'caring practices'. This work has been influential within academic STS but also found a wider audience in healthcare. In particular Mol's (2008) book *The Logic of Care* speaks to healthcare workers by celebrating professional practice as forms of care. Mol, Moser and Pols eds (2010), collaborators, and other work by John Law (e.g. Law and Singleton 2005) or Vicky Singleton (2017) on health care practices, for example, draws attention to how caring is being done, positioning it as collaborative, material practices of 'tinkering' and relationality. 'To care is to tinker, i.e. to meticulously explore, 'quibble', test, touch, adapt, adjust, pay attention to details and change them until a suitable arrangement (material, emotional, relation) has been reached.' (Winance 2010: 102). This work helped us particularly in thinking about how to reveal the creativity and density of practices and to value already-existing aspects of the social world that often remain invisible and unrecognised.

In the 2010 collection and subsequent work, both Mol and Pols strategically present detailed descriptions of practices that they find 'good'. Writing with Else Vogel, for example, Mol observes that some professionals encourage people to cultivate pleasure in eating, "crafting situations and meals that give joy" rather than seeking ever-stronger self-discipline (Vogel and Mol 2014). They hope to support

such efforts, using careful description of practice to "strengthen and sharpen the theoretical creativity of our informants and help their insights to travel beyond their daily practices" (2014: 306). In a similar mode, Pols draws attention to the creative work of patients with Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease who create new communities of 'shared bodies', generate new forms of knowledge and know-how about ways of living with breathlessness and make these forms of knowledge 'travel' – creating possibilities for "new forms of social inclusion". In these examples, different care practices are highlighted as already existing, and presented almost as a source of creative inspiration.

We came to think schematically of Mol's 'praxiography' (Mol 2003) and the work on caring practices (Mol et al. 2010) as trying to honour the complexities of what people do. The normative work here is revealing the value of people's already existing practices (Will 2016). By contrast, we see Shove and her collaborators as arguably more focused on change, with attention to what might be seen as problematic practices. As we note in the Introduction, Matt Watson argued at one of our seminars that theories of social practice do not have normative content, they "do not usefully tell us what we ought to do." However for him and for Shove it is clear that telling practice histories is imagined to bring insight into (past and present) processes of change; how and why change can be slow and is usually unpredictable; identify alternative means of intervention; and show how change in any one practice demands change in other practices.

A persistent question asked of researchers interested in practice approaches is how engagement with local, day-to-day 'doing', 'saying' and 'relating' can offer sufficient insight into larger, more powerful systems and structures that shape and influence our world. Neoliberalism, capitalism, austerity are all large-scale programmes of activity that according to some analyses are inescapable and play a part in everything we do. Similarly, the question of how the activities of a few people can be treated as being of equal significance to the actions of governments or large corporations is regularly posed. In

common with other practice theorists and ethnomethodologists, Davide Nicolini describes how practices "never happen in isolation, and to a large extent they cannot be carried out independently of other practices" (2012: 229). On this basis he describes how "practices can only be studied *relationally* and they can only be understood as part of a nexus of connections" (ibid.). Purposefully following these connections in order to understand how practices contribute to the wider picture by tracing the work that goes into making associations come about is the empirical and analytical work that authors such as Nicolini and Latour (2005) describe as necessary to ensure practices are not presented as isolated. In the seminar series Nicolini took this notion one step further by referring to the concept of 'scalography' and the possibility of embedding 'critical scalography' in our academic practice. This would involve not simply observing and describing connections between the local and the distant but where necessary making those connections in order to bring recognition and visibility. This was a particularly resonant contribution to the series that has stayed with us during the writing of this book.

What's missing?

We have noted that our own reading of practice returned repeatedly to cases from 'health', resulting in us looking at health care providers, patient experiences and efforts to change domestic practices in the name of public health. This still brought us into contact with very varied work on 'practice' from the codified versions of Shove (drawing on Schatzki and Reckwitz, see Knorr-Cetina et al 2005) to the praxiography of Mol and organisational theory of Nicolini. There are numerous attempts at synthesis and review, including a recent piece by Hui (2017) which helpfully for us draws across all three traditions. Nevertheless, it is clear that practice theory – both our readings and as a broader field – is shaped by the kinds of cases that are being elaborated. Like us, people within those traditions have been discussing this, pointing out how these theories might be developed by attention to broader sets of examples, whilst acknowledging that even quite well-trodden areas may have gaps and limitations.

One point at which this became very clear to us was when we interviewed Yolande Strengers, who articulated some of the gains from taking a posthuman perspective. When we interviewed Yolande Strengers she talked about animals. Mol et al (2010) include animals through their attention to farms, but most cases in the book relate to care for sick and ageing human bodies at home or in the clinic. In a fascinating story of trying to look for disruptive figures and images in

her work on sustainability practices, Strengers told us that she had become very interested in pets. As she said, pets rarely appeared in models of household energy demand, yet pet ownership was rising and there were indicators that in Australia people were attempting to cool their homes to keep animals comfortable even when they themselves were out. Talking about pets, she told us, helped raise questions of policy about who was an energy consumer, and what kind of energy practices were important.

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Pets are totally off the energy consumer radar because in that space it's one adult consumer, the bill payer, and occasionally families who are considered in various scenarios but certainly not animals. So it was another way of broadening out what the household is and who's in it and who also performs practices... The danger is you don't get taken seriously. In an academic context it's quite legitimate to talk about technology scenarios and just make them up, but it's not legitimate to talk about pet scenarios. I have to stand up and justify my focus.

In this book we have taken the diversity inherent in care practices undertaken by the voluntary sector as a similar prompt for disruptive and challenging thinking, both for policy and for those social scientists working on 'practice' in different ways.

Another example of an internal critique that supports the argument that 'some of our cases are missing' is work by Gordon Walker who joins the Shove-informed practice theory community to account for matters of equality and inequality. He comments on the types of cases on which previous scholarship has focused. He argues that these tend to overlook "issues of access and inclusion/exclusion" (2013: 181). He provides three vignettes of people's practices of keeping warm – a homeless man living on the street, a couple living off-grid, and a single parent living in rented

accommodation – arguing that each skilfully performs practices that contribute towards keeping warm. He notes the great variety of their practices, but also makes the point that these instances of practice are not normatively equivalent, meaning that they are localised and situation-specific. He contends that these are examples that "cry out for comments and attention" (191), and in his paper inequalities between practitioners are brought into focus by comparing the different ways a "normal practice" can be enacted within a single society. In their more 'disruptive' mode of writing, Maller and Strengers (2013) propose that attending to practice histories through memories of people who have moved from resource poor to resource rich settings, can bring insights to how we attend to "diversity and scarcity". They may also provide a source of resilience through 'resourcefulness' that comes about "through experience with making, sorting, treating, coordinating and using energies and waters in the course of everyday practices" (Strengers and Maller 2012: 761).

Other interventions have tried to articulate practice theory with questions not just about material inequalities or variation in access to material resources, but also more conceptual questions about 'power'. Sayer (2013) for example provides a critique of Shove's practice scholarship, arguing that the 'practice turn' has hitherto not featured consideration of political economy, discussing the role of big business (in relation to energy consumption), countering the tendency to consider consumers as the sole carriers of practice and drawing attention to other practitioners and practices (in his case, business practices). Although we are not necessarily focussed on political economy, Sayer's intervention is useful in enjoining us not to look for all the action at ground level. For us this means looking beyond practices in the community to give due consideration for example to policy practices and what they do. In our series, both Matt Watson and Bente Halkier also spoke from a social practice theory perspective to suggest that greater attention to 'power' was needed, and what Halkier called "supra-practice level discourses" operating in policy around 'health' or 'sustainability'.

We think that these critiques within the practice theory community partly rest on the kinds of cases elaborated within the Shove approach to practice theory, which often involve consumption and relatively affluent practitioners (cycling, hula hooping, yoga, skate boarding, Nordic walking, showering, heating, laundry). In our work an awareness of inequality was unescapable. Many of the VCOs involved worked with the most vulnerable people in our communities. Engaging with civil society organisations and the practices in which they are involved points to inequality in a way that examples like skateboarding and hula hooping do not.

Some different gaps can be identified in the selections of topics, locales and practices discussed in care practices work, particularly that developed in Mol et al (2010) and subsequent work by Mol (e.g. Vogel and Mol 2014) and Pols (2011). Many of the examples focussed primarily on caring for those who were sick or ageing, where the scholars saw care as hidden and requiring to be made visible, much as the previous generation of feminist scholars sought to make visible domestic work and care work. However the current work has tended to focus on care in institutional settings or in private domestic settings and there has been little focus on 'community' action, that is people working together outside formal organisations.

Further, in her choice of cases, Mol repeatedly returns to the value of clinical work carried out by some health care professionals, defending it against forms of bureaucratisation (2003) and consumer logics (2008) in cardiology and diabetes care. A slightly different political position is developed by Pols. In her work on mental health she draws attention to the contested nature of good care in that field, and tensions between "modes of doing good" that reference "patient rights" versus "care" (Pols 2003). In later work on Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease she finds new value in the creative practices of patient organisations and support groups (Pols 2011). In this sense, Mol's project is rather different to ours in that she is interested in bringing to light the value of threatened *professional* caring practices whereas, like Pols, we want to do something similar

for the practices of groups and organisations in the voluntary and community sector.

Shedding light on marginalised practices

So far, we have mapped out some of the rich, diverse contributions of the practice literature, and drawn attention to some things we might understand as gaps.

In this section we want to talk through how examining two different set of practices, that are enacted in VCOs as well as universities, helps create new thinking around practices, their intersections and their variations (after Hui 2017). We argue that this has the potential to contribute to existing scholarly work on the VCS. The first set of practices concerns the organisation and political importance of the VCS. The second set concerns practices of public engagement as 'done through' civil society organisations. We discuss each briefly below to try to clarify what a practice lens might additionally offer.

The organisations involved in this project were part of our local community and voluntary sectors, which as would be expected, are made up of a mixture of groups, variously constituted (including, those which have paid staff, some which are volunteer run) and which are variously concerned with issues including: peer support; health inequalities; housing; food waste; and mediation between

third sector and statutory bodies. Such features, characteristics and differences have been well-explored in existing literatures around the third and the voluntary sector, drawing on a range of different theoretical positions (Kendall 2003). Where this sector provides services it attracts political attention as a resource within, for example, a welfare state under pressure, or a health service seeking new ways to engage people in prevention or management of chronic illness (cf. NHS Five Year Forward (Department of Health 2014) or Realising the Value (NESTA 2016)). One way of understanding some of the tensions inherent in these positions comes through looking at organisations who focus on 'support' rather than 'advocacy'. However, we hope that by bringing new conceptual sensitivities to bear we might get beyond a common way of understanding VCOs as having to choose between these, or the tensions and trade-offs involved in performing a mixed role. By attending to everyday doings we seek to uncover the diverse practices of VCOs who may deliver services, but may not be recognised as formal or established partners to the public sector, and whose work is not easily captured by dualisms.

Another set of scholarship, which draws on a sociomaterial imagination, is provided in studies of consultation processes or practices in which voluntary sector organisations may appear as interlocutors and stakeholders of different kinds. This would include STS work on 'making publics' or doing participation (Chilvers and Kearnes 2016, Bellamy and Lezaun 2017). This attends to the 'doing' of representation but in very particular contexts where scientific or technological innovation is often debated through consultation with national level organisations, especially environmental groups, or with individuals. Again, this is a quite small set of cases, with a palpable absence of the kinds of organisations who engaged with this project. Andrew Barry (2012) engages with STS literature on 'knowledge controversies' and how often in debates over nuclear energy for example, technocratic disagreements between experts become disrupted by a need to engage with public concern. He argues that

'political situations' often 'drop out of' these cases in favour of analyses that focus solely on knowledge.

Groups that overtly define themselves as activist do attract scholarly attention for their knowledge claims and political impact (Hess 2009, Pilgrim 2009). However, here again the VCOs in this project largely do not fit in this category. For academics as well as policy makers there appears to be a hierarchy of civil society organisations which draw different levels of attention. Therefore, a focus on the practices of organisations such as Mothers Uncovered and the Hangleton and Knoll Youth Project help to make visible, support, give voice to and collectivise marginalised publics. These cases are either absent or marginal in these other literatures, perhaps precisely because their practices include at different times service provision, care, representation and activism, whilst none of these practices in isolation define them as organisations. Like Mol, Pols and their collaborators we seek to make visible these more complex yet mundane, everyday and unnoticed activities, and consider them as a source of innovation or creative practice.

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Here, we start to reimagine the world of the voluntary and community sector not through different organisations or functions, nor simply through hierarchies of regard (epistemic and political), but thinking of some practices (or combinations of practice) themselves as potentially marginalised, excluded and ignored. We would argue this represents an important difference from literature focussing on the categories of people who suffer exclusion.

Later in this book we will particularly explore practices of caring, valuing and brokering as suffering this kind of marginalisation, and how they are in fact, interconnected with one another. When considered as nexus or 'knots' of associated practices it becomes interesting to acknowledge that practices associated with austerity such as withdrawal of funding streams and restructuring of provision are moves to which VCOs respond. Their responses echo Barad's concept of 'response-ability' in that historic brokering practices and efforts to recognise the value and worth of care,

support and advocacy offer a set of resources that, given the right conditions, can be mobilised. Those conditions are strongly associated with the presence of experienced brokers, such as infrastructure organisations. Spaces too become significant in times of social change and transformation, as resources for gathering and coming together. Memories of activism, brokerage and alternative uses of space can feed into a sector that has a potential to see organisations reduced to 'service providers' or restricted to 'participants' in 'consultation'.

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Practices in practice: case studies

Introducing our case studies

Mothers Uncovered and Soul Food

Sussex Peer Support Network

Hangleton & Knoll Youth Project

New Cross Learning

Student Volunteering

Community Works

The Monitoring, Evaluation and Impact:
Making Data Work Partnership

Introducing our case studies

In this section of the book we present 'case studies' of seven different organisations or groups who intersected in different ways with the project. The nature of their involvement was quite different in each case and how their experiences have been captured and shared here also varies. This in some ways reflects the relative maturity of some of the relationships we already had with each other as the project began, since they arose from university practices interwoven with each case, including research for, research 'with', advice, joint funding bids, sending volunteers to projects. The variety here also reflects the difficulties some of us had in remaining engaged with the project over its lifespan. For example, Helen Bartlett, from the Hangleton & Knoll Youth Project found it harder to engage towards the end of the series as her time and attention was needed to oppose the City Council's proposal to cut youth services funding in the area.

Another variation you will see is how far different practices are both explicitly identified and interwoven in each case – some do this by mobilising theory, some through pointing to significant political and theoretical implications of what they are sharing. Others remain more descriptive – outlining and detailing examples of the everyday ways their work comes into being. The intention with these cases is that people were invited to present them in their own ways and

voices; some opted for stories, some for project descriptions and some for opportunities for reflection. This also relates to the methods through which these cases were developed; some were written individually, some collaboratively, some between university and community partners and some through being interviewed.

Kay Aranda had a close pre-existing working relationship with Maggie Gordon-Walker from Mothers Uncovered and had discussed their experiences at various points in the project, sometimes using a practice theory lens. Maggie also spoke directly about the Mothers Uncovered and Soul Food projects in a talk at the first seminar and added details in conversation with other members of the group during the Book Sprint. Catherine Will wrote up the Sussex Peer Support Network story in conversation with Mirika Flegg and Maggie Gordon-Walker, and these cases reflect all of these different narratives. It is clear from this that we often brought multiple standpoints on a particular case, we spoke as members of different collectives simultaneously or in quick succession, and we reflected together and reimaged our experiences through the project. This enables us to hear many voices in the case studies – and where possible we have retained direct speech or used other devices to signal this multiplicity.

A paid youth worker at the Hangleton and Knoll Youth Project, Helen Bartlett attended some of the events and was an interested participant in the series as a whole. Here the story of the case is told through extracts from her talk at the launch event, and some reflection subsequently.

The story of New Cross Learning came about through Alice Corble's participation as PhD student in the seminars. The case study was written in conversation with Debbie Hatfield and Kate Weiner, based on Alice's experiences as a local resident, participant observer and volunteer at the centre. It involves significant reflection on the political and theoretical implications of the story, which is also data in Alice's ongoing PhD work on libraries.

Debbie Hatfield, who joined the group because of her academic interest in NHS consultation forms and patient involvement, recounts the story of her student community engagement module, which seeks volunteering opportunities for nursing students to engage with non-profit organisations. Here she writes as a university lecturer as much as researcher.

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Community Works was represented on the project group from the start through Ceri Davies – who works at the University but is also the Chair of their board. The case study Community Works was co-written by Mary Darking with Dave Adams from CW.

Mary Darking also knew Community Works well from her wider work on 'community data burden' in the voluntary sector and wrote about this experience in the case study about the Making Data Work Partnership. This study is also part of a bigger theoretical research project and effort, and that is visible in a more thematic aspect to that case.

Mothers Uncovered and Soul Food

This case study was created from a number of different sources. The first was a presentation by Maggie Gordon-Walker who spoke at our first event about her work with Mothers Uncovered. We supplemented this with material from the project website. Maggie was then able to discuss the story further with Mirika Flegg from the Sussex Peer Support Network and Catherine Will, who was a co-investigator on the ESRC bid. Here we offer a description of Mothers Uncovered and a very recent development called Soul Food, using elements of the 'peer support' practice, and some reflections based on discussions with Kay Aranda, another co-investigator.

Mothers Uncovered (MU) is a peer support programme set up by Maggie in 2008. MU provides a support service to mothers through workshops and creative arts projects giving women the chance to talk openly and honestly about their feelings and experiences, without fear of judgement. MU also gives women the chance to celebrate and mark motherhood as a significant point in their lives. Soul Food is a more recent project that runs workshops for families in community centres around the city to help people engage with food in a more positive way. It is a

collaboration with local chef, mum and former Masterchef quarter-finalist Ingrid Wakeling.

Below Maggie tells the story of how MU has evolved in practice.

How did Mothers Uncovered start?

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Mothers Uncovered is the result of a journey that started when I became a mother in 2004. Like many women, I had focused solely on the birth of my child, not seeing that my life would be changed forever from that point. After my second child, I set up Mothers Uncovered in 2008 as a project for Livestock, a registered charity that I am co-founder of (www.livestock.org.uk). I thought it essential to have a group for mums that wasn't entirely focused on the baby/child. Of course the participants talk about their babies and children, but it is in context of the whole person, because behind every mother is the woman she has always been.

Some of the groups are for first-time mothers, but they are mostly aimed at women at any and all stages of motherhood. Sometimes women do not feel the need to process their experiences until much later. Participants have the chance to explore their experiences through art, writing, drama or mindfulness. This is often shared through exhibitions and performances and helps build self-esteem and validate a woman's perspective. It also brings the often hidden nature of motherhood into the open.

In the first year we had three groups, and in each of them mothers took photos and did writing, and a filmmaker made a short film, which is available on the website. Then we did a show based on four interviews with initial participants. In the show four people each embody a character. All are on stage, talking,

each in their own little bubble. They cover life, pregnancy and bodies.

Aren't there lots of mum and baby groups?

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There are, but these are often informal drop-ins, not suitable for discussing issues that might be difficult or painful. There are also post-natal depression groups, but these carry a stigma of 'not coping'; and a fear that someone is keeping tabs on you because you are usually referred by a doctor/health visitor. There is a big hole between these two extremes and we do our best to stem that gap, believing that most new mothers in fact have 'new motherhood syndrome', in which it's completely normal to be blissfully happy one minute and in the depths of despair the next. When a woman gives birth the focus shifts to the baby. Women may be delighted and grateful to be mothers, but they need an outlet for the emotions generated by the enormous event they have experienced.

Who runs the sessions?

In 2014 I started training up past participants in MU to be facilitators. We now offer eight week courses, usually over about half the participants are first-time mothers and two or three with a second or third child. Facilitators are all past participants of Mothers Uncovered. We are not affiliated to the NHS or any other bodies, so do not have access to any information about participants unless they choose to provide it. We ask for a mobile number so we can remind them about the course beforehand and

the first part of their postcode, which is useful for providing data for funding forms. We are not 'perfect' mothers. Such a thing does not exist. We are going through the motherhood journey too, but just a bit further along. Nor are the sessions telling people how to be a mother. There is a wealth of information out there for that. We offer peer support.

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The facilitators are trained along the lines of 'Mothers Talking', an approach developed by Naomi Stadlen the author of *What Mothers Do* especially when it looks like nothing. (That was an open group, running every Friday and led by a psychotherapist in London). There are always two facilitators because even if it is a small group it can be draining listening to stories, and holding it. It is good to have debrief partners. A lot of discussion in peer support is about drawing lines between you. One of my facilitators likes to be friends with them all, but that's up to them. Either way, I think it is useful in a network to discuss ethics, your own ethics, worst experiences, dos and don'ts of facilitating peer support.



Peer support is shaped by embodied experiences of coming together in a space, engaging around food, talk and play.

What happens in the sessions?

The group is informally run, sitting on comfy chairs or cushions (if possible!). Each person shares something from their week. Further discussion takes place in pairs and within the group on specific topics, such as body image, relationships with others or how mothers are presented in the media. Group members are given a notebook for writing in the sessions and at home if they wish. Depending on which course it is, there will be further writing, art, mindfulness or drama exercises. There is opportunity to share birth stories. Refreshments are provided (but participants can bring their own food). Only pre-walking babies are brought to the sessions because it is very hard to concentrate if you are chasing your child around the room. But we have toys and other things for them to explore. We don't worry about babies making noise and disturbing the group – we want people to be comfortable and relax.

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How is Mothers Uncovered funded?

The initial funding for the programme came from Big Lottery, whose criteria at the time stipulated projects must have a creative element. Over the years we have received funding from Brighton & Hove City Council, Santander, Awards for All, The Co-operative and Sussex Community Foundation. However, the funding is quite precarious and we have had to introduce charges for our courses in order to continue, but we keep them as low as we can. Course fees help cover some of the costs of the venue, refreshments and materials, facilitators and publicity. There are always two free places per course and the concession rate is quite

generous, so people are asked to get in touch if they would like to come but money is tight.

Mothers Uncovered and working with practice-based thinking

Since January 2016, Maggie has been working with academics involved in the New Practices seminar series as a key community partner representing Mothers Uncovered.

At one of the seminar sessions held in Sheffield in December 2016, Maggie and Kay Aranda participated in a workshop that focused on how we might begin to think about change; the exercise was devised and facilitated by Margit Keller and Peter Jackson. Maggie and Kay went on to use the workshop format to explore how practice-based ways of thinking can be useful to the work of Mothers Uncovered. In discussing the peer support that Mothers Uncovered offers, they explored new ways of thinking about current priorities and concerns for the group, with a view to considering changes that would benefit and allow Mothers Uncovered to develop further.

Kay and Maggie first mapped elements of the project's practices to Shove's triadic framework of 'meanings', 'competences' and 'skills':

Attending to meanings in MU practices involves accepting the different motivations, needs or understandings of the facilitators and the women who attend. This includes how the changed identity and status involved in becoming a mother means many of the women want to explore their identity or status before and after birth, how this impacts them and their partners and relationships with others, and how they are seen by society, for example feeling invisible and ignoring self. There is considerable emotional work involved in sharing narratives or birth stories especially when expectations of a home birth did not match the reality of hospital or technological intervention such as caesarean sections, involving shame, anger,

isolation and loneliness. MU group participants often discussed confusion and anger over the unrelenting work of motherhood and a lack of empathy and understanding from partners or others. At the same time, they can be seen as seeking validation of their experiences, not wanting to put down expert or professional input.

Attending to competences highlighted the role of various knowledges, skills and experiences such as respectful listening; sharing experiences or stories; recognising boundaries; honesty; the need to develop ways of working together in the group or workshops; valuing different status or experiences or needs e.g. disability, class, sexuality as mothers and others' knowledge or understanding of motherhood; signposting, other help or referrals; developing respectful discussions about breastfeeding and bottle feeding; and managing or reflecting on encounters with professional staff, who may have been defensive or dismissive of the women's expertise by experience, using their professional knowledge instead.

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A focus on material resources highlighted the importance of technology (a website, technical and financial administration). Changes in bodies and size meant lots of talk about eating and cooking objects. The workshops involve materials like art equipment, paints, paper, writing materials and great significance could be attached to the specifics of rooms or environment, seating and comfy chairs, floor cushions, a relaxed environment space for the babies, toys to play with, but also office space and a permanent base for both this and the workshops/courses and drop-in sessions.

Having done this, Kay and Maggie then identified two areas where MU might want to bring about change and what would need to be done differently to produce what Vilhalemm et al (2015) term a 'new normal'. They used practice theory thinking to 'zoom in' on an area where Mothers Uncovered might have some influence e.g. working with NHS practitioners or securing funding from primary care commissioners, and then tried to work out exactly who Maggie would need to involve in the planning and organisation of that change and also who could help initiate or sustain the intervention or

changes. They considered how to change working relationships or open up dialogues or conversations with statutory services, Clinical Commissioning Groups, the NHS more generally, increase knowledge of Mothers Uncovered with midwives, health visitors, practice nurses and health and wellbeing boards; increase recruitment working in collaboration with organisations working on women's mental health or homelessness and the local authority including its Family Information Service. They talked about developing work with the Sussex Peer Support Network to enable wider recognition of and secure funding of activity. The focus on material resources, objects, bodies and technology emphasised the importance of maintaining permanent space, one place to run everything from workshops, drop-ins and specific courses, but also to have more staff to offer evening or family sessions, being able to offer free places, develop phone services and increase publicity.

In discussions about Mothers Uncovered at the New Practices project meeting in July 2017, Maggie also added some stories about Soul Food, a very new project that extended the notion of peer support and tried to reach people in poverty through the city's food banks.

It really came out of talking to a friend, Ingrid, who's a chef. We did a couple of food nights, where people could email in a 'food memory' and we'd pick one of them and cook. We felt that sometimes other cooking workshops can feel quite demanding. We thought that the same psychological thing that we bring to Mothers Uncovered might be helpful here. If you think about food as something that people like to talk about, then why not get people in a room to talk about what you eat, what you ate as a child, reassuring them and boosting them. To share happy memories, with friends, Christmases, they often involve food. In spring 2017 we ran some workshops on 'feeding a family

healthily on a tight budget... lunchbox tricks, weaning' etc. at a local community hall.

Since, we've had the idea to go into food banks. In Brighton these are spread around and linked to community venues or churches. Ingrid was used to working with what she had having worked with Real Junk Food in the past. So we wondered how would it be if we went along to the food banks and did some cooking, a bit like Ready Steady Cook (a TV programme where participants give a chef a limited set of ingredients and then cook against the clock, and are competing with another chef for best creations). Ingrid has a portable hob for cooking at festivals. So all she needs is a table, socket and access to a sink. So the way we've done it is that she goes along and looks at the food available. She chooses some and starts making a dish. She does this before the doors open, so that as people come in they can smell something cooking.

Of course given the reasons people are there, maybe they have particular problems, they don't necessarily come up to the table straightaway. But they can smell and see the food, they are engaging in it already, and hopefully tasting. But no one is saying, 'Come and cook' or 'Come and learn something.' So Ingrid makes bruschetta. They ask, 'What's that?' 'Tuna, I don't like tuna.' But someone tried it. 'Oh, it's okay'. Talk starts... 'I used to cook...'

Some people don't want to engage, they come in and line up and pick up food and want to leave. They don't want to be there. But food does help break through some of that. When I went along there were some pots of macaroni cheese. It smelled horrible from the microwave. But Ingrid fried up an onion and pancetta... and people were saying 'Ooh that's nice'. There was one young man, wild eyed, probably high on something. He came in and was shovelling up food. By the end of that one session, he said would like to volunteer with Real Junk Food.

What was nice, some people were saying ‘How can I make it?’, smelling spices, so Ingrid was bagging up a little bit of garam masala or something. We would like to take some paper bags so that she can put in a bag of pasta, tin of tomatoes, even write a recipe note. Ready meal, ready to go. They have seen it, tasted it, ready to go. Simple, basic stuff, it could also become a training ground of a kind. People are engaging and learning to be in a group.

So the nice thing about Soul Food is that you don’t have to get people to come along to something. You go to somewhere where they are already going. With other events that we run you’re always anxious about getting money to run it and then getting people along to it. You have to sort out venue hire, and spend quite a lot of money on advertising events. With this, the venue is there already, the food is there already and people are planning to be there. And now we are looking to approach other food banks, the Women’s Centre, all we need is a table, socket, access to sink, to be able to come and do something.

Rather than reproduce an analysis around the three practice components again, we end this case study with a reflection on how the two projects imagine 'care'. The commitment to peer support is set out in more or less gentle opposition to professional practices which bring the risk of telling people what they should be doing. This was clear in the way Mothers Uncovered addressed feeding as something where mothers could reflect on their experiences and breast and bottle feeding practices without judgement, implying the need to do this differently to statutory health services who promote breast feeding. Though grounded in an 'ethos', as a practice, peer support required and was shaped by embodied experiences of coming together in a space, engaging around food, talk and play. As a practice it can also travel – being adapted to different settings and

meanings (mothering, living with hunger and poverty). It can co-locate with other practices, enriching them by its particular commitment to sharing, non-expert, democratic interventions. This informed extensions of the practices of Mothers Uncovered into food workshops with mothers and older children, and then the very recent Soul Food experiments with cooking at food banks. The logics of the funding environment also encouraged Maggie to develop these small, episodic engagements as 'projects' both in an experimental mode and to match activities to resources. However as Bente Halkier reminded us in the fifth seminar in our series, working through 'projects' often leads both academics and VCOs to struggle to deliver what they have promised in very short timescales. The practices of 'project thinking and doing' are overly tidy, and often over-optimistic about the time and resources need to produce social change – and there is always a risk that people start 'caring for the project' rather than the change.

We observe that work by Mol on professional feeding practices (in care homes) and interventions in eating (by dieticians and nutritionists) is also developed in this territory, while work by Shove and others, using practice theory inflected by consumption studies, has paid great attention to eating as a fundamental practice. Bringing the amalgamation of cooking and peer support together into the food bank space was a fascinating move. Food banks as a particular form of social action have become emblematic of the current austerity situation in England, and a hotly contested domain. Food banks have sometimes been celebrated by government as a charitable response to poverty, even as central government may question the need for charity on this scale, casting doubt on the extent of 'real poverty'. The practice of handing out food donations is relatively established, and often coordinated by churches, drawing on their extended histories of work with those in greatest need and mediating donations from some community members to others. However other smaller or newer groups are also moving into these spaces. Cooking with or for people – according to Soul Food and the Real Junk Food Project described in our introduction – is different from handing them a food parcel.

Handing them a set of ingredients including spices and even a handwritten recipe is quite different again. This draws on skills like Ingrid's ability to cook from a given, limited set of ingredients, to form part of practices as diverse as television cooking competitions, the Real Junk Food Project's 'pay as you feel' cafes and food banks to create innovative forms of care that shift meanings from leisure and family care-giving to community and social action. In both projects this is not only about shifting the meanings, but about marshalling material resources – a portable cooker, table, power socket – to use together, reclaiming food as part of convivial social experience.

Sussex Peer Support Network

The Sussex Peer Support Network (SPSN) is a network of organisations and individuals working to provide peer support in the region. Membership is diverse and includes organisations focused on mental health and disability, as well as domestic or sexual violence or other more broadly defined groups such as those in the field of supported living. From a practice theory perspective they might be said to be linked through a shared practice – peer support – though they also describe this as a particular 'ethos'. Though there is a lot of shared understanding of what this means, the terms used are still debated and vary across organisations – sometimes people talk about 'peer-to-peer' work and sometimes about support workers with 'lived experience'. The ethos of peer-to-peer work and the lived experience of participants is depicted as a 'word cloud' on the SPSN website:



The network members seek to offer support to each other and advocate for the peer support approach. The platform embodies a commitment to mutual respect and positive engagement, taken from direct community work and translated to relationships between different community-based organisations. Members also agreed to use the network ‘to improve practice’ and ‘develop best-practice recommendations’, expressing a commitment to learning and extending or improving on their current practice in individual ‘grassroots’ organisations. Though this case study was written jointly by Mirika Flegg, Maggie Gordon-Walker and Catherine Will at a New Practices for New Publics meeting in July 2017 – and thus in a more reflective academic space – this should not be taken to mean that a layer of academic thinking was added to an account of community action. It was clear when we talked that in establishing the group there were numerous points of connection to more academic ways of working, as well as reactions against them, and that these shape the network’s current practices.

The network officially began after a community evaluation of peer-to-peer services in East and West Sussex (Flegg, Gordon-Walker & Maguire, 2015) – it thus came out of activities framed as a form of knowledge production. However the evaluation had fairly complicated roots. It had started when Maggie Gordon-Walker was looking for ways to support the work of Mothers Uncovered, which

had begun working with mothers in Brighton some years before. A local councilor suggested she work with other small community organisations in the area – Grassroots Suicide Prevention and Synergy Creative Communities, a mental health group begun in 2009. Meeting together, they realized that they actually shared a commitment to peer support as a way of working. In that meeting they were joined by the former director of Community Works in the city, who suggested that they put in for money to research this kind of work and they bid for funding, building on the expertise of Community Works and some additional input from Mirika Flegg who was already highly engaged with peer-support work and ‘had some references to give them’.

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They received some funding from the Big Lottery and collectively designed the project and had discussions about how to define the project when writing it up. A number of University and clinical staff offered advice and support to the group in the design phase. As this was a community-led project, they suggested it was best not to claim the project as ‘research’ but instead to use the terminology of community evaluation to avoid challenges based on methodology (especially those established norms in health research).

Once the community report was published (see below, Flegg et al 2015) people that worked within academia and the Trust gave further informal advice about getting the work into academic journals. Some of these advisers had personal experiences of mental health but felt the stigma of that – there was the feeling they wanted this work to be published and ‘out there’ in an academic sphere. Ultimately the piece was published as a case study but in part this meant it found a home ‘on the outskirts’ of clinical research (which might prioritise randomized controlled trials or systematic reviews).

One of the recommendations that arose from the consultation was that a network model would support best-practices in peer-led services because it would provide flexibility to respond to changes in the sector and promote sign-posting between peer-led organisations, public health services and wider support systems (such as councils,

commissioners, academics, etc.). They also hoped to promote this approach in health and social care and advocate on behalf of peer support groups more generally. Some of the groups that provided data in the evaluation do continue to be closely involved, for example by sitting on the board. However at the time the network was established there was an open invitation for others to join and a much wider group now participate in regular meetings, roughly three times a year.

It could be said that the network now functions as ‘a support group for the support groups’. It brings a sense of peer support ‘when we’re all on our own trying to make other people’s lives better, this is our chance to talk, the way people in offices talk around the water cooler’. It’s important that the people in these groups are diverse, and many have different backgrounds: for example there are two performers and a musician, writers and performers. They are not ‘office drones’ but have a ‘maverick’ quality.

Practically, there are still questions. The group needs space to meet. At the moment a smaller organisation, Sanctuary Group, provides a room and tea/coffee etc. There is a feeling that though others attend they don’t provide this kind of support. The network also shares information and resources through the website which Mirika curates. They also have a members’ resource area where groups can share articles and resources with one another.

The groups participating in the network have terms for what they do and approaches to providing that support and wider involvement. As mentioned above, for some ‘peer support’ is an ‘ethos’ that is brought to different situations. However it has some elements that seem to fit well with a practice theory approach: it is a way of working that is embodied and sustained through people’s competences. Both their own lived experience and skills learned in living with situations for themselves, and then the commitment to help others develop those skills by talking or working creatively with others. There is some debate around the value of claiming skills once you are out of the situation, and who counts as a ‘peer’. The

terminology of 'lived experience' is seen as making space for people to offer support even if they have moved on from the experiences. The term 'peer-to-peer' is also widely used, and has currency within the NHS. In the health setting, it is sometimes the case that 'peer support' is used to indicate an element of a public health services intervention, rather than a practice that is initiated within the community sector, even though the history of peer support is largely community-based. However it was important to remember that while these ideas have gained currency in policy, there is still limited infrastructure, funding, or space to be able to support this kind of work. In terms of the actual practice of peer support, it requires not only skilled engagement and commitment from those with relevant experiences, but also particular material elements – a room to meet, sometimes tea and coffee, sometimes art materials to allow for creative activities. It encourages people to bring other skills – like photography or film making. It is perhaps significant that two of the groups in the first evaluation project had this creative element.

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There are also important issues that arise from the involvement of numerous groups with a strong interest in mental health. The idea of peer support or peer-to-peer working has become popular in NHS policy and encouraged within mental health trusts, who can sometimes see peer-support as a way of offering services, or deflecting demand from professional-led services. Members of more grassroots peer support organisations can also be cautious about being coopted by 'the system.' They often bring some suspicion of formal, organisational and professional approaches. When the network has sought to pursue evaluation or research this can become rather important, and they may feel wary of formal evaluation, paperwork, consultations etc. Therefore, though efforts were made to publish the initial evaluation in an academic journal, and thus to narrate the work in terms designed to describe academic practices, there is also a strong and shared commitment within the Network to support research on their own terms. Both of the publications, one in *The Journal of Mental Health Training, Education and Practice* (Flegg

et al 2015) and the other forthcoming (Flegg & Gordon-Walker, forthcoming) specifically recommend that the university should support individuals to do research to give members some control over how this knowledge is created and who gets to be a part of the creation. The second suggests changes to wider support systems and further explorations of methodologies to support community-led research.

We had quite complex discussions about appropriate acknowledgement for the efforts of these organisations to other initiatives in the field of health and social care. Often this is narrated in quite material terms around resources, but it also comes back to questions about acknowledging the distinct philosophy and contribution of more grassroots organisations. For example the network and its members sometimes get asked to report back from the frontline, to report on the needs of the peer support sector or give advice to how it can be supported and researched. But such data can get used without acknowledgement and without payment for "a day away from frontline work". Different groups have different capacities to provide such services. Many are constrained by having to chase funding that is largely allocated to 'projects' offering limited opportunities to develop infrastructure and cover running costs. So rather than claim for salaries to coordinate the type of support offered by a network like this one, funding bodies often priorities front line services. Therefore, it may be easier to get money to 'run a conference' or deliver something tangible, e.g. a community garden. "Stopping 100 people from feeling a bit shit, like they can't cope, they don't like that because they can't see where their money's gone."

It is important to reflect that some contributions are made but often are explicitly made 'invisible' – for example advice from academics on how to get the evaluation published, or the quiet use of university web resources to support a blog-based website for the network. There are still tensions however. Maggie and Mirika reflected that people from the university and the mental health trust would come to network meetings but never provided a room. Mirika

felt the network 'gets used more by the university than uses the university'. When they had been asked to speak at conferences, for example, their need for support for mundane things like travel expenses was not acknowledged or met. Mirika often takes annual leave to work on the network, including representing it at other people's events. They continue to feel much less established and resourced than something like Community Works which they perceive as having its own building (even though we found out in discussion that that's not the case), funding and staff. Enormous amounts of work around the network are unpaid and unacknowledged. At the same time they experience this as offering some freedom. Where an organisation like Community Works may find it harder to negotiate a common position or make more political statements: "we can stir the pot a little bit, we don't have to risk losing our funding if we play our advocacy role."

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Flegg, M., Gordon-Walker, M., & Maguire, S. (2015). 'Peer-to-peer mental health: a community evaluation case study'. *The Journal of Mental Health Training, Education and Practice*, 10(5):282-293.

Flegg, M., Gordon-Walker, M., (forthcoming). 'When the community leads the way-Peer-to-peer mental health: Reflections from a community evaluation case study. Nurturing Co-construction'. University of Brighton (accepted for publication 9th February 2017, in press).

Hangleton & Knoll Youth Project

Helen Bartlett is a longstanding youth worker at the Hangleton & Knoll Youth Project (H&KYP) in Brighton. She became a partner in the seminar series after correspondence with Sara Bragg over a funding application when practice theory was proposed as a possible perspective to bring. She has co-authored a chapter on community development models for an International Handbook of Youth Work (forthcoming) with Adam Muirhead, a youth worker and lecturer on the youth work provision at the University of Brighton. Again, this suggests something of the fluidity of perspectives and exchanges between different kinds of practice and communities. The case study takes the form of an edited transcript of Helen's presentation at the launch seminar 'Spaces to Care', followed by our reflections on how Helen's account might be related to issues of practice.

Helen: I am specifically from the Youth Work team of the Hangleton & Knoll project. We define ourselves as a community development *and* youth work organisation, which brings with it its own tensions.

We're a neighbourhood-based community development organisation, in the north west of the city. It's a big ward,

geographically and politically, and interesting demographically in that it has a swathe of relative wealth through the middle and then the outskirts have housing estates that are demarcated as areas of material poverty. That's interesting because we use H&K as an overall area both organisationally and politically to construct the notion of a coherent community, but of course there are divisions within that. If we are ever articulating our work to funders we will talk specifically about our work on the estates because we know we can say that this is where there are areas of real need, high levels of poverty, high levels of adults *and* young people with mental health needs, high numbers of older and of younger people. So we both use it ourselves, and, with the young people we work with, they won't say they come from Brighton, they sometimes say Hove, but very often they will describe themselves specifically with reference to the housing estate they come from. Their whole identity is constructed around those neighbourhoods. It's important because the work we do is very, very spatially defined. We're based in community centres but we're also out and about: bus stops, shelters in parks, young people's front gardens etc, form some of the core places in which we do our work.

The other aspect that features in any discussion of young people and community is how young people get constructed in relation to the community – notions of young people and community are often not compatible or coherent.

[In general] we would say that we aim to support young people to have a voice in their community on the issues that affect them; to give young people the opportunity for positive involvement and recognition; to support young people to develop and maintain their health and well being and resilience; to increase networks and instill a greater sense of belonging; to give young people opportunities to improve their self esteem. For the majority of the young people we work with they are lacking self-esteem, belief in themselves.

We situate all of these things within a wider context of positive community change and development, but there is a problem there... [In terms of] organisational outcomes, all of our work is framed within community work and social justice for people in the community. But within youth work, the move has been almost wholesale towards individualised outcomes for young people, the notion that young people as individuals need to have their problems solved, to gain something. That is a tension that we struggle with and at times fall into and reinforce. So being here [at the seminar] is thinking how we might reframe our thinking around that.

Formally we carry out a range of projects with a wider community development framework. We walk around the neighbourhood meeting young people and introducing ourselves to them and responding to needs and wishes as they come up. We have what would generally be described as participation projects, so we have a youth manifesto, a local manifesto led by young people and trying to make sure that actions and decisions affecting them are made by and for young people. We have a Young Leaders programme to support young people to become involved, especially those who don't have opportunities elsewhere to do this. We are doing anti-bullying work because our work on mental health showed bullying was a massive issue for young people.

Then we do what would be categorised as more conventional youth work interventions, in a context in which the responsibility for youth services is being shifted in our city and the funding for youth services is absolutely being cut. Whenever you ask young people what they want, it's remained the same, they say we want spaces to hang out, we want someone to listen to us, we want safe spaces that we can go. They keep saying that and the removal of youth clubs, holiday clubs etc. – we try to step in to do that, as well as the more focused one-to-one work.

One of our key roles is just that we provide support and care and an ongoing presence for young people. We're a really longstanding team. There are four of us, we've been working there for 6-10 years so as individuals we are quite a fixed feature in young people's lives. And so, we can tell when 3 o'clock comes in our office, because we have a stream of young people who start to come in, tell us how their school day went, what they're going to have for dinner, have a cup of tea... And all of that work ... to a certain extent goes unrecognised. But really, if you ask the young people what they get out of our project, it wouldn't be the skills development, it would be someone to listen to them. We came back after Christmas one year, two of our young people said, we have been looking up at your office every day to see if the lights have come on and if we can come in and just say hello to you.

Food features throughout all of our projects both as a hook for young people to come in, as a collective experience to share that may be missing from some young people's lives, and also more obviously in recent years because more young people are coming in having not had enough to eat in their lives and coming in hungry. So we now have a freezer that has bread in it and we have spreads there so that we can say, help yourselves to a piece of toast or whatever.





Space and practices of caring for young people (through providing food) were key to H&KYP's work, although rarely recognised by funders

We try to situate young people in a wider definition of community. In our organisations we have community workers and we have youth workers, and there is a split between young people and community, you can see that if you think about your community meetings, young people are often [seen as] a problem, if they play football, there need to be activities for young people to do. Those are real concerns, but it can also get to a position where there is a division between the community and young people. So we advocate on behalf of young people individually but also as a group within a wider community, and looking at what a 'whole community' picture might look like.

So our problems and challenges and reasons for being here are about individualised outcomes, how we can move away from a focus that is just on behaviour change, and a movement from somewhere to somewhere else.

And situating the local within the wider context. It's very easy to become focused, when you are working in a neighbourhood setting, on what is going on in an individual neighbourhood setting, but there are wider contexts and shared contexts, so how can we situate that [neighbourhood] within other young people who are experiencing similar issues and then a broader policy framework.

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And how to demonstrate or explain both for ourselves and for others that invisible aspect of what we do?

Helen's presentation raises a number of themes relevant to 'caring practices', and a practice lens might draw attention to what Vicky Singleton (2010 and at our launch) has described as 'materiality, relationality' and the 'embodied, located' practices of care. We might therefore notice the material aspects of the youth project's provision: a place to go, supplying cups of tea and toast for hungry young people who wait watching for the lights to go on in its office. As both Helen and Vicky note, these are often unrecognised and unarticulated, so these are yet another example of hidden practices. We might also note how timescale features in Helen's story – a team of workers in place for 6 – 10 years has been a fixture in perhaps the whole of a young person's late childhood and teens. Also again this is a way of working where the worker's embodiment – who they are, their presence on the streets – and the relations they form are fundamental aspects determining successful engagement.

We have referred to the inadequacy of individual behaviour change as a point of government intervention, but the metrics remain collective. In the case of youth work, contemporary policy is actively re-making youth work towards one-to-one support and metrics associated with individual outcomes, away from its 'traditional' forms of providing collective spaces for 'hanging out'. Such developments raise the question of 'community', both in the tensions

Helen discusses between 'the community' and 'young people' construed as mutually exclusive and even antagonistic groups, and the refusal of funders to attend to what young people collectively say they want. She further raises issues of scale – working at the micro level of a community as a possible block to identifying wider patterns, but also wondering how to collectivise when 'youth' are being individualised and marginalised.

A coda to this case study is that Helen's involvement in the seminar series became more difficult towards its end due to the need to oppose a City Council's proposal to cut all youth services funding in the area. Such proposals are now seen all over the country. In the case of Brighton a successful and energetic campaign saved funding for community and voluntary sector youth organisations, although the Local Authority youth services were closed. Helen commented that such funding battles inevitably engaged H&KYP in questions of wider contexts and broader policy, the issue on which she ended her presentation in May 2016. (See Barker et al. 2017 for an account of this campaign). As for practice theory, she remarked that it "made me think about *how* to think about things differently".

Barker, K., Bartlett, H. and Muirhead, A. 'Case study: Brighton and Hove'. In Grace, J., and Grace, P., (2017) *360 degrees of Participation Handbook*. Medvirkningsagentene (NO), Youth work Europe (UK) and Institute for Policy research and analysis (LT). downloaded 25 July 2017 [here](https://issuu.com/mariusulozas/docs/participation_handbook_online) [https://issuu.com/mariusulozas/docs/participation_handbook_online]



Helen's photos further tell a story of the material practices of youth work – post-it notes, large sheets of paper, brightly coloured pens, the artefacts involved in creating youth 'voice'.

New Cross Learning

This case focuses on a community-run library situated in South East London and draws on Alice Corble's doctoral research at Goldsmiths, University of London, and her experience as a volunteer, researcher and local resident. The case study was written as part of a conversation between Alice, Kate Weiner and Debbie Hatfield at a New Practices meeting in July 2017.

Organisational origins

Following the first major spending review of the Coalition government in 2010, which marked the first wave of austerity on public services, the London Borough of Lewisham decided it had to withdraw five of its 13 libraries from council delivery. Four of these branch libraries were transferred to voluntary sector organisations but New Cross Library was not part of the tendering process and was closed, with rumours that the building was earmarked to become a Pound Store (a shop offering a range of cheap personal and household goods for the relatively low price of one pound per item). Local residents saw what was happening and quickly mobilised to mount a campaign to save the library. The library is situated within a ward that is very socially deprived, although there are pockets of privilege in the area, including Goldsmiths (which is more or less opposite the library) and some more affluent neighbourhoods.

A range of different activists converged around the cause to save the library, which at one point involved an overnight occupation of the space by students and anarchists, who were inspired by the wave of Occupy protests happening around the country at the time, but the space was ultimately reclaimed through the persistent efforts of two local residents and their supporters. After protracted negotiations involving the support of sympathetic local councilors and a local charity, the residents managed to secure a lease on the building, including its circulating book stock and shelving. The self-organised community library has been run entirely by self-selected volunteers since 2011 using a grassroots, collectivist model. The library receives no core funding but has received some small one-off grants.

The library was initially known as the New Cross People's Library, with a tag line 'by the people for the people', but within a year its name was changed to New Cross Learning (NXL). This was on the advice that they would be more likely to attract funding as a social learning centre than as a library. The new name was chosen, after a community consultation process, by local school children who use the library.

We probably looked like a pair of namby-pamby mums, with nothing else better to do than open up a library, and hadn't got a clue, which in all honesty, we didn't have. But we're quick learners, and we actually got started just by persistence. [...] Every single meeting, something else was put in our way. But we did it! (Gill, NXL co-manager*)

The first time we opened up, that was the scary thing. When we did get the keys, for the very first time, and we had to open the shutters, you know, turn alarms off and all this type of thing, we were thinking: Gosh! Amazing! There was so much to do – sorting it out, cleaning it up. But the community came together. We thought we were saving a library, but in fact it's become much more. ... We've got many roles in this library from toilet

cleaning, to shelving, to organising and participating in workshops. (Kathy, NXL co-manager*)

* quotes transcribed from '[Learning New Cross](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CdMy7GrmlME)' film

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Running the library

The co-managers of the library are Gill and Kathy, two women in their 60s, long term friends who met when they were bringing up their children on a local estate, with a shared history of engaging in community activism. They work 50 or 60 hours per week running the library, entirely unpaid. They are supported by a steady but changing stream of volunteers, who often have their own vulnerabilities and need a lot of support themselves. The library is open three week days and Saturdays from 10 am until 5 pm some nights and until 7 pm on others. The library has received some small grants from a local trust and some support from the council in building maintenance, but its day-to-day running costs are met through fundraising events, the sale of donated books (both online and in-house), and renting out the space in the evenings (mainly to local political groups).

NXL still operates as a lending library with over 5000 books that circulate within the rest of the borough, enabled through partnership with the statutory library service which maintains the stock and circulation software and hardware. Professional council library staff also link with the volunteers through a community outreach and engagement relationship, providing informal guidance on best practice in managing the book stock and on national literacy and library engagement initiatives. NXL also receives support from a local umbrella charity, Bold Vision (akin to Community Works in Brighton but on a much smaller scale), that helps with setting up and running the organisation, governance issues and stakeholder management.

Everyday activity and spaces of NXL

The activities of NXL have developed quite organically and spontaneously in response to local interests, talents and needs. It delivers the traditional elements of a library service, including lending books, promoting literacy to a range of social groups and ages, regular work with schools, and information and digital literacy through access to and support using public computers. In addition NXL is involved in a range of other cultural, learning and welfare activities such as:

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- employability work – for example CV writing workshops, and giving one to one help with the completion of benefits forms, evidencing job searches and skills development – all of which government systems require people to complete online. They also bring in volunteers from the corporate world to share expertise on job applications;
- offering the space for use by the Credit Union;
- organising and housing a range of cultural events including film screenings, talks, performances, workshops;
- providing a venue for a quarterly Local Assembly meeting led by a council community development worker and local councillor to share messages and priorities, and elicit views of local residents.

Beyond these activities, NXL undertakes a number of less conventional practices, which are firmly related to unmet care and welfare needs of local people. The library works in partnership with a local food bank, serving as a drop-off point and informally as a referral service. It has organised seaside day trips for families who would not otherwise have a holiday and have never seen the sea, tying this into literacy initiatives through enrolling children into a national summer reading project. It has provided vital support to countless people in desperate circumstances. If volunteers notice, for

example, that someone is homeless locally or at risk of benefits sanctions they support them, acting as informal social caseworkers. As a trusted and safe space, the library has acted as a sanctuary or refuge, providing an informal community and advice centre, in the absence of withdrawn services such as the Citizens Advice Bureau.

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Food bank donations at the drop-off point in NXL

NXL is also a space where unmet social needs are discussed as social issues. For example, through their social activist networks, the volunteer co-managers have hosted talks and film screenings by Ken Loach, whose most recent film 'I, Daniel Blake' includes a scene set in Newcastle public library where the protagonist receives support with navigating his online welfare requirements. A lively debate was held in NXL, with a representative from the local food bank contributing to the discussion. NXL has also hosted a visit from two veteran Black Panther activists from the US, who discussed the importance of community archives and learning spaces in relation to political organising, after discovering by chance via Twitter that NXL had received a donated collection of original Black Panther magazines.

NEW PRACTICES FOR NEW PUBLICS



Lorenzo Kom'boa Ervin is an American writer, activist, and black anarchist. He is a former member of the Black Panther Party and Concerned Citizens for Justice. He and his partner, fellow veteran Black Panther JoNina Abron-Ervin discussed past and present struggles at NXL.



Film maker Ken Loach addresses a public audience in NXL to discuss how libraries are situated within wider social struggles and inequalities.

NXL is a place where connections between people are made. One library volunteer describes this as a form of 'social brokerage':

There isn't a town square, or a natural place for people to hang out together, there's this and this has an important role to play. And because it's a library where people are allowed to speak then more of that can happen, and introductions are made. I was brought up a Catholic, and the people I really admired were the parish priests – the people who played that social broker role, because they knew what the matches were so they would say to me, oh you've got a car, can you take Mrs Jones home because she's hurt her foot. And I was completely happy to do that, but I would never have known that and it would never have happened without somebody to make the connection. So that role they play here is so valuable ... we need new mechanisms – society as a

whole needs new mechanisms – to make those connections work.
[NXL volunteer interviewed April 2014]

This is one way in which NXL takes a brokering role, connecting people with other people and places to meet social needs. It has also become a natural hub for community organising. The community activists that worked to save the library and now run it as volunteers have proved their skills at galvanising local campaigns, and NXL has become a hub for other struggles where the co-managers share their skills and knowledge in campaigning – for example NXL hosted meetings for the campaign to save Lewisham Hospital Accident & Emergency Department and were instrumental in the production and dissemination of their publicity.

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Hidden practices

As with other libraries, a huge amount of caring practices take place in meeting service user needs. But here this happens even more in the case of a library like NXL because the very reason why the library exists in its current form is because the people running it voluntarily *care* on multiple levels. We know that professional librarians and council workers too often work beyond their specific job descriptions and shift patterns, 'going the extra mile' to help people with various needs. Yet the voluntary library workers here are working within no specified parameters, they are not managed or monitored, and operate in a constant mode of giving for the sake of the social good.

These caring practices are unaccounted for in any kind of formal monitoring or evaluation processes, they are not recorded as outcomes or measures of service delivery, yet this community library model is often held up by the council as a success story for local civic empowerment.

How public library services measure their usage across the country is through capturing the numbers of books issued, the number of visits to the building, and public computer usage, which does not account for the variety of other social interactions and services that take place in libraries. However, in the case of volunteer-run libraries, even these basic metrics are not always accurately captured, since the materials and technologies that do the capturing are often sub-standard or missing. For example, at NXL the self-service machines for issuing and returning books frequently break down, and volunteers have to wait for some time for council library staff to fix the equipment. The 'people counter' on the door is not automated or reliable, with room for human error. Furthermore, although the public PCs are in constant use by library members, the practices for recording this are paper-based and not systematised, unlike in statutory-run libraries which have a shared networked infrastructure for booking public computers.

This means that the vast majority of practices that create social value in NXL remain undocumented. It is common and tacit knowledge that NXL is able to meet a variety of needs in the community, and indeed users often come to the library for help having been informally referred from other statutory and non-statutory services who are unable to help them. The fact that the caring practices of NXL fall largely under the radar of official monitoring means that they are not formally valued, and therefore not invested in. At the same time, however, escaping scrutiny in this way can have a beneficial effect for the community organising work that happens at NXL, particularly when it has a political edge, such as saving the borough's hospital services. This campaigning work could not happen were the library still run by council staff. We observe a common tension here, with on the one hand the inequitable provision of free labour by the volunteers and the obscuring of NXL's value, but on the other hand the relative invisibility in statutory terms affords a certain autonomy and has led to innovative, creative and responsive community practices.

Bold Vision plays a role here in brokering between NXL and the local authority, mediating between volunteers and more mainstream funders and providers. Bold Vision described it like this:

...it's important to have that middle man, because the alternative would be for the people running the library to be very measured and strategic and that would dampen some of the spirit. It's good to have me in between so they've got the space to do what they need to do. And if there's trouble on the boundaries then I can step in and deal with that. (Bold Vision trustee, interviewed May 2014)

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While NXL benefits from this buffer when they need it, operationally, they are otherwise largely left to their own devices. This means that the volunteers running NXL, as well as its users, are on a constant journey of learning:

Alice: as well as the learning and literacy that comes from books in a library, what other kinds of learning do you think goes on here?

Volunteer: Interesting, yes, because we're also learning how to run a library, aren't we? Being a learning organisation is a good thing to try and aim for I think. Getting better at doing things. (NXL volunteer interviewed April 2014)

As a participant observer in the daily running of the library, Alice has witnessed how the practice of learning to be a successful organisation proceeds through trial and error, taking risks, and seeing what sticks. There is no template for how to run a volunteer library – the values,

norms and aims are entirely uncodified, although influenced by the history of the public library system and tradition. The major question concerns succession – who will run NXL when the co-organisers finally bow out, potentially taking with them the competence, skills, knowledge and drive that they embody? This may be a matter of 'recruiting' new 'carriers' of practices (Shove et al. 2012), or, it may be a matter of the limits of civil society organisations substituting for statutory services. The co-managers mused eloquently on these issues in response to a question about the future of NXL:

I've got two little grandchildren and who knows how many grandchildren might be coming, and you just think, well what do I want out of life now? Well really I want a better future for them. And I don't see the better future being what we've come through, the past seven years. It isn't – so it all ties up – I have to carry on fighting. (Gill, interviewed June 2017)

Who knows, maybe we'll get a new government, this is my hope. When we see a new government, or we get a new Lewisham Mayor, who knows what might happen with libraries in Lewisham. So I'm always hopeful that they might find some money to put a manager in here. I'd really like a librarian in here. That would be great. And then we can go home and do some gardening. Possibly. I don't know. I hope. You know, you just want things to change, don't you? (Kathy, interviewed June 2017).

Student volunteering

Debbie Hatfield is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Health Sciences at the University of Brighton, and module leader for *Student Community Engagement*, a 10 credit optional module scheduled in the second year of the BSc (Hons) Nursing degree programme. Debbie has written this case study in conversation with Ceri Davies, Development Manager, Community University Partnership Programme (Cupp).

Student Community Engagement has been running since February 2013, is open to all students irrespective of their field of practice (adult nursing, mental health nursing or child health) and comprises 30 hours of volunteering in addition to the normal professional practice placements. This volunteering must be done in a health and social care project in a not-for-profit, user-led organisation. For many students this is the first time they have been invited to explicitly consider ideas and practices of care and health in non-statutory 'community' rather than hospital 'clinical' settings. It is also often the case that students lack experience in what it might mean to work in partnership with volunteers, residents, charities and 'non-clinical' service provision. For both these reasons, part of the module focuses on classroom teaching to facilitate learning about the purpose of their volunteer placement organisation and how this contributes to

the health and wellbeing of a community. We also invite wider expertise and experience from people inside and outside the university to help us with this. Assessment is by means of a written report examining the skills the student has used and developed, and reflecting how this is transferable to nursing, against the following learning outcomes:

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1. Discuss and analyse the concept of community engagement and contemporary contexts of health and social care.

2. Understand the structure and functions of organisations, with reference to the volunteering agenda.

3. Demonstrate and explore the value of contributing to a community initiative or project by reporting on the skills and experience acquired during participation.

4. Reflect on the transferable nature of this engagement to professional roles within health and social care.

The volunteer roles the students are asked to fill must be positions that already exist within the organisations for the particular needs of those organisations. Examples of VCOs (or 'third sector organisations' as they are referred to in health) students work with include newcomers and established charities, from The Real Junk Food Project to The Red Cross, Terrence Higgins Trust, Moulsecoomb Forest Garden and Wildlife Project, Salvation Army, and Blind Veterans Association, among many more. Documents including a service agreement and placement checklist are completed by the university and the organisation, setting out terms for the placement and completing a risk assessment.

on the experience of volunteering with a very established charity – the CCHF – All About Kids (formerly the Children's Country Holiday Fund), offering children respite and residential breaks. The charity has existed since 1884, focusing on children aged seven to eleven living mainly in London. It relies on donations. Children can be referred from anyone who works with disadvantaged children such as teachers and social workers. Today criteria for being involved include poverty, abuse, low self-esteem, young carers or substance abuse and mental health issues in the family. The charity has always relied on volunteers.

Students reflected that they had gained confidence through the experience of working with 'challenging children' and related this back to the skills they were developing as professionals.

The children were well behaved, safe and actually enjoyed themselves, and at no point did I find myself worrying or panicking. Later on in the day, the senior leader praised at CCHF this activity, which helped to build my confidence for future situations on camp. Although these individuals were children, my confidence in leading larger groups of adults has definitely improved and this has made a noticeable difference in clinical practice, for example, when managing a bay of patients in a ward.

More specifically they talked of confronting and thinking about 'difference' and their own judgements.

The demographics of children on the camp was incredibly diverse as was their range of ethnicities and socio-economic

backgrounds. This was in contrast to my own quite stable upbringing and I felt a little under confident in my abilities to engage and relate to them... During my nursing career I will encounter people from all walks of life; this episode forced me to think about my own attitude and values. I believe this realisation equates to a shift in values which will stay with me for years to come.

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The facilitator also commented on this aspect, relating it back again to the limitations of traditional nursing education and the need for nurses to reflect on their own tendencies to judge and to learn to think differently.

In our action learning set I probed their narratives, asking what it was about the experience that so differed to other experiences on their course. My overriding sense was that it was the immersive nature of the summer camp combined with their interactions with the young people that had helped to transform their attitudes towards themselves, their practice and their ability to form and maintain relationships. Johnson and Webb (1995, cited by Stevenson, Grieves and Stein-Parbury, 2004) found that 'nurses do judge the social worth of people and that such judgments do have moral consequences'. However, in our students' case we have seen these relatively negative evaluations were negotiated and renegotiated throughout their interactions. Once such attitudes are brought into awareness through the process of reflection, corrective thoughts were assumed.

Other projects involved partnership with a national organisation, the Patients Association, placing students from nursing, pharmacy and

occupational therapy courses in a local hospital trust, where they were encouraged to learn to practice 'patient-centred care' by engaging with each other across professional boundaries.

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Volunteering as part of curricula can be traced to origins of 'service learning' in North American contexts. How and why students should engage with community groups as part of their degrees is part of a broader debate about the role of the university in the 'real world'. At the University of Brighton volunteering is now an essential component of curricula and seen as part of the wider community engagement agenda to promote 'socially purposeful citizenship' and enhance employability skills. This wider agenda has principally been led by the Community University Partnership Programme (Cupp), established in 2003 and with an international reputation for innovation and knowledge exchange in this area. It was from this team that the earliest student community engagement modules were supported. However, a critical infrastructure is required to translate these principles into reality – and particularly at any scale. In 2017, there are 26 courses at University of Brighton which use a model of student community engagement similar to ours across disciplines. Some are compulsory modules as a undergraduate requirement of a degree course whilst others are offered as an option.



VCO practitioners meeting University of Brighton students at a volunteer 'matching event'. Image credit: David Bauckham

Crucial to the success of the *Student Community Engagement* is the sourcing, securing and organising of these placements, managed by the Active Student Volunteering Service (AS). Whilst AS are responsible for all volunteering at the university (staff and student – in and out of curricula), they are the key broker to enable our module to run. AS has relationships with 133 organisations to provide engagement opportunities for students on 23 courses. The AS model means that appropriate, safe, supported and rewarding roles are sourced for students. The projects are owned by the organisations and the students contribute by co-production and/or co-design and some have included inter-professional projects (e.g. with pharmacy and occupational therapy). The ethos of the partnership work facilitated by AS is that volunteers should be 'wanted and needed' (with the focus on the needs of the organisation); they should learn

to 'do with, and not to' and there should be a commitment to 'mutuality'. The role AS play is a central one and in doing so they are the perfect mediator between the needs of our module and the needs of community organisations. They understand both. However they are situated within the University Careers Service, and not easy to find on its website. Their work is often under appreciated.

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We run this module at the same time that partnership working has become central to new models for integrating health and care services at a national level via the English NHS. The People and Communities Board led by National Voices, a coalition of health and care charities in England, set out six principles for engaging people and communities, one of which is volunteering and social action as a key enabler. Changes to health care and social care services set out in the 2014 NHS Five Year Forward View herald a more engaged relationship with patients, carers and citizens. Therefore, it has never been more timely for health care students to gain an enhanced understanding of the value of working in partnership with each other and not for profit user-led organisations. What this means for our students is that this module is an essential opportunity to develop components of practices – the meaning and competences in particular – required for these changing landscapes.

Drawing out some initial reflections on this case, we start by noting how difficult it was for Debbie Hatfield to narrate it in a new way. Previous accounts had been written for professional journals and gave descriptions that related the project very much to evaluation practices developed and practiced in undergraduate education, especially versions used in the education of health professionals. These were largely cognitive in focus, but did elaborate on skills and competences that could be named, shared, learned and demonstrated. A SWOT analysis approach reflected a history of these organisations borrowing from managerial practices – applying it here not to organisations but to the individual who had strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and 'threats' to the successful completion of the volunteering placement. Looking at the story from the practice

perspective we noticed also how much these practices rested on some key materials, especially paperwork setting out agreements between the university and the third sector organisations, placement checklists including risk assessments, and module handbooks. Like the work of the Active Student Volunteering Service these formed part of the hidden practices of brokering and caring for relationships. Other practices – belonging more authentically with the 'third sector' – were acknowledged. Students were learning about what (and how) volunteers did, how this fitted into the set of practices that made up the work of very diverse organisations, and how these were positioned in relation to the statutory service providers – as supplementing, replacing, supporting or changing professional-led health care. For at least some this was transformational. They felt it would radically change the way they practised as professionals.

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Stewart, W., Brown, L., Harris, S. and Isaac, A. (2017) 'The impact of volunteering on nurse education'. *British Journal of Research in Health Sciences* 2(1). [Link](http://blogs.brighton.ac.uk/bjrhs/2015/05/21/the-impact-of-volunteering-on-nurse-education/) [http://blogs.brighton.ac.uk/bjrhs/2015/05/21/the-impact-of-volunteering-on-nurse-education/].

Community Works

Recognising social action as ‘happening everywhere and all the time’ is a way of understanding why different forms of collecting together and lending voice are important within civil society. In the current UK context, supporting the journey from social response and direct action into more formal, funded forms of intervention is one that is nationally recognised. Although in no way assumed or obligatory, should individuals or groups seek to sustain themselves through formalising aspects of what they do, support can be accessed from regional and national bodies to guide them along this route. Forming networks of organisations with the aim of influencing, enabling recognition and capacity building is not a new phenomenon. However, in this case study we explore with our community partner some of the practices that are currently considered to enable the voluntary and community organisations to collectivise, connect and gain recognition for the work they do.

The focus of our case study is Community Works which is an organisation known in the UK as an infrastructure organisation or Council for Voluntary Services, whose role is to support VCOs. It offers membership to VCOs which in return are able to access support, training and events to facilitate networking and representation across public, private and the VCS. Operating at local level, infrastructure organisations across the UK are typically funded by local government and by health bodies such as Clinical

Commissioning Groups (CCGs) but have other income streams that come from membership fees, trading activities such as consultancy services, and other funding bodies.

VCS infrastructure organisations exist across the UK and most, if not all, receive core funding for buildings and staff from local government. The existence of such infrastructure organisations suggests a need, although this is contested. Some would argue that the close associations and funding relationships with government organisations have made infrastructure organisations and the groups they support ‘part of the state’. Others would argue that in a policy environment where local government and public sectors are reducing in size and ‘government by contract’ has created a fragmented picture of welfare provision, infrastructure organisations are necessary to hold the picture together. However, from a social movement perspective, organising for social action is the original organisational form and constitutes an inevitable and for the main part, positive aspect of social life that endures beyond the term of any government or policy move.

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When we consider what our case study organisation does through a ‘practice lens’ it becomes clear that much of their efforts are spent on forming, holding in place and coordinating multiple relationships with multiple sectors, organisations, groups and individual stakeholders. Connection and coordination can imply instrumental forms of relationship building whereby organisations can be straightforwardly put together. However, facilitating relationships across diverse, value-driven organisations, bringing together a collective voice, and negotiating relationships with much larger, statutory organisations, all involve the careful crafting of spaces, events, networks and methods for maintaining representation and accountability.

As an example of this kind of practice, Community Works members involved in ‘green spaces’ activities – who tend, encourage engagement with and advocate for publicly accessible parks, gardens, allotments and open land – identified the need for a network through

which to share issues and concerns. This move towards collectivising happened to occur at the same time as the local authority initiated a policy to reduce its management of parks and employment of park rangers. Community Works were able to contact green spaces membership organisations, reach out to non-membership organisations and 'send out a message' to let people know a need had been expressed for a city-wide, green spaces network. Their role from that point was to create and hold a space for citizens, groups and organisations interested in green spaces to come together. A 'parks and green spaces network' was subsequently formed and this created an opportunity for collective voice to build and take shape. The network now acts as a contact point for groups, individuals and statutory organisations and facilitates the creation of new green spaces, relationship building with other related groups interested in organising around food or sustainability, and engagement in local and national policy dialogue relevant to green spaces groups.

There are clearly tensions running through these examples particularly around top-down, bottom-up dynamics – who is responsible for initiating action and the political significance of that ownership. To form a collective at the request of a statutory body is very different to a community-driven move to collectivise. There are undisputed examples of each of these but there are others that are more blurred where different sectors and organisations move into a social action space. Leadership is needed to bring people together but individual leaders or organisations can signify alignment to a particular position and this can create division. For these reasons, people in this field talk of 'holding spaces', facilitation and brokerage as key practices.

A focus on 'sharing across' also forms part of the facilitative practice of Community Works. For example, over a number of years a business skills volunteering programme has developed to enable skills from different sectors to be shared. This could mean that a person working in the private sector with graphic design, animation and IT skills might contribute their skills *pro bono* to a voluntary

organisation. Likewise, a VCS group that in turn hosts staff from businesses, will enable those staff to develop a wider skill set than they can achieve in a business environment. These cross-sector sharing networks have become embedded strategically over time and are arguably translating historical views of volunteering as somehow unskilled and belonging only in welfare, to something more universally relevant.

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In parallel to these practices, Community Works plays a role in what could be called the democratic practice of supporting people to understand, engage with and influence government policy. Again, this could be viewed instrumentally as the top-down dissemination of government initiatives and no doubt different examples of this practice would suggest different levels of balance between unidirectional dissemination and open debate. However, being able to act formally, in a funded capacity, in certain social action spaces, requires an understanding and appraisal of policies and initiatives that originate from central and local statutory bodies. To facilitate these dialogues credibly and retain the trust of membership organisations, Community Works has to demonstrate neutrality whilst being a clear protagonist of sector needs and values. Therefore, rather than simple dissemination, the practices of translating, encouraging active engagement, inviting appraisal and facilitating opportunities to influence, form part of this role. These practices are achieved through training, consultancy, workshops and events, but the facilitation and brokerage involved in these cannot be captured through conventional models of training and education.

Increasingly, direct responsibility for project management and partnership coordination alongside incumbent accountability for financial performance and delivery is being taken on by infrastructure organisations. Deciding on the balance of these activities in relation to face-to-face brokerage and facilitation presents further dilemmas. For example, Community Works used to run a well-used, face-to-face drop-in service for anyone who wanted to volunteer or else recruit volunteers. Although highly-valued, the

service was time-intensive and so the decision was taken to bring it to a close in favour of dedicating resources to areas of provision that would reach more organisations. However, expansion is controversial and arguably changes the organisation in subtle and less subtle ways. Deciding on ‘the limits of growth’ is a controversial area that nonetheless holds consequences for sustainability.

The Monitoring, Evaluation and Impact: Making Data Work Partnership

In our previous case study on Community Works we identified how ‘holding spaces’, brokering and facilitation practices brought about interaction within potentially contentious environments. In this case study we take another example of brokerage that introduced an additional dimension to the work of supporting groups to develop skills in monitoring, evaluation and impact measurement. This case study begins with a key example of brokerage practice undertaken by Community Works and the University of Brighton's Community University and Partnership Programme (Cupp). The practices of collectivising university-based, academic researchers and the practices of collectivising the diverse needs of VCS organisations bring different challenges, yet they share similarities that we discuss later in this book.

In 2014, Community Works approached Cupp to ask if there were academics who would be interested in responding to a need

they had identified among their members on how VCS organisations could evaluate their work more effectively. This was partly in response to a then recent move towards impact assessment or measurement (for example Inspiring Impact, a collaborative encouraging charities to share ideas and learning about evaluation). Two academics co-designed a workshop with Community Works and trialed this with VCS organisations in December. The workshops were free and well-attended given how little time service managers and Chief Executives in the VCS have for training and professional development activity. The workshop format allowed 90 minutes for discussion at the beginning of each session during which groups were asked to describe: what it is their organisation or service does; what the core values of the organisation are; and how far the way the service or organisation works with data is consistent with core values. This approach was informed by a premise shared by most examples of how strategy development takes place in management education literature, which routinely emphasise the need to start from a common starting point or set of shared values.

What was not known in advance was that within this 90 minutes of discussion, individual groups who had not shared information on evaluation strategy or methods before, cited very similar concerns. They spoke about how they worked with data in their organisations and how much of that work was not the product of strategic thinking on their part or focused around 'knowing their services better' in order to innovate and improve. It was carried out in response to funder and commissioner requests for data. Ordinarily attached to individual contracts these requests were siloed and focused around the use of questionnaires to produce quantitative data in the format of 'outcome measures'. Positioned as a progressive move on the part of national audit bodies and policy makers, outcome measurement was understood to move evaluation on from a simple description of activities or a basic count of outputs. Outcome measurement is designed to assess the effectiveness of service delivery by asking services users directly what kinds and level of improvement they

experience. Impact assessment aims to take individual outcomes and position them within an overall theory of change or narrative concerning ‘the difference’ organisations are seeking to make within the setting they work and beyond.

The problem that groups described was that for their own financial sustainability and resilience they needed to draw on a range of different funding streams and sources. Each funding stream brought with it distinct requirements for data collection and outcome measurement.

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An organisation who attended one of the workshops described this situation as follows:

I think there is a movement of people in the community and voluntary sector and within universities as well, starting to question whether the amount of data that is collected is actually proportionate and also appropriate. Are the questions we ask of service users appropriate? Sitting under that heading of data burden. Because it can feel quite a burden that we are having to collect an enormous amount of data on people, and how useful is that data and how is it being used? With every little pot of money there will come monitoring requirements and every little bit of money wants its own response to that, so it can be quite easy to get caught up in a lot of data collection and feeding back for quite small pots and it’s trying to align those so that from the point of view of the service user, they are getting a smooth service, but behind the scenes is quite a patchwork approach with us trying to make sure that it is as aligned as possible. (Sophie Gibson, Women’s Centre)

The pressure to collect data was not only described as absorbing organisational capacity but as intruding on the care, support and

advocacy organisations were trying to engage in with people in need of support.

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For example, our aim to produce contacts that will lead to social connection, therefore reducing isolation among mothers of babies and pre-school children. The contacts that take place are voluntarily brought about by mothers and from our side each contact will be carefully thought-through and crafted. When contacts are made obligatory, through insisting mothers attend a course for example, they have been shown not to work. But how do we report 'compassion' for example? We aim to talk to mothers, explore their life circumstances, build confidence by drawing attention to what they are achieving, find out from them what it means to feel happy and safe, build their confidence in the happiness and safety they are providing for their child. To give you an example, a mother comes into the drop-in centre with baby in a pram. She is standing in the corridor crying. We have never met her or her child before. Our first task is to show compassion and support for the mother, to see what her needs are and listen to the circumstances that have brought about this situation. If mother comes back again we will take the opportunity to draw baby's care into the conversation and gently relate the needs of the mother with the needs of the child. Clearly, in these moments, that space in which a connection is or is not formed is incredibly important for both mother and child. What happens in that moment will have a direct bearing on if the mother makes subsequent contacts. It's inappropriate for us to do anything other than work compassionately and professionally with that space. It is inappropriate to burden that encounter with data collection. We may be able to collect a name and address but even the need to do this is secondary to establishing a connection with the woman. If she returns, then there is perhaps an opportunity to focus more on the child and 'how baby has

been'. Focusing on the child can restore mother's confidence in what she is giving her baby and help her focus on where she feels she needs support. (Making Data Work, Workshop Transcript 4)

There were moments or 'encounters' when requirements to collect data intruded on the relationship-building practices that sat at the centre of what groups were trying to achieve. It was not only the timing but the type of questions asked to whom:

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You can't do it with people recovering. There is often hostility towards conventional services and forms of interaction associated with those services like sitting across a desk answering forms. This comes from what is often a long history of those services not being willing or able to be person-centred. You have to be unconditional and empathetic. Questions put the barriers back up again. To drop into that trusting relationship is hard. Answering the questions funders want us to ask, as part of the interactions we have, is not going to work. You can't even begin to broach most of those subjects. (Making Data Work, Workshop Transcript 3).

There were also questions concerning whether questionnaire based data collection designed to collect data from services users 'could ever' capture the complexity and situation-specific nature of the challenges people faced and the positive improvements they experienced.

What we do is nebulous. How do you measure human interaction? There are the clinical measurements. We can record

footfall, sales. But things like the interventions? You can change someone's life with one conversation. How do you capture that? How do you measure the trajectory of someone's recovery? There is a national data collection recording system. With that you're supposed to capture every single little intervention, every single encounter and conversation but that's not how we work. With that kind of system you ask, 'on a scale of one-to-ten how much have you changed your life since we last spoke? How much have we helped you changed your life?' And there is this huge focus on confidence and isolation. How do you ask people about those issues in way that doesn't automatically distance you from them? (Making Data Work, Workshop Transcript 6)

In order to collectivise and take forward these experiences, the academics who led the workshops applied for ethical approval to collect verbatim notes from the workshops. Groups had to be assured that confidentiality and anonymity would be respected as many were concerned that if they voiced these issues to their funders directly they would be seen as uncooperative. On the basis of the workshop notes, a position statement (Darking et al. 2016) was written that aimed to draw attention to the issue of community data burden by highlighting the need for appropriacy, proportionality and dignity in data collection. In a later version of the workshop, focus was directed towards the forms of community data practice that were valued by organisations as important to connecting with and knowing the people they support and work with. The workshop encouraged groups to use the position statement to initiate a discussion with commissioners and funders at the point monitoring and evaluation requirements were agreed. A related symposium brought together provider groups, commissioners, funders and academics encouraging further multi-stakeholder discussion of these issues.

A former Chief Executive of Community Works described the project as follows:

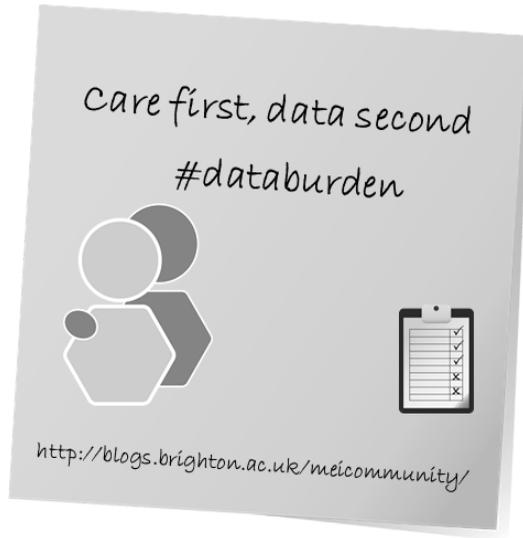
Over the last couple of years we've worked closely with the Community University Partnership Programme at Brighton University in supporting the sector to develop its skills, abilities, capacities around monitoring, evaluation and demonstrating its impact. So there's been a series of training and learning opportunities for our members and also a couple of symposia where we've brought a lot of people together including academics to reflect on how monitoring and evaluation is within the sector at the moment. And that work coincided with the Learning Programme and led to a full and robust conversation about what is acceptable in terms of organisations needed to ask their service users questions about how they have benefited from a service and the resource that takes up for organisations and the ethics of it in terms of interrogating the service user many times, asking them potentially inappropriate questions. Funders requiring different questions to be answered and how much of a burden that is placing on a community and the organisations working with the community and with the university and our members we produced a position statement collating all of that information in one place which came to one of the social value learning programme sessions for commissioners and others to consider and has gone on from there to be taken up and considered in other areas. (Sally Polanski, former CEO Community Works).

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The Making Data Work project and questions of community data burden featured prominently in the workshop series. The phrase 'data practice' came to be used intuitively by VCOs and academics alike,

enabling them to raise a range of issues about the ways in which data is performed and enacted.

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Darking, M., Marino, A., Prosser, B. and Walker C. (2016) 'Monitoring, Evaluation and Impact: a call for change', Position Statement, January 2016. Available [here](https://blogs.brighton.ac.uk/meicommunity/files/2016/04/Monitoring-Evaluation-and-Impact-Position-Statement-Jan-2016-with-SSPRC-logo-1a7e901.pdf) [https://blogs.brighton.ac.uk/meicommunity/files/2016/04/Monitoring-Evaluation-and-Impact-Position-Statement-Jan-2016-with-SSPRC-logo-1a7e901.pdf]

What we learned: hidden practices

Introduction

Care practices

Valuing, measuring, caring: the ethical
dilemmas of making data travel

Brokering practices

Reflections and inter-relations of
caring, valuing and brokering as a
'nexus of practice'

Introduction

In this section we reflect on how practice approaches drawn upon in the seminar series help us to think about the case studies presented in the previous chapter. Our interest in what kinds of concepts usefully travel 'within and between' academic-community discussions is maintained here. Here the key concepts are identified as practices that we found value in articulating together over the course of the seminar series and in the writing of this book. From an academic point of view these practices play the role of boundary objects (Star 2010) meaning that they were simultaneously 'sufficiently stable' and 'sufficiently flexible' to facilitate shared conversation around practices of care, practices of valuing and practices of brokering. These were the examples of 'knowledgeable collective action' that forge 'relations and connections' (Gherardi 2009) that appeared most relevant to articulating what is of value but hidden in VCS work.

Despite offering powerful presentations and in some cases achieving social change at a national scale, the organisations and groups we spoke with routinely referred to the difficulties they experienced in communicating the importance of their work to policy makers in particular. In their own distinctive ways and for different historical reasons their practices were fundamental to their work yet unrecognised. This is an important paradox to dwell upon especially at a time when the 'community' sector occupies such a central place in health and care policy. Academic authors have written about

'invisible work' (Bowker and Star 2002) and 'absent presence' (Law and Singleton 2005) in an attempt to speak these phenomena and these terms resonated strongly with VCOs.

Working with people who are marginalised there is a sense that people and their needs are routinely – spatially and conceptually – 'pushed to the edge' as described in other scholarship (Wacquant 2008, Tyler 2014). Supporting people who experience this marginalisation means, to a significant though lesser extent, sharing this position with them, such that whatever difficulties they experience in having their situations acknowledged will be shared by the organisations who support them. However, by taking a practice approach to empirical enquiry and re-immersing ourselves in the detail of the everyday, the materiality of what people do, the spaces they create and work and the various flows of time their practice follows we felt we were able to move toward an account of some of the hidden practices in which VCOs engage. What we are keen to avoid is a 'romanticised' or uncritical account of either VCOs or community. On the contrary, while we see social action as a field in which individuals and groups organize with the implicit or explicit aim of bringing 'change for the better' we assume that what constitutes 'betterment' to be situational and contested. Nonetheless, as a counterpoint to separate, programme-based interventions that characterise statutory bodies' approach to health and (social) care, for example, the VCOs on the whole offer a more person-centred and social perspective that we seek to explore further.

This chapter goes on to describe specifically what we mean by practices of caring, valuing and brokering as VCS activities that may suffer this marginalisation. Whilst we distinguish these practices in our analytical framing we attempt also to draw out their inter-relationships as part of a 'nexus of practices'.

Care Practices

One of the easiest practices to identify and agree as being mutually valuable was the concept of 'care as practice' or 'care practice' as it is referred to. We noted previously that this is a topic that has been articulated most clearly in work by Mol et al. (2010) with particular focus on the case of care practice in homes, on farms and in clinics. The authors in that collection declare a commitment to using these cases to find a way of valuing and hence defending these practices.

"We seek to give words to things (events, habits, frictions) that have previously been unspoken... Perhaps when articulated, when put in so many words, care will be easier to defend in the public spaces where it is currently at risk of being squeezed. Perhaps care practices can be strengthened if we find the right terms for talking about them." (Mol, Moser and Pols 2010: 10-11, their emphasis).

This was a commitment that resonated with participants at our first workshop. Members of very different organisations could share a sense that their caring work was all too often invisible and hence underappreciated by funders. Community and voluntary sector representatives described a sense that the pressures of applying for

funds, and the monitoring and evaluation that followed, crowded out the real purpose of the organisations, which was to engage with people and places in a caring way. They talked about the time and the space it takes to care, the 'care-full' work of establishing relationships with volunteers who may also be service users and the practices involved in relating to people coming to an organisation for advice, support or food. Vicky Singleton's presentation elaborated on this through stories from her fieldwork conducted in services designed for people living with alcoholic liver disease. Much like Mol et al (2010) she found a sensitivity and flexibility to care practice within this case that she wanted to celebrate.

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Yet this was not a simple point of departure for our discussions. We shared feelings of discomfort about some of the 'baggage' of care as a term, including the risk that it romanticised some activities, and elided important differences between practices. Nadia Edmond, one of the seminar series co-investigators, said she was a little worried about using the term 'care' to think about 'education'. They might come together in early years education but perhaps care should not be the focus later. She noted there were other forms of care practice that did not create a 'subject' such as caring about your work. Others introduced phrases from the 'ethics of care' literature like 'caring with, not caring for' and referenced terms like autonomy, rights and empowerment. As Barnes (2009) and disability rights authors (e.g. Shakespeare 2000) discuss, care is and has been a controversial topic and there remain very important issues being played out across the health and social care literatures around what is gained by emphasis on individual empowerment, and what might be lost. To be 'in care' or within the 'care system' is still seen as a potential source of additional disadvantage and marginalisation. In universities special programmes seek to acknowledge this by generating activities to support 'care leavers' as a specific category of students. We acknowledge that the use of terms like 'care' and 'empowerment' is contentious and that their definition and ensuing battles over meaning are important.

In the section on 'care practices' that follows we will try to be attentive to these issues and tensions, whilst also drawing attention to the positions we shared.

Practices of caring for and with space

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Drawing on Shove, we are reminded always of the material and the first and most important that emerged across numerous cases was the question of space. This engaged all the organisations to some extent who looked for spaces to meet, spaces to work and spaces in which to bring people together. In our own practice we spent considerable time thinking about the right spaces to allow academics and voluntary sector groups to connect – choosing community settings, or academic rooms accessible from the offices of known groups, with breakout areas and space to talk as well as larger spaces in which to come together and listen to presentations or watch videos.

Finding, organising and crafting spaces that bring together diverse groups of people was an important area of practice identified by VCOs. Due to its significance 'having space' was enviable and in our discussions the Sussex Peer Support Network described another partner as having 'the luxury of its own building'. The Real Junk Food Project talked a lot about looking for spaces to store and serve food salvaged from supermarkets and other shops. In Brighton and Hove, spaces were found in churches and community cafes already found in the city's parks. The Hangleton and Knoll Youth Project told us about the importance of the community-based room they use where a kettle could always be boiling, toast and spreads were on the side or in the freezer and chairs were available to sit and talk. Young people used this room as space to come after school and in their feedback routinely referred to its significance. In other examples, informal use of space was a somewhat sensitive question that groups preferred to remain veiled in case they were made subject to the same requirements as larger, better-funded organisations.

VCOs also expressed a spatial sense of the city as a whole; as having spaces where care was more needed, or could happen in particularly productive ways. The Hangleton and Knoll Youth Project noted that their estates were often referred to as being deprived or in need and that young people had come to identify with this. But it could also be imagined as part of Hove – a more socially mixed area. New Cross in London was similarly associated with very high material deprivation, but had pockets of affluence, not least the privilege represented within the Goldsmiths University community (teaching and learning spaces, but also students renting rooms).

Celebrating parks as green spaces and as social spaces allowed for links between practices to be made visible. Both the Real Junk Food Project and a wider Brighton and Hove Food Partnership saw parks as resources – spaces for cafes but perhaps also growing food. In their development of the Green Spaces Network, Community Works gave added visibility to these projects and their inter-relationships therefore highlighting the value of parks, green spaces, the network and the VCO organisations involved. In Hangleton and Knoll the youth project worked not only in its office, but also bus stops, gardens, verges across the estates. Here, we see that one of challenges that VCOs face in articulating what they do, in the fact that their practices encompass a range and scope of inter-relationships which do not 'fit' conventional categories. This is a problem in academic practice too where a number of authors highlight the deficit created when human-human practices form the focus of enquiry, to the exclusion of other relationships, practices and material forms. They refer to the need for us to develop a posthuman orientation (Gherardi 2017) which in our examples would include, for example, the waste food, green spaces, plants, cookery practices and toasters that form part of our accounts.

Like parks, libraries have a history that moves from private funding (philanthropy) to public funding, which is now under threat. Just as in Brighton and many other cities, parks are getting less from the council and are appealing for voluntary effort, libraries have been

closed or threatened with closure, or 'rescued' but often painfully, through community action. The New Cross Learning example is a story where the council saw economic value in the library site, but it was social action that re-established it as a space for community practices. Forged through activism, fed in part by proximity to the Occupy protests and Goldsmiths, University of London, the library as a community project became a space where people could organise campaigns to save a local hospital. Here the space absorbed and hosted social action and people in need, performing new versions of 'service' and support, and galvanised new practices that referenced embedded practices of protest and social transformation.

Practices of caring for or with people

In caring for people, responding to need, VCOs drew on other and different models and traditions. Prominent among these was 'person-centred care' or a 'person-centred approach' as a practice label. In professional work – for example in social work – this may be codified as tailoring a person's care to their interests, abilities, history and personality. However it is also referenced in the voluntary and community sector for the commitment to seeing people as embedded in wider relationships and engagements. They referenced a commitment to 'holism' which they thought was lacking in professional, largely sectoral, working. Statutory services based around health (even specific conditions), social care, housing etc. as separate brought the risk of fragmentation. From a practice perspective this can be translated into a sense of the diverse materials, skills and meanings brought to bear when one starts caring through engaging with the detailed, everyday problems of an individual / service user and their membership of social groups. In the community library case where technologies could be used to count people entering or borrowing books, library volunteers were able to respond to people as whole persons, to help some get online, to notice that someone needed advice about housing, food or

immigration issues, and to help signpost appropriate and accessible sources of advice and support.

At the same time our partners elaborated on possible tensions that arose when trying to interpret care practices in relation to possibly quite different meanings. Speaking about the Hangleton and Knoll Youth Project Helen told us about some of the clashes in the ways they worked and the moves between 'individual' and 'community' lenses.

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"We are organisationally funded by a multiplicity of funders so we present our work in different ways to different people, but in a general way we would say that we aim to support young people to have a voice in their community on the issues that affect them; to give young people the opportunity for positive involvement and recognition."

Here the practices of community work brought a set of meanings around the push for social justice, the idea of community development, and working with a group. Recent funding moves were felt to bring an emphasis on 'individualised outcomes for young people', the notion that young people as individuals need to 'have their problems solved, to gain something', which was very different to a 'traditional' collectivist youth work focus. However in the course of our project the Brighton and Hove Council proposed making deep cuts to youth services. Young people organised as activists, engaging in practices such as marching and gathering more than 2,000 signatures on a petition, and created so much pressure that the Council thought again and rewrote the budget.

We have noted that several partners specifically located themselves around the practice of 'peer support'. Peer support was not the same as professional care, nor the same as friendship or comradeship. It was described as having a different meaning ('ethos')

but we also observed how far it was enacted through and with material resources, especially space, as well as 'comfy chairs' and the embodied competences of those positioned as 'peers'. This reference to peers was important. In *Care In Practice* Mol et al. (2010) argue that they want to rescue care from false dichotomies between professional care dismissed as paternalistic or care as an 'innate human capacity or something everyone learns early on by imitating their mother' (2010: 12-14). In referencing 'peer support' VCOs also refused this dualism, celebrating care practices that were non-hierarchical, resting not simply on a notion of 'natural love' but on concrete embodied experience and connections that evolve in practice, but do not need to be codified or credentialled. Members of a Mothers Uncovered group share their experiences, facilitators extend from an appreciation of mothering practices, to strengthen and sustain them with another set of reciprocal practices – telling stories, talking through experiences, drinking tea and watching children play or calming fractious babies. The invisibility of everyday mothering is referenced in Naomi Stadlen's (2005) book *What Mothers Do especially when it looks like nothing* – in a group the practice is celebrated through other practices grounded in women's sociality, and supported against top down or expert instructions. In mental health this opposition was even more acutely felt. In the Sussex Peer Support Network grassroots mental health groups might sometimes define themselves through survivorship, having been through professional biomedical treatment or 'clinical care' they also sought to celebrate personal 'peer' contact as an alternative model. Here 'peer support' is not just another form of care, but meant to be disruptive and developed in opposition to professional practice. VCOs may choose to celebrate maternal care practices, and oppose professional ones quite consciously. As academics we could acknowledge this is important to them. We might also notice, as pointed out by Bente Halkier in our London workshop (see also Halkier 2017), how on occasion campaigns and materials from the voluntary and community sector that looked too 'professional' might

be associated with 'commercialisation' and viewed with suspicion by ordinary people.

Even so, this confrontation is now challenged itself by the new practices of the public sector, not least practices of cost containment as well as evaluation that threaten to co-opt 'peer support'. This makes a space for peer support to find funding and recognition. Yet the SPSN evaluation work had to be framed carefully to seek to join a growing body of literature on the clinical effectiveness of 'peer-to-peer' work in mental health, for example through randomised controlled trials and systematic reviews. Peer support may be at risk of being exploited as a way of supplementing or even replacing the provision of services by statutory bodies. Some similar dynamics were at least possible in the case of student volunteering facilitated by Cupp and the Patients' Association. Nursing students taking these modules were learning that the not-for-profit sector related to the NHS in a complex set of ways – supplementing, enhancing and providing services with direct funding from the public sector. They were also gathering 'skills' from their experience of volunteering to take back to the NHS if they stayed in nursing. Not-for-profit practices observed and engaged in by students were positioned both as different from and perhaps less judgemental than professional ones, but being recruited into these practices also meant taking them back into professional development for the NHS.

Valuing, measuring, caring: the ethical dilemmas of making data travel

In the seminar series our focus frequently returned to questions of 'how to measure' – or rather 'if, when, what and how' – to measure. This was a concern shared by community and academic partners who all, in their own ways, experienced it. Annouchka Bayley's performance art piece in which she put on a 'business suit' and used a 30cm ruler to physically measure two Business Schools was particularly striking in this respect, as were the responses her performance attracted from onlookers. Annouchka used Karen Barad's (1997; 2004) work to make the point that 'how we measure' changes both 'who we are' and 'what it is' we seek to engage. It also directed attention to the 'performance of measurement' and how any performance of measurement has implications beyond the outputs it creates. The performance itself has both ethical and political consequences.

Measuring is a form of valuing or valuation practice. It is a process that includes a set of apparatus or techniques that create 'the measured', 'the measurer' and in most cases produce an output (for

example a length) that is placed alongside other outputs for comparison. However, measuring is only one form of valuation practice and numbers are only one form of output. Often unease about the use of numbers leads to alternative efforts to capture the complexity of other practices. For example, Power (2015) describes how the framework used to assess and compare academic research outputs in the UK is based on 'case study' and 'peer review' rather than metrics and algorithms. Nevertheless, the idea that numbers are the best way to assess or attribute value is dominant within contemporary policy environments and this was certainly the assumption that seemed to underpin the commissioning practice with which VCOs engaged. 'Data' were needed to provide 'evidence' of improved outcomes, and 'data' were numbers. Academic researchers participating in the seminar series used a range of approaches to 'working with data' and strongly rejected the idea that quantitative methods (i.e. the use of questionnaires) were always the most appropriate and effective way of knowing what works (and indeed challenged the simplifications of the 'what works' mantra altogether: see Biesta 2010).

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In academic practice, the question of 'choice of method' and its implications forms the basis of reflections on research design and methodology. Some of those reflections involve selecting 'what' forms the focus of research and 'what' therefore should be articulated. How data is collected and what consent for collecting data is sought is a practical and ethical question that will be assessed by academic peers on the basis of whether what is proposed is fair, just, proportionate, appropriate and needed. Research activities will not be allowed to proceed if they do not meet appropriate standards. Academic researchers are also held to account for their choices in storing and archiving data. When VCOs said in seminars that what they do is "not captured by existing forms of funder or commissioner-stipulated data collection" this suggested to the academics that the methods being used were perhaps not the most appropriate. This would not be an issue if there were limitless time for VCOs to engage in different

forms of data collection. However, this is not the case and organisational capacity consumed by 'data' is organisational capacity that is lost to face-to-face care. VCOs said that the data collected did not reflect what they did and they could not use this information to reflect on how to improve and innovate. Again, this is a problem, given that the social issues VCOs contend with tend to be the most enduring, unjust and intractable.

On these issues, the role of universities and the question of *whether and how* knowledge contributes to valuing and valuation becomes interesting to consider. In this organisational field, practices associated with public accountability become entangled with practices associated with caring and knowing. Much of the work involved in *knowing* whether a service is effective is conflated with *being accountable*. Yet, in terms of how these are performed or 'done' on a day-to-day basis, both become translated into the production and use of mainly quantitative data. VCOs argued that the costs of producing data are forgotten and that on the whole 'what is done with data' – or what we refer to as data practice (Darking et al. 2016) – has been overlooked at many levels.

In the case we include here of the 'Making Data Work: Monitoring, Evaluation and Impact' workshops and symposia, almost all groups felt there was an issue with funder and commissioner requirements for data collection and the siloed, contract-specific, quantitative form these requirements took. They were described as 'disproportionate to the encounter' and involving questionnaire items that were considered unethical or inappropriate to ask. Groups depicted these monitoring and evaluation practices as burdensome, time-consuming and at times disruptive to the relational practices of care they sought to enact. The position statement provided a basis for Community Works to collectivise those experiences which organisations had previously experienced individually, often feeling that it was 'just them' who could not cope.

What became interesting to explore with both VCOs and commissioner-funders at the second 'Making Data Work' symposium,

which formed part of the third seminar in our series, was the idea that a range of choices exist as to what data is collected and how. The value of qualitative data – in the form of interviews, observations or focus groups – and its status as 'evidence' seemed to be almost entirely lost. Yet, in many cases writing reflective notes after speaking with someone in need of support or collecting case studies was seen by practitioners as extremely valid, enabling them to engage fully in practices of relating and relationship-building.

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As well as raising questions about appropriateness and proportionality, groups reported that the 'measures' they were asked to use did not capture what it was they actually did that was important. In this way the measures acted as a barrier rather than a facilitator of organisational learning. One of the main issues was that groups worked in very context- and person-specific ways, orienting their practices around the individual they were working with – discussed above in relation to person-centred care practices. Often the barriers to feeling well, or happy or safe were complex. Addressing one issue in isolation was rarely sufficient. Young people in Hangleton and Knoll Youth Project needed to feel 'safe' from each other (bullying) and others, while other community members needed to be 'safe' from anti-social behaviour. Measuring a set of fixed outcomes limited the range and scope of what can be known about a set of practices. For example in New Cross Learning, measuring a public service with reference to people through the door or borrowing books failed to capture the huge range of other activities and consequences of the library's existence, activities that could be pursued and expanded upon in New Cross Learning as a volunteer-run library. Despite these limitations, formal measures all too often became markers of what it was about the service that should be valued in the eyes of commissioners and funders. Expectations of these groups also shaped practice in other ways. The volunteer-run library developed on the site of the former library – funded and run by the Local Authority – was advised to call itself New Cross Learning, rather than a library, in order to appear as an appropriate

project to receive funding of other kinds. Luckily they only had to buy seven new letters to create a new sign, replacing the 'library' of the original with 'earning'.

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In the Sussex Peer Support Network case the value of peer support was recognised by a number of key stakeholders, and advocacy for the practice became a way through which those stakeholders sought to bring recognition and legitimacy to this field. However, advocacy alone was not sufficient and ultimately it was the apparatus of knowledge production and 'evidence' that were called on to articulate the worth of what it is that peer support achieves. Even so, the relative status of academic research and evaluation were called into question, as was the case study method used which was taken to offer a different calibre of evidence to randomised control trials. Here we see how practices of valuation become bound to practices of knowing and describing. Hierarchies are apparent within these whereby, for example, qualitative case studies may be considered of lower value than quantitative outcome surveys, which are in turn considered inferior to research using randomisation and statistical analysis. The legitimacy of this hierarchy has been challenged particularly where questions of proportionality, appropriacy and access to resource and expertise are concerned. But clearly, for VCS organisations there is more at stake. If there are inequalities between valuation practices, and some practices are difficult to perform without significant funds, some of their work cannot be made visible.

Groups often described how it was hard to attribute value to elements of practice: for example what the people they supported would refer to as the atmosphere of a place or group. In the Mothers Uncovered case we see that creating a safe and welcoming space where interactions with others were carefully mediated and supported was shown to help women experiencing post-natal depression. People benefitting from such forms of peer support would often use words such as 'welcoming' and 'comfortable' on feedback forms. In many respects this went unrecognised as a significant

achievement of the group and was not an outcome that most funders or commissioners would consider worthy of measuring. Yet for many practitioners creating a space in which people who typically found 'getting out of the house', let alone 'socialising with others' difficult, creating a space where they felt comfortable was a huge achievement in itself.

Valuing relationship-building and practices that encourage a movement from isolation to connectedness was also something organisations found particularly hard. In some ways 'the old system' of simply counting how many people attended a group on different occasions might even signify much more than a questionnaire asking about whether an individual's confidence has increased since attending. A similar point might be made about focussing too much on the self-confidence or 'wellbeing' of young people in Hangleton & Knoll in comparison with their collective sense of safety, confidence in their rights (to be listened to, to be respected, to be recognised as having distinct needs and contributions) and ability to organise. In the case of volunteering by students on placements from the Brighton Health Sciences courses, the volunteering experience had to be translated into learning outcomes ticking off a concept 'analysed' and a structure 'understood'. Module lecturers could only gesture to the kinds of value that emerged when people engaged in reflection as a group or in writing – feeling how they had moved from judgemental to non-judgemental practices and positions.

In our fifth seminar, Judith Green reflected on how academics set out to produce 'evidence' on the public's views about street lighting reduction schemes in eight local authorities. She pointed out that important information produced by letters of complaint in the local press was ignored in favour of a survey and qualitative research. A growing body of academic literature seeks to direct analytical attention toward the processes and outcomes of valuation and evaluation (Kornberger et al 2015; Stark et al. 2015), and to ask why some aspects of social and public life are considered 'harder to measure' than others. The implication here is that these aspects must

and can be measured and that this is somehow necessary for worth to be communicated. Certainly, we see the consequence of not accounting for practice in the concepts of 'hidden practices' and 'invisible work' that resonated so strongly with the VCOs. Visibility and communicating the value of practices is important: methods which reduce that visibility and the possibility of shared understanding should be considered problematic.

The question of whether these objects *are* harder to define and therefore value is an interesting one. There is an argument that there is no significant difference, we simply need to apply more effort and produce better tools. However, organisational, critical accounting and science and technology (STS) scholars suggest that there is more at stake (Callon and Muniesa 2005; Jeacle and Miller 2016). For example, it is argued that a tool-based view of valuation obscures important questions of relationality and performativity (Orlikowski and Iacono 2002; Orlikowski and Scott 2013). There is also an implicit suggestion that one optimal tool or process exists, its selection is therefore obvious and it will be used in isolation from any other tool, precluding any controversy that may come about through interactions between tools (Wagner et al. 2006). A tool-based view also veils the fact that valuation is performed by *someone* or *something*, in a specific space, at a moment in time, in a specific situation and that this has a bearing on the relative merit and ethical standing of the valuation produced (Hutter and Stark 2015). When valuation is treated instrumentally, the situation in which it occurs is rendered irrelevant, quite deliberately, in order to support claims that the knowledge produced is context and value-free, which in turn supports notions of transferability, replicability and authority.

Relatedly, Biesta (2010) offers a critique, which draws on STS perspectives, of the notion of 'what works' in evidence-based education policy. He argues that it occludes the kind and the amount of work that needs to be done to create an order in which connections between actions and consequences can become more predictable and more secure. In schools, locating learning physically,

spatially and temporally within specific institutions and timetables; 'ability' grouping practices; curricula staged according to assumed norms; assessment forms that define what outcomes are said to be valuable, and so on, are all crucial means by which the conditions of 'effectiveness' are produced. These processes come to make learning seem a more rational, linear and knowable process whose 'effectiveness' can be gauged, but they have costs, particularly in reducing the complexity of human learning. His argument raises the question of how measuring and valuing practices might fundamentally change the objects they claim merely to capture.

Both VCOs and academics found value in the statement that 'data is practice' and the term 'data practice' became commonly used. This brought an attentiveness to how data are collected, if and how they are analysed, how analytical efforts are consolidated into shareable learning 'for the city' and the fact that there are choices to be made about each of these. Combined with Edgar Whitley's keynote seminar presentation on *Data Practices and Privacy: Exploring dignified community engagement from the perspective of Dynamic Consent* we were able to apply practice-based theorising to 'data practice' in order to look at the performativity of data collection and the ethical issues that arise in both health research and in VCS service provision. Building on this, Judith Green's talk offered inspiration for research methods and sources of data beyond the usual suspects: proposing that academics and VCOs might use the local press, 'intercept interviews' in pubs, shopping centres and buses, and observations to gather different kinds of talk about an issue affecting a community, reminding us that 'different data production practices produce different publics' (see also Green et al 2015, Steinbech et al 2015).

In the next section we show how relationship-building practices have consequences for whether and how the value of practices is understood and can be 'made to travel' beyond the immediate setting in which it occurs. Our shared aim here is to highlight those practices through which mutuality and 'change for the better' are achieved and

to support these to become established principles within community-university co-working.

Brokering Practices

We want to advance a view about brokering practices that brings together an inter-related set of observations from our cases in which questions of scale, reach and power are inherent. Some practice theorists would resist the use of scale as an analytical approach (Mol and Law 1994), whereas others, such as Nicolini (2017), argue that scale can be relevant in relation to some examples. This is particularly the case when we turn our attention to practices that deliberately aim to extend the reach of a specific collective, practice or set of voices. Many of the cases we draw on here describe organisations and projects who achieve their aims precisely by working with, or on the development of, relationships between different sectors or groups of actors. Contract opportunities, research engagement, student experience and the expansion of public engagement activity on the part of statutory bodies in the UK, mean that practices we refer to here as brokering are widespread. However, we would argue that brokerage is different to most conventional public engagement activity. On close examination of our cases, using a practice lens, we see that brokering practices stand in contrast to more instrumental, political and managerial understandings of 'leadership' or 'partnership'. In place of this we see specific collectives taking action to bring groups together, action that is characterized by a humility that stems from not taking ownership or claiming the success of alliances formed. Brokering practice involves the creation

of viable spaces for conversations to begin and be sustained across diverse groups. They support those conversations through facilitative practice and unlike much alliance-forming activity, brokers are likely to step away when the job is done unless invited to remain on account of their trusted facilitative and impartial practice. This is why brokering practices are typically hard to bring into view. In the sections that follow we aim to address this using concepts and key methods from practice theorists and material from our case studies.

Bringing brokering practices into view

Brokering practice in our cases refers to practices that support collectivisation within and across sectors or groups of organisations. We draw here again on Gherardi's (2009: 117) definition: "knowledgeable collective action that forges relations and connections amongst all the resources available and all the constraints present". Collectivisation is a common theme across all our cases, but clearly illustrated with differing nuance. Mothers Uncovered support mothers to come together by offering a space and a way of relating to one another they do not find elsewhere. Sussex Peer Support Network created another version of this by bringing together those who 'do' peer support and using this space to share/build practice that can travel across the network. New Cross Learning offers yet another, with the library reclaimed as a site of grassroots social action, produced through collectivising practices of solidarity and social brokerage. Mothers Uncovered talk about the sense of community and safety they aim for in their group. They hold a space for women to explore issues and agendas however they like – and in different ways (e.g. talk, art, music). In doing so they are withholding judgement and are focused on the outcomes of the women's experience, not 'outcomes' for their group. In this way, MU are brokering a purely facilitative space and holding their own agenda lightly.

Often formalised as partnership development and working, network building, or as consultation and public engagement, our use of the term 'brokering practices' aims to draw attention to those more nuanced aspects of relationship-building that come to light through our cases. In those cases, we see organisations practising brokerage through how they create and hold spaces; the means of facilitating dialogue and representation they enact; and the democratic values they bring to each of these practices. Relationship-building practices are typically identified as brokerage when they occur in stark or challenging situations where diverse and potentially antagonistic stakeholders identify, or are asked to identify, a need to work together for the public good. We associate this with Community Works in particular, not least because their role as an infrastructure organisation explicitly positions them 'in between' different sectors. From this position they respond to different issues produced through the changing roles and responsibilities of the public sector, which is withdrawing from some activities, and how these changes intersect with VCS members' interests and activities. These are often contested spaces, contending with, for example, the consequences of austerity and the impact that has on the council's budget setting process. To do so they explicitly mobilise dialogues between different actors, materially developing and sustaining practices that open channels of communication and develop accountability. Community Works experience both a push and pull to broker in this way. For example, they represent and advocate for their members' needs whilst seeking to offer the 'neutral', trusted spaces needed by public sector partners to adequately 'engage' with community groups and actors. While these practices are essential they are challenging and undervalued.

We identify relationship-building practices as particularly overlooked within monitoring, evaluation and impact frameworks in most sectors. Simply creating a space and bringing diverse stakeholders together is clearly not an end in itself. However, when facilitation practices are sufficient to overcome diversity and power differentials and when interaction is routinized and sustained, there

are grounds for claiming that new collectives or publics are created. In *New Cross Learning*, the practices involved in creating and maintaining the library also create a social space where new connections are made between people, places and organisations. Establishing access to a physical space through the commitment and dedication of two driving volunteers, and to social spaces through the culture and accessibility of the library, contributes to producing a new community, both relationally but also with respect to social action. The engagement module at the University of Brighton is yet another take on this – Active Student brokers relationships with 133 different community and voluntary groups across the region that provide opportunities for students on 23 different courses. This relationship building has developed over a number of years. The growth and reach of these partnership activities has been gradually brought into view with other university staff and decision makers – but this itself involved more paperwork through service agreements, contracts and placement checklists. A further aspect of sustaining these practices is that 'new' arrangements that produce particular types of social action and inform curricula are brought into being.

Embedding brokering

Embedding brokering in contracts and partnership models of working implies a managerialist or instrumental approach. The role of broker could be seen as synonymous with ideas of political or organisational leadership according to which much emphasis is placed on the individual and the policy programme or initiative for which they become a protagonist. By contrast, in our cases, brokers are organisations or collectives, not individuals, and are characterized by their perceived neutrality and impartiality. This status is not instantly attained but is typically arrived at over a period of time in which trust in their ability to mediate in potentially contentious environments has been demonstrated. A further apt example here is *Community Works'* role in facilitating and hosting the Sector Support

Network, a regular meeting of partners across a range of fields. This group originally came together during a period of change. Community Works is the lead partner but is invited by other partners to host and support the network because of this status.

The need for trust that the organisation will not exploit a key position in a network adds to dilemmas and issues associated with expansion and growth as Community Works has experienced. In the example of the Sussex Peer Support Network however, trusting relationships between the network and the university as a primary collaborator appear less assured. The case suggests that VCOs may sometimes feel exploited, for example receiving invitations to speak at conferences where travel costs are not met, or contributions not acknowledged in terms of co-authorship. This raises questions of mutuality in brokering spaces and draws attention to the question of what judgements and compromises are required in maintaining viable spaces for conversation across more explicit power differentials and in particular with respect to knowledge. Further consideration of this dynamic is also necessary for the university engagement module – the careful and routinised partnership working that Active Student practices provides the space and opportunity for the modules to run. However, when students are 'on placement' they build their own relationships and practices which risk doing harm to the university-community partnerships if they do not model Active Student-type practices and values.

In the case of Community Works, occupying such influential territory implies a centrality and reach which again calls for trust on the part of organisations that this power will not be claimed or monopolized. Paradoxically, infrastructure organisations such as Community Works can find that whilst their brokerage capacity may increase, the demands of neutrality can create dilemmas when engagement in key issues is important to advocacy on behalf of the sector in which they are based. There are inherent dilemmas therefore in achieving scale. In contrast, for smaller organisations and collectives such as Sussex Peer Support Network there is less at

stake in terms of engaging in advocacy. “We can stir the pot a little bit, we don’t have to risk losing our funding if we play our advocacy role.”

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In performing the practices of advocacy in which they may be expert, VCOs can consciously and reflexively engage in what Nicolini (2017 and at our seminar) calls reflective critical scalography. Some of that work pertains to disrupting hierarchies of valuation practice and enabling community practices including brokerage to achieve legitimacy. Thus embedding brokering is fraught with difficulty, and there are ongoing dilemmas around achieving scale and visibility versus keeping practices workable and nimble, or whether codifying risks commodification or instrumentality – which we argue would change them.

Brokering practices contribute to relationship-building by supporting the articulation of local or overlooked practices. This contributes to making them visible and to helping them travel beyond the local setting. Making practice travel is an important brokering practice that can facilitate scaling or scalography. However, scaling good practice cannot occur if the practice itself has not been described or accounted for. This is a problem for the type of hidden practice described in our cases not only for local providers and settings but for more ambitious aims to create a caring and just society (Barnes 2012). The challenges of scaling also bring into view some of the interconnections between practices, captured in recent practice theory through the 'nexus' concept.

Reflections and inter-relations of caring, valuing and brokering as a 'nexus of practice'

In our cases, caring, valuing and brokering are not practices that occur in isolation. On the contrary, we see how caring (when care is 'good') can be a form of valuing, through the purposeful ways in which care practices strive to attribute dignity, respect and worth. Brokering practices, in facilitating a 'coming together,' can ensure that smaller organisations' less widespread practices are not overlooked. In caring for green spaces, local residents enabled individual spaces to thrive. However, linking green spaces together meant that those individual spaces became associated with a city-wide articulation of their value and campaign work could be applied to 'all not just one'.

Person-centred care (a phrase used routinely by community practitioners) was a form of care that respected that fact that the challenges people face can be multiple, inter-related and mutually reinforcing. Prioritising this understanding above conventional

service-provider logic of 'we can only help with this' enabled people to adjust their care practice to suit a person's history and current situation. Given that typically these people were facing complex and intractable problems, this was a form of intervention and a form of valuing in itself. In combination with the notion of peer support it also linked caring to ways of acting together that referenced political protest as another form of visibility. In the case of the Hangleton and Knoll Youth Project, such connections could be made within the project office.

In this and other spaces, eating and feeding practices both embodied care and acted as materials for brokering relationships. New bundles of practices could be the result of experimentation, where the food bank became a site for sharing as well as handing out donated food, and talking and caring about the care for food and for bodies that is performed through cooking. New Cross Learning also started to link to a food bank, storing food, and referring people on to this. It also invited in practices associated with activism, framing slogans, making badges or banners, and exploring other activist practices through exhibitions, film showings and talks. Less organised spaces, that linked to histories of community activism, and drew on fewer managerial or bureaucratic practices, might be sites for more flexible and creative combinations.

Being able to imagine and reproduce such spaces, design better services or advocate for people and their situations requires good knowledge and good accounts of precisely what it is that people are doing and experiencing. These accounts need to travel beyond the situations that people are facing to sites where people are able to respond and work collaboratively to make a difference. Universities have a role to play here and it is to this response-ability that we turn in our final chapter.

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Community- University Working

Reflections and future directions

Reflections and future directions

In this final chapter we reflect on what it has meant to work together – on our particular ‘community-university practice’ – and ask what it suggests about future co-working, not only for us, but in the context of the wider agendas to which our work speaks. Here, we look again at the collections of practices we identified as emerging from the case studies. These were: brokering practices and practices of valuing and caring. We do this by asking three questions, each of which is designed to help us engage with these respective collections, or ‘knots’ of practice.

What does our experience tell us about what happens when ‘community’ and ‘university’ work together?

Our experience tells us that relationship-building requires care, effort and diligence, and is rarely straightforward. The relationships created through this seminar series were diverse and built on different histories of people working together. Previously, we identified brokering practices and the work of relationship-building more

generally as 'hidden practices,' meaning that this is a crucial, yet seldom valued or adequately recognised, area of work.

Our experience reinforced our own recognition of the people and organisations who perform brokering, and typically have acted as trusted, impartial yet effective relationship-builders *over time*. In the locality where much of our work took place – the city of Brighton and Hove – we benefited from the knowledge and experience provided by two organisations – Cupp at the University of Brighton and Community Works – which themselves had a shared history of facilitating spaces and opportunities for brokerage. Individuals involved in the project also brought specific associations with them that had developed through their own histories of community-university research and co-working. Some academic partners, particularly those teaching health or social policy related subjects, had found or been granted space to do this work through the development of community-involved courses and modules that referenced 'patient and public involvement' policy agendas. For others, the opportunity for involvement created through the seminar series opened new possibilities for engagement and recognition.

Recognising how important 'spaces' are to brokering was a key learning point for academic partners. Although intuitively and pragmatically aware of this issue, academics' institutional privilege of being able to book rooms across a range of buildings could also mean that this dimension of brokering practice slipped from view. This is an example of how institutions take for granted facilitation effort, spaces and relationship-building work and can assume it to be 'free' of resourcing costs. These assumptions can be challenged or reinforced when such activities are referred to using vocabularies tied to particular policy landscapes, such as: engagement, consultation, public involvement in research. Though this can lead to the allocation of resources and celebration of skills, many statutory bodies, who are required by policy makers to undertake such activities, still do so without the skills or sensitivity required. Such work requires awareness of what it means to build relationships

within a given setting and of the risks that present themselves when such efforts lack authenticity.

On the other hand, it is important to recognise that there are and to some extent always have been, efforts to engage healthcare professionals in particular, in discussions around public engagement, compassion, teamwork, coordination and distributed intelligence and these are currently very much alive (see for example NHS England's 'competencies framework' from [NESTA](http://www.nesta.org.uk/sites/default/files/nesta_pps_competency_framework_june2017_1_0.pdf) [http://www.nesta.org.uk/sites/default/files/nesta_pps_competency_framework_june2017_1_0.pdf]). Current health policy programmes in the UK, which focus on transformation and 'digital health and care', emphasise 'integration' of health and (social) care, and a corresponding need to build relationships. However, here there is concern that these programmes over-simplify the practices through which these ends can be achieved and depict them as 'resource-free'.

In our view, this is an area in which institutions can learn from community through accepting and acknowledging the relevance of brokering practices.

What does our experience tell us about care, support and advocacy in community and university work?

In our seminar series and over the course of writing this book, academic and community partners benefited from an engagement with the idea of 'care' as a sociomaterial practice. Drawing attention to 'what it takes to care' was particularly appreciated by community partners who felt that 'much of what they do' to care for and support others goes unrecognised. This aligned very well with academic work on care practice which identifies care, particularly non-clinical or informal care as 'invisible work'. However, we recognised that along with care, when speaking about the informal care carried out in community, the concept of care practice needs to be extended to

include practices of support and advocacy and recognise historical tensions or oppositions between user-led and statutory services, or between peer or professional work.

The boundaries between care, support and particularly advocacy were also recognised as being tense and problematic. A balance between keeping stakeholders enrolled and the need to at times 'speak out' or campaign on behalf of people and issues, was acknowledged as being hard and on occasions impossible to maintain. This was a tension felt by both community and university practitioners. Two of the academics involved in the cases presented here were told they should no longer work together because of the campaigning work in which one of the academics engaged outside the university. Community partners too had to be mindful of their funders and their political positions when speaking out against policy moves and austerity-driven cuts.

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Collectivising (so that the risk of campaigning was not borne by any one organisation alone) and speaking out on each other's behalf were both practices that were valuable in these cases. At one of the seminars, university partners and Cupp managed to facilitate conversations between commissioner-funders and local VCOs to address issues associated with contract-specific monitoring and evaluation. This took our collaborative practice beyond a straightforward 'exercise' to an engagement through which there was potential for change to be influenced and effected.

In their work on care practices, Mol, Moser & Pols (2010: 10-11) suggest:

"Perhaps, when articulated, when put *in so many words*, care will be easier to defend in public spaces where it is currently at risk of being squeezed. Perhaps care practices can be strengthened if we find the right terms for talking about them."

Our shared view has been that talking about care together has begun an important dialogue through which, locally, informal care carried out in community can receive renewed or additional attention. In order to prevent these practices from subsequently drifting from view, their value and worth need to be firmly established and made to travel, as we go on to discuss.

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What does our experience tell us about valuing 'what happens' and 'what is produced' by community-university co-working?

The time, space and effort that our co-working required was facilitated by the funding we received for this seminar series from the Economic and Social Research Council. With this resource we were able to pay community partners for their time and travel expenses. We were able to pay for hiring rooms outside the university in order to for us to meet in community settings. In other words, we were able to pay for the key resources that underpin brokering practice of 'coming together'. Academic time was harder to account for as it was not a cost covered by our grant. Academics were therefore to some extent dependent on the good will of their institutions and senior managers – on their capacity to appreciate that this was a project worthy of their time, or to comprehend what was happening in terms of broader institutional strategic aims. Over the course of the seminar series this became a source of tension for some academic partners who experienced line management pressure to direct their energies to 'work they were paid for', even in one case being told 'not to bother' with such activities again. However, these experiences of how community-university practice was valued at local, institutional and national levels were highly varied. During the period of the seminar series the Monitoring, Evaluation and Impact Partnership in which Mary Darking and Community Works were central won the

University of Brighton's 2016 'Excellence in Community Engagement Award'.

The unrecognised and unpaid-for work of relationship-building meant that academic partners often felt it was something they had to do in their own time or potentially keep 'under the radar'. In addition, academics in the project realise that this work may fail to produce normatively recognised 'outputs' and thus be marginalised in relationship to a key impact measurement framework for universities – the Research Excellence Framework. Within this framework, our products (such as this book) may not be accepted as being, for example, sufficiently 'internationally recognised' for 'significance, rigour and originality'. As such, the tension of attending to practices in the ways we have, becomes relevant to broader questions of scale and valuation practice.

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Concern over how what we do is valued was obviously something we shared with our community partners and it was through thinking about and challenging 'impact measurement frameworks' and how they manifest that we were able to disrupt 'practices of valuing' in their case. Knowledge practices and in particular 'what counts' as 'evidence and data' was a space in which academics felt very comfortable opening up debate. However, it was through valuing 'care in the use of data' – for example through attending to the ethics of community data collection and use – was a key area of practice that the seminar series contributed to bringing to light. However, there is a potentially more compelling point to make here.

If changing the way we think about knowledge, evidence and data can bring recognition to the practices of care that mean 'so much to so many' in community, surely this is a responsibility – or response-ability – that we need to realise and act upon. This is an area or nexus of practice with which we will continue to engage and 'make travel' through our ongoing co-work with community.

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Appendix

Seminar series summary

Personal reflections on why and how we
came to practice theory

Seminar series summary: the events

Below is a brief list of the seminars, speakers and content of the ESRC seminar series which gave rise to this book. Recordings and presentation slides can be found on the [website](http://blogs.brighton.ac.uk/newpracticesfornewpublics/) [http://blogs.brighton.ac.uk/newpracticesfornewpublics/]

Seminar 1: Spaces to Care – May 2016

The morning session involved our community partners discussing their work, issues and concerns. These included: Community Works, Brighton Women's Centre, Mothers Uncovered, The Real Junk Food Project Brighton, Hangleton & Knoll Youth Project and Brighton Housing Trust.

In the afternoon Vicky Singleton from the University of Lancaster used the work of 'care practice' authors to describe how and why it is that care becomes overlooked and how to address this through use of 'method'. Vicky's research aims to develop conceptual tools that articulate the complexity of the work of caring and the 'productive ambivalence' of publics and practitioners, and to make visible the (often) hidden and unacknowledged practices and

processes through which knowledge/interventions/people/materials are perpetually changing through caring practices, and the implications of this for policy development. She introduced key ideas that frame her work which have also figured in this book – Materiality, Relationality and Practices – shared fieldwork stories and introduced the analytical concept of Critical Caring.

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Seminar 2: Practice theory as disruptive method – June 2016

The second event took place in central Brighton, with Davide Nicolini and Annouchka Bayley from the University of Warwick, and Jeanne Mengis who joined by Skype from the University of Lugano, Switzerland.

Davide Nicolini, Professor of Organization Studies at Warwick Business School, gave a paper entitled *Is small the only beautiful? Making sense of 'large phenomena' from a practice-based perspective*, which discussed how a practice-based sensitivity (which is often pigeonholed as part of micro-sociology and thus deemed unsuitable to deal with some of the big issues of our time) can be used to address big issues and 'large scale phenomena'. He critically surveyed how practice oriented scholars have addressed 'large phenomena' and commented on their affordances and limitations, concluding that practice theory requires us to reconsider what counts as 'large scale phenomena', thus not so much resolving as dissolving traditional dichotomies such as the difference between micro and macro, local and global.

Annouchka Bayley discussed her performance-based approach to the issue of measurement and evaluation.

A collective paper in the afternoon, *'Diffraction in practice and diffraction as practice'*, with all three presenters, drew on the work of Karen Barad to reflect on her statement that "language has been granted too much power" and consider how the material – the

materiality of the body, space, apparatus – actually intra-actively produces the organisation.

Seminar 3: Evaluation practices – September 2016

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Our keynote for this seminar, *Data Practices and Privacy: Exploring dignified community engagement from the perspective of Dynamic Consent*, was given by Dr Edgar Whitley from the London School of Economics who spoke about the ethico-legal requirements of ‘privacy’ in healthcare and biobanking research and his model of ‘dynamic consent’. We explored practice-based theorising from the perspective of ‘data practice’ looking at the performativity of data collection and the ethical issues that arise in both health research and in voluntary and community sector service provision.

This event was combined with the second 'Making Data Work' symposium and brought service managers, volunteers and commissioners from across the region's voluntary and community sector together. At the end of that seminar the local authority commissioner for community engagement tweeted her support for addressing #databurden. Following the seminar in the afternoon was the second 'Monitoring Evaluation and Impact (MEI) Partnership' Annual Symposium, which looked at progress made on the 'community data burden' position statement, discussed our collective 'toolbox' for knowing communities better and looked at ways to progress dialogue with funders and policy makers on how to make data work for communities.

Seminar 4: Practice theory for social change – December 2016

This seminar took place in Sheffield where Margit Keller from the University of Tartu, and Matthew Watson and David Evans from the University of Sheffield related ways of using practice theory in

conversation with policy makers or other people trying to effect social change. To what extent does practice theory help understand how and why practices recruit people, how new practices emerge, thrive and travel and why others fail to ‘catch on’?

Matt discussed *Lessons from practice theory for tackling energy demand* considered what a practice theory approach means for seeking change in the context of home energy use, drawing on his current projects. Seeing energy consumption as part of a nexus of interwoven practices, he argued that we need to understand the practices of policy and other institutions as much as of householders to tackle thorny issues that are bound up in much more distributed sets of relationships between practices. David's talk on *Theories of practice and policies for sustainable consumption* reflected critically on the practical applications of practice theories with policy makers. Margit's talk *Making practice theory practical: reflections and hands-on experiences from Estonia* touched upon the strengths and weaknesses of (a version of) social practice theory from the point of view of policy makers and various change agents.

These talks were followed by a workshop, led by Margit and Peter Jackson (University of Sheffield), which allowed us to work through how to draw on practice theory when trying to develop and implement changes, drawing on local examples.

Seminar 5: New Publics and Practice Approaches – January 2017

The fifth seminar was held in London at the London School of Economics, with Judith Green, King's College London, and Bente Halkier from the University of Copenhagen. It considered the contribution of practice theory to thinking about civil society organisations' work of campaigning, fundraising and advocacy, processes in which they try to create particular versions of the public as a focus for their activities, for different purposes and in different ways, and all the while operate in a context where the boundaries

between private and public services are being redrawn, and the distinctive space of 'civil society' or even 'community' action is narrowed. The seminar explored what practice-based approaches can teach us about these activities and this context, considering where, if and when practice theories might bring new understanding for the sector.

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Judith's presentation, *Finding and producing 'the public': reflections from a project on street lighting* explored how different research practices generated different publics and different sorts of expertise, discussing how 'publicness' is performed and the limits of practices of consultation. Bente's talk *Looking for and producing 'public engagement': citizens' connections with public issue campaigning* discussed a Danish research project on citizens' relations with public issue campaigns. It considered when and how different campaigns make connections with citizens and debating the contribution of practice theoretical perspectives to understanding the challenges of 'civic engagement by invitation'.

Personal reflections on why and how we came to practice theory

Dave Adams

Practice theory has allowed me to look in a new and interesting way at organisational practices that I believed were set in stone.

Helen Bartlett

Practice theory made me think about *how* to think about things differently.

Sara Bragg

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I came to practice theory in part because it helps move away from making individuals centre-stage in accounts of why society, and more specifically in the case of my research interests, schools and classrooms, look the way they do, which can end up ‘responsibilising’ individuals for issues over which they have little control. It speaks to my frustration about sometimes using abstract concepts like ‘neoliberalism’ as the end rather than the start of a conversation. I like the invitation to develop richer descriptions of what’s involved in everyday life, including the role of ‘things’ and ‘stuff’ and ‘mess’, and how all these relate to and entangle with each other. Maybe its rejection of simplified, rationalistic accounts of human behaviour resonates with my interest in psychoanalytic approaches, which also depict human consciousness as only the tip of the iceberg of what drives and shapes us (to pick up a theme / image from the series).

I was not really aware of 'practice theory' as a scholarly domain until I came across the New Practices for New Publics seminar series. For me this opened a door into a space to think and discuss with like-minded others what is involved in 'doing' the work of social and academic practice. The interdisciplinary roots of practice theory particularly chimes with me, as I have spent my career traversing professional borders between frontline community and public sector work in both social care and libraries, as well as academic borders between humanities and social sciences. So I experienced the first 'Spaces to Care' seminar as a novel and welcome 'space to fit', have since greatly valued the opportunity to learn from the co-investigators of the project on how to weave the various strands of practice theory into my work. Finding new and interdisciplinary ways of communicating the value of libraries to diverse academic, public and policy audiences is vital in an age of austerity, and the community of practice that this seminar series has offered is enabling me to do this.

Mary Darking

I am endlessly interested in simple, creative, beautiful things that happen in difficult or challenging circumstances. Devoting time to describing these things, in detail, particularly where other people don't seem to have noticed them, is important to me. I don't like Theories or even 'theories' but I do like describing and then linking those descriptions up or making them visible in ways that make a difference. That is my practice.

Ceri Davies

I'm really enthusiastic about giving voice to the everyday nature of what people do. I have often felt, certainly in social theory, attention can be lost to these 'mundane' things, and actually to me that's where lots of my interest is – in particular because of the harm that can be done by not dealing with difference, and not valuing what diverse ways of doing and being have to offer, especially to questions of social change. I've always been a resister, or critical of the 'grand theory' – the one thing that can explain it all, especially when my own life, work/research and voluntary experiences have also pointed to the value and necessity of different ways of doing and knowing. I find that practice theory gives this a language, attention and legitimacy. It also gives me lots of space and freedom to think through ideas and issues in ways that disrupt and thus 'free up' traditional ways of thinking – it helps with my resistance!

Nadia Edmonds

My interest in practice theory originated with research into the changing roles and ‘professionalisation’ of certain non-professional roles in education. Discourse perspectives (what Reckwitz (2002) has termed ‘culturalist textualism’) provided a useful way of exploring the changing constructions of these roles at national and local level. However, these approaches maintain a focus on the role *per se* and I became increasingly interested in making sense of the changing role as a contributor to, and aspect of, emerging practices and identities in classrooms and schools. Practice theory provides an appropriate vocabulary for this, describing roles not simply as discursively constructed but as emergent, routinized patternings of bodies, knowledge, things and spaces, which include discursive practices. Involvement in this seminar series has developed and challenged my understanding of practice theory and its variety and complexity and have been particularly interested in Davide Nicolini’s call to apply a practice lens to ‘large phenomena’.

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Mirika Flegg

I like practice theory because it can be used to open discussions with diverse groups. I feel this way because:

1. It breaks down terminologies to meanings;
2. It breaks down theoretical constructs (example ‘Power’) into practices and implications; (therefore has the

capacity to extract “the political” from politically-charged constructs)

By breaking things down to “building blocks” as you could say, means new opportunities to compare/contrast and identify best practices. Not sure if it is doing this, but feel it could.

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Maggie Gordon-Walker

I wanted to do the seminar series to give some ‘clout’ to Mothers Uncovered – i.e validating what we do and explaining its worth and importance to bodies outside of local groups/health service in Brighton.

Also, to provide ‘social value’ type data to be used in funding forms and on reports – especially when we are asked to provide evidence of outcomes and justify our existence!

I 'discovered' practice theory through revisiting social science theories and concepts for my PhD studies where I have been exploring trust and patient and public involvement (PPI) for partnership working in clinical commissioning. In addition, I have had a practice-based strand to my work as a nurse lecturer. For many years I have supported practitioners with work-based learning and delighted in the knowledge and understanding they gain from reflecting on their projects in work to accredit learning as a social practice. It was therefore not surprising that I took an interest in the 'practice turn' in wanting to explain and understand my own research data. This developed through the support of one my supervisors, Kay Aranda, who is a co-investigator for the seminar series. By using a practice lens, I want to move beyond the usual debates of structure and agency, issues of power and representation which pervade the PPI literature. If PPI is to be 'done differently' in the new world of sustainability and transformation partnerships with local health economies, perhaps practice theory provides a different take and understanding which informs leadership and trust practices

Kate Weiner

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I came to practice theory because of my dissatisfaction with the focus on 'behaviour change' in health – it focuses on individuals, putting families, households, communities and material contexts into the background, and because it focuses on individual 'behaviours' rather than seeing these as embedded in and connected with a whole range of everyday activities and priorities. Practice theory helps by bringing attention to the collective or shared and material aspects of everyday life and showing how practices are enmeshed with each other. I had come across various different academic discussions about practice from different perspectives and through the seminar series I hoped I would develop a better understanding of how these relate or don't relate to each other.

Practice theory is getting increasing attention in health, especially versions that pick up from Bourdieu or recent work by Shove. Reading out from there I have particularly enjoyed work by Yolande Strengers and Cecily Maller. Where the Shove interpretation moves from careful theoretical reflection to offering toolkits or 'elements' to be considered by policy makers, Strengers offers me a playful and creative interest in using the references to mundane, material and invisible elements of social life to enrichen policy discussions, often in collaboration with designers. This fits well with other currents in Science and Technology Studies looking at practices of experimentation as novel and disruptive forms of knowledge practice. In that field I am familiar and deeply engaged with the work of Annemarie Mol and Jeanette Pols on care practices, and sought in this project to bring that work into conversation with the work of Shove, Nicolini and Gherardi. I have particularly been inspired by moments where the caring, brokering and evaluation practices of VCOs drew on traditions outside health care or research, including activist practices and repertoires, and creative practice from theatre, art and creative writing.