

**A PRACTITIONER INQUIRY INTO THE CREATION &
APPLICATION OF A CONTEXTUALISED THERAPEUTIC
MODEL TO RAISE THE COMPETENCIES OF YOUTH
FACILITATORS IN SINGAPORE**

A commentary submitted to Middlesex University in partial fulfilment of the
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ABSTRACT

Bringing about change in any field or work domain can be onerous, with no linear progression towards the certainty of efficacy. Regardless, one of the hallmarks of effective clinical practice is to constantly strive towards improved care for clients and this is often accomplished by practitioners expanding their scope of practice through rigorous inquiry to enhance their competencies. In similar vein, the present project, aimed at advancing real-world practice via the utilisation of action research, served as a practitioner inquiry into the creation and application of a structured, transdisciplinary and contextualised model (i.e. Bio-Psycho-Social Work, or BPSw Model) to guide intervention programmes for at-risk youth in Singapore. Furthermore, the model was reviewed to assess if it could be used as a competency-raising mechanism for facilitators of youth work in the country.

Accordingly, it was assessed that the action-reflection steps enacted within the project aided the inquiry into improving clinical practice and training in Singapore regarding work with at-risk youth. In this light, the project is the first of its kind in Singapore (i.e. a ground-up, practitioner-led project concerning youth work aimed at improving practice at a national level); serving as an important contribution to research and practice.

The project utilised a mixed-methods design which was crafted around action research. The latter was selected due to its emphasis on action and its promotion of goal-oriented research. Data reflected findings that met the aims of the project and was used to create a training manual for facilitators (i.e. the project artefact); a reference document that could also be used for anyone interested in working with at-risk youth in Singapore. The value and implications of utilising the BPSw Model, along with the training manual, as a potential therapeutic framework and a contribution to practice in Singapore, are elaborated on and reviewed.

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ABBREVIATIONS / KEY TERMS IN COMMENTARY

Term	Definition / Elaboration
<i>ARY</i>	At-risk youth. The term is predominantly used to refer to the at-risk youth of Singapore; specifically those on the trajectory towards criminality.
<i>BPSw Model</i>	A structured, transdisciplinary and contextualised model created within the project to be used as a therapeutic guide for intervention programmes with ARY in Singapore. The model comprises of elements from the biological, psychological and social work perspectives.
<i>Facilitators</i>	A collective term for professionals in Singapore who work with ARY. They include Teachers, Counsellors, Social Workers, Youth Workers, Law Enforcement Officers (e.g. Police Officers, Prison Officers, Lawyers, etc.) and Programme Coordinators.
<i>Competencies</i>	A measurable set of knowledge and skills, regarding working with ARY. For this project, the term shall only refer to a set of knowledge and skills, regarding working with ARY, as this definition would afford a more straightforward and manageable pathway for inquiry.
<i>The Social Service Sector (the Sector)</i>	The sector primarily responsible for developing and executing intervention programmes for ARY in Singapore. Towards this end, the sector works in close collaboration with the Education and Law Enforcement Sectors, but is generally regarded as the custodian of the function of steering ARY away from criminality.
<i>Stream / Streams</i>	a. Academic categories in mainstream secondary schools that adolescent students are pigeonholed into, to better cater to their learning needs and abilities within the

	<p>Singapore Education System. It should be noted that the categorisation appears early in life (beginning in primary school).</p> <p>b. There are generally three main streams:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. The Express Stream (for more academically inclined students). ii. The Normal-Academic (NA) Stream for less academically inclined students. Students here go through a longer phase of schooling at the secondary level but may still be able to sit for the same final exams as those in the Express Stream. iii. The Normal-Technical (NT) Stream for the least academically inclined students. Students here are generally steered towards vocational education. This stream tends to spawn the most number of ARY. <p>The streams of NA & NT are those that comprise of students who may be less academically inclined.</p>
<p><i>VWOs</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Voluntary Welfare Organisations: a type of non-profit, non-governmental organisation historically empowered with the role of therapeutic work in Singapore. b. They are entities designated as charities and in Singapore, are a collection of different organisations (with different organisational protocols) that make up the Social Service Sector. c. They may receive partial funding from the Singapore Government but are generally one of the least funded arms within the national budget.
<p><i>Raven</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Raven Counselling and Consultancy Pte Ltd is the researcher's primary place of work. Its website and services may be accessed at www.raven.com.sg

	b. The organisation performs therapeutic, supervisory and consultancy work in Singapore. Raven is presently a consultant organisation for a number of schools, law enforcement agencies and Government bodies regarding issues pertaining to Psychology and working with ARY.
<i>Confounds</i>	Any variables that can potentially affect the outcomes planned for. These can even include micro details such as temperature and noise levels.
<i>TA</i>	The Therapeutic Alliance is the alliance / relationship between a healthcare professional and a client / patient. It is generally regarded as the most crucial component in efficacious intervention programmes.
<i>PAP</i>	The People’s Action Party. A political party and the sole ruling party of Singapore since its independence in 1965. The PAP makes up the entire Government of Singapore.
<i>AR</i>	Action research
<i>MMR</i>	Mixed Methods Research
<i>TM</i>	The training manual which serves as a guide and reference tool for Facilitators. Also referred to as “the artefact” within the commentary.
<i>RTP</i>	The Responsible Thinking Process; a therapeutic methodology that fosters critical-thinking and self-discipline. It is a methodology from the Social Work domain.
<i>SSI</i>	The Social Service Institute. The institute is a statutory board in Singapore tasked with training Facilitators to raise their competencies via professional development programmes.

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Please Note For Clarity: All Quotes From Primary / Secondary Sources Or Book Titles, Etc. In This Work Are Illustrated With 'Single' Inverted Commas Whereas All Direct Quotes From The Participants Of This Research Project Are Illustrated With "Double" Inverted Commas.

Chapter 1: The Person, The Practitioner & The Project

'The farther backward you can look, the farther forward you are likely to see' – Winston Churchill

This chapter seeks to elaborate on crucial experiences and learnings I have attained during my professional career that have not only informed and guided my research inquiry, but also my larger goal of wanting to make a positive impact within my community. The chapter begins with a review of my personal and professional development, as well as how such development has intersected with my context to instil within me the eagerness to bring about change for my community as a whole. The chapter then provides insight into the context upon which my project is situated and concludes with a brief outline of the entire critical commentary.

1.1 *The Person & The Practitioner*

Presently, much of my job involves training and guiding local Teachers, Counsellors, Social Workers, Therapists, Youth Workers and Law Enforcement Officers (collectively termed: Facilitators) to attain professional competencies in working with at-risk youth (ARY). For clarity, it should be noted at the very onset that the term *at-risk*, in itself, is not without controversy as scholars suggest it may be laced with assumptions and not without socio-cultural or socio-political implications; often requiring deconstruction (McDermott, Raley and Seyer-Ochi, 2009; Pica-Smith and Veloria, 2012). Whilst the term *at-risk youth* frequently appears in scholarly articles and popular media, the term itself does not seem to have a concise or widely acknowledged definition (Pica-Smith and Veloria, 2012). The definitions of *at-risk* used by professionals were abridged into two directions by Nakkula and Thoshalis (2006, cited in Pica-Smith and Veloria, 2012). They were the foreseeable tendency of moving towards negative outcomes in the future; and the current experience of difficulties that might be psychological, behavioural, or educational. Scholars also point out that in many cases the term *risk* is

understood as being associated with individuals classified as disadvantaged in terms of opportunities due to their racial and / or socio-economic background (McDermott, Raley and Seyer-Ochi 2009). Such an understanding may be limiting and often misleading, which in turn impedes the exploration of a well-conceptualised definition of the term (McDermott, Raley and SeyerOchi, 2009; Pica-Smith and Veloria, 2012). However, these elements are not examined within this project and, for simplicity and ease of dissemination, the term is utilised as it is generally understood within my community; one that is ubiquitously used to classify adolescents who engage in behaviours that have the potential to bring them in contact with the criminal justice system (as elaborated on in [Section 2.1](#)).

Whilst I have never really attempted to structure and understand my development in a linear sequence, undertaking my doctoral research has challenged me to embark on a journey of critical reflexivity; something I have come to see as a crucial tool in enabling me to understand why I believe my project is being undertaken, and how it may contribute to my community. It was not until my doctoral project that I realised the fact that I had actually been using critical reflexivity throughout my professional career, albeit in a more subconscious manner. I shall elaborate more on reflexivity as a concept in Chapter 3. For now, I shall try to shed light on my professional journey within my context via four turning points in my life. Through critical reflexivity, I have come to view these turning points as vital rudiments encouraging Aristotelian *phronesis* as well as elements that have not only contributed to the formation of my personal values and beliefs, but also my professional journey and research inquiry.

1.1.1 *Crisis To Crossroads: Formative Experiences*

I grew up as the youngest child of three in a single-parent household. My father passed away when I was four and after his death, my mother descended into depression. Due

to these factors, I did not have much caregiving and soon began working at the age of 14 in order to support myself. Being exposed to the working world also meant that my education took a back seat while I enjoyed the pursuit of financial stability for myself. The more I earned, the more independent I felt. With the unbridled feeling of independence at such a young age came a worldview that saw me at the centre of all I did; an egocentric perspective that engulfed me with a false sense of bravado and the notion that I was incapable of experiencing harm. These feelings and perspectives soon cascaded into an indulgence in at-risk activities. Reflexivity during the early phase of my doctoral studies allowed me to understand that this may have been the first critical turning point in my life; one that has brought me to my present circumstances.

At the age of 14, I began with odd-jobs such as being a waiter, and then moved onto enterprises that were less than scrupulous or legal, such as being a runner for a gambling syndicate. Whilst in school, my poor attendance meant that I was often sent to attend intervention programmes by well-meaning Facilitators but never found any of them useful. In fact, I continued to be involved in a number of at-risk acts such as gang associations, fights and even minor substance abuse up till the age of 17. The delinquent activities I was involved in often led me to partake in everything from random acts of violence, to participation in various forms of crime; always calibrated to be emotionally stimulating but under the radar so as to ensure no formal authority could penalise me too harshly. While I did feel compunction for much of the activities I was involved in, I noted that such compunction was never really enough to provide me with a true commitment to stop partaking in such activities. I consider this a turning point as I believe my life experiences during the age of 13-17 years exposed me to facets of the real-world that other youth my age were not necessarily exposed to. Additionally, it may have led to the groundwork for contemplation into what it would take for someone

like myself to cease indulging in delinquent activities. As a result, my own need for autonomy, financial self-sustenance and an inherent malaise towards the rigid education system I perceived to be around me, together with a disregard for adult authority further exposed me to the unfiltered experiences of an ARY. I believe this left an indelible mark upon my belief and value systems which subsequently translated into my ontological perspective (to be elaborated on in Chapter 3).

1.1.2 *Crisis To Crossroads: Educational Experiences*

Students within the Singapore Education System are pigeonholed into categories early in life in accordance to their academic aptitudes and potential future contributions to the nation's economy. These categories are termed as *streams* in Singapore. Figure 1.1 illustrates an overview of the Singapore Education System. One aspect that is palpable is the fact that students in lower *streams* (i.e. Normal Academic & Normal Technical) would have to go through a longer process of formal education than students in higher *streams* in order to attain tertiary-level qualifications.

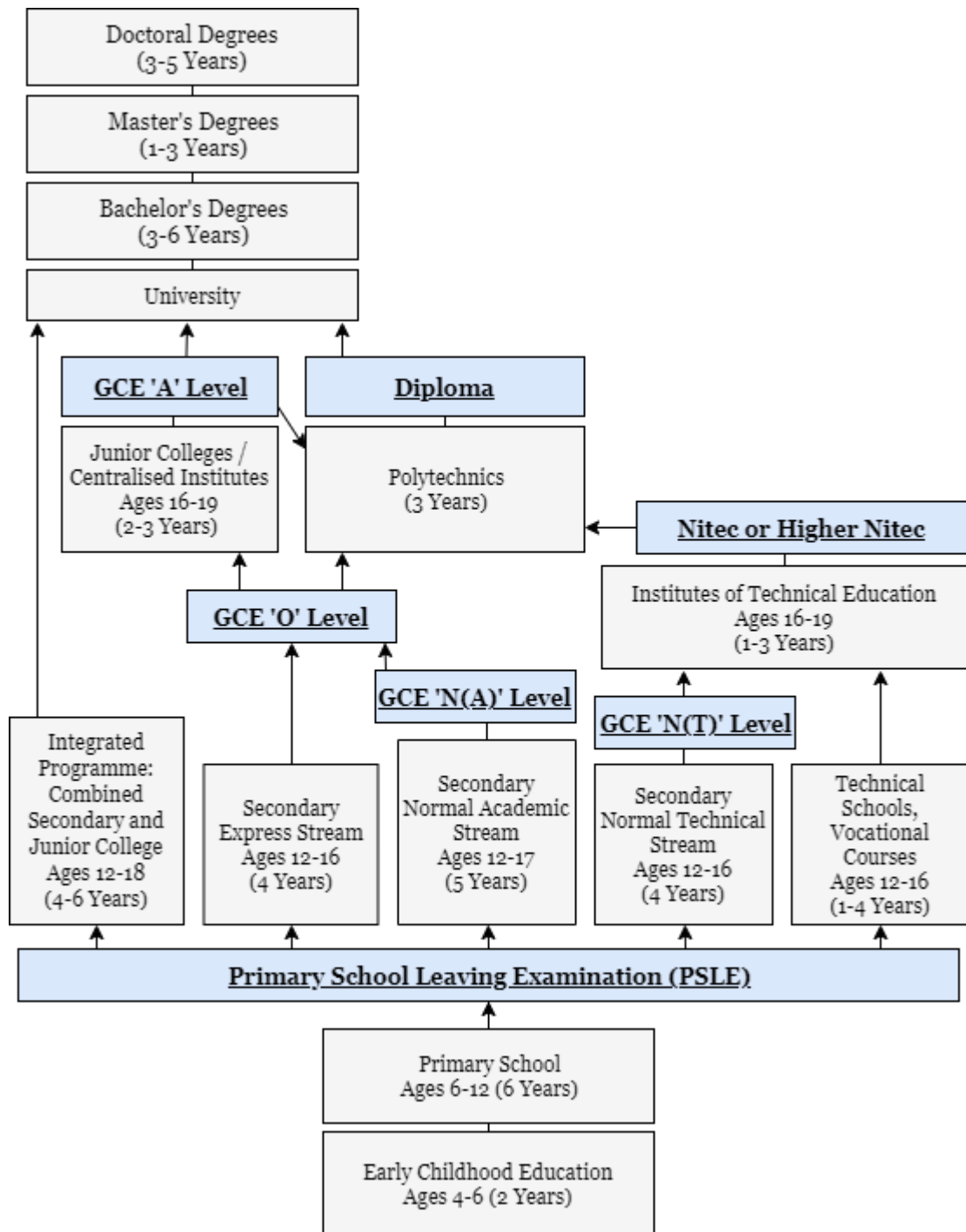


Figure 1.1 Overview Of Mainstream Education In Singapore As At 2020

While in secondary school, I was categorised into one of the lower *streams* due to poor academic performance as a child. With regards to reputation, my secondary school was generally not a very good one, and I got the sense that most of the faculty, as well as the larger community, often held the view that its students would either end up in

vocational studies or low-wage jobs. My second turning point came when I challenged myself to study for my Singapore-Cambridge General Certificate of Education Ordinary Level (GCE 'O' Level) examinations out of spite as many around me commented that I would probably amount to nothing in life due to the *stream* I was in. As noted by Balafoutas, Kerschbamer and Sutter (2012), spite can induce an aversion to being behind others, thereby serving as a strong motivator which significantly increases performance. With spite as my motivation, I eventually excelled in my GCE 'O' Level examinations and even became the Valedictorian of the school. I was also one of the few from my *stream* in Singapore to be afforded the opportunity to pursue pre-university education at a Junior College. I had achieved all of this whilst working part-time in order to pay for my school fees. This achievement was significant for me. For the first time in life, I was imbued with an immense sense of self-efficacy and self-awareness that propelled my curiosity to inquire why I had managed to excel in education much later in life (at the age of 17) as compared to many of my peers, despite the many factors I considered as detrimental to achieving such a state of affairs. I believe my feelings at the time initiated my process of inquiry that has not only impacted my field of study, but also my professional life leading to my current project. For instance, I believe that the curiosity and awareness that sparked off from this moment in my life:

- (a) laid the foundation that has led me to acquire a penchant for observing and analysing phenomena around me with a specific zeal towards trying to recognise themes and patterns that may be prevalent, not only in my life, but in human behaviour in general;
- (b) led me to subsequently pursue further studies in the discipline of Psychology;

- (c) led me to pursue a professional career as a clinical practitioner working with ARY despite starting off my professional life as a Military Officer; and
- (d) led me to my present project which I believe to be an effort to address some of the patterns I have observed in my community.

1.1.3 *Crisis To Crossroads: Early Work Experiences*

After graduating from Junior College with my GCE ‘A’ Levels, I served my National Service (compulsory military enlistment for males in Singapore) and was afforded the opportunity to be trained as a Military Officer in the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF). I then decided to pursue a career as a Military Officer due to its lucrative financial incentives and my desire to save up funds for my eventual undergraduate studies. Joining the military as a teenager taught me many things but above all is a lesson on the importance of being single-minded when it came to attaining goals in life. Perhaps this was because military goals were often clear and precise with the singular objective of winning a strategic battle in a specific context. Being rigorously trained to achieve such goals for a period of around seven years, particularly in the midst of early adulthood, may have moulded my personality to imbibe goal-centredness in ways I may not have realised at the time, but only years later. Research suggests attributes and values inculcated at a crucial stage of development tend to stay with us subsequently, even if contexts change (Roche, Ahmed and Blum, 2008; English *et al.*, 2016).

On the flipside, parts of my work in the SAF made me realise that aspects of my job had the potential to bring about hurt, sorrow and pain to many people regardless of my own values and beliefs. It was a by-product of military work that made me feel very uncomfortable. At the time, being inundated with mass advertisements to encourage a

military career, and being fortunate to be able-bodied to do so, gave me the impression that military service was a noble cause often done for the betterment of society. Whilst not a driving reason, part of my calculus for joining the military, as opposed other work options to save up funds, was a belief that military service was a form of community service; particularly for a small country like Singapore. Festinger (1962) theorised that inconsistency between one's beliefs and actions would create a state of cognitive dissonance which can drive an individual to change either behaviourally or through their thinking to reduce such inconsistency. The inconsistency between my belief in wanting to help my community and the reality of the true nature of my work in the military created strong dissonance within me. I may not have realised it at the time, but such dissonance may have also built up immense feelings of guilt. As Rawlings (1968) noted, guilt serves as a powerful motivator for altruistic behaviours and at this stage, I was ridden with guilt from both my own acts of delinquency during my teen years and my work in the military. Hence, I took the opportunity to study Psychology whilst still in the military in the hope that I could use my education to help others in my community. This served as the main source of formal learning for my adult career and a mechanism that allowed me to switch from the military to the Social Service Sector (the Sector) of my country. I consider the study of Psychology and the switch in vocation the third turning point for me. Studying Psychology filled me with passion. It became the canvas on which many of my earlier reflections were sketched upon and interpreted. I have always tried to understand and interpret human behaviour, trying to be aware of patterns and themes. Psychology provided me the scientific rubrics that guided my thoughts and reflections in this regard. Furthermore, the study of Psychology afforded me an opportunity to exit the military and plot a new career path. By the time I had finished my undergraduate studies, I had become deeply disillusioned by military

service and was longing for a way out. Even though my life would be impacted by lower remuneration and reduced benefits, I decided to join the Sector as I believed it would grant me not only the opportunity to utilise things I had learnt in Psychology, but also an opportunity to give back to my community and be a part of something larger than the day-to-day grind I perceived most adults in Singapore to be going through. In fact Singapore at the time, was often interpreted as a highly materialistic society (Ferle and Chan, 2008; Li *et al.*, 2015); something I never really identified with and wanted to be different from.

1.1.4 *Crisis To Crossroads: The Practitioner Unearthed*

In the Sector, I found myself challenged emotionally, intellectually and physically. However, I found the experiences deeply invigorating and stimulating. Although I had less remuneration and benefits as compared to a military career, I had more contentment and fulfilment. My fourth turning point came when I attained the opportunity, by chance, to conduct intervention programmes for ARY. I had never done so before so I studied the various programmes that were existing. I realised that many of the programmes I studied lacked any real structure and measurement rubrics. They generally comprised of well-intentioned people setting out to mentor youth through a series of dialogues and activities. Consequently, I began a process of observational analysis into existing programmes for ARY whereby I sought to look out for, document, and analyse the following.

- (a) What constituted working for ARY in the Sector (with regards to the provision of services within overarching systems and policies)?
- (b) Why and how ARY and Facilitators behaved the way they did during sessions?
- (c) What motivated ARY who were the recipients of such services?

- (d) What motivated Facilitators who were the providers of such services?
- (e) How prevalent was *praxis* as an extension of *phronesis* in Singapore?

I tried hard to keep my mind open and not to be weighed down with preconceived notions. As I was new to the Sector, this was perhaps easier for me to achieve as my only instinct was towards truth and not towards any cherished hypothesis, ideological underpinnings, theoretical models or Government policy. For my preliminary research, I kept a rough journal since 2005 where I collected data through observation, interaction and reflection. While I did not know it at the time, I realise now that I was actually sowing the seeds for my own manifestation of *praxis* and my doctoral project. At the time, it was just a means for me to try and perform well in a new job I was assigned within a new sector for me. Like a military tactician in my previous profession, I viewed my new task of conducting programmes for ARY as a mission with a singular focus; one that was designed to be more effective than what I was observing within my landscape. In order for a programme to be considered effective I believed:

- (f) it would have to be contextually situated;
- (g) it would have to contain measurable elements for documentation;
- (h) it would have to control for confounds which I took to mean any variable(s) that can potentially affect the outcomes planned for as described by Halperin, Pyne and Martin (2015);
- (i) it would have to be structured in content and timing so that it may be easier to implement and use as a mechanism to instruct other Facilitators;
- (j) it would have to be based on scientific theories;
- (k) it would need to be radically different from what was presently available and what I observed to be ineffective and time-consuming;

- (l) it would need to reflect some qualitative and quantitative data that highlighted positive impact from the ARY's perspective so that such data may be presented to the relevant stakeholders;
- (m) it would have to be agreeable to and usable by most Facilitators; and
- (n) it would have to be flexible enough to allow alterations from the Facilitators' perspective while still possessing a general framework for action with ARY.

For the above points, I was guided by developmental-contextual considerations as espoused by Lerner, Walsh, and Howard (1998); who propose that behavioural interventions should be designed and implemented while paying attention to the various developmental and contextual issues related to the target audience in order to increase efficacies. Witnessing the prevailing programmes for ARY brought me back to my own youth experiences and what I felt to be contextually ineffective when I was considered an ARY myself. Leveraging on my personal experiences, my new-found knowledge of Psychology, and my recorded data, I tried to develop a structured model for ARY programmes and made continual improvements to it. I was basically gathering data and feedback from my observations, reflecting upon it intensely, and working it into a possible theory that I could present to my superiors, subordinates and fellow Facilitators to make the work that we performed more productive and efficacious. The rudimentary outline of a model I conceptualised was received well, and consequently raised revenue for my Social Service Organisation (referred to in Singapore as Voluntary Welfare Organisations, or VWOs) as more and more schools and youth organisations were requesting for programmes to be run by my VWO via my rudimentary model. The perceived success of my work afforded me the privilege of moving from being an Intern Social Worker to the *de facto* Deputy Head of my VWO in a mere four years. I was also offered a scholarship by my VWO to pursue further studies. I believe all of this

was due to the impact of my basic model and its revenue-raising capacity that greatly benefited my VWO at the time. As a result, even though I have since left VWO work, I made the decision to properly research and re-design my model at a doctoral level to explore how useful it could be as a guiding framework to both my present organisation as well as clients and Facilitators within my community. Unlike the time when I was an employee at a VWO, my present circumstances afford me the ability to more accurately research and explore how a contextualised model for ARY in my community may take shape and whether it may be useful for advancing practice for a wide range of Facilitators. This is because I presently serve as a consultant for a number of organisations that work with youth (including law firms that deal with youth crime), and also serve as a clinical supervisor and trainer for Facilitators at a national level.

In summary, my personal and professional development may be encapsulated within the four turning points mentioned thus far. These crossroads of my life bestowed upon me a number of elements which I have used as a nexus between my own professional journey in my context and my doctoral project. I shall attempt to explain the latter in subsequent chapters. Essentially, the four turning points presented me with:

- (o) the development of values and beliefs arising from personal experiences and the reflections accompanying them;
- (p) an appreciation for critical reflexivity and how it may be used for personal and professional development as well as a mechanism of *praxis*;
- (q) a glimpse into the interconnections between political power, industry, social service and human behaviour within my context;
- (r) a critical intersection between myself and my context, both from personal and professional experiences, that served as a catalyst for critical reflection on what I believed to be truth and reality;

- (s) an opportunity to view life challenges as obstacles to overcome as a means of personal growth, and in so doing, understand more about my own views on motivation, guiding philosophies as well as knowledge generation; and
- (t) the determination to pursue a doctoral level project with the aim of laying the groundwork for societal change within my context.

1.1.5 *Researching Personal Development*

As a supervisor and educator of Facilitators, my hope and goal is that examples of good practice on my part may motivate and inspire good practices amongst the Facilitators I guide. The possibility of such a view coming to fruition is supported by Lipka and Brinthaupt (1999). From this notion, what is apparent is that I have to be bound and dedicated to improvements that begin with me as a person and a professional. I then have to reflect examples of good practice to the Facilitators I guide via my interactions with them. The difficulty, however, is to instil in the Facilitators I guide, a genuine passion to develop their own specific talents and potential with regards to performing their jobs with ARY more effectively.

In relation to this, I ascribe to the view of McNiff, Lomax and Whitehead (2003, p. 19) who summarised that the process of education is not limited to solely instructing, but ‘education refers to interaction between people (and other beings) which enables them to grow in life-affirming ways.’

Accordingly, have chosen to consider myself as an action researcher for my project. Inspired by the work of Dewey (1938), action researchers argue that the overarching goal of education is to empower the human form to grow and develop in a multitude of ways, and as such, must be understood as manifest in the relationship between humans

(McNiff, Lomax and Whitehead, 2003). In light of this, I would put forth that the subject of my doctoral project, as shall be elaborated on subsequently, affords other Facilitators and myself, a suitable context for a process of learning and growth. I believe such a context is presently lacking and informs my desire for my project to initiate the spark of inquiry into personal and professional growth for Facilitators in my country.

However, I am fully cognisant that getting to that end point will be challenging as researching personal development in itself can be tricky (Eraut, 2004; Marhuenda-Fluixá, 2018). Accordingly, I would first need to adopt an established framework for the process of my inquiry and for this, I have selected action research (elaborated upon in Chapter 4). Furthermore, in order to be of benefit to other Facilitators and my community as a whole, I would have to go through my own process of learning and growth so that I, myself, would be able to reflect the tenets of good practice. I would have to ask the following questions.

- (a) How do I improve what I am doing?
- (b) How do I assist others to learn?
- (c) How do I combine (a) & (b) to initiate an action for positive change within my context?

Questions such as these are embedded within my project. They are the very essence of advancing practice (what I am trying to achieve with my project) and shall be elaborated on once the context of my role within my project is explained in more detail.

1.1.6 *The Practitioner-Researcher*

For me to explore the essence of how to ameliorate my practice, I took on the dual role of a practitioner (within my field of running clinical intervention programmes for ARY

& training Facilitators), and a temporary researcher from my organisation for the term of my project. For Coghlan and Brannick (2005), choosing a research topic from one's own organisation serves a dual purpose of resolving a practical problem and laying the foundation that the research will make a positive contribution to the organisation. The quintessential objective of my project would be to not only improve the manner by which clinical interventions are done with ARY within my present organisation, but to also have an impact which might improve the way clinical interventions for ARY are done in my country as a whole. As my project is situated within the paradigm of action research, it may be pertinent to classify myself as a practitioner action researcher. Whitehead and McNiff (2006, p. 12) describe this as a process where a practitioner is engaging in:

...purposeful investigation, involving gathering data and generating evidence in relation to articulated standards of judgement in order to test an emergent theory.

However, partaking in research at one's workplace can be demanding and often involves copious amounts of personal commitment. If I want to reflect good practices for my clients, both ARY and Facilitators, I have come to understand that I should be receptive to change and transformation on a personal level, as well as possess the ability to use my project to amplify my knowledge and understanding for the purpose of improving both myself and my practice as suggested by Loughran and Berry (2005). As an action researcher I want to encourage my clients to partake in actions that promote reflection and self-awareness in a process of change and transformation. I believe that Facilitator training needs to be more person-centred, motivating Facilitators to engage in their own development whilst sowing the seeds that sprout self-organisation, curiosity, creativity, empowerment and courageousness.

Ultimately, a Facilitator cannot avoid being a role model and, consequently, wields a great deal of power. As such, care needs to be taken to ensure that elements such as reflexivity are built into the change and learning process in order to lessen the potential for arbitrary action that may cause more harm than good. In my opinion, critical reflexivity needs to be the bastion of cognitive processing around which strategic ideas to implement change are built and this will be elaborated on in Chapter 3. It is the essence of what scholars have termed *praxis* (Alvesson, Hardy and Harley, 2008; Collier and Lawless, 2016). At present, I assess this to be lacking in my country's training of Facilitators as almost all the training sequences are based on a top-down pedagogical model whereby trainers try their best to impart knowledge based on facts and theories normed from a Western (e.g. American / European) cultural context. The entire process thereby becomes one of absorption and attempted replication from the Facilitators point of view, often leading to outcomes which are either hard to measure or do not serve the specific needs of my country. Whilst there are reasons to explain this phenomenon, I shall refrain from going into them in-depth as they are not the central focus of my project.

What I shall try to highlight, however, is the need for a practitioner-researcher within my context to try and spark some change with regards to how Facilitators are trained and how the issue of ARY is addressed. This starts with an understanding of the issue in question, the context (both the minutia and larger specifics of the work involved), as well as a realistic appraisal of the challenges regarding working with ARY in Singapore. There should also be attempts to encapsulate the thought-processes of ARY themselves along with the developmental tenets of *praxis* from the Facilitators part in order to arise at a potential solution that is more contextually-based and therefore apposite. It is for these reasons, coupled with my own professional journey, that I

believe I am suitably placed to undertake my project. As a former ARY, I believe I have some understanding of the thought-processes at play within the mind of an ARY. As a practitioner who has worked within the civil service (military service), non-profit sector (VWO vocations), and private sector (present vocation), I have tried to utilise my formal training and experiences to engage in critical reflexivity and *praxis* in order to attain a more nuanced and in-depth conceptualisation of my context and the potential issues I am trying to address.

1.1.7 *Project Links To Organisation & Profession*

Apart from being a supervisor and trainer of Facilitators, as a clinical practitioner and consultant to a number of private and public sector organisations, my present work also revolves around providing consultation on issues pertaining to ARY. Accordingly, I have observed that, at present, there is no locally contextualised model or therapeutic paradigm to base intervention programmes on. My project will thus seek to coalesce principles from past work I have done into a singular intervention model in the hope that it may serve as a guide for Facilitators in my community subsequently. I do not intend for my intervention model to be a rigid paradigm to be adhered to strictly, but rather a poignant stepping stone for Facilitators to use as a guide to potentially raise their own efficacies via the process of reflection and action by illustrating that a practitioner-research project for ARY interventions in Singapore would be possible (something that has not been done before).

Although research with regards to the effectiveness of ARY interventions, such as studies done by Hawkins, Catalano and Miller (1992), Dishion and Andrews (1995), as well as Wilson, Lipsey and Derzon (2003), are widely available, they are generally

based on Western literature and may not be totally applicable for the unique socio-political and socio-cultural context of Singapore (which I shall try to elaborate upon in the next segment). Accordingly, my project aims to be an inquiry that may be more suited to meet the needs of the local organisations and Facilitators I provide consultation to. Professionally, this may afford me the opportunity to potentially attain a role of Subject Matter Expert in matters pertaining to ARY in Singapore.

Furthermore, through my project, my organisation, Raven Counselling & Consultancy Pte Ltd (Raven), may be able to heighten its reputation in Singapore as being at the forefront of developing and implementing innovative intervention programmes for ARY and supervision programmes for Facilitators. This may not only benefit the sectors in Singapore that deal with ARY, but also afford Raven invaluable growth and scaling opportunities that could ensure its economic sustainability in the long run.

With aspects of my personal and professional development highlighted, I shall next try to elaborate on some critical aspects of my specific context with the aim of illustrating what I believe to be crucial challenges facing my community, and how my position as a practitioner-researcher has afforded me the opportunity to try and enact some change with my doctoral project; thereby setting up the rationale for my project, why I believe I am suitably placed to execute it, and the potential ramifications my project may have.

1.2 The Singapore Context

Singapore was a colonial jewel of the British Empire in the late 19th century and early 20th century (Wong, 1978; Slater, 2012). In the early 19th century, Singapore was converted to an open trading port by the British and started to attract migrants from all around the globe because of the business opportunities and the free immigration scheme during that time (Mathews,

2018). According to Mathews (2018), the racial composition of Singapore had stabilised by the early 20th century with the Chinese being the major ethnic group, followed by the Malays, Indians, Eurasians, and other ethnic groups. Today, the racial composition of Singapore is seen as remaining stable. Correspondingly, the Singapore Department of Statistics (2021) relayed the ethnic distribution in 2020 as follows: 74.3% Chinese, 13.5% Malays, 9% Indians, and 3.2% others. While Singapore's multi-ethnic and multi-racial population does not exist without tension (Bawany, 2021; Zainal, 2022), such tensions, are in large part moderated by the nation's use of laws and regulations explicitly constructed to maintain racial harmony (Moore, 2000; Velayutham, 2016).

The country, which gained its independence from Britain in 1965, is a relatively young multi-racial and multi-cultural island nation that has become an economic powerhouse in Asia despite facing the issues of a small population with scarcity of land and natural resources (Haque, 2004; Abeysinghe and Choy, 2007). To compensate for these issues, Singapore has adopted an almost laser-like emphasis on economic growth and established itself as a non-welfare state, placing emphasis on its people and their capacity for self-reliance (Asher and Rajan, 2002; Lee, 2012; Tan, 2018).

However, while the main driving force for Singapore has been its push for economic growth (Vasoo and Lee, 2001, Menon, 2007), this has come at the expense of other indicators of well-being (Lim, 2014a; Smith *et al.*, 2015). The country's sole governing political party, known as the People's Action Party or PAP, also has a reputation for using laws and regulations as a means to modulate citizen behaviour and / or maintain social control (Human Rights Watch, 2012). Accordingly, many analysts have highlighted Singapore as an illiberal democracy (Mutalib, 2000; Nasir and Turner, 2013); one where the basic right of voting exists but where citizens are often ill equipped to make an informed decision due to the lack of civil liberties

(Gomez, 2006; Skoric, Ying and Ng, 2009). This top-down model of governance, maintained by state-run bureaucracy (Haque, 2004), has both directly and indirectly affected the lives of many Singaporeans (Tan, 2008; Teo, 2010). In my personal and professional assessment, it has also brought about a myriad of unintended consequences that have permeated into almost every walk of life for the average Singaporean. Education and Social Service, two arenas I have been professionally involved with for example, may be two such areas and the impact on Singaporean lives within these arenas has had profound implications for my practice, as shall be delineated subsequently.

1.2.1 Access To Information & Its Significance

Before elaborating on the two specific domains influencing my project, it is perhaps crucial to highlight the difficulty of accessing unbiased information within my community; a point touched upon by Asher and Rajan (2002). Ironically, even the main Government-controlled media apparatus, Singapore Press Holdings (SPH), has acknowledged that access to information in Singapore is not always easy (Sin, 2018; Ang, 2020). To elaborate, there is no Freedom of Information Act in the nation (Singapore Statute Online, 2020) and Singapore has been known as a country that censors a free press in order to control public sentiments (Tan, 2020). In fact, in 2021, Singapore was ranked 160th in a global index of press freedoms (Reporters Without Borders, n.d.).

To exacerbate matters, independent researchers are often at the mercy of Government-endorsed data to complete research projects (Asher and Rajan, 2002); a fact recently appealed against in Singapore (Altbach, 2001; Ong, 2019). Part of the issue here appears to be the local Government's apparent aversion towards critique and any

information that may diminish their legitimacy and competency as the sole ruling political party of the country (Mutalib, 2000; Tan, 2009). The Government has often argued, for example, that Singapore is a small island nation that sometimes needs to react precipitately to ever-changing global conditions in order to survive (Mutalib, 2000; Chong, 2006). Such reactions, the Government believes, would be encumbered by a robust democratic political process that inhibits the enactment of fast action and / or regulations; such as those present in many developed Western nations (Mutalib, 2000; Tan, 2012).

Unfortunately, and perhaps as a by-product of such a paternalistic regulatory environment, many analysts have noted that there appears to be a culture of fear within Singapore, whereby critical questioning is often discouraged (Rodan, 1998; Verweij and Pelizzo, 2009). The Government has also been accused of using the country's legal system to silence and extinguish dissenting views or narratives that steer away from their official talking points (Mutalib, 2002; Verweij and Pelizzo, 2009). Inevitably, it would not be hard to understand that this dynamic would not only be inimical to reflexivity for practitioners, but also problem-solving with regards to the issues faced by the nation as it progresses into the 21st Century. In essence, a culture of fear would perhaps run counter to *phronesis*, the disposition that guides and informs *praxis*.

In Aristotelian terms, it is almost as if Singapore, due to its economic emphasis since inception, has been so focused on *techne* and *poiesis* that it has come to neglect the value of *phronesis* and the immense contribution it may make to address the complex challenges facing the nation. Ineluctably, from a practitioner's perspective, this may mean that such a disposition, one that guides and informs *praxis*, may be lacking within my community. In some ways, my project is thus an attempt to explore the benefits that

may potentially arise from shifting away from *poesis*, and even *theoria*, while focusing on *praxis*.

In view of the current situation, three important points should be noted:

- (a) some facets of my project simply cannot be informed by available data, as such data may simply not be accurate, complete, or even present due to potential larger political considerations within my context;
- (b) the lack of reliable data is often supplemented by my own experiences as an ARY and a practitioner; and
- (c) my project seeks to serve as an exploration that raises critical questioning into what may be useful for addressing the needs of ARYs and Facilitators in my community. In this way, it seeks to sow the seeds of encouraging *praxis* for local Facilitators.

1.2.2 *Education In Singapore*

As briefly touched upon earlier, Singapore's Education System has been noted to be inflexible and austere (Kam and Gopinathan, 1999; Gopinathan, 2007). Even the state-run SPH often alludes to this notion (Teng, 2018; Heng, 2020). Due to the fact that students in lower *streams* (i.e. NA & NT) would have to go through a longer process of formal education in order to attain tertiary-level qualifications, many students in such *streams* tend to face a higher risk of attrition from school and, accordingly, a higher risk of becoming an ARY. While the entire education process has been consistently ranked high in accordance to international standards (Tan and Phang, 2005; Lim and Boey, 2014), there have also been a host of ramifications that have not been very positive. Perhaps an article in the foreign newspaper South China Morning Post titled

‘The downsides to Singapore’s education system: streaming, stress and suicides’ (Jelita, 2017, para. 1) sums it up well when it indicates that:

The country’s school system is geared towards high achievement in exams, but the emphasis on rote learning and memorisation, combined with pressure to succeed, affects children’s social skills, health and overall happiness.

More worryingly, the article relays statistics that are often obscured from the average Singaporean. These include the following:

In 2015, there were a reported 27 suicides among 10- to 19-year-olds in Singapore, double that of the previous year and the highest for more than a decade, according to the Samaritans of Singapore. In May 2016, an 11-year-old boy jumped to his death from the 17th floor of a flat block, fearful of sharing his exam results with his parents. It was the first time the child had failed a subject (Jelita, 2017, para. 5).

Even with an internationally recognised education system, it is ironic that many students within such a system face copious amounts of debilitating stress (Gregory and Clarke, 2003; Tan and Yates, 2011) while the country as a whole ranks low in its ability to produce creative entrepreneurs (Tan and Phang, 2005; Chua and Bedford, 2016); an element that may be perceived as crucial for economic sustenance (Seong and Ng, 2008; Carree and Thurik, 2010).

My own experiences as a practitioner inform me that early categorising, a process that does not take into account a person’s propensity to develop academic skill sets later in life, and increased duration of study, stemming from a system that does not easily allow for flexibility of movement throughout its various tranches, would result in more students from the lower *streams* having a higher probability of dropping out of the

education system. This, coupled with Singapore's dwindling birth rate (Department of Statistics Singapore, 2020) and 'brain drain' whereby more educated individuals are leaving the country (Koh, 2012, p. 193; Fetzer and Millan, 2015, p. 463), may result in a disproportionate population demographic that may inevitably be inimical to the nation's longevity, notwithstanding immigration as a potential remedy.

Singapore has long depended on its people and their productivity as its primary economic resource (Koh, 2012; Maitra, 2016). With the ever-rising brain drain (Koh, 2012; Fetzer and Millan, 2015), the benefits of a good education system, for instance, may be lost to the country if all those who benefit from such a system choose to contribute to the economies of other countries in their adult lives. With a dwindling birth rate that does not adequately replenish its population, the matter is exacerbated when added to it is the notion that those Singaporeans who remain behind may be those without the necessary educational qualifications to fill the knowledge-based jobs of the future. Many authors have written about such a state of affairs with most suggesting that a change in the education system of the country is required (Dimmock and Goh, 2011; Koh *et al.*, 2014).

More germane to my practice is the examination of those who may be unable to cope with the stress of a rigid education system. I have observed through my practice, for example, that many students feel unable to cope with the pressures of school and choose to drop out, normally around the age of 14 to 16 years. Of those that drop out, many, unequipped with vocational, social and critical-thinking skills tend to indulge in at-risk behaviours. This has led to increased demands on the Social Service Sector of Singapore, the primary organ designated by the state to address such social issues. Supporting this view, Rumberger (1987) noted that early school leavers face difficulty

in finding stable and well-paying jobs, which consequently affects their society by reducing tax revenue and increasing demands on social services. These points ultimately underscore the importance of intervention programmes a young person receives which may help them navigate the potential complexity and rigidity embedded within their education system. For example, in Singapore, after completing the Primary School Leaving Examination (commonly known as PSLE) at around the age of 12 years, a young person enters secondary school where they would be pigeonholed into different *streams* according to their academic performance at their PSLE. Those in the NT Stream have a higher chance of being selected for an intervention programme; often for the sole reason of being in the NT Stream. Secondary One to Three is when school-based intervention programmes start to take place for those classified (by the school) as *at-risk* and this is typically the time when Raven is engaged to provide clinical interventions to try and keep an ARY within the school environment (i.e. to prevent them from dropping out of school). While participants for intervention programmes can come from all *streams*, I have observed that the NT Stream tends to contribute to the majority in most local intervention programmes. As Raven generally prefers to conduct programmes for those in the age bracket of 14-16 years, due to the fact that participants at this age bracket may be in a developmental stage that potentially aids receptivity to processing points, Secondary Two is the level where Raven conducts most of its school-based intervention programmes. The first six phases of the current project were thus conducted with students at this level (as elaborated on in Section 5.2.2).

1.2.3 Social Service In Singapore

The Social Service Sector in Singapore plays a significant role in managing the growth of ARY. The majority of intervention programmes targeted at ARY in Singapore are

run by VWOs, with the aid of some Government funding and donations. These VWOs run programmes such as the Enhanced STEP-UP Programme, the Streetwise Programme, the Periodic Training Order and the Guidance Programme. Collectively, these programmes constitute the majority of available intervention programmes for ARY in Singapore, as illustrated by the Ministry of Social and Family Development (2014a; 2014b; 2014c); the authority in-charge of regulating the Sector.

As Singapore's model of economic sustenance discourages social welfare policies, funding for the Sector is often one of the lowest amidst the Government's annual expenditure (Mendes, 2007; Ng, 2012). Additionally, due to the arduous nature of Social Service jobs and the low wages that comes along with it, the Sector in Singapore struggles to attract talent (Leong, 2017) thereby inhibiting its capacity to develop within the backdrop of a small population.

To further compound matters, while the Singapore Government does have regulations in place to govern the Sector, each VWO is a distinct private organisation with its own internal Management Board, policies and processes. This makes uniformity in the delivery of services somewhat onerous.

As a whole, and as shall be elaborated on in Chapter 2, the lack of resources and development of the Sector, has, in my opinion, contributed to a rising number of ARY.

1.3 The Project

With the two specific arenas influencing my practice touched upon, I shall next try to illuminate the nature of my project. My position as a practitioner serving ARY and training Facilitators has afforded me the opportunity to evaluate that Facilitators are tasked with using therapeutic

mechanisms with ARY to reduce the likelihood of their progression into subsequent criminality; a notion supported by Menon (2015). Accordingly, my project seeks to explore the possibility of raising the competencies (referring to knowledge & skills necessary for working with ARY) of such Facilitators via utilisation of a structured and contextualised model for intervention programmes in Singapore. The project was done in seven phases (illustrated in Table 1.1 and elaborated on in Chapter 5). The first six phases involved creating and implementing a structured and contextualised intervention programme for ARY in Singapore, while the last phase involved using the knowledge gained from this endeavour to develop and implement a competency-enhancing programme for Facilitators. With the data accumulated from all phases, a Training Manual (TM) was then developed as a resource for Facilitators, and to aid in subsequent Facilitator training.

Aim	Phase	Description
<p><i>Aim (1):</i> To advance practice by creating a structured, transdisciplinary and contextualised intervention model, incorporating biological, psychological and social work components (termed the BPSw Model) as a form of intervention programme for ARY in Singapore.</p>	Phase I	<p>Step 1: Identifying a Problem Step 2: Generating a Possible Solution</p>
	Phase II	Step 3: Putting the Solution to a Test
	Phase III	<p>Step 4a: Gathering Data / Feedback Step 4b: Analysing Data / Feedback</p>
	Phase IV	Step 5: Evaluating, Modifying, and Re-Integrating Data / Feedback into a New Solution
	Phase V	Refinement (Repetition of Steps 1 to 4 With A Different Group of Participants)
	Phase VI	Overall Analysis of Phases I – V
<p><i>Aim (2):</i> To enhance the competencies of Facilitators by providing them with a therapeutic model (i.e. the BPSw Model) along with a TM</p>	Phase VII	Facilitator Training, Evaluation & Production of TM

Table 1.1 Overview Of Project Phases

1.3.1 *Project Rationale*

The need for research has always been an issue close to my practice. Tashakkori and Teddlie (2009, p. 105) suggest four sources for initiating research ideas:

...intuitions based on previous experiences, reactions to practical problems, results from previous research and theory or conceptual frameworks.

The rationale for my project implicates three of these criteria as shown below.

Criteria 1: Intuitions based on previous experiences. In my clinical, supervisory and training experience, having a contextualised model for addressing the issue of ARY in Singapore is often overlooked in practice and training programmes. My project seeks to assist in this arena.

Criteria 2: Reactions to practical problems. Singapore is facing a serious issue with regards to having a rising number of ARY and appears to not have a holistic solution to this issue. My project seeks to explore answers for this.

Criteria 3: Theory or conceptual frameworks. Facilitators in Singapore tend to adopt theories and models based on foreign (mostly Western) contexts for local application due to the lack of research with regards to having a contextualised, ground-up model for ARY in Singapore. Additionally, well-meaning Facilitators often resort to advocating for a wide array of differing modalities / paradigms with regards to interventions for ARY. These include Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy, Restorative Practices, The Responsible Thinking Process, Systems Theory, Reality Therapy, Solution-Focused Brief Therapy, Person-Centred Therapy, and a host of other Social Work, Psychology and Counselling theories. My project seeks to find a middle ground

that conjoins the principles of some key theories, while examining their practical application when coalesced into a local intervention programme for ARY.

Intervention programmes for ARY in Singapore are a pressing yet ill-defined issue. While there is some preliminary research on ARY in Singapore, they are largely done by Government bodies or their affiliates. There appears to be little effort in seeking the perspective of experienced practitioners in the field, or even ARY themselves, regarding policy, service development and evaluation. In light of this, I have come to realise that research conducted in the area of ARY in Singapore (including my own) has to be largely professionally driven and inclusive of a localised contextual perspective. Therefore, I felt that exploring the issue via my doctoral project may serve as a valuable first step to making a meaningful contribution to professional learning with regards to potentially identifying the training needs of Facilitators and using real life experiences to aid learning and the promotion of critical reflection on practice. For this, part of my project includes the development of an artefact, the TM, to try and provide some beneficial structure to Facilitator training (elaborated on in Chapter 5). The TM will be based on a contextualised intervention programme developed for ARY in Singapore (i.e. the BPSw Model). In the long run, I hope that my project serves as a blueprint for developing a more contextualised model that may serve as a framework for intervention programmes with ARY in Singapore.

1.3.2 *Context Of The Project*

This project has both macro and micro contexts along with a personal & organisational context. For example, macro contexts include elements from the project that may potentially be used to inform policy with regards to curbing the apparent trend of a

rising number of ARY in Singapore (elaborated on in Chapter 2). The micro contexts include immediate training and practice for Facilitators to acquire appropriate clinical skills and knowledge along with a personal and organisational context for myself and my own organisation with regards to providing quality care in harsh economic times. The different contexts have influenced the choice of topic to examine and will be elaborated upon.

Macro Context - Policy Regarding ARY In Singapore: The Evidence Base

Singapore appears to be experiencing a rising number of ARY (expanded upon in Chapter 2). When examined in light of a significant brain drain and a low birth rate, this phenomenon, in the long run, may lead to issues with regards to the nation's population dynamics. It may leave the nation with fewer natural-born Professionals & Managers, and a population that has a significantly higher number of ARY. In addition to potentially impacting the socio-economic demographics of Singapore, this change may also significantly impact the economic sustenance of the nation by drastically reducing the capacity for the nation to develop qualified individuals for the knowledge-based economy of the future without a drastic inflow of skilled migration which, scholars have noted, in itself, can lead to societal dissatisfaction (Yeoh and Lam, 2016). Despite this, the Sector is only recently taking initiatives to try and professionalise work with ARY (Zhang, Choo and Lim, 2009; Leong, 2015; Ministry of Social and Family Development, 2015a; Nagpaul and Chen, 2019). However, such attempts appear to be top-down regulations formulated by those with little practitioner experience. There is also very little local research on the matter with most initiatives being tailored around research done around foreign contexts.

Although research with regards to the effectiveness of ARY interventions is widely available, they are generally based on Western literature and may not be totally applicable for the unique socio-political and socio-cultural context of Singapore. This is touched upon in [Section 2.4.1](#). Accordingly, this project seeks to aid in the development of a contextualised model that may be more suited to potentially guide long-term policy initiatives in Singapore regarding ARY.

Micro Context - The Training & Practice Context

The irony behind the notion of a rising trend of ARY in Singapore is that in many cases, I have observed that ARY are exposed to healthcare professionals and / or Facilitators who are genuinely doing their best to help and serve such groups. Nevertheless, there appears to be very little data on what works and what does not for ARY interventions within the local context. Evidence of this can be seen by the fact that since Singapore's independence, there has been no preventive programme for ARY that has lasted for more than 10-15 years. In fact, intervention programmes for ARY as a concept only became widely available since the year 2000 (Ministry of Social and Family Development, 2015b). Of those that were introduced, many have changed form and function. Accordingly, Facilitators have little options with regards to competency-enhancing training that may be used for professional development. This is most likely due to the emphasis in Singapore to adopt clinical models normed on foreign populations as a guideline for professional development training for Facilitators. A review of courses run by the Government's Social Service Institute (SSI) in Singapore from 2017 to 2021, the main body tasked with professional development for Facilitators, reflected that there were 24 courses that dealt with ARY issues. However, the issue with all 24 is that they were either:

- (a) conducted by foreign experts or non-clinical practitioners (e.g. Human Resource professionals); or
- (b) addressing specific issues (e.g. addiction, scale interpretation); or
- (c) based solely on Western theoretical concepts and not local research; or
- (d) contained repetitive and duplicative content with other courses at SSI.

Furthermore, not a single one encompassed a model that was specifically created and contextualised to the local population. A list of the existing ARY-related courses at SSI are highlighted in [Appendix-A](#).

The risk of having a workforce of Facilitators that may not have the most contextualised competencies may be an inadvertent contribution to increased health care costs; particularly if their knowledge and skills are not deemed to be congruent with their client population. If Facilitators are not able to access appropriate training and professional development opportunities, the result may be sub-optimal care for ARY. This can not only lower the quality of care for clients (i.e. ARY and their caregivers), but also raises professional, practical and ethical concerns regarding professional practice revolving around ARY. This project offers a partnership model for identifying a more contextualised professional development training that may help to raise the competencies of Facilitators in Singapore with the added dimension of input from ARY and Facilitators. The opportunity for this is further reinforced by my own role as a consultant and adult educator (i.e. trainer) at SSI.

The Organisational & Personal Context

Jordan (2000, p. 467) suggests that:

By developing a research agenda for educational effectiveness, teacher researchers can empower themselves to monitor the curriculum and demonstrate their contribution to patient care.

As a lecturer in Psychology & Counselling, a clinical supervisor in practice, and as an adult educator at SSI, I have a strong desire to contribute to my community of practice and my profession as a whole. Structured and contextualised interventions for ARY in Singapore remain a largely under-assessed area. As such, there is an opportunity to lead in this arena both for myself and my organisation. There may also be the opportunity to develop new knowledge that aids professional practice and the Sector as a whole.

As a consultant to a number of private and public sector organisations, my present work generally revolves around providing consultation on issues pertaining to ARY. As there is no local model or therapeutic paradigm to base intervention programmes on, the present project thus seeks to coalesce principles from past work I have done into a singular therapeutic model that may be used to effectively guide Facilitators. This would allow me to develop my role as a Subject Matter Expert in matters pertaining to ARY in Singapore.

Additionally, there is also the incentive of furthering evidence-based and inclusive content development. Jordan (2000) suggests that curriculum restructuring should be informed by service users' views of their needs. Accordingly, my research design reflects my perspective that ARY's experiences are a valuable, yet often omitted, form of evidence that can contribute greatly to developing the competencies of Facilitators.

Furthermore, through my project, Raven will be able to heighten its reputation in Singapore as being at the forefront of developing and implementing intervention

programmes for ARY and supervision programmes for Facilitators. This may not only benefit the areas in Singapore that deal with ARY, but also afford Raven invaluable growth opportunities. Such elements provide a strong personal and organisational context for my project.

More importantly, as alluded to in [Section 1.1.7](#), my project is not meant as a direct panacea to the issue of ARY in Singapore. Instead, it seeks to initiate and promulgate a culture of asking critical and informed questions to try and address social issues that have taken place within my community. It is thus hoped that regardless of the findings of my self-initiated therapeutic model, the larger learning would be the value of *praxis* governed by *phronesis* and how it can be introduced within my community. Accordingly, the model highlighted in my project is not meant to be an all-encompassing prescriptive tool but a loose framework that allows Facilitators to enact flexibility, reflexivity and control in their own interventions by showing them, that it would be possible to conceptualise a therapeutic intervention that is transdisciplinary, contextualised and meaningful. On the whole, it is hoped that this may bring about an advancement of practice for the benefit of ARY in Singapore.

1.3.3 *Commentary Outline*

This commentary commenced with an introduction in Chapter 1 that has delineated the personal, professional and environmental contexts supporting the development of the project.

Chapter 2 will outline the terms of reference for the project as well as the research aims and questions. A review of existing knowledge and literature will also be done to highlight contributions to the present project. Chapter 3 will examine the role of

axiology, reflexivity and epistemological paradigms that have helped in situating the project into context. It will further review factors that have contributed to or hindered the research activity. Chapter 4, on the other hand, shall examine the research methodology utilised within the project while Chapter 5 shall expand on the project activities and results attained. Chapter 6 shall examine crucial aspects pertaining to the creation of the project artefact (i.e. the TM), while Chapter 7 will conclude the commentary with a review of critical learning as well as general limitations and potential future avenues for exploration.

Chapter 2: From Review To Inquiry

‘We can never solve problems with the same level of consciousness that created those problems’ –

Albert Einstein

In this Chapter, I will present a review of current information and knowledge relevant to my project. I will be providing information regarding what constitutes being an ARY, the links between being an ARY and criminality, an analysis of the main issue influencing my project, and the research antecedents to the creation of a Bio-Psycho-Social Work Model (BPSw Model) that serves as a key component of my project. The chapter concludes with the research aims & questions. In essence, I shall illustrate the following in sequence:

- (a) being an ARY increases the chances of engaging in criminality;
- (b) Singapore is experiencing a rising number of ARY;
- (c) existing intervention programmes for ARY in my community are inadequate;
- (d) there is a need for better Facilitator training to ameliorate intervention programmes for ARY; and
- (e) the aims of my project are to create a more structured, holistic and contextualised intervention programme for ARY in my community, and to use it as a means to raise the competencies of Facilitators.

2.1 *ARY Behaviours & Criminality*

Research suggests that ARYs who engage in at-risk behaviours are more likely to move towards criminality (Farrington, 1990; Kelley *et al.*, 1997; Fagan and Western, 2005; Huan, Ang and Lim, 2010; Leve, Chamberlain and Kim, 2015; Segeren *et al.*, 2020). Previous studies pertaining to at-risk behaviours amongst adolescents have suggested that such behaviours may include:

- (a) substance abuse (e.g. alcohol, tobacco, drugs) (Mason *et al.*, 2010; Chu *et al.*, 2012; Herrenkohl *et al.*, 2012; Mason and Spoth, 2012; Kelly *et al.*, 2015; YouthReach, n.d.); and / or
- (b) delinquency (e.g. gang involvement, truancy, shoplifting, vandalism) (Mason *et al.*, 2010; Chu *et al.*, 2012; YouthReach, n.d.); and / or
- (c) aggressiveness and extreme violence such as destruction of property, defiance towards authority and causing harm to others (Mason *et al.*, 2010; Chu *et al.*, 2012; Herrenkohl *et al.*, 2012).

My own observations as a practitioner have affirmed these findings within my community. Whilst the preceding may not be an exhaustive list, I believe the behaviours highlighted may represent the common behaviours of ARY in my community. As I have observed that the individuals who exhibit these behaviours often go on to being charged for a criminal offence in their future, addressing such behaviours may perhaps be a crucial component of crime prevention. This is consistent with the view that a successful transition to the responsibilities of adulthood, from the turbulence of adolescence, can stunt criminal behaviour (Warr, 1998; Uggen, 2000; Bushway, Thornberry and Krohn, 2003; Forrest and Hay, 2011). I have observed that in my community, such a transition is sought through intervention programmes for ARY.

In an analytical review report done for the United Kingdom's Ministry of Justice, Adler *et al.* (2016) found the following concerning the factors present in effective intervention programmes internationally to reduce offending in youth.

Some Factors Found In Effective Interventions

- (d) *Individual needs*. Programmes that targeted attributes in individuals that are predictive of reoffending were found to be more effective.

- (e) *Individual ability.* Tailoring intervention approaches to individuals' learning styles, motivations, abilities and strengths to increase learning were found to be more effective.
- (f) *Programme type.* Programmes that were therapeutic in nature (e.g. skills building, restorative, counselling / mentoring) were found to be better than punitive and control-based approaches.
- (g) *Multiple services.* Targeting a range of offending-related risks and needs instead of singular factors were found to be more effective.
- (h) *Wider context.* Programmes considering wider issues from the family, peers and community were found to be more effective.

Additionally, the following points regarding youth interventions were noted by Adler *et al.* (2016), and finds support in research literature.

- (i) Placing young people with low-level offences into the formal justice system may increase their offending. This is supported by the finding that diversionary approaches (i.e. therapeutic programmes) were found to be more effective (Gendreau, Cullen and Goggin, 1999; Lowenkamp and Latessa, 2004).
- (j) Effective communication with young people displaying mutual respect, understanding and fairness was found to be effective; a finding that finds support in research (Bertolote and McGorry, 2005; Saarikkomäki, 2016).
- (k) Helping young people to visualise the consequences of their actions in conjunction with other support and / or therapies was found to be effective; another finding that finds support (Spence, 2003; Velleman, Templeton and Copello, 2005).
- (l) Encouraging young people to develop agency, autonomy and respect for others, as well as themselves, often helped them progress in life. This too finds support in research (Beckert, 2007; Cullaty, 2011; Robinson *et al.*, 2020).

- (m) The Risk-Needs-Responsivity approach (RNR) that both assessed the risk of reoffending and targeted it with interventions, as well as focused on attributes predictive of reoffending and maximised learning by tailoring intervention programmes to suit individual needs, worked well. RNR might, however, be more effective for girls than boys in reducing reoffending; all of which are findings affirmed in research (Andrews *et al.*, 2011; Brogan *et al.*, 2015).
- (n) Different types of interventions may be needed for different stages of life; a crucial notion supported by research (Loeber and Farrington, 2000; Goldberg and King, 2007; Heller *et al.*, 2011).
- (o) Efforts to reduce participant attrition rates, staff turnover, poorly trained staff and incomplete service delivery aided in reducing reoffending; findings reinforced by research (Latessa and Holsinger, 1998; Hancock, 2017).
- (p) When the programme developer was involved in the programme, the effects of success tended to be larger; an element noted in literature (Lipsey *et al.*, 2010; Wigelsworth *et al.*, 2016).
- (q) Besides matching interventions to an individual's needs, interventions could be targeted at bolstering self-esteem and resilience, as highlighted in literature (Veselska *et al.*, 2009), as well as changing thoughts and increasing skills, a notion supported by Greenwood (2008).
- (r) Practitioners should aim to establish a good therapeutic alliance with offenders in order to better engage them in interventions and direct them towards change; a notion reinforced in literature (Ross, Polaschek and Ward, 2008; Marshall and Burton, 2010).
- (s) Multiagency partnerships may be good for young offenders as it caters to diverse needs. However, without clear protocols, strategic leadership, inter-agency cooperation and cross-referral routes, the beneficial effects may be isolated and piecemeal. These

findings have been noted in literature (Minkes, Hammersley and Raynor, 2005; Gray, 2016).

- (t) Mentoring needs to be paired with other interventions to be more effective; a finding supported by Rhodes (2008). However, mentoring is less effective than skills-training in reducing reoffending; a notion supported by Bouffard and Bergseth (2008).
- (u) Some intervention approaches such as nature or wilderness programmes have shown some levels of efficacy but the evidence is mixed. This too is supported by research (Bettmann, Russell and Parry, 2012; Hoag *et al.*, 2013).
- (v) Most of the studies reviewed originated from the United States of America leading to the notion that more studies need to be undertaken; a suggestion supported by other scholars (Seglen, 1997; Östlund *et al.*, 2010; Bajwa and König, 2019).
- (w) Family-based interventions may not be appropriate for some young people, as they do not keep in contact with their parents and families. This finding has seen support in literature (French, Reardon and Smith, 2003). Such interventions may also not be sufficient for all young people as backed up by Moretti and Obsuth (2009).
- (x) Intervention programs should also consider the wider community and related contexts that may influence parenting efficacy; a finding apparent in literature (Murphy, 2002; Greenwood, 2008).
- (y) The characteristics of an intervention programme (i.e. type, duration, intensity) has a greater influence over the outcome than the characteristics of the young people participating; a notion supported by Mckenzie (2000). Additionally, vocational and life-skills programmes can be effective in increasing resilience towards external influence; once again, a notion that finds support in literature (Oliver *et al.*, 2006; Griffin *et al.*, 2009).

All of the points listed above, along with my own reflections and analysis as a practitioner, has informed and contributed to my project (e.g. its scope and aims) in that I have sought to construct a contextually-based intervention programme for ARY in Singapore that attempted to incorporate the general findings listed to be effective.

2.2 *The Contextual Issue Analysed*

Singapore has experienced a rise of ARY in recent years (Cheong, 2015; Lim, 2015; Baharudin, 2016; Tan, 2020) and this is mainly measured by the number of new initiatives (e.g. community-based diversionary programmes) and infrastructure (e.g. Government-led committees) set up to focus on youth issues and ARY from 2005, along with the general consensus from Facilitators, and my own observations as a practitioner. For example, the *Central Youth Guidance Office* was set up in 2010 to assist with inter-agency collaboration with regards to youth offending, the *Youth Advisory Group* was started in 2017 to advise on rehabilitation issues, while an entirely new career track such as the *Youth Worker* was conceptualised and launched in 2019 (National Council of Social Service, 2021). In fact, a variety of mechanisms have been enacted to manage youth offending (Xu *et al.*, 2020). In 2018, it was reported that the Minister of Social and Family Development had stated that the recidivism rate for juveniles was ‘still too high’ (Tan, 2018, para 2).

Perhaps more pertinently, the following statements from Singapore’s present Chief Justice best elucidates the matter:

To take just one example, in the last few years, the number of youth arrests has hovered around 3,000 cases annually, which accounts for about 10 per cent of the total crimes reported annually in Singapore. This reflects overrepresentation of youth as compared to their proportion of the population as a whole in Singapore (Menon, 2015, p. 8).

With data hard to attain (as mentioned in [Section 1.2.1](#)), the key driver of my project has been my own experience as a practitioner, which has highlighted to me that there appear to be more ARY in the community. Ultimately, the local Government's own report on youth delinquency states it best when it relays the following:

Youth delinquency remains a concern for Singapore...Our research has found that youth offending not only threatens community safety and security, but may also have enduring effects on youth's economic well-being, attitudes and behaviours (Ministry of Social and Family Development, 2019, p. 54).

Like most nations, in Singapore, the main groups working to redress youth delinquency and at-risk behaviours are Facilitators. My position as a practitioner in this environment has afforded me the opportunity to evaluate that Facilitators are tasked with using therapeutic mechanisms with ARY to reduce the likelihood of their progression into subsequent criminality; a notion supported by Menon (2015). Accordingly, the present project seeks to explore ways by which the competencies (referring to, for the purpose of this project, as knowledge & skills necessary for working with ARY) of such Facilitators may be raised via utilisation of some standardised principles extracted from a contextually-based and developed model (i.e. the BPSw Model). Defining *competence* as a possession of knowledge and skills finds support in literature (Niss, 2003; Albano, 2012).

The rise of ARY within Singapore can perhaps be observed and understood through three main factors such as the changing education system, parenting issues and an underdeveloped Social Service Sector.

Factor 1: The Changing Education System

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the Singapore education system pigeonholes its adolescent students into different academic categories known as *streams* from around the age of 12 years (Ismail and Tan, 2005; Albright, 2006). The Normal-Technical (NT) Stream, which caters to the lowest-scoring students of each cohort, was created in 1994 (Ismail and Tan, 2005; Albright, 2006). It emphasises vocational training more than academic development and most students from this *stream* usually graduate to become low-waged, skilled workers (Ismail and Tan, 2005; Albright, 2006). There are two issues of particular relevance to the current project which may explain how the NT Stream is perhaps linked to the rise of ARY.

- (a) A large-scale exploratory study conducted in Singapore in 2002 indicated that delinquent acts were most prevalent among students in the NT Stream (YouthReach, n.d.). My own experiences as a practitioner have also reflected that the majority of intervention programmes for ARY are done with the NT Stream. One contributory reason could be the immense social stigma and low expectations surrounding NT students leading to their own perceived sense of low self-worth (Ismail and Tan, 2005; Albright, 2006).
- (b) Recent years have seen a growth of the NT Stream, with two new schools catered purely for NT students being established in 2013 and 2014 (AsiaOne, 2013).

With recent years also witnessing an increase in the youth crimes in Singapore (Baharudin, 2016; Tan, 2020), there appears to be a correlational link between the growth of the NT Stream and the rise of ARY in Singapore. While investigating this link is not the core purpose of the project, the information available, coupled with my experiences as a practitioner, suggests the development of an effective intervention programme to try and address the present issue of more and more ARY may be pivotal. In fact, the below statements made by Ismail and Tan (2005, p. 7) after an ethnographic study best encapsulates the issue:

The normal technical students are seen as students in the ‘at risk’ group as they are ranked in the lowest stream in the educational structure of Singapore... The focus of our efforts, therefore, should be on enhancing our institutional and professional capacity and responsiveness, rather than categorizing and penalizing students for simply being who they are.

Factor 2: Parenting Issues

Singapore’s focus on economic growth has resulted in the country burgeoning into a modern metropolis (Haque, 2004; Abeysinghe, 2007). Additionally, the country is known for being frugal with its resources when it pertains to social welfare (Khan, 2001; Mendes, 2007; The Economist, 2010; Ng, 2013). This may have led to unforeseen circumstances such as a widening income gap (Asher and Rajan, 2002; Mendes, 2007; Ng, 2013). In fact, Singapore has been found to have one of the widest income gaps when compared to developed countries (Chan, 2014; Tan, 2018). Potential implications of this income gap may be the fact that many individuals are being placed into extreme ends of the Socio-Economic Status (SES) spectrum which ineluctably affects their parenting capabilities. For instance, aside from the fact that parenting in fast-paced modern cities can be stressful, affecting parenting as a whole (Drianda, 2018), research has also indicated the following points.

- (c) There may be a poor environmental framework inhibiting optimal parenting in low SES families (Conger and Donnellan, 2007). This may be a factor contributing to adolescents experiencing a higher likelihood to engage in at-risk behaviours; an element I have noted to be the case in Singapore.
- (d) Whilst there is numerous research highlighting the association between low SES and less optimal parenting (Bradley and Corwyn, 2005; Conger and Donnellan, 2007; Rochette and Bernier, 2014), a Singapore-based study found that youth who commit delinquent acts may also come from a high SES background (YouthReach, n.d.), indicating that even a high SES may not be a buffer for at-risk behaviours. One

hypothesis for this phenomena could be that caregivers in high SES families may be pre-occupied with work (where both parents may be employed full-time) and thus have less time to spend with their adolescents, leading to less opportunity for optimal parenting. This supports the notion that parenting in modern cities can be stressful (Drianda, 2018), and is consistent with Singapore's emphasis on economic growth through the self-reliance and productivity of its workers (Abeysinghe and Choy, 2007; Lee, 2012; Tan, 2018).

Accordingly, Singapore's relentless push towards economic growth may have contributed to its citizens facing a host of parenting issues. This is best exemplified by the following words of Singapore's present Chief Justice:

A plethora of economic and social factors have put pressure on the traditional family unit. With globalisation and increased competition, the average Singaporean works about 500 more hours annually than his or her American counterpart and this inevitably puts pressure on our social relationships... Divorce is probably at its highest level in our history. Since 1980, the number of divorces in Singapore expressed as a ratio to the number of marriages has more than quadrupled (Menon, 2015, pp. 6-7).

The country further faces high numbers of depressed (O'Brien *et al.*, 2008; Phua *et al.*, 2009) and sleep-deprived (Natu *et al.*, 2018; Visvalingam *et al.*, 2020) people, lending weight to the notion that being a parent amidst such circumstances may be a daunting task. Additional illustration of this may be evident in the fact that family violence cases are on the rise (Wong, 2021) along with the cases of abused / neglected children in the country, illustrated in Figure 2.1.

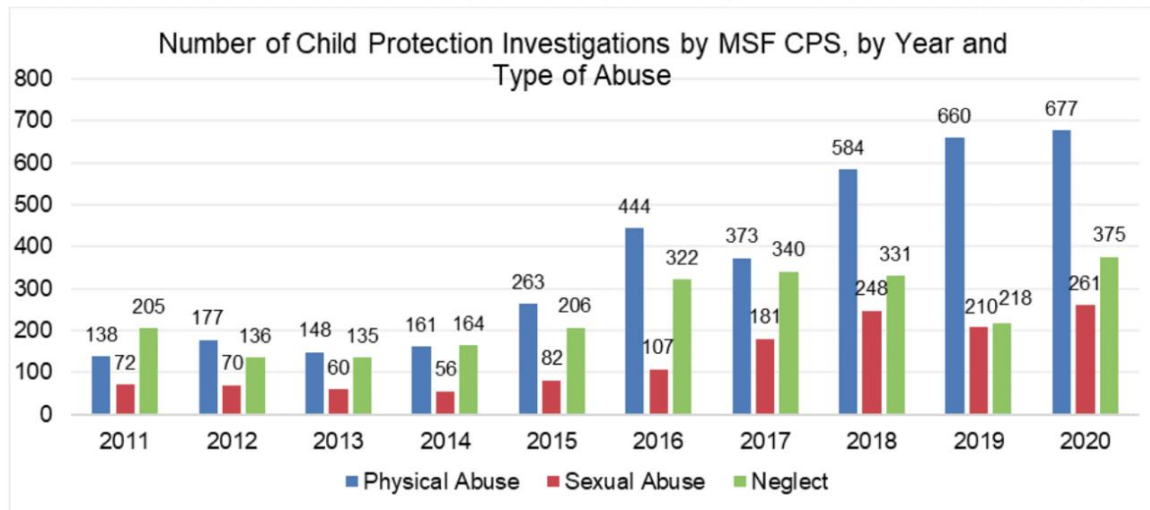


Figure 2.1 *Rising No. Of Child Abuse Cases (Ministry of Social and Family Development, 2021a)*

Further implications of parenting issues are the following potential consequences on children.

- (e) *Poor diets.* Research has shown that the poor diets of children may be brought about by a lack of supervision by parents of their food intake (Parletta *et al.*, 2012; Østbye *et al.*, 2013). Poor diets may also be brought about by a lack of means to afford healthy, balanced food for those of low SES (Drewnowski and Darmon, 2005a; 2005b; Monsivais and Drewnowski, 2007).
- (f) *Increased emotive-thinking.* Research suggests that certain parenting styles may affect the emotion-regulation capacity of children (Bornstein, 2002), thereby enhancing such children's propensity to make emotive decisions (Saritaş, Grusec and Gençöz, 2013; Kanwal, Jung and Zhang, 2016).
- (g) *Decreased critical-thinking.* Research also suggests that decreased critical-thinking may be brought about by parenting behaviours (Allen and Allen, 2000; Heyman, 2008; Hunter and McEwen, 2013) as well as poor diets (Greenwood and Winocur, 2005; Bondi *et al.*, 2014).

My position as a practitioner enabled me to observe and evaluate that when the preceding Points (f) & (g) merge, it often leads to adolescents experiencing a higher likelihood of engagement in at-risk behaviours; a notion alluded to by research (Allen and Allen, 2000; Koolhof *et al.*, 2007). If viewed at in a vacuum, this simplifies the solution to lean towards either increasing critical-thinking or reducing emotive-thinking. The former is chosen for the project as research suggests it is possible (Butler *et al.*, 2012; Kargar *et al.*, 2013) and there is a long track record of programmes such as those done by Singapore's National Committee of Youth Guidance and Rehabilitation (Ministry of Social and Family Development, 2021b), that seek to be consistent with such a goal.

Consequently, I believe an intervention programme to counteract the potential effects of parenting issues, by targeting essential cognitive constructs such as critical-thinking within the participant, may be helpful in Singapore.

Factor 3: An Underdeveloped Social Service Sector

As highlighted in Chapter 1, the Sector in Singapore plays a significant role in managing the growth of ARY and the majority of intervention programmes targeted at ARY are run by VWOs from the Sector.

Consistent with being pro-self-reliant and a non-welfare state (Khan, 2001; Ng, 2013), I have observed that there has been a lack of emphasis on developing the Sector in Singapore, though this appears to be gradually changing. To elaborate, although Singapore had gained independence in 1965, the National Council of Social Service (NCSS), which oversees the Sector, had only been established by the Government in 1992. Prior to that, the Sector had been led by volunteers (Maisharah, 2008). Even following the establishment of the NCSS, there had been a lack of governmental emphasis on developing the Sector as made apparent by the following points.

- (h) The lack of public spending on the Sector. Even until 2015, the amount of national funds that go to the Sector is generally low when compared to the other Government departments (Asher and Rajan, 2002; Mendes, 2007; Ng, 2013; Ministry of Finance, 2015). In fact, the level of Government expenditure is even low when contrasted with other vibrant Asian countries such as Taiwan, Japan and South Korea (Khan, 2001; Mendes, 2007).
- (i) The low salaries of those working in the Sector (Sim, 2010; AsiaOne, 2012; Ministry of Social and Family Development, 2012). This could have had several implications which may have contributed to maintaining an underdeveloped Social Service Sector, including:
 - i. the potential reduced public awareness of the Sector in Singapore (Mathi and Mohamed, 2011; Ministry of Social and Family Development, 2012); and
 - ii. the shortage of competent Facilitators in Singapore (Basu, 2010; Sim, 2010; AsiaOne, 2012; Ministry of Social and Family Development, 2012).
- (j) The lack of standardisation over the minimum qualifications for Facilitators employed in VWOs in the past (prior to 2015). A potential repercussion of the latter was the inability to verify the qualifications of Facilitators employed in VWOs. This may have cast doubt on the competency levels of some Facilitators to design and implement programmes for ARY.

I believe the factors mentioned have potentially given rise to a dearth in both the quantity and quality of workers from the Sector who are responsible for designing and implementing intervention programmes for ARY. This may have, in turn, contributed to an increase of ARY in Singapore. Another implication of the Sector being underdeveloped is that although there is some research with regards to the effectiveness of interventions in Singapore (Tester, Watkins and Rouse, 1999; Au and Koh-Wong, 2007; Lau, 2009), the amount and scope of such research

is greatly limited. For instance, there is presently no contextualised model for guiding intervention programmes for ARY in Singapore. All available programmes appear based on Western literature and are not specifically contextualised to the ARY of Singapore. In essence, they are based on evidence from a different contextual background.

Consequently, the Singapore Government has recently taken steps to address some of the factors mentioned above (Basu, 2010; Sim, 2010; AsiaOne, 2012; Ministry of Social and Family Development, 2013). The present project thus hopes to serve as a catalyst to assist the Sector to professionalise by potentially providing a therapeutic framework that may enhance the competencies of Facilitators working with ARY in the country.

2.3 *Research Considerations & Antecedents*

The following points highlight some preliminary work that set the stage for the eventual project. They also review some pertinent issues.

2.3.1 *Transdisciplinary Research*

McGregor (2004) argues that transdisciplinary research is useful for practice and it has been noted that doctoral projects where practitioners research their own practice inherently contain elements of transdisciplinarity (Costley and Pizzolato, 2018). Such programmes can have a huge impact on practice via the implementation of new mechanisms that aid organisational workflow (Boud *et al.*, 2018). In fact, scholars have argued that learning in or from the workplace, is transdisciplinary by nature (Boud, 2001; Costley and Armsby, 2007; Lester and Costley, 2010; Bravenboer and Workman, 2015) and this frame of reference was reinforced in me when I set out to undertake my

doctoral studies. In what I believed to be true to the form of *praxis*, and consistent with my military training which emphasised a problem-solving approach to perceived obstacles, arriving at the analyses highlighted in the preceding [Section 2.2](#) would not have been possible without intense inquiry and critical reflection that concerned itself less with dogmatic ideologies or preconceived notions, but more with pragmatic solution-focused rubrics. Accordingly, I believe studying the issue from my perspective as a practitioner-researcher allowed me to see the multidimensionality and complexity of the issue that may often be missed by the most well-meaning theorists and policy-makers. It was apparent to me that any effort to address the issue would require a marked trajectory away from the type of cognitive conceptualisations of the past. Whilst viewing the issue as layered and complex, it dawned on me that perhaps an integrated knowledge approach; one that drew upon multiple paradigms to increase the cumulative knowledge base to tackle an issue (Weaver and Olson, 2006) may be required. Research suggests that the use of integrated knowledge approaches may afford Facilitators the opportunity to not only understand complex issues, but also work together to create knowledge and translate such knowledge into practice (Kirkham *et al.*, 2007).

This led me to the pragmatic paradigm where practical problem-solving was key (Dewey, 1938; Kaushik and Walsh, 2019). Whilst I shall elaborate more on my philosophical framework in Chapter 3, it is imperative to note that reflective exercises through the lens of Deweyan Pragmatism allowed me to understand how to bridge my interests between various disciplines (such as Counselling, Forensic Psychology, Organisational Psychology, Educational Psychology, Social Work & Neuroscience) to create a conceptual framework that would not only serve me in my practice, but also be used to guide other Facilitators. Perhaps Soskolne (2000, p. 2) states it best in the following way:

Transdisciplinary approaches to human health are defined as approaches that integrate the natural, social and health sciences in a humanities context, and in so doing transcend each of their traditional boundaries.

Additionally, Flinterman *et al.* (2001, p. 257) express the following about transdisciplinarity:

Transdisciplinarity...a specific form of interdisciplinarity in which boundaries between and beyond disciplines are transcended and knowledge and perspectives from different scientific disciplines as well as non-scientific sources are integrated.

These definitions resonated with me as they guided me to understand that if I was to consider tackling a specific issue that was complex, I should not be bogged down by ideologies, preconceived notions, or limitations inherent in specific methodologies that may restrict the capacity to enact a holistic form of intervention, especially if such an intervention may be more beneficial for addressing a complex issue. I further observed that this form of cognitive conceptualisation was something not really practiced by Facilitators in my community who preferred to utilise singular methodologies normed on Western populations such as Reality Therapy or Solution-Focused Brief Therapy for their work with local ARY. As such, I tried to integrate a myriad of theories and techniques into an intervention model, all of which I had used individually before to some form of effectiveness (as measured by programme evaluation data). My goal was to see if the model could be conceptualised and implemented as a structured intervention programme for local ARY, as well as a mechanism to guide Facilitators in their practice. [Appendix-B](#) attempts to illustrate the integration and represents what I wanted for my ARY intervention programme.

2.3.2 *Preliminary Research*

Through the course of my work over the last 15 years, I observed and studied existing intervention programmes for ARY in Singapore. What I realised was that these programmes:

- (a) did not try to control for potential confounds. The latter may be termed as variables that could potentially affect the outcomes planned for (Skelly, Dettori and Brodt, 2012; Halperin, Pyne and Martin, 2015); and / or
- (b) did not have any particular structure or a singular goal during the intervention process as they often comprised a collection of Facilitators covering a variety of life-skills topics over an undetermined span of time; and / or
- (c) illustrated that ARY participants often exhibited great resistance to the programmes seemingly because no therapeutic alliance (TA) appeared to have been established with them prior to conducting clinical content. The TA is the working relationship between the Facilitator and the client (Bordin, 1979) and is a crucial component in efficacious interventions (Horvath and Symonds, 1991; Martin, Garske and Davis, 2000). The importance of the TA has been supported by numerous papers (Coady, 1992; Strupp, 1992; Beutler, Machado and Neufeldt, 1994; Pinsof, 1994).

In light of these findings, and with reference to my own early experiences as a youth who went through therapeutic intervention programmes (as highlighted in Chapter 1), I planned and conducted the programmes listed in [Appendix-C](#) in the course of my professional work as attempts to address the issues mentioned in Points (a) to (c). I felt that addressing such issues were crucial but there was a lack of emphasis for such issues in existing intervention programmes in Singapore. However, my experience so far has

been in trying to resolve the three issues individually, whenever I could, in an unstructured manner and within separate programmes, as the work of conducting interventions was often assigned to me and slated for completion within a very tight timeline. Thus, the current project is the first attempt to address the three issues all together in a model that can perhaps serve as a therapeutic framework for implementing interventions for ARY. The model is specifically set up to address the three main shortcomings observed from over 15 years of studying existing intervention programmes for ARY in Singapore. Such a framework may ultimately be an invaluable tool to help raise the competencies of Facilitators as well.

2.3.3 *An Evidence-Based Approach*

Fundamentally, as a supervisor and educator for Facilitators, I have come to learn that the best way to raise competencies is by using evidence-based approaches, a notion supported by Lipsey *et al.* (2010). According to the American Psychological Association's Task Force on Evidence Based Practice, 'Evidence-based practice in psychology (EBPP) is the integration of the best available research with clinical expertise in the context of patient characteristics, culture, and preferences' (Mahrer *et al.*, 2006, p. 273). With little to no research on contextualised intervention programmes for ARY in Singapore, as well as no contextualised intervention model that could be used to guide Facilitator training, the present project first sought to run an intervention model that not only attempted to be transdisciplinary, and therefore potentially more holistic, but also one that addressed the issues I observed from studying existing intervention programmes (highlighted in [Section 2.3.2](#)). This was done in Phases I–VI (illustrated in [Appendix-D](#)).

2.4 *The BPSw Model – Etiological Considerations*

Whilst the term *biopsychosocial* is not new and often used as a means to denote holistic interventions (Alonso, 2004; Fava and Sonino, 2008), the iteration of the term within my project serves more as means to encourage transdisciplinarity in approaches towards intervention programmes for ARY as a whole. The original *biopsychosocial* term reflects the contributions of biological, psychological, and social factors in determining health (Engel, 1980). The term used in my project denotes the contributions of Biology, Psychology & Social Work to the arena of ARY interventions in Singapore. The acronym I have thus come to use is BPSw as a way to differentiate my model from other interventions that may represent as a biopsychosocial model merely to denote holism.

Mathi and Mohammed (2011, p. 40) note that the majority of interventions in the Sector tend to be ‘piecemeal’, ‘focused on the immediate nature’ of an issue, and need to be more holistic in approach. My early analyses and observations as a practitioner led me to conclude that the general paradigm with regards to addressing ailments or psychosocial issues within my community seems to be closely aligned to positivism; whereby there is a hint that there is an absolute answer or truth and a panacea is possible provided the appropriate diagnosis or search is made to uncover such relevant truth. In medical terms, this may be loosely interpreted as the Medical Model whereby a person’s ailments are treated exclusively by medical means generally aimed at targeting biological processes (Engel, 1977). Years of observing the most well-meaning of practitioners in my context have led me to understand that perhaps the answers to dealing with the complex and multi-layered issues of ARY in Singapore lies not in a single established path or truth often adopted via a theory normed from a Western context, but instead, in a process of discovery by which the practitioner uses a broad array of tools from a variety of disciplines in order to establish what works best for them in their cultural context. I have

also observed that a specific methodology that seems to work well with one Facilitator may not necessarily work as well when adopted by another; potentially due to issues of personality alignment with the chosen methodology.

With much dissatisfaction poised towards the Medical Model for its inflexible and narrow viewpoint on a disease or ailment, Engel (1977), even suggested that the Medical Model had become close to being interpreted as dogma. He states the following in his landmark paper:

We are now faced with the necessity and the challenge to broaden the approach to disease to include the psychosocial without sacrificing the enormous advantages of the biomedical approach (Engel, 1977, p. 131).

Accordingly, the current project sought to encourage Facilitators to use an integrated approach that works for them; a process refined through critical reflexivity and a rejection of dogma or ideological underpinnings with regards to what works with ARY. As a point of note, unlike traditional biopsychosocial models, the disciplines of the BPSw Model in the current project are Biology, Psychology and Social Work. The inclusion of the latter is deliberate and specific as it gives acknowledgment to the notion that a plethora of Facilitators in Singapore are Social Workers from the Social Service Sector. Such Facilitators may be more receptive to a framework that includes elements consistent with their orientation. Additionally, [Section 5.2.1](#) of Chapter 5 elaborates on why these three disciplines were included and how they were integrated into the project scope.

2.4.1 *Overview (BPSw Model)*

The BPSw Model represents my belief that a structured, transdisciplinary and contextualised model may reflect benefit for ARY in Singapore as it would cast a wide

net to cover a range of therapeutic modalities, thereby being amenable to a wide variety of Facilitators, and be more in-tune with local complexities so that local ARY may better benefit from its use. In this regard, the BPSw Model is consistent with the principles of developmental contextualism (Lerner, Walsh and Howard, 1998), which generally propose that behavioural interventions should be designed and implemented while paying attention to the various developmental and contextual issues related to the target audience in order to increase efficacies (McHolland, 1985; Lerner, Walsh and Howard, 1998; Horowitz and Garber, 2006). A graphical representation of the BPSw Model is illustrated in [Appendix-B](#), whereby the preliminary theories and rationales are delineated.

The following factors informed and contributed to the creation of the BPSw Model.

- (a) The need for a transdisciplinary, contextualised model with a singular goal as explained below.
 - i. Transdisciplinary approaches exhibit flexibility and involvement of a broad range of disciplines (Klein, 2008; Hurni and Wiesmann, 2014; Di Iacovo *et al.*, 2016). Transdisciplinarity also grounds the research in a need to understand its relevance to real life contexts (Nicolescu, 1997) and solve problems of the real world (Hadorn *et al.*, 2008). Accordingly, my belief is that such approaches may be better suited to control for confounds as they could potentially identify more confounds due to the broader perspectives they offer. Furthermore, being transdisciplinary also increases the likelihood that more Facilitators (with their various orientations) may gravitate towards being open to the model.
 - ii. Research indicates that there are differences across varying cultures (Kiyokawa *et al.*, 2012; Obal and Kunz, 2016). An implication of this

may be that studies promoting certain practises within one culture may not necessarily apply to another culture. In addition, the benefits of contextualisation have also been highlighted in a number of studies (Beswick, 2011; Tan, 2012). ARY programmes in Singapore may thus work better if they were adapted to the local culture and contextualised.

iii. Furthermore, planning for a particular goal can lead to goal success (Gollwitzer and Brandstätter, 1997; Diefendorff and Lord, 2003). However, having multiple goals may potentially affect the success of achieving them (Dalton and Spiller, 2012). ARY programmes may thus work better with a singular goal, something I have observed to be presently lacking in Singapore. Towards this end, the singular goal in the BPSw Model was that of critical-thinking as research suggests it is at the core of rectifying most ARY behaviours (McBride and Bonnette, 1995; Lubans, Plotnikoff and Lubans, 2012; Benard, 2017; Hughes, 2017).

(b) The need to use the BPSw Model to subsequently serve as a structured framework to enhance the competencies of Facilitators. Programme structure (illustrated in Chapter 5), contextualisation, simplification and having a singular goal were the mechanisms by which this was carried out.

i. Research has shown that contextualisation is effective in instructing individuals (Bottge, 1999; Craig, 2006; Jones, Myhill and Bailey, 2013; Perin and Holschuh, 2019). Thus, utilising a contextualised model may make it easier for Facilitators to receive guidance on conducting ARY programmes.

ii. Research also indicates that when learners are required to divide their attention amongst varying sources of information, their perceived

difficulty regarding learning increases (Corradi *et al.*, 2013). Accordingly, to aid instruction to Facilitators in the final phase of the project, the BPSw Model was simplified to seven principles via thematic analysis (elaborated on in Chapters 5 & 6 and [Appendix-E](#)); all revolving around a central goal of promoting critical-thinking. This was to allow Facilitators to be better able to capture the essence of a contextualised model that may be used for their work (i.e. by structuring & simplifying it); thereby enhancing the probability that their competencies may be raised.

I chose to execute my BPSw Model as a form of group counselling (a mixture of indoor and outdoor sessions) in a school setting. The latter was chosen as it was deemed the easiest way to gain access to participants through partner schools already known to my agency. In Singapore, secondary schools are where most ARY intervention programmes are conducted. Furthermore, group counselling for adolescents has been shown to be efficacious in schools for a host of at-risk issues (Praport, 1993; May and Housley, 1996; Rosen and Bezold, 1996; Becky and Farren, 1997) and the BPSw Model was planned as a short-term therapeutic intervention because research supports the effectiveness of such interventions (Littrell, Malia and Vanderwood, 1995; Lambert and Cattani-Thompson, 1996). Research further supports the notion that time-limited, small group counselling was good practice and developmentally sound for the school setting (Borders and Drury, 1992, Sells and Hays, 1997; Prout and Prout, 1998).

2.4.2 *Main Goals Of The BPSw Model*

Principally, with reference to research, the BPSw Model sought to accomplish the following as a direct response to the issues discovered from my preliminary analysis ([Section 2.3.2](#) above):

- (a) *Target critical-thinking as a singular goal.* The vast majority of ARY interventions in Singapore revolve around Facilitators trying to conceptualise and implement distinct programmes to address individual life-skills (i.e. anger-management, decision-making, resilience, etc.). However, research indicates that most life-skills such as decision-making and problem-solving are related to critical-thinking (Saiz and Rivas, 2011; Papathanasiou, Tsaras and Sarafis, 2014; Radulović and Stančić, 2017). Hence, by targeting critical-thinking as a central construct (i.e. making it the main thrust of any ARY intervention), regardless of what topics may be covered in individual sessions, the goal was to attain a more structured and targeted intervention that could potentially inculcate a plethora of life-skills simultaneously. Inculcating the skill of critical-thinking for ARY may further serve as a buffer against the myriad of other challenges that may influence their propensity to engage in at-risk behaviours. Such an intervention, with its singular goal, may also afford itself to be better passed on to other Facilitators via instruction or guidance.
- (b) *Identify and control for potential confounds.* As mentioned previously, confounds are variables that can affect the success of an intervention. For instance, even factors such as temperature and classroom design could be confounds impacting the effectiveness of learning (Dunn and Dunn, 1979). It may therefore be crucial to identify and control for potential confounds to

implement beneficial interventions. Some examples of this are illustrated in Appendix-E.

- (c) *Emphasise the attaining of a TA.* The TA between Facilitators and ARY is vital for intervention programmes to be successful (as mentioned earlier). However, I have found that this element is rarely paid attention to in the local context. One reason could be the nature of local ARY interventions, which are generally handicapped by budget considerations and issues of access thereby limiting the overall number of sessions possible in any given programme. The result tends to be Facilitators compromising on time to build a working TA and focusing more on content (given the short amount of time they are usually afforded to enact a programme and have that programme, as well as themselves, evaluated). Accordingly, the BPSw Model advocates for the first 1-2 sessions in any intervention programme to be mainly dedicated to building a TA. This should be before any primary clinical content is touched upon. Whilst it is acknowledged that this may limit the total amount of clinical content that could be covered, the belief is that responsiveness, participation and even attendance rates on the part of ARY would be boosted, laying the groundwork for future mentoring or individual casework sessions once the programme is concluded.

2.4.3 *Critique Of BPS Models*

Unlike traditional biopsychosocial models, the disciplines of the BPSw Model in the current project are Biology, Psychology and Social Work. I have thus found it difficult to find any similar research that the present study can be based on, or draw reference from; particularly as the Social Work component, and contained Responsible Thinking Process Theory, appears to have never been placed in a model for ARY before.

Nevertheless, effort was made to learn from the challenges and limitations exposed by past research that had integrated similar disciplines. Some lessons are highlighted below.

- (a) *Continuity of development.* An article by Pilgrim (2015) explored the strengths and limitations of a biopsychosocial model within healthcare research. It was revealed that the well-rounded model that explored the biological, psychological and sociological perspectives of mental illnesses may have limited utility due to a lack of continuity in critical examinations (Pilgrim, 2015). The latter refers to the fact that many researchers and practitioners do not extend the same amount of time and / or resources in continuously developing their biopsychosocial model once the model has been utilised. This can be problematic as it may limit the model's reliability and validity for healthcare application in the long run as the model may not be able to accommodate a range of fluctuating variables that may arise after its original inception. To counter this aspect, the current project used its BPSw Model as an instructional tool that also encouraged flexibility and adaptability when instructed to Facilitators. During the instructional phase of the project (Phase VII - highlighted in Chapter 5), Facilitators were regularly informed that the BPSw Model was not meant to be an all-encompassing prescriptive tool but a loose framework that allows Facilitators to enact flexibility, reflexivity and control in their own interventions by showing them that it would be possible to conceptualise a therapeutic intervention that is structured, transdisciplinary and contextualised. On the whole, the findings from the present research are not meant to be absolute, but part of a continuum of progress with regards to professional development for Facilitators.

- (b) *Application of theoretical models.* A common concern around the development of a biopsychosocial model is that it may not be adopted into practice or in actual interventions (Suls and Rothman, 2004). One reason could be the fact that practitioners may have too much clinical demand and are unable to find time to keep up with the most updated research regarding the biopsychosocial aspects of the model, or translate the findings of such research into practice (Suls and Rothman, 2004). This notion was similarly supported by research (Alonso, 2004), which reflected that practitioners are often reluctant to implement biopsychosocial models into their treatment plans due to the ubiquitous use and comfort with traditional modalities. To counter this aspect, the first phases (Phases I to VI) of the project focused on exploring how a BPSw Model for ARY could indeed be enacted in the local context. This would be useful for the later parts of the project which focused on Facilitator training.
- (c) *Holism.* One of the strengths of cross-disciplinary models such as the traditional biopsychosocial model may be their holistic nature. However, Ghaemi (2009) suggests that holism is not without limitation. For instance, the biopsychosocial model may provide a framework to look at a disorder via multiple perspectives, but it does not guide practitioners on which perspective to prioritise. This may eventually lead to prioritisation based on a practitioner's preference, with the biopsychosocial model simply becoming eclecticism (Ghaemi, 2009). To avoid the pitfalls in this regard, I extensively explored the different aspects of my BPSw Model to have a sufficient pool of knowledge and understanding with regards to utilisation of the various disciplines contained within my model. [Appendix-F](#) highlights some of the past research incorporated into the BPSw Model. Furthermore, the final model was translated into seven key principles

([Appendix-E](#)), covering all the main disciplines, that may be used as a reference for guiding Facilitators so that they need not expand time to do their own in-depth exploration of the various paradigms, theories and techniques that went into conceptualising the BPSw Model, and may merely use the model as a guiding mechanism for their work and development. All preliminary research, however, was listed in the TM, the eventual artefact for the project.

2.5 *Critical Reflection For Educators*

Whilst I shall touch upon the importance of critical reflection more in Chapter 3, it is perhaps crucial, at this juncture, to understand that much of the preliminary research and review of literature may not have made sense unless viewed through the lens of critical reflection. This is because merely noting that there is an issue in your context does not necessarily lead one to be able to formulate a beneficial plan of action. Additionally, this is why the need for reflexive thought is built into the training component of the project (i.e. Phase VII). My present role as supervisor and trainer for Facilitators often prompts me to try and supply explanations to complex issues. Personally, this encourages me to wear the hat of a reflexive educator whether I like it or not and I believe many other Facilitators are often in similar roles.

Brookfield (1995, p. 1) argues that critical reflection is a crucial component for an educator and states:

We think that all resistance to learning displayed by students is caused by our own insensitivity and unpreparedness. We read a poor evaluation of our teaching (often written by only a small minority of students) and immediately conclude that we're hopeless failures.

The essence of the claim is that by adopting a critically reflective stance towards educating, the potential pitfalls of self-blame and demoralisation may be avoided. With Brookfield's view in mind, along with my own experiences as an educator, I can truly state that there were moments during the education process where I felt inept and inadequate. I can thus relate to the potential blame educators may sometimes lay upon themselves. Conversations with professional colleagues in a similar role have reinforced this notion.

Therefore, initiating a dialogue amongst Facilitators with the BPSw Model and the subsequent training on the use of it, might sow the seeds that may assist to prepare them for the realities they may face when working with ARY (especially for young and / or new Facilitators). Critical reflection has to perhaps encompass the wide spectrum of the teaching and learning process, enabling the Facilitator to study complex issues with questions that not only tackle the why and how of a solution, but also the questions regarding what may have gone wrong and why. All of this would, in my opinion, create a more informed cadre of Facilitators better equipped to address the multi-layered issues of ARY in my community.

2.6 *Integration Of Theory & Practice*

Facilitators are predominantly educators and when it comes to educating educators, Korthagen and Kessels (1999) claim that there is a tendency in discussions about theory and practice to proceed to polarising ends, inquiring whether to start with theory or practice. They instead put forth the notion that perhaps it is more vital to question how to integrate theory and practice in such a way as to enable integration within the educator themselves (Korthagen and Kessels, 1999). According to them, this is essential but not ubiquitous in the professional literature. They do concede the following however:

...recent insight into teacher development and the nature of the relationship between teacher cognition and teacher behaviour could offer a sound basis for a paradigmatic change in the pedagogy of teacher education... (Korthagen and Kessels, 1999, p. 4)

This argument seems to expose the need to develop a more holistic approach to educating Facilitators with the purpose of bridging the gap between theory and practice. The general lack of such an approach has been observed in my community where professional development programmes for Facilitators seem to comprise of a loose collection of discrete courses where the focus is on understanding theoretical concepts without the inclusion of the realities of practice-based considerations. This finding is supported by Barone *et al.*, (1996), who argue that the same may be prevalent in many teacher-education programmes.

A structured, transdisciplinary and contextualised model that encourages critical reflexivity may, accordingly, claim to be more holistic than what is currently present in my community. However, the question of how Facilitators could promote this holistic approach has to be explored further.

2.7 *Research Aims & Questions*

The following broad question contextualised the research project:

How do I improve practice for Facilitators in Singapore conducting intervention programmes for ARY?

Consequently, as a nexus of review and preliminary research, the current project sought to address the broad question via two aims:

Aim (1): To advance practice by creating a structured, transdisciplinary and contextualised intervention model, incorporating biological, psychological and social work components (termed the BPSw Model) as a form of intervention programme for ARY in Singapore.

Aim (2): To enhance the competencies of Facilitators by providing them with a therapeutic model (i.e. the BPSw Model), along with a Training Manual, that they may find useful for working with ARY in Singapore.

Collectively, at a macro level, the entire project tried to explore how to improve practice for Facilitators in Singapore conducting intervention programmes for ARY. More specifically, the project sought to accomplish the following.

- (a) To examine if a structured and contextualised transdisciplinary model (i.e. BPSw Model) could be used to inform the training of Facilitators in the local context and how useful such a training programme may be as a means of raising their competencies (as reflected by the questions below).
 - i. Could the BPSw Model accommodate the derivation of easy-to-take-away key principles that may be used as a generic framework for practice?
 - ii. Could the BPSw Model lead to Facilitator training that participants find worthwhile for raising their competencies?
- (b) To explore if the experience gained from performing all of the steps above may eventually contribute to the construction of an artefact (i.e. a Training Manual) that may subsequently be used by my agency, in our line of work, to assist Facilitators in Singapore.

In practical terms, my project aims to assist a plethora of individuals as either the practitioners, or receivers, of ARY-focused clinical therapy. In research terms, my project contributes by adding to new knowledge as a project of this scale & scope has not been done before.

Chapter 3: The Pragmatic Application Of Reflexivity & Axiology

‘Education without values, as useful as it is, seems rather to make man a more clever devil’ –

C. S. Lewis

This chapter seeks to highlight the critical examination of my epistemological assumptions along with how they may have evolved to shape my ontology whilst contributing to my doctoral research. In particular, the salient role of reflexivity, pragmatism and axiology as constructs that have aided my professional development shall be elaborated upon.

3.1 *The Incipience Of Reflexivity*

The complexities of navigating my practice as a clinical practitioner and not having an Archimedean point led to moments of what I now term *forced reflexivity*. It was forced because I observed that reflexivity was not really practised or encouraged in my community. For one, Singapore is a city-state not known to be a free, democratic nation (Mutalib, 2000; Ortmann, 2011; Ho, Alviar-Martin and Leviste, 2014) and encompasses a fast-paced society (Teo, 2010; Teoh *et al.*, 2013; Lee, 2019) with people struggling to survive amidst being in one of the most expensive cities on earth (Ortmann and Thompson, 2014). Singapore also has high rates of anxiety & depression (O’Brien *et al.*, 2008; Phua *et al.*, 2009) as well as sleeplessness (Natu *et al.*, 2018; Visvalingam *et al.*, 2020). All these factors appear to discourage reflexivity because a busy, fearful and disempowered populace may not necessarily feel emboldened to practise reflexivity, partly due to its time-consuming nature. The practise of reflexivity can also often lead to cognitive dissonance when examined against messages the state wants to promulgate. For instance reflexivity can raise questions that run contrary to national policy and challenge the status quo as alluded to by some authors (Salleh, 2006; Lim, 2014b), thereby potentially placing practitioners in harm’s way by situating them in the firing line of politicians who may

have differing agendas. It may thus be easy to understand why practitioners in my community may resist reflexivity.

Despite this, my inclinations towards problem-solving, developed from years as a Military Officer, often led me to observe, deconstruct and analyse variables related to the accomplishment of my mission, which in the case of my current practice, revolved around trying to understand how best to deal with the issue of ARY in my community. As I grew into my practice, who I was and what I believed to be the panacea contradicted more and more with the environment around me. This led me to numerous interludes of what I now term *forced reflexivity* because the reflexivity intently arose out of the incongruence between my original epistemological assumptions, the general positivist paradigm displayed within my environment, and the often practice-led actions that seemed to highlight efficacious outcomes.

3.1.1 *Incongruence To Insight*

Both my early training in Psychology (emphasising experimental designs), and Singapore's overt portrayal of the PAP as the only solution with regards to governance, along with Singapore's emphasis on economic numbers, often to the exclusion of all other indicators of well-being (Vaingankar *et al.*, 2012; Pousi, 2019), appear to fall within the positivism school of thought as they preach a rigid finiteness with regards to what the nature of reality is. Quite simply put, regarding governance in Singapore, the ruling party has for more than 50 years sold the message that they alone are best equipped with what it takes to run the nation (Kong, 2000; Morgenbesser, 2016) and any dissenting voices or ideas, often the result of critical-thinking, may not only be wrong, but also inimical to Singapore's longevity. While this never really mattered to me before my practice, my work as a practitioner forced me to challenge some of the

claims and underlying assumptions that were constantly projected towards me, both by politicians and the state-controlled media. This led me to my own ontological inquiry and I believe that my periods of reflection are concordant with periods of critical-thinking; all of which influenced me to a great extent. It is something I hope for my clients as well which is why critical-thinking is the central tenet that guides my intervention approach for ARYs in my community.

Every time I was faced with a dilemma in my practice, I found myself in deep reflexive exercises centred around the following four queries (all of which were combined in an effort to address the dilemma).

- (a) What is the problem in concrete terms (i.e. can it be deconstructed and defined)?
- (b) Why is the problem represented as it is (e.g. why are some people acting the way they do)?
- (c) How did this problem come to be with regards to historical, sociological, political and psychological factors (i.e. what complex interplay of factors led to the development and perpetuation of the present state)?
- (d) How can a plan of action be enacted that would lessen or resolve the problem (i.e. what strategy would work best to address the problem)?

Only much later, during my doctoral studies did I realise that I was actually enacting the rudiments of practice-based reflection that many authors have opined about (Schön, 1983; Bennett-Levy *et al.*, 2003). Notwithstanding this, during my early years as a practitioner, I yearned for a way to bridge the divide between my environment and my cognitive dissonance. In most undergraduate Psychology courses, the main emphasis for research is on conducting experimental designs that steer towards the positivist paradigm. Coupled with Singapore's general slant towards positivism (in its

governance model), the world I was now experiencing as a practitioner was one that had incongruence as it did not necessarily lend itself to be encapsulated within rigid ideological or philosophical boundaries. In fact, to better comprehend how to best serve my clients as a practitioner, I reverted to the lessons learnt from my prior military schooling. They were lessons based on the harsh realities of military strategising and problem-solving that led me to my eventual governing paradigm of choice; one that moved away from ideological discourse and into the realm of practical problem-solving.

3.1.2 *Bridging The Divide*

In my search to develop my competencies as a practitioner within my community, I spent many hours reflecting on a larger paradigm that could not only coalesce my ontological and epistemological beliefs, but also serve as an overarching framework to guide my actions in order to aid my clients. For this, I reverted to some readings I recalled as a young Military Officer centred on the writings of Carl von Clausewitz. The latter's writings provided me with a new way to understand and address my four reflexive queries highlighted previously by providing me with better insight into the situation I was facing and the way to address problems that arose within such a situation. Perhaps most cogent was von Clausewitz's elaboration on strategy as summed up by the quotes and translation supplied by Pietersen (2016, para 10):

The talent of the strategist is to identify the decisive point and to concentrate everything on it, removing forces from secondary fronts and ignoring lesser objectives.

Loosely interpreted, this could be taken to mean that in order to do well at strategy, we must first truly understand what it is before pursuing it doggedly and single-mindedly.

I believe this eloquently summed up the essence of my four reflexive queries and represents why I chose critical-thinking to be the central focus in my BPSw Model.

Simplicity in planning fosters energy in execution. Strong determination in carrying through a simple idea is the surest route to success (Pietersen, 2016, para 21).

I took this to mean that the more simple a strategy was, the more successful it would likely be. Aside from providing me insight into my fourth reflexive query, this heavily influenced me in my practice as I constantly sought to develop intervention programmes for ARY that were, in essence, well-received by my clients and my staff because they were structured, simple to enact, replicate and provide instruction on.

We need a philosophy of strategy that contains the seeds of its constant rejuvenation — a way to chart strategy in an unstable environment (Pietersen, 2016, para 31).

I took this to mean that strategy was not a static process but one that would be fluctuating with dynamism. Accordingly, such fluctuations needed a way to be tied together via some form of overarching philosophy that made sense to me and would aid in making my practice more effective and successful. As expressed by von Clausewitz, to be successful in my mission to address the issue of ARY in my community, I needed to use strategy not only as a link between policy and tactics within my context, but also as a mechanism of study in a critical, reflexive way (Kornberger and Engberg-Pedersen, 2019). However, in order to attain such a use, I first needed to situate strategy within a larger paradigm of action; one that was geared towards not only helping me and my practice grow, but also one that had an eye towards helping my larger community with the issue of ARY. This was critical in order to avoid the pitfalls of the current piecemeal and short-term solutions with regards to ARY intervention programmes already taking place within my context (as elaborated on in Chapter 2).

Organisations that discard *ad hoc* approaches often create their own futures via the strategies they undertake (Martela, 2019; Bilohur *et al.*, 2020). With this in mind, I was motivated to find an overarching philosophy that would not only aid my practice, but also quell my reflexive queries and provide me with a way to better situate my ontological and epistemological inquiries within my context. All of this inevitably led me to the Pragmatic Paradigm; a paradigm that, to me, signified and exemplified the philosophical observations of von Clausewitz and my earlier military schooling. This had great relevance to me as a former Military Officer who became charged with trying to address the issue of ARY as a practitioner.

3.2 *Pragmatic Praxis*

The pragmatic process centres on knowledge as the imperfect and constantly re-scripted product of experience (Dewey, 1916/2001; Biesta, 2010; Kaushik and Walsh, 2019). Consequently, research methodology within the paradigm may take numerous forms (e.g. qualitative, quantitative or mixed) depending on what the researcher deems most efficacious to ascertain knowledge given available data, resources, and opportunities for analysis. It is thus the needs of the inquiry itself that often guides the researcher. Accordingly, pragmatism, rather than highlighting how specific methods navigate and distil larger ontological questions of observed reality, places greater importance on the ways in which different methods produce different understandings of phenomena with an eye towards emphasising the researcher's unique position that facilitates interaction with the world (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Morgan, 2014).

For example, Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004, p. 16) state:

...we advocate consideration of the pragmatic method of the classical pragmatists (e.g. Charles Sanders Peirce, William James, and John Dewey) as a way for researchers to think about the traditional dualisms that have been debated by the purists. Taking a pragmatic and balanced or pluralist position will help improve communication among researchers from different paradigms as they attempt to advance knowledge. Pragmatism also helps shed light on how research approaches can be mixed fruitfully; the bottom line is that research approaches should be mixed in ways that offer the best opportunities for answering important research questions.

A pragmatic perspective often acknowledges the unique interlink between practice and knowledge whilst appreciating the essential role the practitioner's experiences may play in ongoing knowledge creation (Doane and Varcoe, 2005). It is this viewpoint that greatly appealed to me as a practitioner. Specifically, I found that the pragmatic standpoint not only offered me the ability to unite multiple sources of knowledge with the aim of attaining practical real-life solutions, but also the ability to better comprehend people, the world we live in and the ability to seek solutions to social issues (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004); all of which were inextricably linked with my role as a practitioner in my country's Social Service Sector.

In my quest to execute meaningful *praxis*, I was heavily drawn towards pragmatism as a guiding philosophy. I may have even been using it throughout my working life without really realising it. Rescher (2010), for instance, argues that philosophical frameworks often guide us whether we know it or not. I believe the philosophy was inculcated in me during my early adulthood spent as a Military Officer. Wanting to do well in my military vocation, I realised that the way I could excel was to be doggedly determined in executing a military solution to a military problem. In context, this meant planning, strategising and executing a plan of action that would have short and long term ramifications that benefited friendly forces. In effect, every mission may be seen as an inquiry geared towards solving a problem for practical ends. In this

regard, experience played a vital role as only through experience could one enact an appropriate plan of action that mitigated risk. Such an emphasis on human experience was consistent with the writings of Dewey (Dewey, 1916/2001; 1925; 1938). Dewey situated experience as built around a cyclical loop between actions and beliefs leading to the notion that experiences can give rise to meaning through the interpreted connection between actions and beliefs.

For practitioners like me, research is often construed as an exploration to develop new knowledge to improve practice. Accordingly, the classic adage within pragmatism of ‘truth is what works’ was highly appealing as in this adage, truth may be considered fallible and revisable as it can only be considered truth for so long as it works (Creswell, 2003, p. 14; McCready, 2010; Suter and Cormier, 2012). Perhaps more importantly, in pragmatism, knowledge may be seen as more of a process than a product and knowledge creation can thus be fluid and complex rather than occurring on a linear trajectory as suggested by Reimer-Kirkham *et al.* (2009). These principles resonated with me as I undertook my doctoral project, as they allowed me the fluidity of thought that I believe encouraged creativity and problem-solving with the specific goal of finding an intervention programme for ARY in my community, that may be exemplified by feedback from ARY participants and Facilitators, as one that works.

A major component within pragmatism is the crucial role of inquiry for interpreting belief systems and problem-solving (James, 1907; Dewey, 1938; Misak, 2004; Levi, 2012). Some areas of convergence for pragmatists include the focus on practical repercussions of actions, the importance of the social context and the element of problem-solving through inquiry (Bernstein, 2010). Personally, I found all of this congruent with the principles of reflexivity I tried to utilise as a practitioner. I also found it consistent with my views of what *praxis* meant

in my context. All of this made it much easier to plan and align my doctoral project towards what I wanted to achieve (as set out in Chapters 1 & 2).

3.3 *Axiology & Reflexivity: A Critical Examination*

The term *Axiology* is derived from the Greek words – *axios* and *logos*. *Axios* refers to ‘worth’ or value and *logos* refers to ‘reason or theory’ (Hart, 1971, p. 29). For meaningful research, it is not uncommon for the researcher to examine his / her axiological stance. It is argued that values are dynamic, malleable and practical entities that are contingent upon an individual’s experience (Katuin, 1920). As the unique experiences of each person often set different criteria for determining the value of an act or condition, the interpretation of values stems solely from the individual’s perspective (Katuin, 1920).

According to Hart (1971, p. 29):

Valuational preferences are not artifacts we can dispense with. Inquiry into the claims, truth, and validity of value judgments is a necessity of life itself. The concept of value permeates our life at every step.

In essence, behind each decision, action, passion, interest and even words spoken lies the belief of worthiness that the individual assigns to it, measured by a conscious ‘scale of values’; one which attempts to quantify the nuances of satisfaction (Hart, 1971, p. 29). Therefore, adopting a reflexive approach that allows me to examine my axiological stance in my doctoral inquiry is critical as axiological issues may be inexplicably intertwined with ontological and epistemological assumptions (Littlejohn and Foss, 2009). Furthermore, axiological, ontological and epistemological positions underlie and influence decisions throughout the inquiry process from the selection of research topic to methodology (Greenbank, 2003; Littlejohn and Foss, 2009). Research that is neutral and free from values is ‘little better than a myth’ (Hiles, 2008,

p. 53). Hiles (2008) believed that any kind of values in research should be clarified and reflected upon because scientific inquiries could potentially influence the structure of the world through the knowledge it acquires. Since the scope for change is tremendous and could potentially affect the lives of millions of people, reflexivity in research is indispensable as it helps to raise the methodological rigour of one's research (Gewirtz and Cribb, 2006) and raise transparency in ethics (Hiles, 2008). This would in turn increase the self-awareness and accountability of researchers.

Accordingly, to better understand reflexivity, Bisset *et al.* (2017) identified and summarised the essence of reflexivity as a self-critical attitude adopted by the researcher to scrutinise underlying assumptions and examine its effects on society. However, the concept of reflexivity is broad and multi-faceted (Lynch, 2000), hence, considering the social context is perhaps key to understanding reflexivity. As Lynch (2000, p. 26) wrote:

... 'reflexivity' is not an epistemological, moral or political virtue. It is an unavoidable feature of the way actions (including actions performed, and expressions written, by academic researchers) are performed, made sense of and incorporated into social settings.

Beyond gaining a deeper understanding of oneself, reflexivity may benefit the wider community in the form of knowledge translation or KT (Alley, Jackson and Shakya, 2015). According to the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (2014, para. 1), known for promoting KT, the concept is defined as 'a dynamic and iterative process that includes synthesis, dissemination, exchange and ethically-sound application of knowledge.' It is a reciprocal process where both knowledge-users and researchers are involved in the interaction and exchange of knowledge which culminates in mutual learning (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, 2014). Although the definition stemmed from health research, the concept appears pertinent to other fields. For example, knowledge from research has to be delivered to

knowledge-users in order to be widely applied in various settings and thus reach a larger population. Otherwise, knowledge acquired from research would be concentrated in the field of academia and isolated from the population, thereby potentially rendering the purpose of research pointless from a practical real-world perspective.

Advancing KT is pivotal in bridging the research-practice gap (Alley, Jackson and Shakya, 2015) and one way to achieve it is through reflexivity (Lockyer, Gondocz and Thivierge, 2004). Reflection deepens understanding by connecting existing knowledge to synthesise new information, contributing to the pool of knowledge and insights (Lockyer, Gondocz and Thivierge, 2004). When a practitioner engages in reflective practice, he / she undertakes a journey of self-evaluation, self-analysis, self-recall, as well as self-observation, and this conscious effort in reflecting on practice leads to learning (Yip, 2006). The practitioner then emerges from this process with a deeper sense of self-awareness and consciousness which can be incorporated into future action, thereby refining it (Yip, 2006).

The following points will elaborate on my own reflective-axiological discovery process. Rokeach's (1973) framework for understanding values was adopted to categorise the different types of values in a clear and concise way to facilitate the analysis. In essence, I shall try to delineate values that are important to me, how they developed, and how they contributed to my project.

3.4 *A Framework For Axiological Analysis*

Rokeach (1973) believed that individuals have a value system which comprises of moral, competency, personal and social values that interact in a complex manner and the outcome of this interaction is reflected in a person's attitudes and behaviour. Two clusters of values – instrumental and terminal values, emerged from his study and according to Rokeach (1973),

terminal values define the end goals that an individual wants to achieve in life and instrumental values are the ways that help to achieve such end goals.

Moral and competency values are instrumental values whereas personal and social values are terminal values with personal achievement goals noted as the outcomes of the interaction between personal and social values (Rokeach, 1973). Rokeach's well-defined and clear framework of different values served as an apposite tool to analyse the key values that have emerged in my own life and how my personal experiences have shaped the trajectory of my values to influence my present project. Accordingly, the concluding aspects of this chapter uses Rokeach's definition of values to examine the personal, competency, moral and social values that I hold and how they contributed to my doctoral project. These values are autonomy, creativity, non-maleficence and democracy.

3.4.1 *Personal Values: Autonomy*

Upon reflection, the early turning points of my life (Sections [1.1.1](#) & [1.1.2](#)) may have forged me as a person with an internal locus of control (an *Internal*). As a previously classified ARY myself, I experienced instability and chaos as I tried to navigate my world. The coping mechanism I adopted to counter the chaos and attain desired outcomes was to actively exert control in various aspects of my life. Furthermore, excelling at my studies despite the challenges I faced may have imbued me with an immense sense of self-efficacy which could have reinforced my capacity to flourish as an *Internal*. It strengthened my belief that the power to change one's life lies in one's hand and that led me to become a strong proponent of autonomy. Research suggests that *Internals* have a strong affinity for autonomy and this may guide them in their day-to-day work (Fazey and Fazey, 2001; Wu, Griffin and Parker, 2015).

Autonomy is defined as an ‘experience of choice in the initiation, maintenance, and regulation of behaviour, and the experience of connectedness between one’s actions and personal goals and values’ (Connell, 1990, pp. 62-63). Hurka (1987) believed that autonomy is intrinsically valuable as it connects to deeper values such as agency. According to Hurka (1987), autonomy allows the individual to exert a causal influence on the world and achieve goals through deliberated autonomy. The outcome of deliberated autonomy is an increase in goals achieved and consequently, an increase in agency (Hurka, 1987). Since autonomy is positively associated to agency, it may be inferred that little or no autonomy should lead to low levels of perceived control and may thus cause stress to individuals. This inference is supported in Agnew’s General Strain Theory which identified ‘supervision or discipline that is very strict, erratic, excessive given the infraction, and/or harsh’ (Agnew, 2001, p. 344) as one of the potential strains that is very likely to lead to delinquency and criminal behaviours because such supervision is perceived by the individual as high in magnitude (if it occurs frequently and involves parents, school officials, criminal justice officials), unjust, and associated with low social control.

Similarly, Moffitt’s (1993) Adolescence-Limited Delinquency Theory argued that adolescent delinquency is a result of frustration arising from the discrepancy between physical maturity and the lack of autonomy. Both Agnew and Moffitt’s theories point to a need for autonomy which is effective in buffering against offending behaviours. I believe this was the case for me as even though I experienced chaos as an ARY, being an *Internal* and my deep longing for autonomy may have buffered me from even more sordid actions that may have derailed my life consequentially.

Keeping in mind the research on autonomy and delinquency, I sought to design interventions that not only replicated my own values as an *Internal* but also those that aimed to achieve this balance between autonomy and control where adolescents are neither deprived of autonomy which could pressure them into rebelling through delinquency, nor given too much autonomy which could potentially lead to an abuse of freedom if unmonitored. Years of experience in designing intervention programmes highlighted to me that critical-thinking would serve as an effective mediator that could lower the risk of delinquency without depriving adolescents of autonomy which they may believe they deserve. Hence, the design of the BPSw Model in my doctoral project was centred on the single goal of inculcating critical-thinking in youths who are at risk of delinquency. As such, it serves as an outlet to not only reflect my own views on autonomy (i.e. being able to reflect agency in my practice) but also one that may potentially not hinder autonomy within my ARY clients.

3.4.2 *Competency Values: Creativity*

There is some research that suggests being the youngest sibling (such as in my context) makes a person more creative (Eisenman, 1964; Staffieri, 1970). Whilst this association may be a loose one, I have found myself constantly gravitating towards creative mechanisms within my practice. In fact, in my first years as a practitioner in Social Service, I found that the strategies and programmes that worked best (i.e. generated more enthusiasm and revenue) were often the ones which were deliberately designed to be different from whatever else was being done within the Sector. For instance, while other Facilitators were doing indoor sessions, I enacted outdoor ones and while other Facilitators were trying to merely cover content, I tried to execute a strategy that

allowed my programmes to be run as a scientific experiment (i.e. one that was structured yet flexible enough to be self-correcting with the help of data).

It is my belief that creativity served as an invaluable tool that helped to increase the effectiveness of the interventions I have designed thus far in my practice. This section consists of an elaboration on this value I hold and how I believe it shaped the trajectory of my project.

Creativity may be a broad, abstract and complex concept, rendering it difficult to define. The meaning of creativity varies amongst individuals and the definition they ascribe to may define different types of creativity (Glück, Ernst and Unger, 2002). Research on creativity can be generally grouped into two major approaches; namely, the individualist and sociocultural approach (Sawyer, 2012). Each approach generates a different definition of creativity. For instance, the individualist's definition of creativity states that 'Creativity is a new mental combination that is expressed in the world' (Sawyer, 2012, p. 7) whereas the sociocultural definition of creativity defines it as 'the generation of a product that is judged to be novel and also to be appropriate, useful, or valuable by a suitably knowledgeable social group' (Sawyer, 2012, p. 8). Regardless of the approach adopted in explaining what creativity is, the common theme that arises from both approaches is novelty and originality. As such, the term *creativity*, for me, would refer more to the need for generating something novel and original.

I believe creativity to be a value that may have stemmed from my early development but flourished from an interplay of my formal and informal learning. My early experiences with the education system, combined with my value of autonomy, may have affected my personality to an extent whereby I constantly felt the need to express differentiation (within my community) to feel a sense of individuality. I believe this

was the case as, throughout my life, I observed and felt that most Singaporeans were living a very perfunctory, government-mandated life. In fact, it is often the stereotype of Singaporeans to be robot-like as alluded to by some scholars (Fitzpatrick, 2003; Barr, 2006). For instance, the Government is perhaps the single largest employer in Singapore via its numerous government-linked companies (Ang and Ding, 2006). This may reflect the extent of social control exerted in Singapore and such control may have played a part to formulate a conformist mentality amongst the majority of the citizenry. Within this landscape, I found myself expressing my individuality via deliberate, creative mechanisms that appear to have become enmeshed with my personality.

Upon reflection, my experience with various intervention programmes as an ARY myself may have further reinforced my belief that creativity should be valued in designing interventions for youths. The intervention programmes I experienced as an ARY were often long, prosaic and predictable; all of which did little to stimulate any motivation for attendance or internalisation of lessons covered. Consequently, boredom obscured the learning points embedded within the intervention programmes and often rendered such programmes ineffective. For this reason, striving to incorporate creative and intriguing activities within my programmes and practice has always been important to me as I did not want other ARY to experience the same mundane programmes I did.

Furthermore, creativity has aided me in my personal and professional development. At a time, and in a community, where dissent and going against the conventional is often discouraged, the high value of creativity to me allowed me to think out-of-the-box and design unconventional but well-received intervention programmes that other agencies were often unwilling to do. For example, utilising meaningful experiential learning activities and disguising them as fun outings (i.e. outings seemingly without any

learning purpose) was often found to be a novel approach with ARYs that I observed to be aiding their attention and motivation levels within an intervention programme. As research has found experiential learning to be effective in retaining knowledge (Mok, 1999; Kolb, 2015), it underscores the importance of thinking unconventionally to generate novel ideas and solutions to solve existing problems (Klingenberg, 2005). I found that therapeutic interventions disguised as fun-filled all-night outings and / or survival camps would often create the necessary learning conditions for exploration, experimentation and reflection. Moreover, research supports the claim that the best form of learning often occurs when learning is disguised as fun whereby participants may not be cognisant of the learning process (Gaillard *et al.*, 2007; Hromek and Roffey, 2009; Jerrentrup *et al.*, 2018). This act of infusing my practice with creative strategies may have parallels with my experience in the military. In the latter setting, there was often a pragmatic purpose for the use of creativity; namely, to achieve a military objective in the most efficient way possible (i.e. in the shortest time with the least resources). This often involved the use of novel approaches to overcome obstacles placed by enemy forces or shortcomings faced by friendly forces. Regardless, my mind may have associated the two concepts of problem-solving and creativity with regards to professional work. So much so that when I began working as a practitioner in Social Service, whenever I was faced with an obstacle, I often reverted to the values and beliefs that served me in my life; ones such as creativity.

Accordingly, the inclusion of creativity (i.e. via novel night outings for ARY) was a key component of my doctoral project. The main aim was to share such strategies with other practitioners so that they too may inculcate such mechanisms into their work in a manner that best suits their practice (i.e. to highlight that it is possible in Singapore-based interventions). With the present inquiry, the intention is to seek out a mechanism

that addresses the issue of an increasing number of ARYs in Singapore through designing a pragmatic and creative (i.e. novel) programme that Facilitators find useful.

3.4.3 *Moral Values: Non-Maleficence*

Non-maleficence is based on the Latin maxim *primum non nocere* which means ‘First, do no harm’ (Morrison, 2011, p. 46). Till today, it remains a cardinal ethical principle of psychological practice (Knapp and Vandecreek, 2004; Ridley and Mollen, 2011). Gillon (1985) argued that non-maleficence is not necessarily more important than beneficence as he raised counter-examples centred around the argument that beneficence and non-maleficence must be weighted together so that minimum harm is inflicted for a greater benefit. Although the notion of whether non-maleficence takes precedence over beneficence is vigorously contested in the philosophical realm (Gillon, 1985), the obligation of not inflicting harm on to others is undoubtedly the rule of thumb within the healthcare setting.

Regardless of the debate in academia, it is reasonable to suppose that every practitioner in Social Service has the moral obligation to not harm those they serve. This explains the need to put in place ethical guidelines to help practitioners in therapeutic fields. In my understanding of non-maleficence, it is an ethical guideline that demarcates what should not be done while giving me room to experiment with creativity within acceptable boundaries.

My early experiences as an ARY often saw me indulging in intentional, deceitful acts; often for no better reason than a thrill. Whilst I never really thought about it at the time, as I grew older, the cognisance of the extent of harm that I may have been inflicting on people developed too. Eventually, the guilt of engaging in deception was too

overwhelming and I turned towards non-maleficence as the key underlying principle of my practice in adulthood. Thorough preparation and planning was put in place to ensure that almost all activities within my practice that dealt with clients were evidence-based and consistent with psychological literature so that unnecessary and unintended harm could be prevented. The principle became a key tenet of my practice. In fact, I believe non-maleficence complements pragmatism as the guiding principle for designing intervention programmes as it prevents me from falling prey to the temptation of justifying the means with the end (elaborated on in [Section 7.1](#)). Upholding non-maleficence serves to weed out programmes or activities that may achieve the desired outcome, but does so at the expense of the participant's wellbeing.

In my doctoral project, non-maleficence was a key theme I constantly returned to with regards to the ethical safeguards I tried to put in place as I executed my inquiry.

3.4.4 *Social Values: Democracy*

The final value of pertinence is perhaps the one with most significance. It not only links my own experiences with the larger paradigm of pragmatism, but also plots a path towards larger social change within my community. Despite having the veneer of a democratic state, Singapore does not have in-built democratic mechanisms that encourage freedom of expression or freedom of inquiry (Mutalib, 2000; Ooi, 2008; Verweij and Pelizzo, 2009; Tan, 2018). It is a nation based more on a paternalistic approach with regards to governance (Bhasin, 2007). The latter approach has slowly eroded many democratic ideals that have directly and indirectly conflicted with my own value of democracy: one that closely aligns to the facets highlighted in the three

subsequent quotes from Dewey and Freire. An elaboration of such erosion is then presented in four factors to reflect the impact on my practice and community as a whole.

Knowledge is humanistic in quality not because it is about human products in the past, but because of what it does in liberating human intelligence and human sympathy. Any subject matter which accomplishes this result is humane, and any subject matter which does not accomplish it is not even educational (Dewey, 1916/2001, p. 237).

Leaders who do not act dialogically, but insist on imposing their decisions, do not organize the people--they manipulate them. They do not liberate, nor are they liberated: they oppress (Freire, 2000, p. 178).

To glorify democracy and to silence the people is a farce; to discourse on humanism and to negate people is a lie (Freire, 2000, p. 91).

Congruent with the quotes above, democracy as a value may have become innately important to me due to its links with the Pragmatic Paradigm (Dewey, 1916/2001; Danforth, 2006; Neal, 2011) as well as its link to those who value autonomy (Pratchett, 2004; Sharp and Miller, 2019). The slow erosion of democracy via the four factors below has thus served as an impetus and catalyst for me to conduct my project and present it to my community; not only to highlight that action research via a reflexive viewpoint was possible as a practitioner, but also to demonstrate that such research may have positive outcomes that could aid in practice as a whole.

Erosion of Democracy - Factor 1: Excessive Laws & Regulations

Although upholding the rule of law often serves to protect individual rights, foster social cohesion and avoid unnecessary violent conflicts (United Nations, 2005), Singapore's approach may be too restrictive and dictatorial (Verweij and Pelizzo, 2009). With strict and harsh laws in place, there is no doubt that Singapore is a safe and

well-managed place to live in (Haque, Chin and Debnath, 2013, Tan 2018). As such, the people are generally willing to give up their civil liberties in exchange for safety, stability and a generally high standard of living, which George (2007, p. 133) termed as ‘instrumental acquiescence’. This manifests as a social contract between the citizens and the Government (Yeoh, Yeo and Auyong, 2016). However, laws and regulations of the state may often be inversely proportional to autonomy. It is my belief that with increasing numbers of strict laws and regulations to restrict behaviours, people start to lose autonomy or the sense of having autonomy. This may lead to many second and third order effects where risk-taking, curiosity, creativity and innovation may be stifled. Whilst some authors have noted that this is already the case within Singapore’s economy (Lee and Lim, 2004; Bhasin, 2007; Ooi, 2010), I believe it is a general miasma that has permeated into all walks of life within the country; including the Social Service Sector. Consequentially, there is very little emphasis on asking reflective questions in practice which, in turn, leads to a reduced capacity for real-world problem-solving. My project thus seeks to illustrate to fellow practitioners what may be possible in our line of work by initiating ground-up practitioner-based research projects.

Erosion of Democracy - Factor 2: A Culture of Fear

The PAP appears to believe that a liberal model of Western-style democracy is unsuitable for Singapore (Han, 2007, Tan, 2018). Instead, they utilise a Singapore-style authoritarian democracy where people still vote in an election, but the opposition parties are often handicapped by the ruling party’s oppressive tactics such as the ‘sophisticated usage of legal restrictions, judicial punishments, media control and hegemonic construction’ (Zhang, 2012, p. 479) to entrench their power and dominate the political scene. With the social contract and oppressive tactics in favour of the ruling party, apathy and fear surrounds the political scene and Singaporeans are discouraged from

active political involvement (Mutalib, 2000; Zhang, 2012). This serves as a stumbling block to advocacy in my line of work as the rules and regulations of the ruling powers often force people to practise self-censorship for fear of jeopardising their livelihood and this fear permeates throughout society, even at the secondary school level (Ho *et al.*, 2011). Interestingly, interviews with secondary school students highlighted their awareness of the restrictions on free speech as well as their fear of criticising the ruling party in the following quotes.

In Singapore, if you were to criticize the government or the president, then [you] will be in jail (Ho *et al.*, 2011, p. 314).

... we are not allowed to say bad things about the government. If not, [you will] get arrested and be put in some places and so nobody can find you (Ho *et al.*, 2011, p. 314).

The apprehension apparent in these statements is disheartening as it reflects the general state of fear prevalent in the country. Engulfed in such a climate, I have observed that many practitioners are wary and stop short of critiquing official policies that revolve around ARY even if they see potential negative effects. The vast majority of practitioners appear to accept their role within a top-down model; one of merely implementing instructions of the state that have been decided by the higher echelons of governance. Combined with Factor 3 below, this climate seems antithetical towards solving real-world issues. The reason is that those who decide policy at the higher echelons often do not have the benefit of domain competence and experience. Coupled with the lack of honest and earnest data / feedback coming from the ground up (perhaps due to fear), I have observed that this makes such individuals susceptible to numerous blind spots. The present project, combined with my present role as a consultant, thus seeks to be a research-based exploration to try and help provide data / learning points

that may potentially lend itself towards utility in policy-making with regards to ARY. I believe this is possible as I presently have the opportunity and capacity to develop nation-wide training programmes for Facilitators in Singapore.

In essence, Freire's quote below best encapsulates the relevance of this factor.

The oppressed, having internalized the image of the oppressor and adopted his guidelines, are fearful of freedom (Freire, 2000, p. 47).

Erosion of Democracy - Factor 3: State-Sanctioned Stratification

Whilst claiming to practise meritocracy (Tan, 2008), Singapore actually has a *scholar system* in place (Tan, 2008; Poocharoen and Lee, 2013) that bears similarity to the confusion era whereby young people are identified by the state as intelligentsia and shoed into a cocooned system where they are provided state-funded scholarships and quick promotions to eventual high positions of leadership within the civil service and Government. This has been noted by several authors (Mauzy and Milne, 2002; Tan, 2008; Poocharoen and Lee, 2013; Barr, 2014). From there, some of these people are identified to take up cabinet roles within the Government and paid some of the highest salaries in the world (Mauzy and Milne, 2002; Tan, 2008). Whilst the publicly-stated rationale behind this system is to potentially weed out corruption (Quah, 2001; Kidd and Richter, 2003), in reality, over the past decades, it appears to have been a mechanism for the ruling party to retain power under the guise of attracting talent. With this system of political in-breeding (i.e. scholarships and promotions to those closely aligned to the ideology of the ruling party), Singapore has actually gone up the global index with regards to cronyism (The Economist, 2016). The two-fold net effect may be relayed as follows.

- (a) The rise of a system that stratifies people into different social echelons with pre-defined social roles, responsibilities and expectations based on their perceived abilities, which is mostly academic (Ho, 2012; Barr, 2014). For example, students who excel academically and display some leadership qualities are rewarded with prestigious Government scholarships with huge monetary benefits such as fully paid university tuition fees, monthly allowances as well as career opportunities like guaranteed internships and jobs upon graduation. It is widely known that these scholars are carefully chosen and groomed to take over leadership positions in the future so as to provide continuity to the PAP's governance model (Kenway and Koh, 2013; Barr, 2014; Rodan, 2015).
- (b) With such state-sanctioned stratification and cronyism in place, the entire governance system appears diametrically opposed to the ethos of meritocracy. Even within the Social Service Sector, the higher echelons of leadership and policy-making are filled with individuals who lack domain competence with regards to clinical work. In military analogy, it is akin to having a tank commander be at the helm of a nuclear submarine. I have assessed this to be the case since I joined the Sector in 2004. Policies and funding mechanisms are often short-term and short sighted with no real implication of any larger strategy or assessment of the problem issue. It is similar to von Clausewitz's proclamations about tactics without strategy often leading to ineffectiveness and defeat (Pietersen, 2016). Furthermore, having such leadership in place, with their preferred model of a top-down approach, appears to have increased the number of blind-spots and inability to perceive second and third order effects, with regards to policies and initiatives perhaps best highlighted by the rising number of ARY in my practice.

I believe the below quote from Freire best encapsulates this factor succinctly.

The oppressors do not favor promoting the community as a whole, but rather selected leaders (Freire, 2000, p. 143).

Within this climate, I hope for my project to be a ground-up analysis and feedback tool for both practitioners and policy-makers. Ideally, based on the gathered data, a larger strategy may potentially be put in place to govern the training of Facilitators within my community. This would not only help redress the dissonance within me (regarding my value of democracy and what I perceive to be its erosion within my community), but also potentially assist a plethora of ARYs that could also benefit my nation as a whole in both a civic and economic sense.

Erosion of Democracy - Factor 4: Education As Propaganda

A meritocratic system is largely built on the premise that everyone has fair and equal access to knowledge, but I perceive that this is often not the case in Singapore. Evidence may be found in the differentiated National Educational curriculum designed for students from different academic tracks. Students from the Express, Normal Academic (NA) and Normal Technical (NT) streams have shorter contact hours for social studies (a subject which combines History and Social Science) compared to students from the elite Integrated Programme track (Ho, 2012). The former group of students use prescribed national textbooks with differentiated themes whereas the latter group of students are exposed to more challenging and rigorous curriculum designed by their individual schools (Ho, 2012). The students in the Express, NA and NT tracks are instilled with values such as responsibility and integrity while, on the other hand, the elite group are taught advocacy, political and civic consciousness (Ho, 2012). In addition, the NT Social Studies curriculum appears to be designed to make students

accept the existing system which puts them in the least prestigious track for the benefit of the nation (Ho *et al.*, 2011). As mentioned before, the vast majority of ARYs appear within this NT track.

Besides the differentiated curriculum, textbooks published for primary and lower secondary students call attention to the seemingly covert ways these texts attempt to socialise young students into accepting the ruling party's interpretation of history and patriotism. The gist of the messaging appears to be love the country without questioning the Government, believe that Singapore is democratic, and most important of all, accept the PAP's mandate to rule (Han, 2007).

Accordingly, an important implication may be that people who had little education would have had presumably fewer chances to be exposed to the rigorous training in academics for higher level thinking skills such as critical-thinking and reasoning. Consequently, they are perhaps likely to comprehend information at a superficial level thus restricting their capacity to question controversial or unsound policies. This intentional mechanism seems to fly against the very essence of what Freire and Dewey believed. Furthermore, coupled with a restriction on the freedom of media (Mutalib, 2000; Rodan, 2003), this mechanism would potentially prevent people who are less educated from questioning or challenging policies or decisions made by the ruling party. Any unsound policy would ultimately have adverse effects on the lives of these people who had subsumed the role of a blind, patriotic follower. However, they may never draw the link between their circumstances and the oppression hidden in the national education curriculum.

This was demonstrated evidently when the late Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew (the first one of Singapore) initiated the highly controversial *Graduate Mother Scheme* in 1984

(Yap, 2003) which gave priority school admission to children of graduate mothers to encourage more educated woman to reproduce. This decision sprang from the 1980 census which revealed a large disparity between the fertility of highly educated and lower educated women where the latter were considered to have ‘over-reproduced’ (Yap, 2003, p. 643). As Mr Lee Kuan Yew was known for his partial belief in eugenics and heritability of intelligence (Chan, 1985), he believed that such a phenomenon would lower the quality of the Singapore workforce in the long run (Yap, 2003). Under this scheme, women who have at least five GCE O-level passes were considered better-educated and thus would get generous tax breaks ranging from 5 to 15 per cent of their income for up to 3 children (Chua and Chang, 2015). On the other hand, women, and their spouses, who had lower education levels were incentivised to stop giving birth as those who agreed to sterilisation after the first or second child would be rewarded with a \$10,000 cash grant deposited into their Central Provident Fund account which could be used to purchase public housing, and a fine of \$10,000 with 10 per cent annual compound interest would be slapped on the couple if they broke the contract (Chua and Chang, 2015). Fortunately, the highly controversial *Graduate Mother Scheme* was removed soon after its conception as it received huge public outcry, especially from the highly educated women which the scheme was supposed to benefit. Regardless, I have noted that numerous other schemes and a general philosophy of governing via top-down, politically self-serving, and often discriminatory policies exist to this day. This has factored into Singapore’s dwindling birth rate and huge brain drain (Verweij and Pelizzo, 2009; Song, Chang and Sylvian, 2013; Fetzer and Millan, 2015).

Because of the intentional oppression in politics, differentiated educational curriculum and the covert ways of influencing young minds to accept the PAP’s mandate to rule, Singapore is less democratic than it seems and this has served to cause great dissonance

within me. Although I am unable to eradicate unfairness completely, what I can achieve in my personal capacity is to redress some of the imbalance ingrained in the education system to bring about a more democratic society where people have the right to gain equal access to knowledge and choose their leaders. It is for this reason that I incorporated critical-thinking as a core tenet within my interventions because it exposes ARYs to an important and essential competency that they may otherwise be deprived of in Singapore's education system. I believe critical-thinking directly translates into better decision making; a competency that would not only benefit ARYs but also insulate the larger community from the potential criminality that ARYs may eventually find themselves gravitating towards.

Perhaps the below quote from Dewey (1939, p. 3), best encapsulates the points made within this factor.

Everything which bars freedom and fullness of communication sets up barriers that divide human beings into sets and cliques, into antagonistic sects and factions, and thereby undermines the democratic way of life.

Chapter 4: The Method

'With foxes we must play the fox' – Thomas Fuller

In this chapter, I shall elaborate on the research process and the methodology used. I shall begin by highlighting the formulation of my methodology of choice and its links to my philosophical positioning towards pragmatism. I shall then touch upon important concepts that assisted to ensure integrity of the research process.

4.1 *Action Research With Mixed Methods*

The present project was situated within the methodological approach of action research (AR) with mixed methods. On the whole, the project was compartmentalised into seven phases, including the action research cycle (elaborated on in Chapter 5). Various methods of data collection were employed in these phases. These methods included quantitative questionnaires, review of documents, semi-structured interviews, analytical observations and reflective journals.

The feasibility of combining AR and Mixed Methods Research (MMR) was supported by many authors. Ivankova and Wingo (2018) noted that MMR assists AR's addressing of practical issues by setting a sound methodological basis; Mills (2014) suggested that the often-complex research questions in AR requires the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data, especially when they may supplement each other; while Creswell and Tashakkori (2007) indicated that from the practice perspective where a pragmatic stance may be involved, the need for MMR naturally emerges when researchers conduct their AR projects following a ground-up approach.

Action research with mixed methods was adopted after consideration of the harmonious characteristics in conceptual, philosophical, and procedural dimensions (Ivankova and Wingo, 2018) that signalled suitability for the present project. These characteristics of suitability can be summarised in three points.

- (a) *Comprehensive information.* MMR endeavours to produce comprehensive answers to research questions through the use of multiple methods, which aligns with AR's aim of providing comprehensive solutions to an existing issue through its cyclical process (Ivankova and Wingo, 2018). This greatly assisted the present project in finding a workable yet rigorous way to address the complex and multi-layered issues of ARY in Singapore. Such comprehensiveness in development and evaluation of the BPSw intervention led the project closer to a validated and sustainable response to the research inquiry outlined in [Section 2.7](#).
- (b) *Pragmatic attributes.* Both MMR and AR are often associated with pragmatism as their philosophical backdrop (Ivankova and Wingo, 2018). As mentioned in Chapter 3, pragmatism, which values practical problem-solving, has been a guiding theme for me in professional practice. Such an underlying philosophical backdrop greatly contributed to the mix of methods within the AR framework to attain the most workable path of construction.
- (c) *Reflection.* In both MMR and AR, reflection on the results of one step is of great value to deciding and implementing the next step (Ivankova and Wingo, 2018). The seven phases in the present project closely interrelated to one another with critical reflections sewing the links, which inevitably urged each phase, and the project as a whole, to be reasonably coherent and justifiable (illustrated in Chapter 5). The close association between action and reflection in AR, and the deliberate choice of multiple methods, allowed me to rigorously scrutinise my own practice and the feasibility of design

methods. For example, a standard experimental design (commonly used in Psychology) was quickly rejected upon reflexive exercises due to philosophical incompatibility issues and practical incapacity such as the ability to attain random assignment and a control group for the designated aims of the project.

With these larger points, the alignment of the present project to MMR, AR, as well as pragmatism was palpable to me. Detailed discussion on these considerations and the practical design of the project are presented in the following sections of this chapter.

4.1.1 *Rationale For Employing MMR*

Research paradigms have often been viewed traditionally as a methodological dichotomy of quantitative and qualitative approaches, with each approach having its paradigmatic underpinning. The stark contrast between their underpinning assumptions has led some scholars to assume that the two approaches are incompatible (Howe, 1988). However, others suggest that perhaps the more adaptive consideration for inquirers is when each approach would be the most helpful in the inquiry process, and how to combine them to arrive at holistic and valid knowledge (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) thus elaborated on a workable definition for MMR; a type of research whereby methods, strategies, concepts and paradigms of both quantitative and qualitative research are used by researchers in a combined fashion. They continued to suggest that within MMR, a fundamental priority is placed on the research question and the methods selected should be the ones that allow the arrival of the best workable answers for the research questions (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Ultimately, I believe MMR avails itself to a pragmatic utilisation of methods

and, as a result, a pragmatic philosophical backdrop. Its logic of reasoning can be a mixture of induction, deduction, and abduction (i.e. the logical approach of yielding the best available explanation based on the often-incomplete information at hand). In my opinion, such an eclectic style of inquiry would furnish the most holistic responses for my project.

Fundamentally, I felt that the complexity of my inquiry could not be addressed satisfactorily through a singular method. MMR thus came to enable a fuller response to the research inquiry, as well as a more rigorous research process. This is especially the case in the context of programme evaluation. Greene, Caracelli and Graham (1989) summarised the distinct functions embedded in MMR for the context of educational programme evaluation. Some of these functions, as listed below, tremendously benefited the present project.

- (a) *Complementary associations.* This is when one type of data supplements and elaborates another type of data, which would enhance the interpretability and validity of the results (Greene, Caracelli and Graham, 1989). When evaluating the BPSw intervention programme, quantitative questionnaires were originally deemed to be beneficial as a standardised measure of quantifiable outcomes. However, the complexity of the programme brought up my concern that quantitative data alone might not be able to fully capture participants' experiences and learning through the programme. Journal reflections from participants were then attained as a supplement to quantitative data. This was to also capture individuals' subjective perceptions that are often disregarded in quantitative or positivist approaches (Szyjka, 2012). Similarly, quantitative data compensated for a qualitative approach's potential lack of robustness regarding generalisability of findings (Sarantakos, 2013). Hence, the use of MMR in the

present project allowed different types of data to complement each other. More importantly, it also enabled quantitative and qualitative approaches to offset each other's limitations, thus lending support to the completeness and trustworthiness of the research as a whole.

- (b) *Triangulation.* This refers to the use of various methods in answering the same research question so that the inherent biases in each method can be minimised, thus raising research validity (Greene, Caracelli and Graham, 1989), and establishing concordance to the concept of between-method triangulation introduced by Denzin (1978). Denzin (1978) further suggested that if a hypothesis could withstand inspection via various complementary testing methods, its level of validity was considered high. Other types of triangulation used are discussed in [Section 4.4](#) below.

Both quantitative and qualitative data were attained from participants to evaluate the BPSw intervention and Facilitator training programme. Critical reflections from myself and co-facilitators also served as a source of qualitative data. Themes derived from qualitative data were subsequently inspected with reference to quantitative findings. This allowed for the cross-checking between two types of data from various roles, thus arriving at more validated findings.

- (c) *Expansion.* This refers to the selection of the most suitable methods for various components in the design, to extend the overall width and scope of the research (Greene, Caracelli and Graham, 1989). Whilst quantitative data was helpful in the evaluation stage of the project, qualitative methods were more suitable for the planning stage where semi-structured interviews with Facilitators and ARY were conducted. This allowed for the examination of salient issues through multiple perspectives. It also allowed respondents at the planning stage to fully

express their views without being limited by quantitative variables so that the programme development would be better informed by local expertise, an element that is inevitable in AR (Greenwood, 2007).

With all this in mind, taking a dichotomous view of methodology might limit the completeness of the data collected and the research findings. The complexity of the research inquiry, and the participants of various roles and developmental stages being involved in the present project, dictated the choice of MMR in order to fully capture varying perspectives. Therefore, the present project employed a mixed methods approach that I felt enabled holistic responses to the research inquiry with a workable way to amalgamate methods, as well as paradigms.

4.2 *Action Research*

In this section, some key elements of AR shall be elaborated on to illustrate its suitability and utilisation within the project. AR is a scientific inquiry that combines action and research in a continual, cyclical process (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000). There are two essential features that distinctively characterise AR:

- (a) its deliberately planned and executed cyclical process that entails planning, acting, and evaluating of the action which leads to further planning; and
- (b) its nature of being collaborative that requires the active participation of the native members within the context that is being studied (Holian and Coghlan, 2013).

Such processes are believed to be beneficial for AR's main aim of creating situations that are democratic, just, and embedded with local expertise (Greenwood, 2007). Local expertise comes from native members' understanding and interpretation of their own context, which is a fundamental element for a fruitful and lasting mechanism of social change (Greenwood, 2007).

Furthermore, AR has been understood as a democratic and participatory process that aims to establish practical knowing in the exploration of valuable human purposes (Reason and Bradbury, 2008). It seeks the close association between action and reflection, as well as theory and practice. Through collaboration with others, it pursues workable solutions to practical issues that are of concern to individuals and communities (Reason and Bradbury, 2008). As a form of inquiry, AR can be characterised by its action-oriented emphasis that endorses collaboration, a concern towards feasibility with cognisance of constraints on action, an ethical and democratic engagement, and the initiation of both emic and etic knowledge (Hammond, 2013). AR is thought to be able to advance existing knowledge and to generate new knowledge with its commitment to action, collaboration, social justice, and reflexivity (Somekh, 2006). Carr and Kemmis (1986) even noted that for practitioner-researchers, AR is a process that improves the tenability and justice of their own practice, while fostering greater understanding of their own practice as well as the context in which such practice takes place. Action itself and the awareness regarding the action are of equal importance, which requires practitioner-researchers to critically interrogate their own practice and the underlying assumptions that govern it (McNiff and Whitehead, 2010).

4.2.1 *Pragmatic Action Research*

The form of AR utilised within the project is one of Pragmatic AR; a subtype of AR initiated by Greenwood and Levin (2007) that emphasises its close bond with pragmatic philosophy and democratisation. Greenwood (2007) suggested that practicing AR in a pragmatic manner encourages the reflexive and strategic combination of research methods for addressing specific needs of particular communities and situations. Similarly, Hammond (2013) indicated that many AR projects can be seen as a form of pragmatic inquiry where the pragmatic assumptions regarding knowledge have been

adopted by many action researchers in their research and practice. Such an association between AR and pragmatism can be explained in three reasons according to Hammond (2013). First, action researchers arduously and continually generate knowledge through their actions as they give rigorous and reflective examination to the impact of these actions. This is seen as parallel to the pragmatic assumption of knowledge as fallible and consequential (Hammond, 2013), conveying the pragmatic point that practice may be the best way to determine what truly works. This also leads AR to have practical local impact upon the community. Secondly, generating knowledge by examining the impact of actions reflects the epistemological view of pragmatism that the way of knowing is dependent on the practicality of actions. This also explains why AR is a continual, iterative process that always allows knowledge and actions to be challenged to minimise the gap between them. Thirdly, the significance of collaboration in AR is indicative of the pragmatic interest in intersubjective agreement. Collaboration has an epistemological significance of providing a way to validate knowledge, as the consensus derived from democratic discussion leads to warranted assertions about reality and rejects unjustified opinions and dogma (Elliott, 2006).

Similarly, Greenwood (2007) suggests that AR should not be seen as merely a research method or technique, but instead, it is an effort in developing a stage for collaborative learning as well as the implementation and evaluation of emancipatory actions. Reducing it to merely a set of methods may be disregarding its larger concerns pertaining to democratisation, justice, and sustainability. Greenwood (2007) further highlighted three elements that are essential to Pragmatic AR.

- (a) *Construction of arenas for dialogue.* This refers to the development of a work form that endorses mutual learning, whereby participants and researchers work

together in a dialogical manner that allows reciprocal learning (Greenwood and Levin, 2007).

- (b) *Co-generative research.* Here, the research process aimed at knowledge generation is rooted in collaborative experiences and joint reflections on these experiences done by the participants and researchers. This resembles an exercise of democratisation that is embedded in both the AR process and outcome. The research process of AR is therefore participatory by nature and one that values openness and justice for all participants. The outcome of AR empowers the participants by addressing their interests and increasing their control over their own context (Greenwood and Levin, 2007).
- (c) *The use of multi-method techniques and work forms.* AR may embrace a variety of methods, theories, and work forms (e.g. quantitative and qualitative methods under the realm of Social Science, interpretive models used in linguistic studies, etc.). Which method(s) to use depends on what would be appropriate for a specific situation, along with the collaborative reflections of researchers and participants, so long as the method(s) do not disempower the individuals involved in the AR process (Greenwood and Levin, 2007; Crist *et al.*, 2009).

4.2.2 *Rationale For Employing AR*

An Extended Epistemology

There were some epistemological elements I hoped to achieve via the utilisation of AR in my project. A core reason for using AR in my project lies in one of its greatest strengths; namely, its capability of addressing practical issues and generating knowledge at the same time. It is a characteristic scholars have termed the ‘extended epistemology’ (Heron and Reason, 1997, p. 5; Reason, 2006, p. 4). The latter is a

framework that facilitates the development of knowledge through AR via the creation of four ways of knowing: experiential knowing, presentational knowing, propositional knowing, and practical knowing (Heron and Reason, 1997; Reason, 2006). When action researchers work actively through the continual process of action and reflection, they embody the extended epistemology where all four layers of knowing are present (Heron and Reason, 2008).

Experiential knowing refers to knowing through direct experience. It is the knowing through one's relationship with others that includes direct perception, empathy, and resonance (Heron and Reason, 2008). Experiential knowing is in many ways comparable with the concept of tacit knowledge that is often described as implicit, unconscious, or unspoken, and is often inaccessible to one's conscious awareness (Reason, 2006). Reason (2006) continued to suggest that one of the aims of action inquiries is to articulate and investigate tacit knowledge by adopting ways of challenging presumptions and being in-tune with experience.

Presentational knowing derives from experiential knowing and transforms it into the first attempt of explicit expression. The stories we tell and the language we use are seen as reflections of our subjective perceptions of experiences (Reason, 2006). For action researchers, presentational knowing is not solely about how they present their work or findings. The qualities of their perception, contemplation, and the awareness they impart also count (Coghlan and Brydon-Miller, 2014).

Propositional knowing is the intellectual knowing conveyed through conceptual expression of ideas and theories that emerge from the in-depth examination of experience and presentational knowing, thereby enabling the linkage between AR and scholarship (Heron and Reason, 1997).

Practical knowing is the knowing of how to do something. It is knowing-in-action that differs from knowing-about-action. Practical knowing is expressed as a technical, political, or interpersonal competency built upon the engagement in action and other forms of knowing (Reason and Bradbury, 2008; Coghlan and Brydon-Miller, 2014). The essence of practical knowing is one's awareness and mastery of skilful doing that is beyond theoretical formulation (Reason, 2006).

These four interrelated aspects of knowing, representing the extended epistemology, have been considered in two ways: the pyramid model, and the cyclic model (Coghlan and Brydon-Miller, 2014) and both have a relevance to my project. These two ways are illustrated in Figure 4.1.

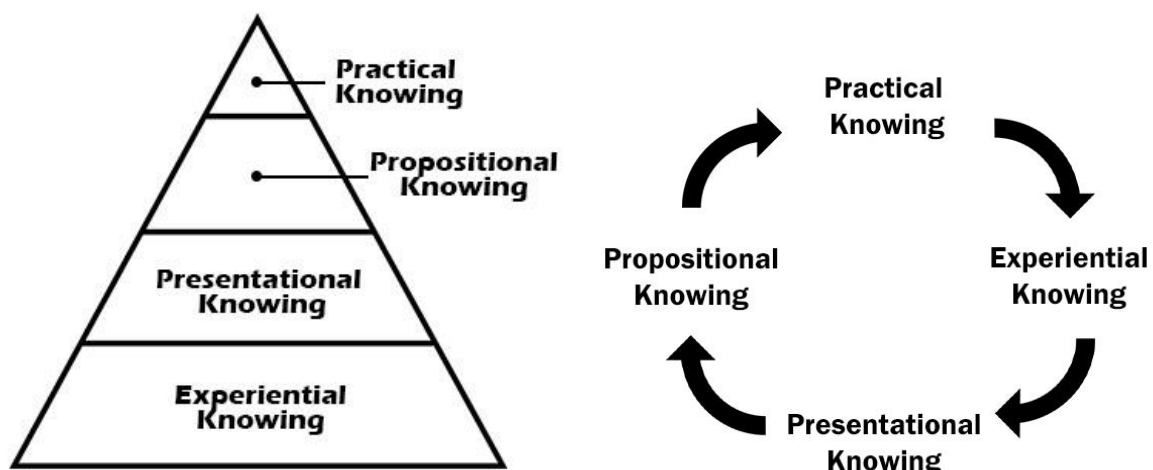


Figure 4.1 *The Pyramid & Cyclic Models Of The Extended Epistemology*

The pyramid model forms a hierarchy with experiential knowing as its foundation, emphasising that direct involvement is the basis for all forms of knowing, with informed practice (i.e. practical knowing) being the culmination of all other forms of knowing. The cyclic model presents the four ways of knowing in a cycle where each of them can be a starting point to move towards other forms of knowing in spirals

(Coghlan and Brydon-Miller, 2014). In both cases, the fundamental belief is that individuals naturally engage in all forms of knowing and tacitly merge them in their everyday life. But in AR, this process becomes intentional (Reason and Bradbury, 2008). The congruence of the four ways in AR reflects the validity of knowing whereby knowing is grounded in experience, perceived and conveyed through expressions, explained through theories, and transformed into actions. The intentional use of this cycle may lead to even more fruitful outcomes where skilful actions contrived from enriched experience, manifest as well-delineated expressions and thorough conceptual frameworks, eventually inspiring further improvement of actions (Reason and Bradbury, 2008). These tenets are exactly what I hope to achieve with my project thereby affirming my choice of utilising AR. More importantly, these same tenets to me represent features of *praxis* that I hope to impart to other Facilitators via my work as a clinical supervisor and educator.

A Mechanism Of Professional Development & Community Engagement

Another vital reason for adopting AR was that its collaborative and reflective nature served as a mechanism that allowed me to rigorously inspect my own practice and its potential impact on my community. Collaboration empowers people by enabling them to work together towards a solution to the problems they have mutually (Marrow, 1969). Correspondingly, it is palpable that broader participation has the capacity for initiating stronger agreement for change. Models developed from broader participation tend to be sounder and more feasible as the interests of various stakeholders are more likely to be integrated (Whyte, 1991). Participation also facilitates continual reinvention and refinement by allowing participants to get collectively involved in the planning, execution, evaluation and modification stages of implementing a contextualised change (Whyte, 1991). This process can lead to empowerment which takes place when

participants develop a stronger sense that they have control over their own life circumstances. Participants are most likely to be empowered when they are directly involved in decisions and activities that are of significance to their own life circumstances (Crist *et al.*, 2009). In my project, I tried to accomplish these facets by soliciting the views of Facilitators and ARY regarding what may be efficacious in youth work interventions for the local community. This was done both before as well as during the implementation of the BPSw Model. Consequently, the results evident from the final phase of the project (Phase VII: Facilitator training) reflected that many Facilitators found the information shared both relevant and useful for their context (as reflected in [Section 5.5.2](#)).

In AR, the action researcher functions as a leveraging instrument that participates in collaboration, processes critical reflections from themselves and others, aimed at the generation of useful knowledge and practice. With the collaborative and reflective stances, AR keeps the action researcher grounded and honest instead of indulging themselves in the sense of being an arbitrary 'hero innovator' as stated by Georgiades and Phillimore (1975, quoted in Lacey, 1996, p. 350). For me, I did not see this project as a leading path to a correct social circumstance for the individuals and communities involved. Rather, I conducted the present project with the hope of making a skilful contribution to the democratisation of knowledge, and a social change that is ground-up, self-directed, and sustainable. Thus, Pragmatic AR seemed most relevant as it offered the possibility for such change by empowering the community, and tackling practical issues without downgrading itself to short-term problem-solving (Hammond, 2013).

Similarly, improvement and involvement are two essential goals that are perhaps of equal importance for all AR projects. AR seeks to improve in three areas: the practice,

the practitioner's understanding of the practice, and the context in which the practice is carried out (Carr and Kemmis, 1986). The adoption of AR for the present project facilitated the refinement of practice and the reflective examination of it. It also helped in the understanding of the social context through immediate experience and collaboration. I believe it thus helped strengthen the translation of practice and knowledge with an eye towards the interrelated connection between them so that neither one was under-recognised. Via this process, I felt that my role as an action researcher was not as a leader that directs the research but rather a participant involved and contributing to the journey of a collaborative change whereby decision-making was governed by democratic rules.

Through the course of my clinical practice over the past 15 years, I have come to have a greater appreciation of John Dewey's theory of action that refuses to see society as isolated individuals, and values group exploration of social situations that is beyond theoretical deduction (Somekh, 2006). With project activities and reflections (highlighted in Chapter 5), the present project aimed to induce the four ways of knowing for both participants (i.e. ARY & Facilitators) and myself, in order to better reflect what Dewey may have been espousing. On a larger scale, AR methodology directly addresses the gap between knowledge and practice that is frequently encountered in Social Science by discarding the two-stage process where the researcher that generates knowledge and the practitioner that puts it into use are two separate forces (Somekh, 1995). Thus, the present project utilised AR as a feasible framework that guides the integration of research and practice in the local context; elements essential if the research inquiry is to be addressed.

Overall, AR greatly appealed to me because of its suitability for the research inquiry, and its alignment with my past experience, my current role as a practitioner-researcher, as well as my philosophical orientation.

4.3 *Methodological Alignment With Philosophical Orientation*

There is a strong association between MMR and pragmatism as suggested by many authors (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie 2004; Brannen, 2005; Tashakkori and Creswell, 2007). Pragmatism does not accept the traditional view that quantitative and qualitative approaches are epistemologically incompatible, but instead, it holds that these methods need to be combined constructively in order to best address the research question (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). With such a viewpoint, pragmatism has helped corroborate and steer MMR to be the third methodological approach in social and behavioural research (Alise and Teddlie, 2010).

Pragmatism embodies John Dewey's advocacy of employing the most workable way of inquiry in seeking knowledge and scientific truth (Szyjka, 2012). It holds the ontological view that reality is fallible, and can be both individually and socially constructed (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011; Kaushik and Walsh, 2019). To elaborate, objective reality may exist independently from individual experience, but it may nonetheless be contextually grounded and only be disclosed through the exploration of human perceptions (Kaushik and Walsh, 2019). Pragmatism's epistemology concerns practicality where ways of knowing depend on what is most appropriate and feasible for the research question. Methodological approaches can therefore be combined to provide the most workable solutions. Pragmatism places great priority on the research question, and suggests that the research question itself should dictate which methods are the most suitable and how to mix them. This would thus allow for the arrival

of knowledge with greater completeness (Kivunja and Kuyini, 2017). Also, Tashakkori and Creswell (2007) argue that the unique correspondence between its view of knowledge and its methodological concerns regarding knowledge generation is considered a great strength of pragmatism.

Likewise, Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) suggest that pragmatic methodology is pluralistic and concerns what works in practice. It also has a strongly axiological emphasis of conducting research that benefits people (Kivunja and Kuyini, 2017). For practitioners like myself, the default nature of work appears to be generally pragmatic in orientation. In daily work, practitioners are faced with unpredictable issues and situations that require creative and feasible solutions within certain frameworks. The adoption of a pragmatic worldview is therefore highly consistent with my professional practice and the values that I hold (as specified in Chapter 3). Pragmatism also allows practitioners the freedom to conduct research with fewer boundaries, thus arriving at knowledge with general completeness that informs, and is informed, by daily practice. This is congruent with the position expressed by Biesta and Burbules (2003) that educational research (similar to mine) is commonly expected to give rise to knowledge that is in tune with educators' everyday practice. Simply knowing something may not be satisfactory for educators as educators often demand knowledge that sheds light on their actions and decision-making. Biesta and Burbules (2003) further pointed out that educational research is not merely research about education, but rather research for education. Practitioners should thus be able to make use of the knowledge to understand and manage their own educational contexts; something I hoped to achieve with my project.

With these issues in mind, situating the present project in the Pragmatic Paradigm helped direct the concurrent use of different methods as suitable tools to answer my research inquiry effectively and holistically, allowing for what I believe to be the advance of knowledge

regarding the issues under investigation. Nevertheless, such aims may be immaterial if the methodological choices negated rigour; as shall be elaborated on next.

4.4 *Research Rigour & Trustworthiness*

Research rigour is characterised as the quality of being precise, thorough, and accurate (Cypress, 2017). Tobin and Begley (2004) position rigour as the scheme by which integrity and competence of a research piece is warranted and how it is concerned with ethics, irrespective of paradigmatic orientation. Research without thorough strategies to assure rigour could therefore be easily reduced to subjective assumptions.

Concurrently, reliability and validity are two concepts that play a necessary part of quality evaluation in all research. However, these concepts appear to have a positivist grounding, and are therefore more pertinent to quantitative research (Rolfe, 2006). Qualitative inquiry on the other hand, which makes up the bulk of my project, is a path of exploration and explanation that does not lend itself to inelastic boundaries (Thomas and Magilvy, 2011). As such, the concept of *Trustworthiness*, a well-accepted equivalent of rigour in qualitative research, was given more emphasis. Trustworthiness is assessed based on the functions of reliability and validity (Seale, 1999), and is considered to be concordant to the well-established concepts of objectivity, internal validity, and external validity (Manning, 1997).

Table 4.1 illustrates the four criteria of research rigour / trustworthiness conceptualised by Lincoln and Guba (1985). The strategies used in the present project to ensure such rigour / trustworthiness, along with some limitations of AR & MMR, are discussed thereafter.

Qualitative Research	Quantitative Research	Definition
Credibility	Internal Validity	The level of accordance between participants' view and researcher's delineation of them.
Transferability	Generalisability	Also termed as external validity. Refers to the extent to which results can be applied to a defined larger population.
Dependability	Reliability	The extent to which findings are consistent over time.
Confirmability	Objectivity	Refers to the degree of neutrality, or the extent to which findings are clearly drawn from the data, and not the researcher's personal motives.

Table 4.1 *Lincoln And Guba's (1985) Criteria For Rigour / Trustworthiness*

Triangulation

Triangulation has been viewed as one of the most substantial techniques for enhancing credibility in qualitative research (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Besides between-method triangulation discussed in [Section 4.1.1](#), the present project also employed investigator triangulation and data triangulation to strengthen overall trustworthiness.

Investigator triangulation is defined by Denzin (1978) as the involvement of multiple evaluators in the inspection of the same issue. Investigator triangulation was prevalent in several stages of the present project. For example, in the development stage of the BPSw intervention (Phase I), a needs analysis was conducted with Facilitators. Additionally, consensus-building sessions were conducted with other professionals from my organisation to

attain their views on how to best combat researcher biases and attain meaningful data / feedback. In the evaluation stage of the intervention (Phases III & VI), opinions and reflections from co-facilitators and stakeholders, such as the teachers of ARY participants, were sought and noted. This included co-facilitators and I interpreting qualitative data separately before coming together for cross-checking and synthesis. These actions were done to heighten trustworthiness of the research by achieving investigator triangulation and minimising experimenter bias. With concern to my positionality in this research, investigator triangulation helped ensure the neutrality and validity in my understanding of the problem as well as the development and evaluation of the intervention programme.

Data triangulation refers to triangulating by multiple data sources. Denzin (1978) clarified that data sources are to be differentiated from methods of collecting data as, in essence, the latter refers to techniques. Data triangulation in the present project, for example, is evident in the collection of data from individuals in various roles (e.g., past participants of ARY interventions, teachers, counsellors, etc.) and from runs of the ARY intervention and Facilitator training programme.

Data Transcription & Documentation

For the present project, quantitative and qualitative data collected was carefully examined and kept in electronic format with semi-structured interviews audio-recorded and transcribed into written form. This was done meticulously as a form of quality control that aimed to ensure the authenticity and completeness of data. Heightened data quality was beneficial to ensure respondents' and participants' true opinions might be better represented. Although it was time-consuming to transcribe the audio-recordings, such documentation served as a useful trail for auditing where the research process could be easily traced and examined by others and myself to enhance dependability / reliability (Tobin and Begley, 2004).

Nevertheless, transcriptions are considered ‘processed data’ instead of raw data as suggested by Wengraf (2001, p. 7). One downside of this process is the loss of paralinguistic clues that may be a threat to data quality and validity. Thus, the weaknesses of transcription were attentively considered in a reflective manner during data collection and analysis. Notable points recognised regarding this issue were included in my own reflective journal. In addition, the audio-recordings were kept as a reference for the tone, punctuation, and other elements of the speech that might not be well captured by the transcription. This was done to avoid misrepresentation of interviewees’ view(s) by the researcher, thus further aiding to enhance credibility.

Reflexivity

Research validity is strengthened when researchers critically scrutinise the limitations of their own research (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011). In the present project, reflexivity was applied to address potential researcher bias, and to serve as a means to interpret the data collected through a sieve of personal values and understanding, instead of attempting to forcibly repress or remove such biases (Jones, 2001). McCabe and Holmes (2009) noted that controlling for biases through the practice of reflexivity is a substantial strategy to ensure rigour.

In practice, a reflective journal was used to log the details of how I may have influenced the research process, as well as how I might be influenced by the participants. I believe this served as a useful tool for heightening confirmability / objectivity. Journalling has been considered an impactful practice in developing reflexivity; a path of continual learning, self-awareness, creativity and critical-thinking, that helps reconcile one’s subjective beliefs and conceptualisation of reality (Locke and Brazelton, 1997; Cunliffe, 2004). The reflective journal may have raised the rigour / trustworthiness of the present project by achieving two types of reflexivity noted by Lincoln and Guba (1985): *Positional Reflexivity* where researchers reflecting on how their personal factors, derived from their past, and current experience

interfere with their interaction with participants and interpretation of the data, as well as *Textual Reflexivity* where researchers are sceptical and self-critical about their use of language to represent and construct reality.

Another technique of practicing reflexivity used in the present project was bracketing. Bracketing requires awareness on the part of the researcher so that the research can better represent truth (Rolls and Relf, 2006) and accordingly, three practical ways of bracketing were employed in the present project.

- (a) *Bracketing interviews.* This involved conducting dialogue sessions with other sources (e.g. other professionals and / or stakeholders) regarding preconceptions and personal biases and listing down the issues discussed in detail as suggested by Tufford and Newman (2010). Bracketing interviews were conducted prior to, during and after data collection to identify factors that may interfere with objectivity regarding the data collection and analysis as argued by Rolls and Relf (2006).
- (b) *Reflective journalling and memo writing.* This involved starting a reflective journal prior to the commencement of the project in which preconceptions were carefully noted so that they could be identified and considered throughout the research process. Writing memos of any notable interference during the entire research process for in-depth consideration, as suggested by Tufford and Newman (2010), was also executed.
- (c) *Organising & presenting points in final report.* This would allow readers to make informed judgements about the rigour / trustworthiness of the research by having transparent access to the researcher's preconceptions and reflections. Chapters 2 & 3 of this commentary may be evidence of this.

Transferability

I believe transferability in qualitative research often deals with applicability. Korstjens and Moser (2018) suggested that transferability judgements should be made by the readers, not the authors, as the authors are not in a position to appropriately decide whether the research findings would be applicable in their readers' specific settings. Therefore, it is advised that what is primarily within a researcher's responsibility for transferability is to offer thick descriptions, not merely on the findings, but also the process and the context, so that these documentations would become meaningful and usable to readers. Chapters 1-3 and 5 of this commentary hopes to achieve this.

Additionally, in the present project, Phase VII (training for Facilitators) served as a test of transferability / generalisability of the BPSw intervention model developed and conducted in the earlier phases of the project. Results gathered in Phase VII seem to suggest a desirable level of transferability / generalisability for Facilitators regarding use of the BPSw Model in their work (as highlighted in [Section 5.5.2](#)).

AR & MMR Limitations

Despite their suitability for my project, AR and MMR are not without their limitations that may have profoundly impacted the rigour / trustworthiness of the project as well as the implications of findings. Accordingly, these limitations, and how they were addressed, are elaborated on in [Section 7.2.2](#) & [7.2.3](#) of the commentary as part of a larger discussion on the project from an apex viewpoint so that appropriate inferences may be attained on the project as a whole.

4.5 *Ethical Considerations*

This section focuses on some of the ethical challenges faced during the project. While not an exhaustive explication, key elements for ethical consideration are highlighted.

4.5.1 *Ethical Aspects of MMR & AR*

Ethical considerations involve a process of doing good and avoiding, or at the very least, minimising harm to participants, communities and environments (Israel and Hay, 2006). Often, researchers are faced with a series of decisions in the research process and they are responsible for justifying their decisions in terms of suitability, feasibility, and ethics (Denscombe, 2010). Researchers are therefore required to be mindful of ethical issues often accompanying quantitative and qualitative research, and to anticipate the ethical issues specifically associated with MMR (Creswell *et al.*, 2011). For example, participants are often anonymous in quantitative research designs. However, in MMR, identifying information may be required from participants for a qualitative follow-up session. In the present project, thorough briefing and debriefing sessions were valuable tools to navigate this tricky issue and protect the rights of participants. For example participants were informed in advance regarding matters pertaining to the purpose of the research and the protection of data.

The present project was built on my professional experiences accumulated over the past 15 years. Accordingly, from my experiences and knowledge, I have identified a series of ethical issues that may occur and how they may be addressed. This is particularly the case as the present project involved administering the BPSw intervention to adolescents. Throughout the research process, I have tried to be particularly mindful and reflexive with the ethical issues that might be involved when working with juveniles. On a larger note, one key principle that governed the research decisions for the present project, and a value I tried to hold steadfast to, was non-maleficence (elaborated on in Section 3.4.3). For me, this included two elements: not doing harm, and not getting in the way of positively contributing to the experience of participants.

Such elements were consistent with the ethical codes followed by Raven for interventions with young, vulnerable people. In essence, Raven's protocols were adhered to in an effort to ensure care for all participants involved. These protocols were adapted from the Singapore Psychological Society's Code of Professional Ethics (Singapore Psychological Society, 2019). Appendix-G illustrates specific Raven protocols applicable and adhered to for the present project.

Issues concerning ethics and safety were especially important with the presence of the experiential learning activities which included night outing sessions. An example of specific considerations made to ensure non-maleficence with regards to the experiential learning activities included the conducting of a Risk Assessment Matrix (RAM) which was a detailed form used by Raven to identify risks and prepare for adverse conditions. Raven's RAM was used to guide actions and detail specific considerations, as well as contingency plans, associated with conducting outdoor activities. For instance, the RAM helped ensure the occurrence of everything from the reconnaissance of activity sites to post-activity debriefs.

Relatedly, Banegas and Villacañas-de-Castro (2015) suggest that for an educational amelioration to be sustainable, it needs to be initiated from the inside out which requires the participation of learners. Researchers are thus obligated to critically consider the impact that the programme may have on learners and the larger community. This includes being aware that vulnerability may be at work even when young learners such as the ARY, are treated as active informants and co-constructors of meaning in the project. Similarly, Doyle (2007) suggested that whilst a research project plays a part in the researcher's professional development, the young learners are not an auxiliary for the researcher's development. Accordingly, I believe AR was the approach that would

best guide my research inquiry with the least number of ethical issues due to its participatory and collaborative nature.

Nevertheless, the following ethical issues often accompanying AR (Banegas and Villacañas-de-Castro, 2015) were carefully considered:

Collaboration

AR is collaborative and participatory by nature. Accordingly, it may be important to discuss and avoid any form of coercion to ensure that both collaboration and participation are voluntary. The BPSw intervention in the present project was executed with partner schools that were agreeable, and had a history of working with my organisation (i.e. Raven). Parents / guardians of participants were also notified and required to present their written consent before participants could be spoken to. Furthermore, details regarding confidentiality and anonymity were discussed in the consensus-building stage with stakeholders and key decision-makers at Raven and the partner schools prior to the commencement of the project. In all, I endeavoured to avoid imposing my personal ideas on others throughout the research process, and to make decisions based on collaborative discussions and agreements. Banegas and Villacañas-de-Castro (2015) noted that collaboration and execution of any AR project must be under the care of those who are concerned and willing to research their own educational environments. I believe such common understanding amongst all parties involved in this project laid the foundation for facilitating equality in the collaboration. Even ARY participants themselves were provided an avenue to vocalise their views regarding their selection and participation at their respective first session. At all times, every effort was taken to not coerce participants into being part of the intervention. In fact, the BPSw intervention was deliberately positioned as something *special* for ARY participants and

not other students of the school (i.e. one that included night outings, no homework, the ability to wear their home clothes during outings, catered food, etc.).

Confidentiality & Anonymity

In research, confidentiality is defined as the non-disclosure of identifying information that makes participants unidentifiable to anyone outside of the authorised people at the time of informed consent (Doyle, 2007). Anonymity is one of the many features that helps ensure confidentiality which includes using a fabricated code instead of participants' names (Doyle, 2007). However, due to the participatory and context-responsive nature of AR projects, confidentiality and anonymity may not always be fully possible (Zeni, 1998; Banegas and Villacañas-de-Castro, 2015). Thus, this issue was discussed in the consensus-building stage to reach detailed agreement. All data collected was stored and catalogued in accordance with the Confidentiality Protocols of Middlesex University and Raven (e.g. in a secure facility for up to 10 years). Participants and parents / guardians indicated their full understanding of their participation by giving informed consent forms. They could also choose to withdraw from the project freely at any time without consequences; something that was reinforced to the partner schools.

Informed Consent

Whilst informed consent is usually a feature to ensure confidentiality, it is of importance as the present project included working with juveniles. Informed consent forms were attained from the parents / guardians of the juveniles. Both the partner school and the parents / guardians were briefed on the objectives and methodology of the proposed intervention before participants were engaged. They were also provided with my contact details and informed that they could contact me, Raven or the partner school if they required any further information and / or clarification.

Representation & Voice

This is an ethical issue embedded in AR where researchers are often interpreting other people's view(s) and writing about them (Banegas and Villacañas-de-Castro, 2015). Besides the strategies highlighted earlier in this chapter taken to combat experimenter bias which could possibly skew the representation of participants' view(s), I have also reflected on this issue in relation to my role as a sole researcher conducting a project supported by my organisation that may provide me with better job stability and professional development. Such a role could act as a potential factor for me to overvalue the data, or view it as skewed towards attaining positive results, and thus not representing the true voice of participants. In order to outweigh these complexities, reflexivity and different forms of triangulation were planned and executed throughout the research process in an attempt to afford greater clarity and transparency to the representations made.

4.5.2 *Positionality*

This final segment expands on a key point to be noted about my project before the next chapter elaborates on the project activities. Earlier sections highlighted how reflexive practice is often-adopted in AR projects. Positional reflexivity leads the researcher to examining how their personal factors, whether results from their past or during the research process, may influence the investigation in any way (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Accordingly, reflections need to be made with respect to a researcher's position as an insider or outsider in the research process. Outsider-researchers are often distant from the investigated to ensure neutrality, which may be considered akin to the quantitative epistemology. Insider-researchers, however, may directly interact with the investigated to disclose meaningful insights which may be considered akin to qualitative

epistemology. Ultimately, my view is that whichever role the researcher is embracing, integrity and ethics must be considered and practiced in a way that the researcher does not deliberately influence the research with their own bias. Reflexivity is a significant feature of AR especially considering the researcher's direct involvement makes them a part of the social situation under investigation (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2007). An important part of reflexivity therefore includes the making of explicit descriptions by which readers are able to assess the validity of the research reasonably.

Consistent with the issues summarised by Unluer (2012), as an insider-researcher, I was faced with role duality where I needed to balance my insider and researcher roles (in my case, being a Facilitator, educator and a researcher). I was constantly aware of the fact that the closeness of involvement may restrain me from seeing the bigger picture on multiple dimensions. I was also aware that the inside knowledge regarding the people and the context may lead me to unconsciously make assumptions in the research process which may hinder objectivity. However, Bonner and Tolhurst (2002) noted the following key strengths of being an insider-researcher; all of which I benefited from with my project's execution:

- (a) having greater understanding of the context and culture under investigation as compared with an outsider-researcher;
- (b) not eliciting unnatural change to the social interactions within the context;
- (c) establishing a closeness perceived by participants that may promote acceptance, trust, and the telling of truth;
- (d) being less likely to hold stereotypes; and
- (e) knowing the politics and culture within the context that may make it easier for the researcher to approach people.

Similarly, while an outsider-researcher may be in a position of objectivity, it can be epistemologically argued that social experiences cannot be accurately represented by someone from an outside position and outsider-researchers may hold and apply explanatory frameworks that may be inappropriate for a context (Bridges, 2001). Additionally, the 'disempowering effects' of articulating other people's views as an outsider may even be an ethical and political concern (Bridges, 2001, p. 372).

Rabe (2003) suggested that a researcher's positionality can be defined in the context of power. The researcher is at some point powerful, while the investigated can be relatively powerless. When participants perceive the researcher as more powerful, they may subsequently alter their response or behaviour in certain ways. Furthermore, power inequality may exist as researchers are the ultimate composers of the final written paper, even though participants are given the chance to comment on it (Rabe, 2003). As a practitioner-researcher, I tried my best to be cognisant of my own power with regards to when and where it was exercised, and tried to ensure it was used reasonably, without damage to others; aspects deemed crucial (Fox, Martin and Green, 2007). I tried to be reflexive and self-critical with this matter not only to eliminate potential harm, but also to ensure trustworthiness of the data and findings.

Furthermore, a researcher's positionality can also be defined in the context of knowledge (Rabe, 2003). Inside knowledge is the element that differentiates insiders and outsiders. Which role to take may thus vary at some points depending on the researcher's level of familiarity with certain vernacular in a particular context.

Lastly, Rabe (2003) shared that another way of understanding positionality is in relation with the concepts of emic and etic perspectives in Anthropology. An emic perspective has a similar stance to the role of an insider-researcher as it refers to the construction

of meaning from the conceptual framework of a native member of a social group. On the other hand, an etic perspective has a similar stance to the role of an outsider-researcher as it refers to the construction of meaning from the conceptual framework of an observer outside of the social group. The stratification of this point through the lens of Anthropology, as explained by Rabe (2003), really allowed me to understand the issues at play on a much deeper level. In the context of my project, it led me to see that being a neutral outsider may potentially hinder true understanding in Social Science by reducing it to a conversation aimed at finding common ground between an insider and an outsider (Rabe, 2003).

In conclusion, Corbin Dwyer and Buckle (2009) suggested that it may be overly simplistic and restrictive to view the insider and outsider concepts dualistically. A dialectical view may thus be needed where the differences are not seen as absolute. This notion appears to be highly congruent with my own views centred on pragmatism and MMR. As such, while the issue of my positionality was crucial and explored, I was also constantly mindful of what I was working towards and the elements that were crucial to answering my research inquiry (e.g. employing a non-dogmatic viewpoint). Accordingly, I believe this balancing act within my mind never really derailed me from my larger aims within my project such as the pursuit of new knowledge, as it was always guided by my pragmatic beliefs that seemed to ground me firmly with the notion that running improper research (in any way, shape or form) could not possibly be an element of *what works*, and can therefore, never really be part of my project aims.

Chapter 5: The Enterprise (Project Activities & Findings)

‘Do not repeat the tactics which have gained you one victory, but let your methods be regulated by the infinite variety of circumstances.’ – Sun Tzu

While the previous chapter explored the rationale for using AR and a mixed methods approach, this chapter shall elaborate on the key activities of the project to pave the way for an examination of the results. I shall try to highlight key activities such as data collection and data analysis in chronological order leading to a presentation of the results. In essence, the key activities of the project occurred along a continuum of action and reflection and shall be presented in reference to these two constructs.

5.1 Overview of Project Activities

The following Table 5.1 provides an overview of the key activities conducted during the project leading to the creation of the artefact (i.e. the Training Manual for Facilitators, or TM). Crucially, I began the project with two aims broken into seven phases.

Aims	Phases	AR Steps	Objective(s)	Key Activities
<p><u><i>Aim (1):</i></u> To advance practice by creating a structured, transdisciplinary and contextualised intervention model, incorporating biological, psychological and social work components (termed the BPSw Model) as a form of intervention programme for ARY in Singapore.</p>	<p>Phase I</p>	<p>Step 1: Identifying a Problem</p>	<p>To study and analyse issues pertaining to ARY in my community and how best to address the issue of having a contextualised intervention programme (partly informed by my own experiences as a practitioner).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Literature reviews b. Observational analysis of existing intervention programmes for ARY c. Examination of notes from previous interventions conducted and observed d. Semi-structured needs analysis interviews with Facilitators and former ARY participants (audio-recorded & summarised in written form) e. Commencement of reflective journal for lead investigator and co-facilitator (ongoing throughout all phases and steps) f. Generating an intervention model based on findings
		<p>Step 2: Generating a Possible Solution</p>	<p>To develop an intervention model that can be used as a therapeutic framework for planning, implementing and evaluating intervention programmes for ARY in Singapore. This was influenced by the needs analysis, a literature review, prior observational analysis and my professional experiences.</p>	

Aims	Phases	AR Steps	Objective(s)	Key Activities
	Phase II	Step 3: Putting the Solution to a Test	To implement a structured transdisciplinary and contextualised intervention programme for ARY (termed BPSw Model) and to collect data / feedback regarding the programme.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Preliminary screening of participants b. Discussion with stakeholders c. Planning & preparation (including development of evaluation tools) d. Conducting the intervention programme
		Step 4a: Gathering Data / Feedback		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Data / feedback collection <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using planned data gathering tools for quantitative data • Using planned data gathering tools for qualitative data
	Phase III	Step 4b: Analysing Data / Feedback	To review and analyse the data / feedback collected on the effectiveness of the BPSw Model from Cohort 1 (first run).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Data / feedback analysis b. Triangulation of data

Aims	Phases	AR Steps	Objective(s)	Key Activities
	Phase IV	Step 5: Evaluating, Modifying, and Re- Integrating Data / Feedback Into a New Solution	To revise and re-implement the BPSw Model on a second batch of participants (i.e. Cohort 2).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Data / feedback analysis & review b. Continuation of reflective journal c. Further literature review (where necessary) d. Modification of BPSw Model e. Planning & preparation for the 2nd run of the BPSw intervention
	Phase V	AR Refinement (Repeat Step 1 to Step 4)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Preliminary screening of participants b. Preparation and reconnaissance c. Conducting the intervention programme d. Data / feedback collection <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using planned data gathering tools for quantitative data • Using planned data gathering tools for qualitative data

Aims	Phases	AR Steps	Objective(s)	Key Activities
				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> e. Continuation of reflective journal of lead investigator and co-facilitator(s) f. Data / feedback analysis g. Triangulation of data
	<p>Phase VI</p>	<p>Overall Analysis of AR</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Data / feedback collection <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All information from Phases (I) to (V) b. Data / feedback analysis & triangulation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All information from Phases (I) to (V)

Aims	Phases	Objective(s)	Key Activities
<p><i>Aim (2):</i> To enhance the competencies of Facilitators by providing them with a therapeutic model (i.e. the BPSw Model) along with a Training Manual</p>	<p>Phase VII</p>	<p>i. To develop a training programme informed by the experience and data / feedback of utilising the BPSw Model, a literature review, prior observational analysis and my professional experiences to raise the competencies of Facilitators with regards to working with ARY.</p> <p>ii. To implement the training programme and collect data / feedback from participants (i.e. Facilitators). The training programme was administered to five different batches of Facilitators over five runs.</p> <p>iii. To analyse and review the data / feedback collected on the training programme to produce a Training Manual that may subsequently serve as a guide for Facilitators in Singapore (i.e. the Project Artefact).</p>	<p>a. Reviewing the data / feedback from Phases I – VI and distilling relevant data / feedback into seven principles that could serve as a training aid</p> <p>b. Planning & preparation for implementing the Facilitator training</p> <p>c. Conducting the training programme for Facilitators (05 runs)</p> <p>d. Data / feedback collection on Facilitator training</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quantitative and qualitative data via instruments utilised by the Government agency hosting the training <p>e. Continuation of reflective journal</p> <p>f. Planning & producing the Training Manual</p>

Table 5.1 *Project Phases & Activities*

5.2 Project Scope

The following Figure 5.1 provides an illustration of my action research methodology and the key steps enacted during the project. It will be followed by an elaboration of the action & reflection elements.

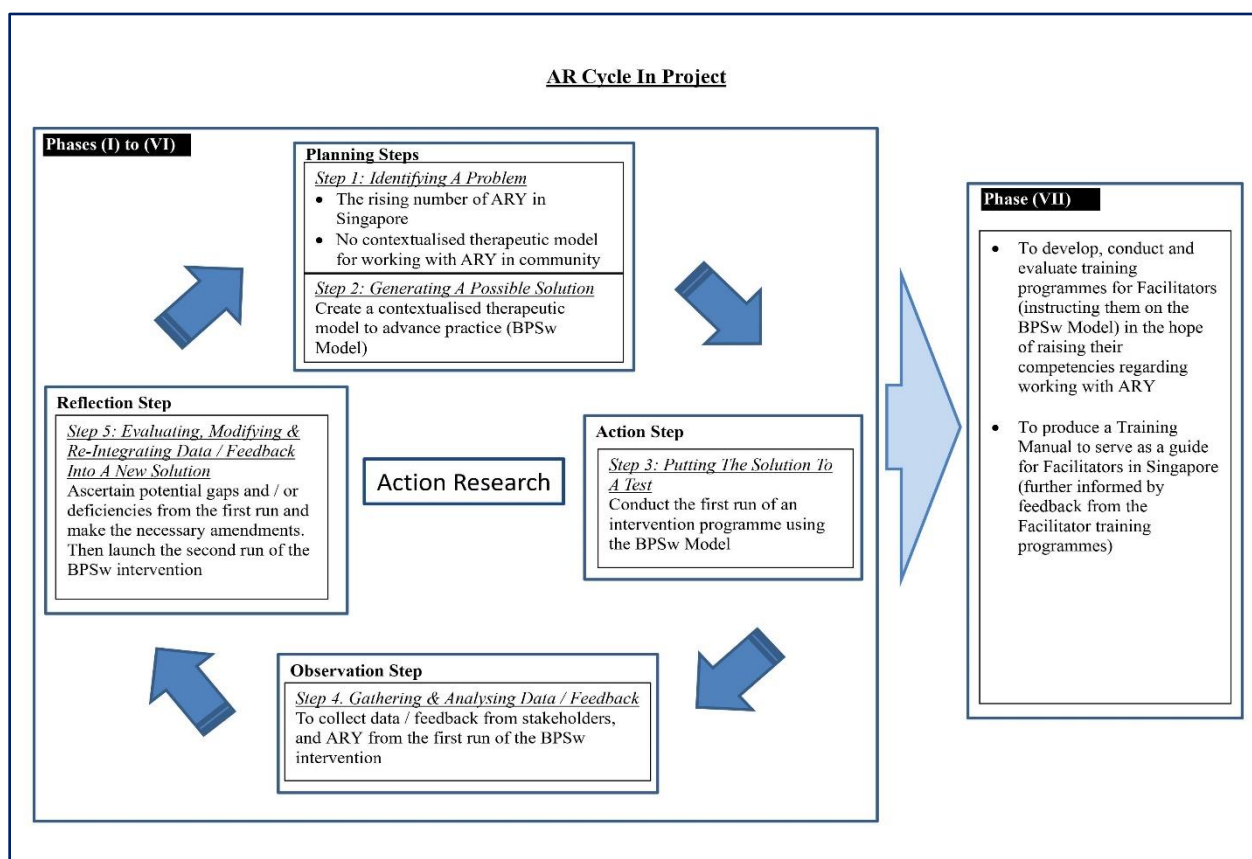


Figure 5.1 AR Cycle In Project

I began the project with an eye towards discovering what could assist in raising the competency levels of Facilitators in my community (Aim 2 - Phase VII). This inevitably subsumed the query of what type(s) of interventions worked well with ARY in my community and whether learning the answer to this could contribute to raising the competencies of Facilitators (Aim 1 - Phase I to VI). In order to achieve all of this, the project was compartmentalised into seven phases as depicted in Table 5.1. The subsequent segments provide an elaboration of the action & reflection elements within each phase.

5.2.1 *Phase I: Actions & Reflections*

This phase of the project was done as Step 1 and Step 2 (The *Planning* Steps, illustrated in [Figure 5.1](#)).

Step 1: Identifying A Problem

The first step of AR is to identify a problem (McNiff, 2002). In the context of the present project, this step included reviewing existing literature, reflecting on my own experiences as a practitioner, as well as conducting semi-structured interviews with ARY (4 respondents), Facilitators (17 respondents) and past participants of my intervention programmes (4 respondents). Interviews ranged from 30 minutes to 2 hours (pre Covid-19 & face-to-face) and vocations included for the Facilitator category included Counsellors, Social Workers, Police Officers, Psychologists and Teachers. This first step of AR also included observational analysis that stemmed from my early years as a practitioner (studying existing programmes for ARY and existing Facilitator training). To elaborate, as a new worker within the Social Service Sector in Singapore, part of my induction into therapeutic work involved me needing to attend a number of training programmes for Facilitators. Additionally, I was also tasked with the logistic preparations for more senior staff at my various organisations as they went out to conduct ARY intervention programmes which meant I could tag along and observe such programmes without being the main Facilitator. All of this provided me with invaluable opportunity, for around 12 months, to be exposed to trainings and programmes that would subsequently inform my doctoral project. Wanting to do my job well, and more as a memory mnemonic, I kept a journal with me. My objective was to note down potential findings regarding three queries; what (e.g. techniques, activities, etc.) worked well during Facilitator training and ARY

programmes, how participants reacted during such trainings and programmes, and what were the main challenges faced by trainers and Facilitators. In essence, for most of the time, I was a non-participant observer performing informal observations in a naturalistic setting. Each observation session lasted from a minimum of 2 hours to spanning a few weeks (e.g. for lengthy training and intervention programmes). I was observing both Facilitators and ARY, jotting down notes and reflections regarding my three queries. When it came time for me to conduct ARY programmes and Facilitator training on my own, I was guided by my journal which helped me analyse behaviours and make inferences about how I wanted to conceptualise and implement my programmes (based on the responses I jotted down regarding my three queries).

Whilst my rough notes were not intended for any scientific inquiry at the time, I now realise that the data I kept for simply wanting to perform my job better, aided my role as a practitioner-researcher in profound ways, as exemplified by their contribution to my doctoral project. It may have even been a simplified form of what some scholars have termed organisational ethnography for healthcare (Côté-Boileau *et al.*, 2020).

Accordingly, all of the mechanisms specified, when coalesced with my own reflective exercises, elucidated the following issues:

- (a) there appeared to be a trend of a rising number of ARY in Singapore but statistics clearly representing this trend were hard to attain due to the tight restrictions emplaced by the local Government agencies;
- (b) there was a lack of a contextualised model for guiding intervention programmes for ARY in Singapore and it appeared as though there was no uniform way to carry out an intervention programme (leading to new Facilitators being shoehorned into tasks they were ill-equipped for);

- (c) ARY found past and existing intervention programmes prosaic and predictable (actual words used included “dull”, “boring”, “useless” and “lame”);
- (d) Facilitators expressed a desire to be instructed with a more useful framework as opposed to the current training programmes based on theoretical frameworks normed on a Western population (many further relayed that they felt existing training programmes were insufficient and inconsequential);
- (e) Facilitators expressed their difficulties with trying to build a TA whilst also attempting to cover topics that they were instructed to cover (e.g. being asked to conduct a life-skills programme over a 2 or 3 sessions timeframe). Many felt that by the time an effective TA could be established, it would often be at the expense of spending less time on content. In fact, many Facilitators themselves stated that current intervention programmes were less than optimal.
- (f) Facilitators expressed a desire to have a structured intervention model (i.e. one that they could edit where necessary) particularly when it came to instructing staff who were new to youth work. Many suggested specific topics they felt should be included in a structured intervention. Such topics were *Teamwork*, *Empathy*, *Respect*, *Effective Communication*, *Overcoming Fear*, *Resilience*, *Creativity* and *Goal-Setting*; and
- (g) a review of 24 nation-wide training programmes by the Government agency responsible for training Facilitators revealed that all programmes were either about addressing specific issues (e.g. addiction in youth, how to use clinical scales, etc.), conducted by non-practitioners (e.g. Human Resource Professionals) or foreign (i.e. non Singapore-based) experts, and highly repetitive in content.

Further reflection and data analysis at the end of Step 1 highlighted the following:

- (h) there was no existing research-based or practitioner-developed ARY intervention programme in Singapore (especially one developed specifically for the local youth). Consequently, there was no contextual model to guide Facilitators in Singapore. I would thus be embarking on a ground-breaking journey which further reinforced my belief that my project was necessary.
- (i) There was no clear consensus on what an effective ARY intervention programme in the local context looked like. All existing programmes did not have a fixed rubrics for measuring their effectiveness (regardless of their length). Most Facilitators, if they did evaluations, would rely on a standard, Government-issued form with a 5-point *Strongly Agree* to *Strongly Disagree* Likert Scale for the following four statements, followed by a request for suggestions regarding improvement (given out at the end of the programme to measure any form effectiveness).

Statement 1: I understand the programme

Statement 2: I find the programme useful

Statement 3: I want to use the skills and knowledge I have gained from this programme

Statement 4: Overall, this programme has helped me

This was the case if the programme was 3 hours or 3 months long. I felt that such opaque measurement rubrics were perhaps inhibiting the improvement of programmes as they could not really delineate specific learning of concepts covered. I would thus have to set about initiating some alternate way to measure my programme and this was what I did to try and get a deeper indication of learning on the part of ARY (elaborated on in Phase II). My reflections in this

area led me to try and capture evaluative data from ARY via quantitative and qualitative form (for wholeness, trustworthiness and verification).

- (j) If I were to address some of the issues highlighted by my respondents, which very much gelled with my own experiences as a practitioner, I would need to construct a radically different yet structured ARY intervention programme that addressed the three key issues regarding existing programmes highlighted in Chapter 2. They are listed below and are a synthesis of the points mentioned in [Section 2.3.2](#) of this commentary.

Issue 1: To have decreased resistance towards intervention programmes by ARY.

For this, I decided to construct a programme that tried in many ways to control for confounds and be novel (e.g. to include night outings). I decided to measure development in this issue via qualitative feedback from ARY as well as actual attendance rates for the intervention programme.

Issue 2: To have increased receptivity of intervention programmes by stakeholders (e.g. ARY & Facilitators).

For this, I decided to construct a programme that touched upon a few key life-skills but always circled back to one main topic of developing critical-thinking. My belief was that a streamlined intervention programme with a single, main topic would not only reduce confusion and aid receptivity, but also lend itself to be easily understood and disseminated as an instructional tool. It would further provide a form of structure and a central goal for ARY intervention programmes. I decided to measure development in this via qualitative input / feedback from ARY and Facilitators.

Issue 3: To have some level of learning captured in the form of data that reflected decreased resistance towards learning by ARY. My belief here was that learning

would be aided if Facilitators and ARY had a better TA. I thus planned for the first session to focus more on TA-building activities and reduced content. Additionally, I decided to construct a basic pre-post questionnaire with a mix of quantitative and qualitative data to serve as a form of measuring learning regarding specific topics covered noting that this was not done for ARY intervention programmes in my country. While the pre-post questionnaires were not constructed to be clinically valid tools, I believed they would assist in providing a basic framework for more accurate measurement with regards to ARY learning within an intervention programme (highlighted in Phase II – Step 3). Furthermore, to prevent a rupture in the TA, all disciplining was done via a non-punitive Social Work methodology known as the Responsible Thinking Process (elaborated on in Table 5.2).

In addition, I further believed that all 3 issues would be aided by having my intervention programme as a transdisciplinary one, as elaborated on in [Section 2.3.1](#) of this commentary. My belief was that being transdisciplinary would also facilitate contextualisation to a greater degree. Furthermore, I believed that constructing the ARY intervention as part of a scientific process within my doctoral project would lend credence to the notion of it being more evidence-based as touched upon in [Section 2.3.3](#) of this commentary.

Step 2: Generating A Possible Solution

This aspect involved planning for addressing the issues highlighted in Step 1 (McNiff, 2002). With all the information available to me, this phase involved the conceptualisation and detailed planning of a structured, transdisciplinary and contextualised intervention model based on concepts and theories regarding human

behaviour rooted in biological, psychological and social work perspectives (as touched upon in Sections [2.3](#) & [2.4](#) of this commentary). The intervention model was termed the BPSw Model and involved a structured intervention programme of seven sessions (05 x 3-hr indoor sessions & 02 x 5-hr evening outdoor sessions conducted from 5pm to 10pm). Contextualisation was done via a variety of mechanisms. Two such mechanisms were the timing of the night outings (intentionally constructed to remain congruent with the 11pm guideline regarding curfews for teenagers below the age of 17 years in Singapore) and the number of sessions. The seven-session design was a decision made with consideration to the local context as it best fit the school calendar for mainstream secondary schools in Singapore (i.e. the programme could slot in within the school term with minimal disruption to academic or co-curricular activities). Mechanisms such as these helped to make the BPSw Model unique to the Singapore context.

Furthermore, two points were pertinent in this step. They were the why and how of integrating biological, psychological and social work perspectives. The following Table 5.2 reflects some additional information that complements the rationale supplied in Sections [2.3](#) & [2.4](#) of the commentary.

Perspective	Why Included	Means Of Integration Into Intervention
Biological	<p>(a) It is one of the core components of models within healthcare that advocate for holistic treatments so as to attain more effective outcomes (Engel, 1980).</p> <p>(b) It reflects my own belief and experience that behaviour may be altered by targeting the biology of an individual.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The refreshments (including lunch) provided to ARY during each session of the programme were carefully selected to include nutritional elements such as oily fish and reduced sugar to aid in focus and concentration as well as to reduce hyperactive behaviour; as suggested by research (Dykman and Dykman, 1998; Kim and Chang 2011; Bondi <i>et al.</i>, 2014). Participants were also provided case studies and input on how a diet could impact performance on a range of issues such as sports and scholastic tests. 2. In neuroscience, Long-Term Potentiation (LTP) is a concept pertaining to synaptic transmission that allows for understanding how learning takes place (Baudry, 2001). In the current project, I used my understanding of the concept to device memory mnemonics to try and ensure important concepts were remembered. For example, whenever a life-skill was processed, I immediately linked it to a catchphrase or word (such as <i>THINK: Our Favourite 5-Letter Word</i>) that could later be used as a repetitive cue to recall a lesson or learning point. This was constantly repeated throughout the programme. 3. The James-Lange Theory of Emotion stipulates that physiological precursors can often influence emotional states and eventual behaviour (Coleman and Snarey, 2011). With this in mind, venues for the

		<p>outdoor sessions were specifically chosen to influence mood and behaviour. For instance, quiet and desolate (yet safe) locations had to be found to raise the arousal state of participants to a slight degree so as to enable retention of topics covered during the session; a notion highlighted by research (Phelps, Ling and Carrasco, 2006; Nielson and Powless, 2007).</p>
<p>Psychological</p>	<p>(a) It is one of the core components of models within healthcare that advocate for holistic treatments so as to attain more effective outcomes (Engel, 1980).</p> <p>(b) It has a cornucopia of information regarding behaviour modification and programme design.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Developmental theories within Psychology provided the canvas upon which programme activities were based. For instance experiential learning, as espoused by Kolb (2015), was one of the biggest influencing factors behind having 2 outdoor sessions in the evening. 2. Additionally, the concept of confound-control and having a measurable dependent variable from Psychology afforded the programme some structure and an ability to be turned into an instructional tool. For example, during the Facilitator training, it was easy to raise this as a learning point and it was noted that many Facilitators agreed that intervention programmes needed more structure and measurability. 3. Some case studies and their subsequent learning points used within the programme also tried to target and alter the negative thinking patterns often found in ARY that I have worked with. This was consistent with mechanisms of Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy (Hofmann <i>et al.</i>, 2012).

<p>Social Work</p>	<p>(a) It is the main discipline permeating throughout the therapeutic sector in Singapore that produces the bulk of intervention programmes for ARY.</p> <p>(b) It gave rise to a discipline framework called the Responsible Thinking Process (RTP) that allowed for disciplining with respect. RTP is a specific methodology that I have experience in. It allows for training ARY to respect rules and the rights of others. It also fosters critical-thinking while disciplining (something I have done with significant effect in other programmes I have conducted for ARY). The use of RTP as the main discipline mechanism within the intervention programme allows for a reduction in the rupture of the TA (Ford, 2004)</p> <p>Systems Theory within Social Work revolves around the idea that behaviour is influenced by a variety of elements that often work together as a system (Wilkinson, 2011). For youth, this may include elements such as family, friends, home environments and even social policy towards them. In this approach, Facilitators are encouraged to look out for, and analyse, the diverse elements that contribute to behaviour.</p>	<p>1. All disciplining and discipline-related matters were addressed via the structured use of RTP. This helped preserve the TA during the intervention programme.</p> <p>Effort was taken to try and attain a diverse view from stakeholders (i.e. from multiple vocations such as teaching and law enforcement to the views of ARY themselves) with regards to what they wanted to see in an intervention programme (during Phase I). The different stakeholders were seen as elements within a larger system that influenced the behaviour of ARY.</p>
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Table 5.2 *Integration Of Perspectives Into BPSw Model*

Additionally, the BPSw concept for the ARY intervention programme was attained after reviewing literature on the matter (summarised in [Appendix-F](#)) and observing various models and their clinical utility in my community from my role as a clinical

supervisor, educator and practitioner. In all, this phase was assessed to play a huge role in shaping the intervention programme for ARY in a clear and structured manner.

5.2.2 *Phase II: Actions & Reflections*

This phase was done as Step 3 (The *Action Step*, illustrated in [Figure 5.1](#)).

Step 3: Putting The Solution To A Test

In this step of AR, the first run (i.e. Cohort 1) of the BPSw intervention was executed with a partner school that was agreeable and had a history of working with Raven.

ARY participants were selected based on consultation with the partner school. Some criteria for selection included, attendance rates, feedback from School Counsellors and disciplinary records (particularly a past history of indulging in petty offences).

Other selection criteria included trying to find an appropriate ratio for gender and race distribution. Informed consent (with forms including details about the research project) was also attained from parents / guardians prior to participants being allowed into the programme. Being a crucial part of one's microsystem, the family plays an essential role in a person's development according to Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1977). Bronfenbrenner (1977) further noted that during psychological research processes, the roles of researcher and participant tend to receive more attention whilst the elements at the microsystem level are oftentimes ignored. These elements are nonetheless likely to be in effect during research processes, influencing participants' behaviour. In an effort to understand participants' immediate environment so that interactions with them could be influenced by such an understanding, thereby paving the way for a greater chance of establishing a therapeutic alliance, information about the family background was included as part of

the pre-post questionnaire (Appendix-H). Similarly, a parents / guardians briefing session was held in the school before the commencement of the intervention programme to fully inform parents / guardians about the structure of the programme and to answer any queries they may have. In essence the meeting was also planned to establish contact with the parents / guardians and to attain their support for the programme in the hope that it may aid in the participation of the selected students. However, upon commencement, parents / guardians were not directly involved in the programme due to the relatively ephemeral and school-based nature of the intervention.

Furthermore, after discussion with the partner school, it was assessed that Secondary Two (where ARY would be around 14 years old) would be where the intervention would be targeted. This was significant as my own experiences, and the feedback from Facilitators in Step 1 indicated that this would be the best developmental stage for an intervention to work. Topics covered within the BPSw Model were informed by my experiences and the input during the semi-structured interviews in Step 1. The following Table 5.3 reflects a summary of the topics but all topics covered were linked to a central construct of critical-thinking. This was done via the use of stories, catchphrases, reminders, and processed learning activities. In addition, the use of experiential outdoor learning sessions at night served as mechanisms to imprint upon participants the processing points covered within the indoor sessions.

Session	Scope & Topics Covered
Session 1	Introduction + Rapport-Building (Forming A Therapeutic Alliance) [Indoor – Within School Premises: 2pm – 5pm]
Session 2	Trust + Cooperation + Teambuilding + Responsibility + Empathy [Indoor – Within School Premises: 2pm – 5pm]
Session 3	Outing 1: Fort Canning Park + Respect + Cooperation (Experiential Learning) [Outdoor – Fort Canning Park: Friday, 5pm – 11pm]
Session 4	Effective Communication + Reflection of 1 st Outing [Indoor – Within School Premises: 2pm – 5pm]
Session 5	Anger-Management + Decision-Making [Indoor – Within School Premises: 2pm – 5pm]
Session 6	Outing 2: Lower Peirce Park + Overcoming Fear + Resilience (Experiential Learning) [Outdoor – Lower Peirce Park: Friday, 5pm – 11pm]
Session 7	Goal-Setting + Creativity + Reflection of 2 nd Outing + Wrap-up [Indoor – Within School Premises: 2pm – 5pm]

Table 5.3 *The Programme Outline For BPSw Model*

Because no readily available measurement scales could be used for this newly created programme that was the first of its kind in my community, I decided to create some for the sole purpose of capturing quantitative and qualitative data. This, in itself, was a challenging task, as prior observational analysis revealed that no Facilitator in my community was doing this. Whilst I do concede that true scale development is a long drawn out and painstaking process that could take years, I simply could not sit back and use the simplistic one-page Government form with 5 items mentioned in Point (i) of Step 1 as such an evaluation may not capture the rich data that I needed to assess my intervention model. Accordingly, with input from Facilitators at my own agency, I created pre-post questionnaires ([Appendix-H](#)) and Reflective Journals for my ARY participants ([Appendix-I](#)). The topics highlighted in the pre-post questionnaires

reflected the topics I planned to cover (either in an overt manner or less directly) and were derived from my experiences as a Facilitator and the semi-structured interviews conducted in Step 1.

Consequently, ARY participants were provided with pre-post questionnaires (with some quantitative data) to gauge learning on a number of topics. They were also provided with a journal (qualitative data) and instructed to write or draw their reflections regarding each session (at the end of the session). Furthermore, all sessions were conducted by myself and a female Counsellor from my organisation (co-facilitator). Cohort 1 comprised of 19 participants aged 13-15 years (6 females & 13 males).

I believe the key learning at this stage was two-fold. It was thinking about how to use learning activities and case studies to link a variety of topics to the central construct of critical-thinking and constructing measurement tools that could capture as much data as possible. For both elements, my past experiences of being an ARY and a Facilitator, as well as my formal and informal learning, contributed greatly as it helped to reduce the time taken to conceptualise and implement solutions that may assist my aims. For example, my early training in Psychology taught me the importance of the *Framing Effect* which carefully guided the construction and representation of sentences in my measurement tools. My past work as a Facilitator also provided me with a plethora of activities I could access and modify with regards to specific learning points I wanted to cover.

5.2.3 Phase III: Actions & Reflections

This phase of the project involved Step 4 (The *Observation Step*, illustrated in [Figure 5.1](#)).

Step 4a & Step 4b: Gathering And Analysing Data / Feedback

The gathering and analysing of data / feedback from Cohort 1 was done during this phase (reflected in [Table 5.1](#)). Consistent with AR, collaborative feedback was also attained from stakeholders (McNiff and Whitehead, 2006) and all the data / feedback was collected, analysed and generated into preparation for the next phase.

Lessons learnt and feedback attained from the 1st run of the BPSw intervention (Cohort 1) included the following:

- (a) Although there was a lot of encouraging data regarding the BPSw Model, it was noted that the gender distribution within Cohort 1 was not ideal (more males than females). Even though there was no significant disparity in responses from male or female participants, more often than nought the male participants were boisterous and dominated group discussions. Accordingly, a decision was made to have Cohort 2 done with more female participants. Fortuitously, a partner school that was a convent school agreed and Cohort 2 comprised of entirely female participants.
- (b) Strong support from the partnering school was needed for the logistical components of the intervention programme. This included everything from having a suitable venue (selected by me), arranging an appropriate time for the programme to be conducted, arranging for transportation for the outings, and having effective *buy-in* from the teachers for the programme. Accordingly, more

thorough briefings and feedback with school leaders prior to commencement of the 2nd run with Cohort 2 were enacted.

- (c) It was noted that it may be important for participants to not be able to predict the scope or content of the intervention programme. Giving participants the element of choice or even the illusion of choice (e.g. whether to have night or day outings, where the venue for outings should be, etc.) greatly heightened their receptivity towards the programme. This was further reinforced in the 2nd run with Cohort 2.
- (d) Prizes (e.g. for the *best behaved*, for the *most respectful*, etc.) were found to be effective in motivating ARY to be more participative and responsive. This was done more frequently for the 2nd run with Cohort 2.
- (e) Making the programme as deviant from conventional intervention programmes as possible appeared to increase responsiveness and participation from ARY. This was done via overall structure and activities. With this in mind, the 2nd run with Cohort 2 doubled down on such elements.
- (f) Targetting critical-thinking whilst covering other topics appeared to not only be possible, but effective as well. In fact, catchphrases worked well for fostering recall of lessons covered even up to weeks later with ARY participants. With this in mind, more activities that allowed for this aspect were enacted in the 2nd run with Cohort 2.
- (g) The more I attempted to control for confounds (e.g. choice of diet, sound acoustics of indoor venue, temperature of venue, Facilitator attire, etc.) the more likely the intervention programme moved towards the direction I wanted it to. Accordingly, more control for confounds was attempted in the 2nd run for Cohort 2.
- (h) Responses in the pre-post questionnaires and journals reflected a treasure trove of positive feedback on what worked and what could be improved upon. This

included everything from the types of refreshment, to whether learning activities appeared to work with regards to recall and understanding.

- (i) In all, and much to my amazement, attendance and discipline were not issues of note. After spending time thinking about confound-control (e.g. venues, timing, etc.), mentioning night outings, providing an element of choice for participants (e.g. where to go for night outings), using RTP for disciplining (as highlighted in [Table 5.2](#)), having prizes as motivating tools, providing nutritionally balanced yet tasty refreshments, and spending an entire session (Session 1) to just focus on building a TA, it was found that discipline and attendance were not really intractable issues throughout the entire programme. In fact, after Session 1, some youth participants (not originally identified for the programme) even asked if they could join in as well because they had heard positive things about the programme from their school mates who were in it.

5.2.4 *Phase IV: Actions & Reflections*

This phase of the project was done as Step 5 (The *Reflection* Step, illustrated in [Figure 5.1](#)).

Step 5: Evaluating, Modifying And Re-Integrating Data / Feedback Into A New Solution

In this step of AR, the data / feedback collected from the 1st run was evaluated and used to modify the BPSw intervention programme. The revised BPSw intervention programme was then prepared for implementation with Cohort 2 of a different partner school.

The key reflections in this phase revolved around reviewing the reflective journals of my co-facilitator and myself. Activities and case studies that failed to spark the interest or participation of ARY participants were either modified or dropped. Additionally, logistical improvements such as the inclusion of a more thorough safety bag for the night outings was planned for.

5.2.5 *Phase V: Actions & Reflections*

This phase of the project encompassed the refinement and / or modification of the BPSw Model following the *Reflection* in Phase IV.

In this phase, the 2nd run of the BPSw intervention, with potential modifications in place, was executed with Cohort 2. Much of the modifications arose from reflexive exercises and triangulation that were continuous and crucial facets of the 1st run. The same techniques for data collection and selection / commencement process regarding ARY used in Cohort 1 were employed. Cohort 2 comprised of 15 female participants aged between 14-15 years.

5.2.6 *Phase VI: Actions & Reflections*

This phase of the project consisted of the collection and analysis of the data / feedback from Phases (I) to (V) above. The pertinent information from all phases was collated and analysed. Triangulation was also executed here. The data / feedback was then used to assess if the BPSw Model could be distilled into core principles that would aid in training Facilitators. The following points reflect a summary of learning after two runs of the BPSw Model (i.e. Cohorts 1 & 2).

- (a) A structured, transdisciplinary intervention model, that controlled for confounds, targetted critical-thinking as a central goal, and focused on establishing a TA prior to instruction on clinical content, was not only possible, but yielded very encouraging feedback and data (illustrated in [Section 5.5.1](#) below); thereby aiding to achieve the first aim of the project. This model was thus named the BPSw Model.
- (b) It was possible to derive some key principles from the two runs for use in Facilitator training. Key principles were derived by:
 - i. observation, documentation, triangulation and reflection regarding methods and techniques that appeared to work well (e.g. raised interest levels and reduced resistance to learning) with both cohorts;
 - ii. thematic analysis of available data as prescribed by Braun & Clarke (2006) and elaborated on in Chapter 6 (artefact-generation); and
 - iii. informal discussions with stakeholders who were proximal to the implementation of methods.

Accordingly, seven principles were derived for use in the final phase (illustrated in [Appendix-E](#)). Explanation regarding the derivation of the principles are detailed in Chapter 6 (information regarding artefact-generation) as the seven principles were incredibly crucial to the development of the Facilitator training and creation of the artefact (i.e. the TM); serving as the spine from which all other training content arose.

5.2.7 Phase VII: Actions & Reflections

With the seven principles derived, a training for Facilitators was conceptualised, implemented and evaluated. The main thrust was to raise competencies while

promoting reflective thinking and reflective practice. As I was already a educator with the Government institute in Singapore that does this (i.e. the Social Service Institute of Singapore) I sought to leverage on this association to run the training. Five runs of the training were conducted (totalling 75 participants). The standard quantitative and qualitative measures of the institute, administered by the institute post training, were used to assess if Facilitators felt that their competencies were raised via the training. I must admit that running the training at the institute was a boon as all training programmes conducted there were meant to raise competencies (the very mission of the institute itself). As such, using the institute to conduct the training was closely aligned with the second aim of my project (as elaborated on in [Section 2.7](#) of this commentary) and any feedback attained could easily be distilled and matched towards the raising of competencies.

In essence, while I was a bit nervous before the 1st training programme, the level of responsiveness towards the content I was sharing once I had begun, imbued me with more and more confidence that I appeared to be on the right track. Nevertheless, for verification purposes, I conducted 4 more training programmes and noted that the feedback from Facilitators was remarkably consistent (as highlighted in [Section 5.5.2](#) below) in that formal and informal feedback provided exclaimed that the training programme based on the BPSw Model indeed helped to raise competency levels. Participants were also asked informally about their views regarding the seven principles as a means of further triangulation. All agreed that the principles helped to provide structure and context for ARY interventions in Singapore with the formal data in [Section 5.5.2](#) supporting this finding. Accordingly, all the data collected culminated in the production of a TM (i.e. the project artefact).

5.3 *Data Collection*

The project employed multiple techniques for collecting quantitative and qualitative data. The latter served the purpose of complementing the aspects that might be overlooked by quantitative data (Sofaer, 1999) and providing interpretive and thick descriptions regarding human experiences in an analytical and pragmatic fashion (Silverman, 2017). Besides quantitative data collected with questionnaires and evaluation forms, other techniques used included the review of documents, semi-structured interviews, observation and the use of a reflective journal. Selection of these techniques was vigorously informed by research as well as my past experience in conducting and evaluating intervention programmes, where such techniques were assessed to be within the realm of practicality, feasibility and efficacy. Measures used to evaluate the BPSw interventions are highlighted next.

Evaluation Of The BPSw Intervention Programme

This was measured through participants' quantitative and qualitative feedback, participants' receptivity towards the learning points imbedded in the sessions, and participants' acceptance / resistance towards attending the programme. Informal feedback from parents / guardians and teachers, as well as feedback regarding subsequent school attendance and discipline records, were also considered.

- (a) *Quantitative and qualitative feedback.* In addition to the pre-post questionnaire, the one-page Government-endorsed evaluation form mentioned in Point (i) of [Section 5.2.1](#) earlier that included quantitative and qualitative components was also administered to participants at closure of each run of the programme to attain their views regarding the usefulness of the programme. This page was placed at the end of the post-questionnaire ([Appendix-H](#)). Quantitative feedback was collected with four items (e.g. 'overall, this programme has helped me'), while qualitative feedback was attained with the last

question. Furthermore, qualitative data from ARY participants' reflective journals ([Appendix-I](#)) was also considered.

- (b) *Receptivity towards learning points.* Visual observation of receptivity documented in the facilitator's journal was a key source of data. However, it was not the only source. As mentioned prior, participants were asked to complete a pre-post questionnaire regarding their understanding of 11 learning points before (pre-questionnaire) and after (post-questionnaire) attending the programme. Each learning point (e.g. overcoming fear, communication, critical-thinking, etc.) was measured with one or two items. The time frame from the pre to post was around four to six months. It was assessed that comparison between pre and post-questionnaire responses would thus reflect a realistic snapshot of learning retention. Certain questions at post-questionnaire also reflected participants' application of the learning points in their daily lives as well as the potential outcome of such application, which may be evidence of practical knowing encouraged by the programme.

The questionnaire was specifically designed for this programme as a measure of evaluating learning. Whilst such measures may be a most elementary element in defining programme evaluation, my prior observational analysis suggests that this element was more often than not neglected by existing programmes. As such, the present project endeavoured to be the first in my community to introduce such a measure in programme evaluation.

Besides quantitative questionnaires, participants were also asked to complete a journal with the instruction to write or draw their reflections regarding each session (at the end of each indoor session). These journals illustrated participants' understanding of the learning points in a more detailed way and provided a snapshot of their feelings regarding each session, thus supporting and complementing the pre-post questionnaire

responses. This not only served as a source of qualitative data, but was also designed to evoke presentational knowing and propositional knowing.

- (c) *Acceptance / resistance towards attending the programme.* This dimension was considered because it might reflect the effectiveness of the BPSw intervention's emphasis on establishing a sound TA, especially given the fact that existing programmes that neglected this aspect are often associated with greater resistance from participants. Acceptance / resistance was reflected through participants' qualitative feedback mentioned above; and co-facilitators' / teachers' in-session and post-session feedback. Attendance rates for the sessions were also considered.

Evaluation Of The Facilitator Training Programme

An evaluation form provided by the Government institute hosting the training (illustrated in [Appendix-J](#)) was administered to participants after each run of the training programme. The form included both quantitative and qualitative components. Quantitative measures of effectiveness were attained with 12 / 13 items (e.g. 'I will be able to apply the skills and knowledge acquired to my work', 'the learning outcomes of the course were met'). The inconsistency in the number of items was due to a small change in the template done by the Government institute for certain runs. Each item was rated on a 5-point Likert Scale from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). Qualitative feedback was sought with the questions 'what did you like about the course?' and 'are there any areas we could improve?'.

5.4 *Data Analysis*

As suggested by Marshall and Rossman (2016), both data collection and data analysis should be done in a systematic and focused manner for a research and its findings to be sound. Patton

(2002) noted that the process of qualitative data analysis is the transformation of data into findings and there is no fixed recipe for this transformation even though there may be guidance available.

As dictated by the nature of AR and the research inquiry, qualitative data in various forms (the vast majority of data within the project) was collected to capture meanings and insights. Such data was analysed using a 5-Step Model represented by O'Connor and Gibson (2003). The model corresponds with established stages of qualitative data analysis suggested by Marshall and Rossman (2016), ensuring the presence of formal steps to follow in decoding and interpreting data that would indicate that the research is being competently managed. The 5-Step Model utilised is elaborated on below with reference to the protocols espoused by O'Connor and Gibson (2003).

Step 1: Organising the data. Perhaps the best practice to organise data is to refer to the original questions, to identify each distinct topic under investigation, and to always keep these focuses in mind when sorting and analysing the data. In the present project, most data was kept and organised in electronic format. This included the transcription of audio-recorded interviews. Paralinguistic cues were given careful consideration in order to ensure data quality. The data was organised in a way that was easy for analysis and reference.

Step 2: Finding and organising ideas and concepts. Here, attempts were made to recognise words, expressions, and ideas that appeared frequently. Such words, ideas and concepts were then categorised structurally to be consistent with coding done within qualitative research (O'Connor and Gibson, 2003).

Step 3: Building over-arching themes from the data. Here, attempts were made to obtain themes underlying the categories summarised in the previous step. These themes often pertained to

different categories overarchingly and encapsulated deeper meaning of the data (e.g. when many ARY mentioned that intervention programmes were normally “boring”).

Step 4: Ensuring reliability & validity in the data analysis and in the findings. This included a thorough examination of the original data, to verify the themes derived from it, and to look for outliers that may have other connotations. This step also included the check for biases, and the various forms of triangulation; all calibrated to establish trustworthiness as detailed in Chapter 4.

Step 5: Finding possible and plausible explanations from the findings. This step began with summarising the themes and findings. Attempts were then made to try and arrive at a reasonable explanation for the findings with reference to literature, and with an eye towards the contextual and cultural factors that may be involved.

Specifically, for the attainment of principles to guide the generation of the artefact (i.e. the TM), thematic analysis was employed. This is expanded upon in Chapter 6 which attempts to deconstruct the various crucial aspects of the artefact; including the seven principles which serve as its spine. The illustration in Chapter 6 further serves as an elaboration of how qualitative data analysis was addressed in the project in general.

For quantitative data, I had originally planned to utilise a paired sample t-test to assess significance in the data. However, I later decided against this for the following reasons:

- (a) The eventual data presented was so direct and simple that I wanted it to stand at face value. One reason for this was that, in my experience, the vast majority of Facilitators in my community would not be comfortable with statistical analysis mechanisms and I did not want any misunderstanding of the data being presented.

- (b) Another reason was that I wanted to convey to other Facilitators that they need not purchase or have proficiency in statistical analysis software to undertake mechanisms of measurement. My larger goal here was to try and not intimidate Facilitators from partaking in their own practitioner research projects while still trying to reinforce the concept that measurement was still a vital component.

In addition to the 5-Step Model mentioned above, data collected through various methods was triangulated for veracity. Figure 5.2 illustrates the interrelated components that were subjected to triangulation.

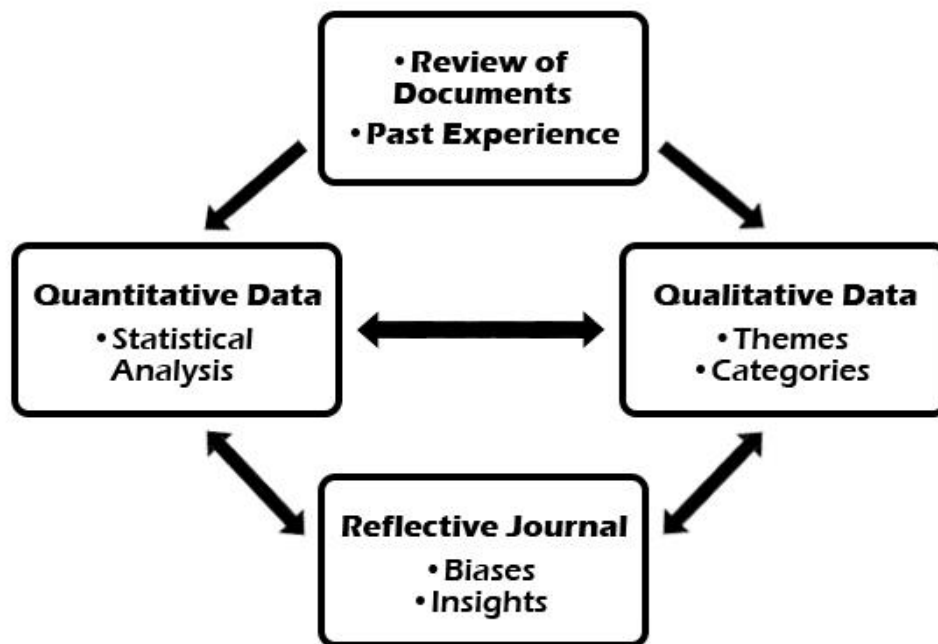


Figure 5.2 *Triangulation Of Data (Interrelated)*

5.5 Results

This section presents the evaluation results of the BPSw intervention programme (Phases I to VI), and the Facilitator training programme (Phase VII) conducted within the project.

Quantitative and qualitative results are presented in a structured and integrated manner for ease of understanding.

5.5.1 BPSw Intervention Programme

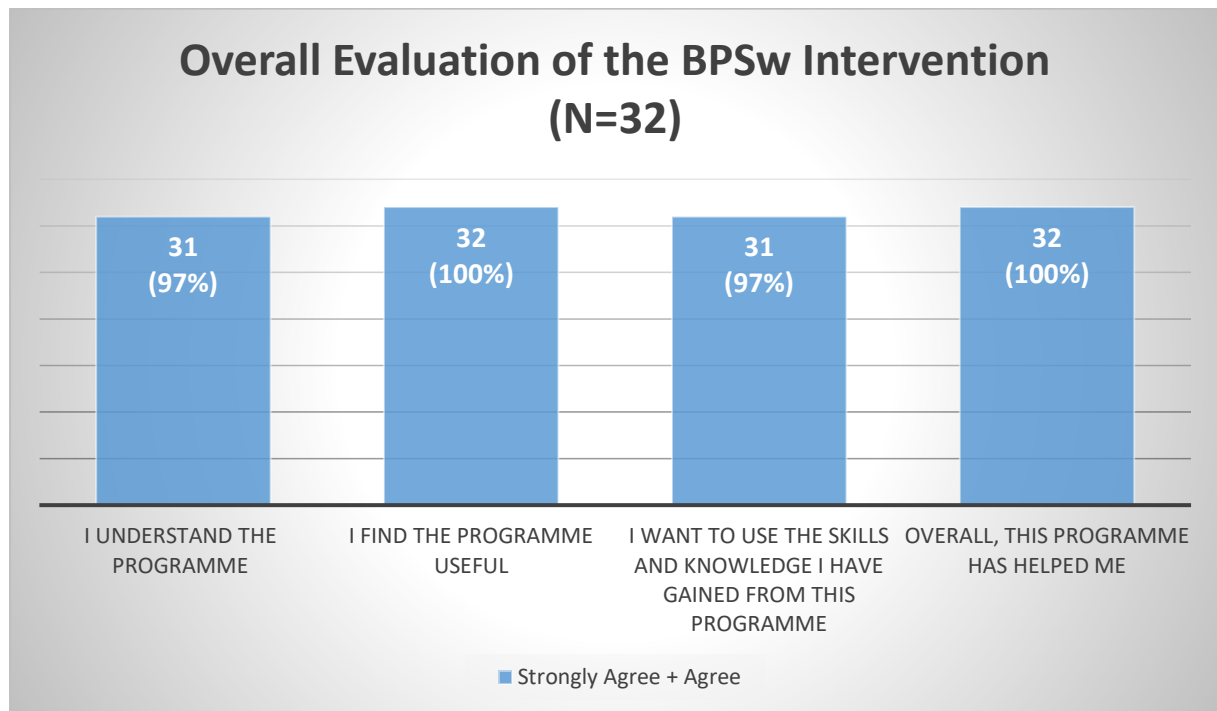


Figure 5.3 Overall Evaluation Of BPSw Intervention By ARY

A total of 34 participants from two cohorts (i.e. from two different partner schools) completed the two runs of the BPSw intervention programme, from whom 32 evaluation forms and journal reflections were attained (2 participants were unavailable for the period of evaluation). The preceding Figure 5.3 shows the overall evaluation results. Out of 32 participants, 100% (n=32) of the participants found the programme useful; 100% (n=32) of the participants agreed or strongly agreed that the programme had helped them; 97% (n=31) of the participants agreed or strongly agreed that they understood the programme and wanted to use the skills and knowledge they had gained from the programme.

The above evaluation data was further supported by the results of the pre-post questionnaire (same questionnaire administered to participants before and after the BPSw intervention to gauge learning where the time frame from the pre to post was around four to six months). Here, data provided specific illustration of what the participants may have learnt from the BPSw intervention. The following Figure 5.4 illustrates the overall comparison between pre and post-questionnaire items completed by 32 participants. The figure displays the substantial contrast between pre and post responses, which suggests participants' learning of knowledge and skills facilitated by the programme. In particular, the most dramatic growth was observed for the number of participants who understood the concept of critical-thinking: from 3% (n=1) at pre-level, to 91% (n=29) at post-level. This could be due to the fact that critical-thinking was the central construct that the programme was designed to target, and was emphasised across all sessions of the programme.

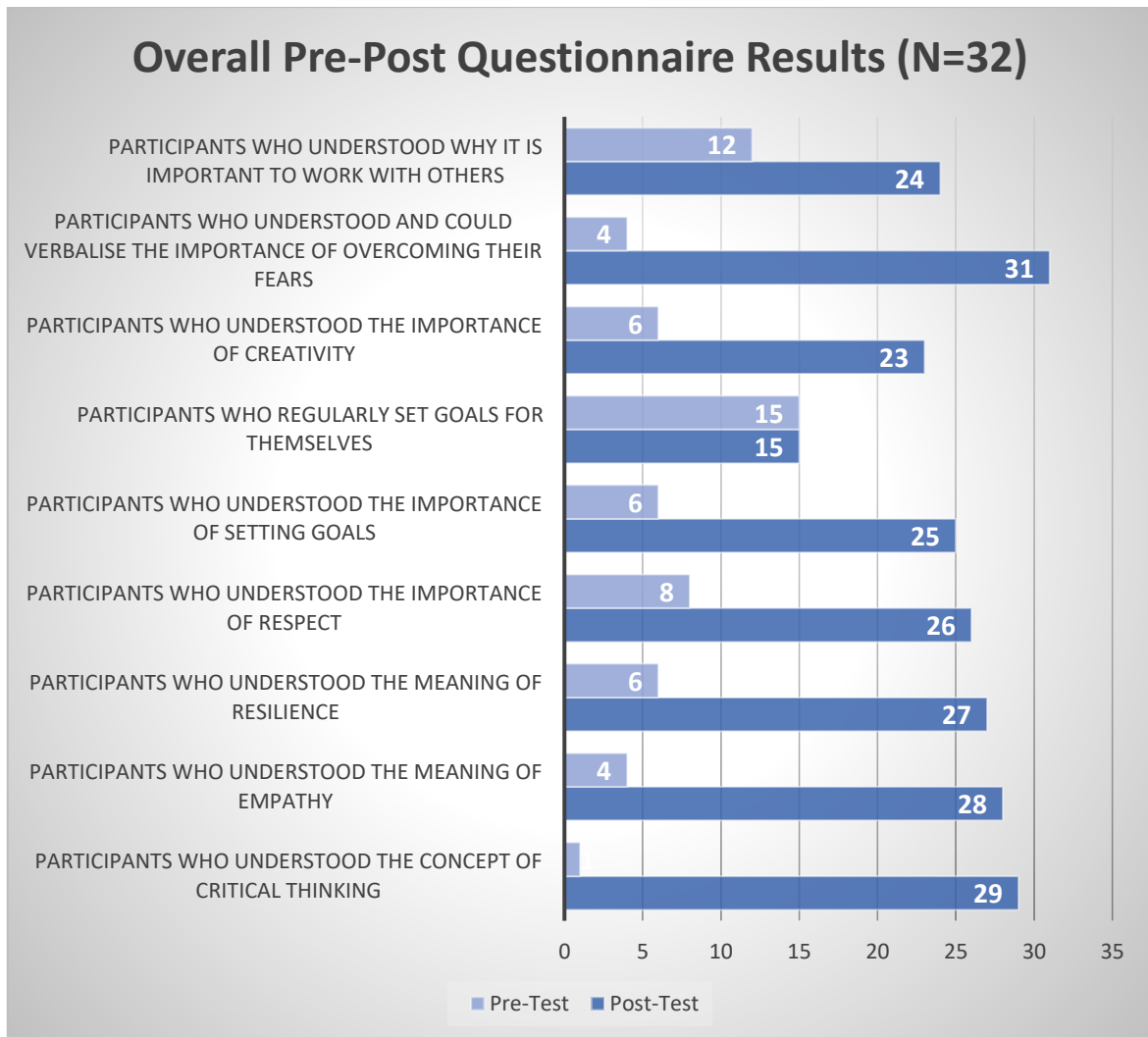


Figure 5.4 Results Of Pre-Post Questionnaire From ARY Participants In BPSw Intervention

Additionally, some other significant post-level results are highlighted as follows:

- (a) 75% (n=24) of the participants felt that people understood them better when they communicated;
- (b) 78% (n=25) of the participants felt they worked better with others;
- (c) 100% (n=32) of the participants understood the concept of self-confidence;
- (d) 94% (n=30) of the participants considered themselves as having average to high levels of self-confidence; and
- (e) 94% (n=30) of the participants agreed that they had an increase in general knowledge.

These results appear to demonstrate the knowledge and skills that the participants had gained from the BPSw intervention programme. It further lent weight to the argument that the programme had been effectively constructed and delivered.

Similarly, the qualitative data gathered through journal reflections of participants validated the quantitative results. Interestingly, a key theme that arose was that participants actually desired more sessions; a notion that I observed to be rare with regards to intervention programmes in my community; thereby reflecting that receptivity towards the BPSw intervention was high and resistance towards the programme was low. Some statements extracted from the journal reflections are presented in quotes below:

- *“I learnt how to communicate in a better way by the tone, timing and the ‘I’ VS ‘You’.”*
- *“Goals are always hard to achieve, but, with resilience and creativity the road to the goal is easy.”*
- *“Nothing that valuable comes easy.”*
- *“We learnt how to overcome fear, it was a great experience!”*
- *“No, the programme is perfect but please let us have camp for this programme.”*
- *“I really enjoyed the programme and I think there should be a camp.”*
- *“I learnt about ‘empathy’, about how we have to put ourselves in someone else’s shoes.”*
- *“I learnt that once we conquer I fear, we will conquer all. If we took the effort to overcome one fear, we can overcome others as well.”*
- *“I will never know my limit unless I try it challenge myself in order to get to my target.”*
- *“More sessions ☺!!”*
- *“Design programme to be longer.”*

On the whole, results suggest that the BPSw intervention programme yielded a throng of encouraging data. This was evidenced by participants’ qualitative entries from their journals. The congruence between quantitative and qualitative data further corroborated such a finding.

5.5.2 Facilitator Training Programme

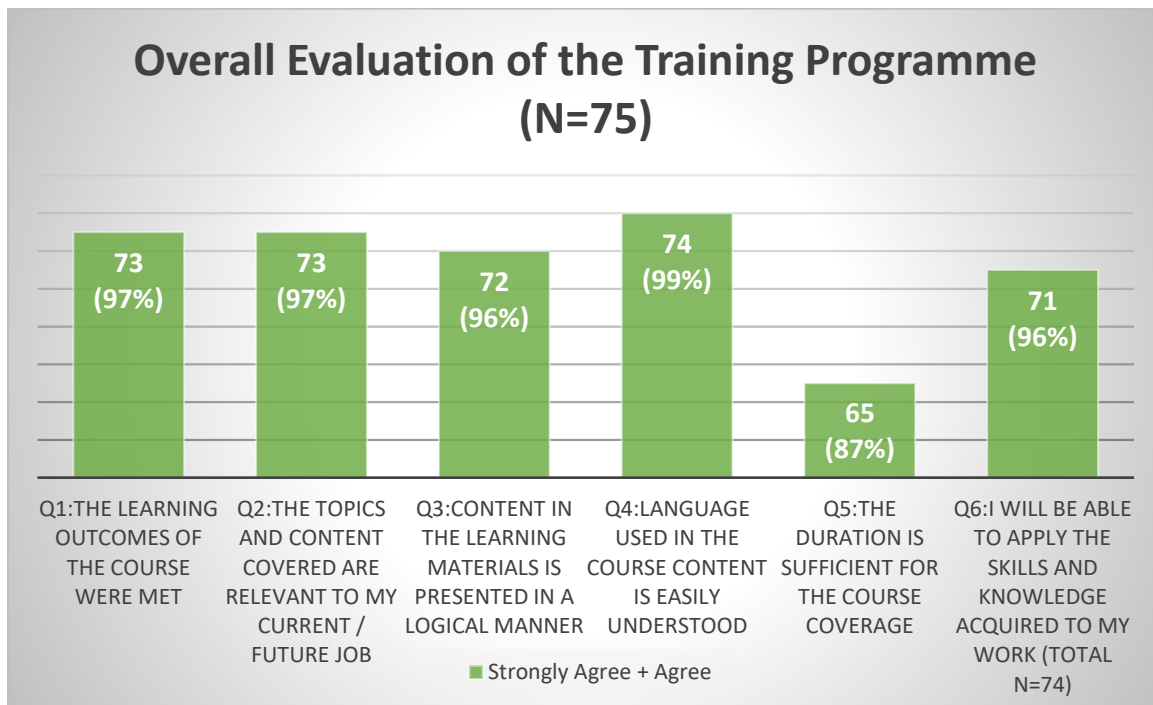


Figure 5.5 Overall Evaluation Of Facilitator Training

A total of 75 participants completed the five runs of the Facilitator training programme. The preceding Figure 5.5 illustrates the results attained from the evaluation forms completed by participants (N=75). However, it should be noted that one participant did not provide a response for Q6.

The results showed that 97% (n=73) of participants agreed or strongly agreed that the learning outcomes of the course, designed to raise competencies, were met. Furthermore, 96% (n=72) of the participants agreed or strongly agreed that the content in the learning materials was presented in a logical manner. These results appear to indicate a desirable amount of content validity as evaluated by the participants. Qualitative data regarding the course content validated these results. Participants further expressed that the BPSw components covered in the course content were able to provide perspectives and insight that were relevant and useful to their work.

Examples of such feedback included the following statements from participants in quotes:

- *“The context and the content is interesting & well-developed.”*
- *“The course touches on numerous topics and has effective intervention that is useful for youth work.”*
- *“The pace was just nice and sufficient activities to enhance on the learning and it met the objectives of the course.”*
- *“It was interactive and concepts were broken into understandable bites. Info was provided surrounding the main aim.”*
- *“Mr Praveen Nair is able to use the shortest amount of time to elicit the main learning points of the course.”*
- *“Neurological / psychological perspective about the youth brain was interesting.”*
- *“The course has science and research to back whatever was shared.”*
- *“I like the activities as it enables me to think critically and out of the box. It enables me have a better understanding in planning program.”*
- *“It gave me a lot of perspectives and professional perspectives in the way we do youth work.”*
- *“Well-substantiated theories and strategies.”*
- *“It covers the biopsychosocial aspect. The science behind why we are doing the interventions we are doing.”*
- *“Helpful to understand how the brain function especially during the youth growing years.”*
- *“Like the examples and how the theories and the principles fits the local context.”*

More importantly, out of the 75 participants, 97% (n=73) agreed or strongly agreed that the topics and content covered were relevant to their current work; while 96% (n=71, total N=74) of the participants agreed or strongly agreed that they would be able to apply the skills and knowledge acquired to their work. In the qualitative feedback, the general themes reflected by participants portrayed the course content as contextualised, practical, and useful for their work. The feedback showed that the BPSw Model appeared to be highly transferable to these Facilitators’ own work settings, and the content was able to improve their practice. Examples of such feedback included the following presented in quotes:

- *“Relevant to work especially the knowledge on using BPS to engage the ARY.”*
- *“Good practical knowledge and tools are presented that is applicable to my workplace.”*
- *“It is very relevant to our area of work. Offers a different perspective on how we can approach our work.”*
- *“It’s contextualized to Singapore (local).”*
- *“Provided framework and structured learning to the practices.”*
- *“It was adapted to our local context thus making understanding easier.”*
- *“Concrete and sound strategies were shared that can be directly applied to youth work practice.”*
- *“Very practical theory & practice tips. Is easily relevant to my work. Can be immediately integrated into my work. Unique framework and easily understood through explanations.”*
- *“I like how examples were given for us to see how what we learn can be applied to our work.”*
- *“The tips and techniques taught were very useful. It can be easily implemented in my work.”*
- *“Considering that this is evidence-based training, it stood out in terms of its applicability to my work in the future.”*

Additionally, out of 75 participants, 99% (n=74) agreed or strongly agreed that the language used in the course content was easily understood. Despite the fact that the course introduced a number of theories and BPSw concepts that may have been new to participants, this statistic suggests that the knowledge and skills imparted seemed to be well acquired by the learners. The course content was further described by participants as “not content heavy”, being “broken into understandable bites”, and being “made to be so easy to learn and remember”. This may be due to the contextualised design which aided understanding, and the effort put in to simplify the BPSw Model to seven principles revolving around a singular goal of promoting critical-thinking (elements I had wanted to focus on as stipulated in [Section 2.4.1](#) of this commentary). Furthermore, the results seem to indicate that such contextualisation and stratification promoted receptivity and applicability regarding the training. This may have, in turn, heightened the probability that participants’ competencies regarding youth work had been raised.

Nevertheless, out of 75 participants, a lower percentage of 87% (n=65) agreed or strongly agreed that the course duration was sufficient for the course coverage. The score was observed to be lower when compared with other questions. However, the qualitative feedback clarified that this was due to the fact that participants actually wanted to have more sessions of training such as a session on how to conduct an outdoor experiential learning activity at night; a point which was covered in the course content when describing the BPSw Model. Participants also asked for more content on some of the specific techniques introduced within the course. Aside from suggesting course efficacy, all of this appears to imply that participants related to the course and understood the applicability of the content for their work with ARY.

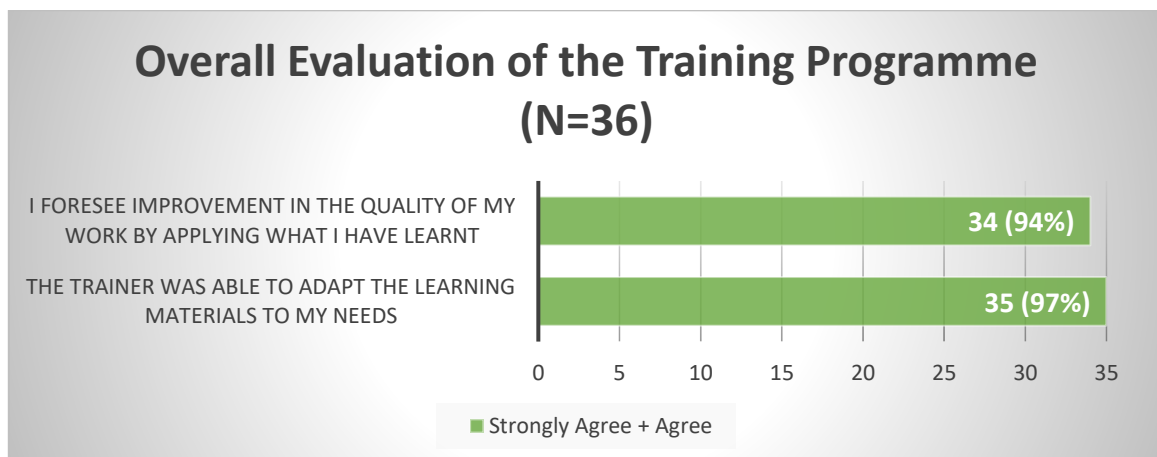


Figure 5.6 Facilitator Training Evaluation Items Subsequently Removed

Unfortunately, due to a change in the template of the evaluation form by the Government institute hosting the training, two questions were completed by a total of 36 participants only (the revised forms omitted these questions). Results of these questions are illustrated in the preceding Figure 5.6 where 94% (n=34) of participants agreed or strongly agreed that they could foresee improvements in the quality of their work by applying what they had learnt from the training. Even though the number of Facilitators who responded was roughly half the total number of participants for

Facilitator training, two implications might be derived from this. Firstly, the course content informed by the BPSw Model was seen by participants as highly transferable to their work. Secondly, it seemed to indicate that participants perceived the usefulness of the course in raising their professional competencies.

Out of the 36 participants who performed evaluations with this older form, 97% (n=35) agreed or strongly agreed that the trainer (i.e. myself) was able to adapt the learning materials to their needs. Together with the qualitative feedback, this seems to indicate participants' great appreciation for the contextualisation of the BPSw Model and the training programme. This perhaps further reflected the current local situation of lacking a contextualised framework for guiding intervention programmes for local ARY. The results therefore appear to suggest that the current project may have served as a successful attempt at tackling this issue.

Overall, the Facilitator training programme was evaluated by participants as being highly effective. Themes raised suggested that it stood out with its informativeness, applicability, simplicity, and contextualisation as highlighted by the quantitative and qualitative results. Participants agreed on its capability of raising the professional competencies of local Facilitators, and its uniqueness among the current training programmes available for Facilitators. One participant's statement in the qualitative feedback (presented below in quotes) well summarised these conclusions:

- *“It is the first course so far I have felt relevant in Youth Work. What I have gathered so far in the 2-day course could equip me with skills I have found hard to gain.”*

5.5.3 *Results Summary*

The results of both the BPSw intervention programme and the Facilitator training were noteworthy. The BPSw intervention programme, developed and refined through the AR cycles, was positively evaluated and produced a considerable amount of data indicating receptivity; something I have not seen in other intervention models in Singapore. The Facilitator training programme received appreciation regarding its inclusion of the BPSw components, its contextualisation, applicability, simplicity, and capacity to raise Facilitators' competencies.

These findings appear to suggest that the BPSw Model may be a useful framework for informing the development of local intervention programmes for ARY, and training programmes for Facilitators. Perhaps more importantly, from the results, I believe the aims of the research project (highlighted in [Section 2.7](#)) were met in that:

- (a) The findings support my original observations that a structured, transdisciplinary, and contextualised intervention model would serve as a useful mechanism for the training of Facilitators; particularly with regards to raising competency levels. This was so as the BPSw Model lent itself to a seven principle framework (highlighted in Appendix-E) that was used to inform Facilitator training that most Facilitators found competency-enhancing.
- (b) The overall data accumulated was invaluable for constructing a TM (to be elaborated on in Chapter 6) that could subsequently be used to guide Facilitators.

I believe the preceding Points (a) & (b) served the functions of advancing practice both for my own organisation (i.e. to possess an actual tool such as the TM for training and supervising Facilitators) as well as for other practitioners who may benefit from a structured and contextualised intervention model to use as a framework for practice. On

the whole such contributions to practice in Singapore serve as the first of their kind and aided me to address the original broad question that set my research inquiry into motion; one that sought to answer how I may improve practice for Facilitators in my community.

Chapter 6: The Artefact

'We are what we are because we have been what we have been, and what is needed for solving the problems of human life and motives is not moral estimates but more knowledge.' – Sigmund Freud

In this chapter, I shall elaborate on the main output of my project; the artefact in the form of a TM. Chapters up to this point have tried to expand on the trajectory and context to the development of the TM in order to frame perceptions of this main project artefact. This chapter, however, will shed more light on the TM by deconstructing it via three fundamental queries of what it is, why it was produced, and how it came to fruition; all calibrated to depict the TM as a contribution to practice-based knowledge.

6.1 *What? & Why? – The Artefact Anatomised*

The term *material culture* is used in Archaeology to refer to the scientific study of concrete, tangible objects left from past cultures in order to understand more about such cultures with an eye towards highlighting the communicative role tangible objects may play in the cultural context (Guarinello, 2005). While this project is not one situated within the field of Archaeology, the term did resonate with me as it led me to wonder if we could truly communicate important messages within our societies in an indelible manner without something concrete and tangible to crystallise such communication. When I originally conceptualised my doctoral project, my belief was that my BPSw Model, in itself, would constitute an original contribution to the world of knowledge. However, I soon came to realise that this may not serve me too well in a practice context; especially in Singapore where, as mentioned in [Section 3.1.1](#), the overall trajectory of acceptability for new initiatives is often grounded in positivism (i.e. having concrete numbers and deliverables).

Similarly, I was also guided by counselling & psychotherapy research which reflected that manuals, in general, have served to fundamentally transform therapeutic work (Luborsky and DeRubeis, 1984) and are often used to train clinical practitioners (Crits-Christoph *et al.*, 1995; Vakoch and Strupp, 2000; Weissman *et al.*, 2006). While the use of manuals is not without critique, such as the overemphasis of technical skills and a deviation from establishing a sound therapeutic alliance (Addis, Wade and Hatgis, 1999; Vakoch and Strupp, 2000), manuals have become ubiquitous and the norm in clinical practice for establishing treatment efficacy (Chambless and Ollendick 2001; Westen, Novotney, and Thompson-Brenner, 2004). Furthermore, as creativity was assessed to be one of the core values that I treasure (as mentioned in [Section 3.4.2](#)), it was not hard to understand why I gravitated towards constructing an artefact where I could oversee the research as well as design elements. With all of this in mind, the idea of creating a TM as an artefact from my project soon materialised.

The TM is meant as a training aid and reference for Facilitators. The TM is also to serve as a business product of my agency. It was constructed to be congruent with TMs used in my industry so as to ensure compliance with industry standards and the capacity for easy dissemination. While this may have limited my capacity for creativity, it did, in retrospect, provide me a general, workable template I could utilise in order to reach more Facilitators. As TMs have long been used as a way to improve practice (Morgenstern *et al.*, 2001; Santana *et al.*, 2015), the present TM seeks to be consistent with this philosophy by being the first of its kind for the local context. As such, I believe it to be a tangible and concrete contribution from my project to the world of knowledge; particularly in the practice sphere. A concise breakdown of what the TM encompasses is listed below.

- Overview of The BPSw Model (Including Research-Base)
- Main Goals of The BPSw Model

- Seven Principles to Guide Youth Work in Singapore
- The Evidence Base For Applicability
- Training Content

As mentioned, the TM is presented in accordance to the standard national template used by the Singapore Government and includes information about the doctoral project as well as the derivation of the TM, and materials that may be used in subsequent Facilitator training. With my work in conducting Facilitator training and my doctoral project being linked, the TM serves as the focal point of my doctoral project and the culmination of research informing pedagogic development for the benefit of Facilitators. The TM has been written for a specialist audience with the following purposes in mind.

- (a) To be a guiding mechanism for Facilitators in Singapore to raise their competencies. In this regard, the TM:
 - i. serves as a training tool for new entrants who seek to work as Facilitators;
 - ii. provides a contextually relevant framework for Facilitators to use in their own practice;
 - iii. provides Facilitators who want to undertake professional development in working with ARYs in Singapore with clear learning outcomes that are ground-up and practitioner-based;
 - iv. serves as a mechanism that allows for reference, thereby saving time and heightening productivity; and most importantly
 - v. serves as a mechanism that may encourage and facilitate critical questions in practice.
- (b) To be a resource material for delivery amidst the current global climate. The global pandemic of Covid-19 has unequivocally impacted the delivery of training programmes with many being redesigned to match an online format. With this in mind, the TM may

assist as a resource material as it caters to a structured delivery approach that may be suitable for online platforms. While this was not an original aim or objective of the project, the present circumstances allow for the TM to be utilised in this manner.

- (c) To be a resource material for further research or exploration into working with ARYs / Facilitators in Singapore including a potential mechanism of encouragement for Facilitators to undertake their own practitioner-based research.
- (d) To be a business tool to aid my own agency as we potentially branch away from direct practice into consulting work. In this regard the TM may be utilised as a commercial item that adds an alternate product-based revenue stream to my agency that currently functions primarily in services. All of this may make the agency's business more scalable.

Potential Impact Of The TM

Perhaps one way to view the potential impact of the TM may be to view it via the different groups it may assist; all of whom serve as elements that make up my current practice thereby situating the artefact as an appurtenant contribution to practice. The following Figure 6.1 attempts to illustrate this in a clear and concise manner.

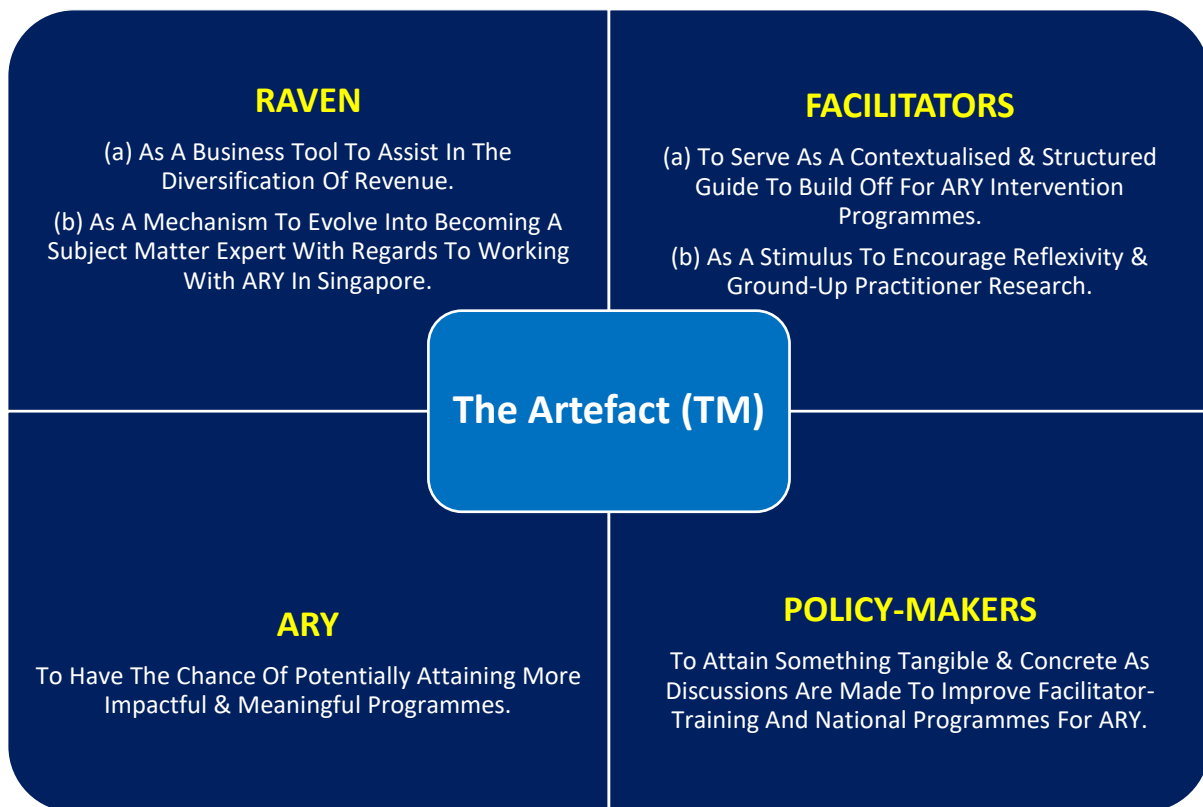


Figure 6.1 *Potential Impact Of TM As A Function Of Groups Served*

Accordingly, with the above elements in this section concerning the TM considered, I decided early on in the project to steer towards the development of an artefact. The catalyst for doing so came about after an early reading which reflected that the artefact can be a crucial and beneficial component of practice-based research (Candy and Edmonds, 2010). With all of this in mind, the next section highlights crucial elements of how the research aspects of the project were transformed into the artefact.

6.2 *How? – The Burgeoning Artefact*

This section focuses on crucial elements pertaining to how the TM moved from theoretical constructs and data, to something more practical and concrete. In essence, the TM was constructed around seven key principles that were distilled from mainly qualitative data gathered during Phases I–VI. The key mechanism for such distillation was thematic analysis.

Development of the TM involved sequential steps illustrated in the following Figure 6.2 where it can be seen that the formation of the seven principles, and eventual TM, would not have been possible without the generation of themes. An elaboration of these steps will then be supplied after examining thematic analysis at a generic level.

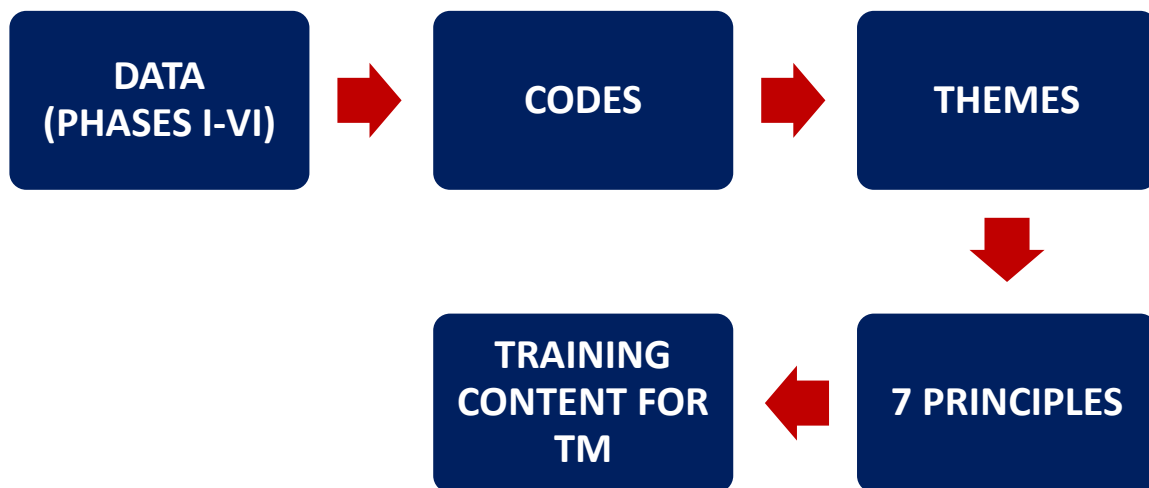


Figure 6.2 *Process Flow For TM Content*

6.2.1 *Thematic Analysis*

Thematic analysis is a fundamental data analysis method commonly practiced in qualitative research which aims to recognise and scrutinise patterns underlying a given data set (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Due to its widespread use within qualitative research methods, some scholars have argued that thematic analysis may not necessarily be a specific method by itself, but a mechanism that can be easily incorporated to aid researchers in analytical tasks (Ryan and Bernard, 2000; Holloway and Todres, 2003).

With the research question in mind as the primary goal, thematic analysis can be a flexible process and this can be viewed as a strength that leads to wide applicability across epistemological approaches (Braun and Clarke, 2012). With my project situated within the Pragmatic Paradigm, this form of analysis thus seemed ideal. Furthermore, as my search for themes was at least partially guided by my prior knowledge as a practitioner, it appeared my process was not fully inductive but more geared towards seeking latent themes via a constructionist perspective; all of which were possible with thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

The widely cited methods for theme development appear to share a similar essence in their phases or steps. For example, the approaches conceptualised by Braun and Clarke (2006) and Vaismoradi *et al.* (2016) do appear to fall within a similar trajectory with different terminology. These well-established methods for theme development were carefully considered and greatly assisted the present project. I believe that employing well-established methods and focusing on the research question enhanced the overall coherence in qualitative analyses for the present project. This may have aided to address the often-mentioned flaw of thematic analysis; one that describes it as being inconsistent due to its flexible nature (Holloway and Todres, 2003).

For my project, I tried to follow the six steps delineated by Braun and Clarke (2006) for thematic analysis. They are as follows.

Step 1: Familiarising oneself with the data

Step 2: Generating initial codes

Step 3: Searching for themes

Step 4: Reviewing themes

Step 5: Defining & naming themes

Step 6: Report generation

However, I soon came to realise that the process was actually reflective, iterative and non-linear as it actually involved frequent back and forth movements between phases. The following Section 6.2.2 presents a breakdown of the six steps as utilised in my project.

6.2.2 Six Steps Of Thematic Analysis In Project

Step 1: Familiarising Oneself With The Data

This step involved attentively and repeatedly reading the data collected, to form initial thoughts regarding any potential patterns that may emerge. Salient points were earmarked for coding and work done at this step also included transcribing recorded interviews, organising the notes taken during observations, reviewing policy-related papers, as well as breaking these pieces of information into smaller units where necessary.

The key challenge here was in the time it took to categorise and log all raw data. Software such as Microsoft Word and Excel was used to try and categorize the raw data at an initial stage.

Step 2: Generating Initial Codes

Initial coding for the data was performed at this step, with the research inquiries being the navigational waypoints that guided my actions. Each data unit received equal deliberation and was assigned with at least one code. These codes were constructed as short sentences or phrases rather than a single word so that fuller ideas and context

could be captured, a notion suggested by Sandelowski and Leeman (2012). Additionally, and as advised by Braun and Clarke (2006), more codes were generated so as to have an ample supply of codes and to allow for more potential themes to be subsequently detected.

This step was a bit daunting due to the immense amount of data to sift through. However, I believe the research question, along with my role as an insider-researcher, helped to provide navigation for the task. For example, it was easier for me to understand some of the raw data from the words of ARY and Facilitators as I had a better understanding of those roles from my own experiences. This may have assisted me to generate codes more speedily.

Step 3: Searching For Themes

At this step, the codes were analysed and categorised in a way that enabled the emergence of overarching themes. This step was also guided by the research inquiries and my own experiences as a practitioner. As a result, all the data units, as well as the codes, were fit into one or more of these themes. Initial formation of the thematic map (a tool that illustrates the associations between themes and codes) was employed. An example is shown in Figure 6.3. The theme pertains to what ARY and Facilitators believe an ARY intervention programme should accomplish with regards to the clinical content covered.

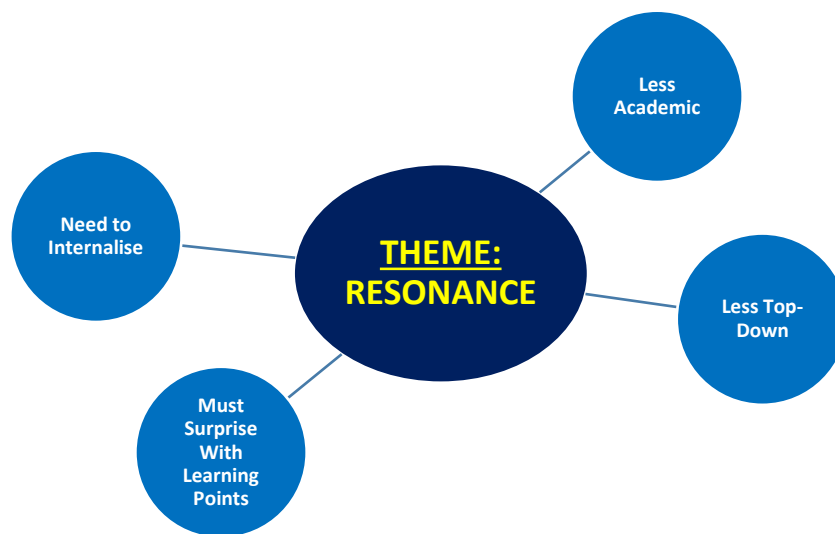


Figure 6.3 *Initial Map Sample - What ARY Programmes Should Accomplish*

Step 4: Reviewing Themes

This was the step where the themes generated were carefully refined. This process included several points for consideration. For example, whether an individual theme had an adequate number of supporting data units; whether some themes could be merged to become one larger theme; and whether the themes showed coherent configuration when compared against the data set. Necessary re-construction of themes and re-categorisation of codes / data units were also conducted here. Such refinement was conducted repeatedly until the acquirement of a satisfactory thematic map, which marked the commencement of the next step.

In this step, I found myself re-reading my entire data set on multiple occasions. My concern was whether the themes accurately linked with the data set. There were also occasions where I had to code additional data (e.g. elements that may have been missed in earlier coding stages). Furthermore, it was in this step where I found that some themes could be consolidated.

Also in this step, there was the very real possibility of interminable re-coding. However, I tried to circumvent this by stopping the review once I felt that themes were able to stand alone, distinct from one another but related to the larger inquiry. Additionally, themes attained, and the process of theme development, were triangulated with co-facilitators of the BPSw intervention runs (i.e. those who assisted me in conducting the BPSw interventions during the action research cycles) as well as two Facilitator colleagues at Raven to ensure the themes were coherent and congruent with the research inquiry. This was to assist in objectivity and overall trustworthiness of the process.

Step 5: Defining & Naming Themes

Further refinement of attained themes was conducted at this step. This included considering whether the themes were concise and whether each theme described a distinct aspect of the investigated issue. Each theme was then analysed in relation to its respective data units, to understand the information that the individual theme conveyed regarding the research inquiries. Braun and Clarke (2006) call for efforts to elucidate the story each theme tells and I tried hard to do this. In fact, much of the background analysis mentioned in Chapter 2 supported the story brought to light by some themes. For example, the theme of *structure* from the words spoken by interviewed Facilitators (i.e. calling for ARY intervention programmes to be more structured), lent support to my own analysis that existing ARY intervention programmes lacked structure.

On the whole, my aim in this step was to be able to clearly define and differentiate each theme and to relate them to the larger inquiry of the project. Themes were also analysed collectively to understand what the association between them disclosed about the research inquiry.

Furthermore, the final named themes were triangulated with two Facilitators at Raven to ascertain if the themes were named appropriately.

Step 6: Report Generation

At the end of theme analysis, an informal report was generated to clearly and systematically demonstrate the implications of the themes and the data units on the research inquiry. The report was constructed in a both descriptive and analytical manner, with the aim to record a clear account of the data set, and the logical arguments that could be deduced from it. The opinions of Facilitators at Raven were also taken into consideration at this stage to assist in objective analysis.

In addition, efforts were made to actively enhance the overall coherence and validity of the results to a greater extent. For example, the processes of analysis were examined against the 15-item checklist for a good thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) and refinements were then made where necessary.

Besides these explicit criteria, I also endeavoured to be self-reflexive regarding the decisions made during the process, and tried to skilfully find balance between traversing the objective patterns and the unavoidable subjectivity involved in the analysis process. The ultimate goal of this was to analytically identify patterns that were beyond the obvious, without being led by my subjective beliefs. Fundamentally, I was keeping in mind the philosophical assumptions and the epistemological backdrop of the present project, and was consistently and coherently practicing them in this process. For example, with the above stated steps as a guiding framework, flexibility in method was at some points made use. Nevertheless, this was always governed by pragmatism's great emphasis on the research question.

On the whole, it was only during further research for the present project that I realised these practices paralleled with what Braun and Clarke (2019) termed as *reflexive thematic analysis*, which holds the view that rather than aiming to follow a series of fixed procedures strictly, thematic analysis should represent the researcher's reflection and analytical engagement with the data as well as the process of analysis.

6.2.3 *From Themes To Principles*

With thematic analysis, it soon became apparent that there were a few core themes that stood out when it came to factors that worked well for designing a local ARY intervention programme. This was informed by the various data sets that were collated during the project (e.g., my own reflective journal during the action research cycles, semi-structured interviews, etc.). From these core themes, I attempted to construct principles that could be used to guide Facilitator training. In this process, I was always cognisant of the research inquiry and guided by my own experiences as a practitioner and former ARY. All of this led me to seven principles to guide local ARY interventions.

Once the principles were attained, I first cross-checked them with two of my fellow Facilitators at Raven. I wanted to know if the principles were well-grounded and had clinical utility in practice. Both agreed that the principles were contextually reasonable, justifiable and useful for practice. Subsequently, the seven principles attained were used to create learning outcomes and then training content for Phase VII of the project (Facilitator training segment). For this, I was guided by the national templates available at the Social Service Institute (the statutory body in Singapore that oversees the training of Facilitators). Additionally, at each of the five runs of Facilitator training during Phase

VII, formal and informal feedback was attained regarding the seven principles and their clinical utility within the Singapore context. While the formal feedback is reflected in [Section 5.5.2](#), informal feedback was documented in my own reflective journal and highlighted the utility of the principles (at every run of the Facilitator training). Some pertinent statements from my documentation made by fellow Facilitators were as follows (reflected in quotes):

- *“I wish I had these principles years ago.”* – Run 1
- *“These principles provide so much useful structure to our work.”* – Run 2
- *“These principles are so useful. I like how all makes sense.”* – Run 3
- *“I think these principles were always in my head in some form. I just did not know how to verbalise like in this course.”* – Run 4
- *“I can see the importance of having some guidelines and framework now.”* – Run 5

Accordingly, data from Phase VII was added to the already plentiful and beneficial data pool from the entire project and used to aid construction of the TM. The entire TM is, in essence, an engineering and metamorphosis of the seven principles attained from thematic analysis into training content. The following Table 6.1 highlights the passage of relevant codes from research within the project into core themes, and then principles, eventually used to formulate the backbone of the TM. An elaboration of the principles with regards to how they were used to inform training content is supplied in [Appendix-E](#). This was the main way by which research from the project was transformed into the artefact.

Relevant Codes	Theme (Regarding ARY Programmes)	Principle Formed
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to be creative • Must catch attention • Need to be different • Can't be boring 	Unconventionality	1. Avoid Conventionality
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to resonate • Must surprise with learning points • Less instructional • Less Academic • Need to internalise • Less top-down 	Absorption	2. Avoid Being Too Direct With Learning Points
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activity/Task congruence • Language congruence • Contextual congruence • Pedagogical congruence 	Relevance	3. Take Note Of Development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Induce reasoning • Encourage better decision-making • Understand actions-consequences • Inquisitiveness • Encourage problem-solving • Cognitive exercises • Encourage reflexivity • Learning by doing • Too many topics for time available • Reduce resistance 	Efficacy	4. Coalesce Life-Skills Around Critical-Thinking 5. Utilise Experiential Learning

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must have perceivable flow • Have structure • Have a framework 	Consistency & Structure	6. Utilise A Theme
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empowering Facilitators • Measurable outcomes • Feasible control • Ownership of programme • Control to establish therapeutic alliance • More operational structure • Need better evaluation 	Facilitator Control	7. Control For Confounds

Table 6.1 *Engineering Of Principles From Relevant Codes*

6.3 *Future Development Of Artefact*

Throughout this commentary I have tried to make it clear that the TM, or even BPSw Model for that matter, are not to serve as prescriptive tools that Facilitators should be mandated to acquiesce to. They are more to serve as a mechanism to advance practice where necessary, and provide guidance if needed; specifically for Facilitators who may be new to the line. Such a mechanism is lacking in my context and the TM serves to be a tangible and concrete representation of the desire to assist fellow Facilitators. With that in mind, my belief is that the TM should not be an artefact fixed in time, impervious to changing contextual or environmental needs. As such, the TM presented with this commentary is a flexible tool for the advancement of practice and can accommodate changes if necessary. For example, the learning outcomes and training content can be modified should there be further development or research that necessitates this. However, it is my belief that such modifications would be more efficiently

mapped out if there was a rudimentary existing framework to begin with, and this is what the artefact in this project hopes to exemplify considering it is the first of its kind in my community. Accordingly, I further believe that the TM serves as a significant contribution to practice.

Chapter 7: The Denouement – Critical Learning

‘The voyage of discovery is not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes’ – Marcel Proust

In this concluding chapter, I shall reflect on my project in its entirety and discuss the various dimensions of learning that has taken place during my project. I shall also expound on the limitations of the project and the potential path forward. Finally, some concluding statements to the commentary are supplied.

7.1 *Critical Learning - The Philosophical Dimensions*

Ontology, epistemology, axiology and paradigms are the main aspects essential for an overall research strategy. However, the approach adopted in the current project was firmly anchored in the stance of pragmatism; a stance that did not necessarily rigidly comply with purist ideological underpinnings when it comes to research. The overall strategy, as well as the choice of specific methods, was informed by considerations of ‘what works’ for the project at hand (Creswell, 2009, p. 28) and, as such, there was more emphasis on attaining effective data to address the research inquiries. For instance, if a specific goal of the project could be attained effectively through the use of one method rather than another, then it was chosen without any dogmatic theoretical constraints.

With regards to ontology, the unidimensional view that all human behaviour is dictated by socially constructed elements and the unidimensional counter-view that it is controlled by external social forces was deemed insufficient to address the research inquiries of the project. As such, epistemologically, both quantitative and qualitative data was sourced for via journals, surveys, semi-structured interviews, researcher observations and evaluation forms consistent with an approach grounded within MMR.

Nevertheless, it is perhaps crucial at this juncture to explore some of the potential limitations I have observed about using pragmatism as my guiding framework. The following is a list of three factors that may be seen as limitations of the pragmatic paradigm.

Factor 1: An Open-Door To Machiavellianism

Whilst undertaking my project, I thought I was sure about the philosophical dimension I wanted my project to fall under. I was also resolute that such a dimension was congruent with who I was and what kind of actions guided my role as a practitioner. However, the more immersed I was in my project, the more it dawned on me that there may be a fundamental disjoint I was facing. Being clinically-trained as a practitioner, we are constantly imbued with the importance of ethics and not directing the client too much as if we did so, we may be taking agency away from the client (Rennie, 2004) and the eventual clinical goal would more likely represent ours and not the client's (Gatongi, 2007). With this in mind, the more I worked within the framework of pragmatism, the more I realised that it would be easy to misconstrue the ends as more important than the means as pragmatism focused more on practical results (McCready, 2010). While this was very consistent with the duties I executed as a Military Officer, I could not help but ruminate on whether this was moving me towards Machiavellianism; defined in my context as doing whatever was necessary, even sometimes potentially crossing ethical boundaries, so long as appropriate results (as qualified by me) could be attained. The following thoughts that I recorded in my researcher journal illustrate this conundrum.

- “If the results are the only thing that is important, why care at all about how we get there?”
- “Does this not mean that the ends justify the means and is this not the philosophy of dictators often sounded out by my own Government?”
- “How will I share this framework with other Facilitators? Do I even need to?”

Many of these reflections led me to see that while I may be conducting my exploratory project under some supervision and guidance from a university, many practitioner-researchers may not be. It is possible that many practitioner-researchers may also be less concerned about the ethical mechanics employed in the present project and more focused on the output; particularly in Singapore where much credence is given to results and output (Wong, Then and Skitmore, 2000; Lee and Haque, 2006; Sing and Khine, 2008). This may inevitably coalesce to a mindset of *the ends are all that matters*. At a fundamental level, this led me to feel that utilising pragmatism could easily turn into an open-door towards Machiavellianism. Furthermore, I received a new appreciation of the importance of having firm and clear ethical mechanisms such as reflexivity and bracketing, and why any practitioner-researcher who utilises the framework of pragmatism needs to take extra caution (perhaps more caution than any of the other paradigms) to ensure that their research output(s) was not unduly compromised by potential latent Machiavellianism. For my own project, reflexive exercises, adhering to the ethical codes of my agency, triangulation, bracketing, as well as the ethical considerations highlighted in [Section 4.5](#) of the commentary, assisted me to navigate this delicate and precarious element embedded within my guiding philosophy of choice.

Factor 2: Unanswered Philosophy

Pragmatism chooses to expound on knowledge that enables individuals to address relevant problems (Friedrichs and Kratochwil, 2009). However, by so doing, it often does not engage in meta-theoretical debating as a solution to philosophical debates and, in turn, has been rejected by many current philosophers (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Guba and Lincoln (1994, p. 105) have proclaimed that a philosophical overview to research is fundamentally important as it is the 'basic belief system or worldview that guides the investigator'. Accordingly, if pragmatism is not really a philosophical paradigm, as suggested by some authors (Alghamdi and Li, 2013), perhaps it would ineluctably be deficient in supplying a

balanced and structured approach to scientific research. In fact, being guided by the same standards of practice pretty much delineate what the term *paradigm* itself should encompass as it may also be viewed as how a community of researchers support themselves (Kuhn, 1996).

In light of these factors, if a practitioner-researcher chooses to utilise pragmatism as his / her guiding philosophy, the question then becomes one of whether there was ever a guiding philosophy to begin with. This may trickle down into actions in research that do not necessarily help in understanding assumptions or drawing conclusions (some of the basic tenets in scientific research); thereby putting into question the validity / trustworthiness of such research. This fundamental challenge to pragmatism is what I found the most poignant in planning and executing my project. For me, I weighed such complications against the need to start some form of research to advance practice in my community. Whilst I fully acknowledge that my present project is far from perfect, the need to initiate it was paramount to my practice (as touched upon in [Section 6.1](#)) and, as such, my central focus was on answering the specific research inquiries within my project to produce a piece of work that was ground-up and not top-down as is the case with most guiding mechanisms in my community (as highlighted in [Section 7.4.2](#)).

Factor 3: The Importance Of The Research Question & Wholeness Of Research

Pragmatism has been critiqued for considering the research question as more vital than methodology or the philosophical paradigm that governs it (Doyle, Brady and Byrne, 2016). With the rejection of traditional dualist paradigms and a gravitation towards eclecticism, it is palpable that pragmatists would consider methodological choices only as a need to address research questions and not as a rudimentary sub-product of philosophical congruence (Onwuegbuzie, Johnson and Collins, 2009; Glogowska, 2011). This, in turn, draws attention to the importance of structuring the research aims in a lucid and investigable manner. As a

practitioner, while the deviance from philosophical debates and trajectory towards problem-solving was highly alluring, I did face some difficulty in adequately structuring my research inquiry. This led me to discern that not having a philosophical paradigm guiding one's research may hamper an individual's capacity to construct research questions, which, in turn, may bring doubt into the validity / trustworthiness of one's research. In essence, this may impact the wholeness of research being executed.

Another dimension of pragmatic research pertains to how complete the research findings may be and this too may impact the wholeness of the overall research. For instance, the pragmatic process often involves exploring what works in everyday practice experiences (James, 1907). However, basing methodological choices on what works does not really address the issue of for who it may be working for, or even to what extend (Doyle, Brady and Byrne 2016). One way pragmatic researchers may circumvent this issue may be to be very candid and explicit about for who the research is designed for and how functional the research may be (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). For my project, I have tried to do this by elucidating that the project, while far from being flawless, is aimed at assisting not only Facilitators and ARYs in the long run, but also my own agency and myself in the short-term. I have also tried to expand on the potential limitations of the project (in this Chapter) while trying to highlight that the project, far from being a utopian model, serves to be a first step in a direction not currently being taken within my context (i.e. a ground-up, practitioner-based exploration of what kind of intervention approach may be useful for ARY and Facilitators in Singapore).

7.2 *Critical Learning - The Project*

This section focuses on elements of learning revolving around the project. In essence, the project is dissected from a critical standpoint where potential limitations and how they were navigated are highlighted.

The project set out with two aims:

Aim (1): To advance practice by creating a structured, transdisciplinary and contextualised intervention model, incorporating biological, psychological and social work components (termed the BPSw Model) as a form of intervention programme for ARY in Singapore.

Aim (2): To enhance the competencies of Facilitators by providing them with a therapeutic model (i.e. the BPSw Model), along with a Training Manual, that they may find useful for working with ARY in Singapore.

In practical terms, my project aimed to assist a plethora of individuals as either the practitioners, or receivers, of ARY-focused clinical therapy. In research terms, my project aimed to contribute by adding to new knowledge as a project of this scale and scope has not been done before. I believe the results reflected in [Section 5.5](#) demonstrate that the project has achieved these two aims.

Accordingly, it may be asserted that the findings of the project are highly original in that no prior project has endeavoured to explore the achievement of the two aims listed. As such, the project served as pursuit of new knowledge in an area under-researched.

7.2.1 *Contribution To Practice*

My project has been something of a living entity as it has straddled the processes of work-based learning and research whilst regularly providing me with scholastic input as I performed my duties as a consultant & clinical supervisor working with organisations and Facilitators. With each work engagement regarding the subject of ARY, the products of my project have been dispersed throughout my communities of practice. This has led to more work opportunities and recognition in my field (even if not directly related to ARY). For instance, since embarking on my project, I have been fortunate to have been invited as a featured consultant for 26 news media articles and shows on matters pertaining to youth work and Psychology. A list of these assignments may be found in [Appendix-K](#).

All of this has allowed me to share my findings with a wider audience outside of the academic sphere and has been a deeply rewarding aspect of my practice. Furthermore, the growth in recognition has allowed me to cultivate new networking links that have served as a loudhailer for my key messages about working with ARY in Singapore, and as potential business outlets for my practice, thereby assisting to crystallise my position as a Subject Matter Expert in my context; something I had set out to do with my doctoral project.

As an educator and clinical supervisor to Facilitators, I believe my project invoked some of the key philosophical dimensions to pedagogy. Joldersma (2002, p. 181) expounded on the concept of ‘Pedagogy of the Other’ and I believe this concept was represented in my project. In essence, the concept stipulated that any new learning comes from the learner welcoming the teacher into his / her own world. Joldersma claims that teaching is ‘a kind of showing by the other, perhaps a verbal saying’

(Joldersma, 2002, p. 183). When viewed in this light, the performing of AR to create and apply a BPSw Model not only made more sense as it was necessary to show other Facilitators that such actions were possible, but also became beneficial during phases of the project that tried to raise the competencies of Facilitators. The reason is that most Facilitators, in my experience, prefer concrete solutions that aid them in their day-to-day work rather than purely theoretical models extrapolated from Western literature. Accordingly, with the creation of the BPSw Model during the early phases of the project, I found that most Facilitators welcomed me into their world more readily as they presented statements (in [Section 5.5.2](#)) that highlighted the fact that the content of my training truly helped them in their day-to-day work. This greatly aided me with the pedagogical dimensions of my practice.

Furthermore, the impact of my project on my practice may also be demonstrated in the following ways.

- (a) A recognition in my thinking that almost all my practice endeavours appear centred on three key themes, namely: *differentiation*, *flexibility* and *control* (to be elaborated on in [Section 7.3](#)). This has allowed me to construct case conceptualisations and treatment plans for clients in a much quicker manner as I had a better understanding of myself as a clinical practitioner.
- (b) I now actively seek clients who view me not just as a catalyst for change, but as a partner who can collaborate with them in the exploration of deeper issues.
- (c) A greater comfort with writing about social policy. The research undertaken for the project has raised my self-confidence to a point whereby I even offered my professional views to political candidates in my nation's General Elections held in July 2020.

- (d) Perhaps most interesting is the fact that when I now work with clients (both ARY and Facilitators as well as organisations), I view the entire enterprise as one where we (i.e. the client and I) are both engaged in an inquiry. As such, I am more confident of advising on the processes of such an inquiry in order to bring about some planned change. I believe this has helped me become a better clinical practitioner.

7.2.2 Limitations From A Macro Perspective

Notwithstanding all of the above points, it is perhaps vital to state unequivocally at this juncture that I recognise the limitations of the project. Furthermore, whatever insights gained from my project and its findings should be viewed through the lens of its limitations. These limitations include the following points.

Philosophical Incongruence

Perhaps the most fundamental when considering limitations is the very notion of the philosophical placement of the current project. Being originally trained in Psychology, I have come to note that the vast majority of studies and research in Psychology revolve around empirical findings, experimental designs and hypothesis testing, thereby being grounded firmly in positivism. I cannot even recall an instance where non-quantitative research was exposed to me during my undergraduate education in Psychology. I was thus surprised to learn that there has been a long-going and active debate on whether quantitative or qualitative methods would be better to understand human behaviour (Smith, Harré and Van Langenhove, 1995; Smith, 1998; Oakley, 2000; Bowling, 2009). The discipline of Psychology which originated in conjunction with developments in modern medicine tends to emphasise the scientific method as paramount to the inquiry

process. This more often than not centres Psychology and psychological research within the domain of positivism. In fact, it was only in the current century that the British Psychological Society and the American Psychological Association formally integrated official sub-sections for qualitative methods in Psychology (Biggerstaff, 2012). Qualitative methodologies are thus still regarded as relatively new within the discipline of Psychology (Richardson, 1996; Hayes, 1997). In lieu of these points, my early orientation was towards positivism as I assumed that was how the discipline of Psychology required me to execute research tasks. It was only until I undertook my doctoral project that I was exposed to a vast array of philosophies towards research and how each one had its own pros and cons. Despite this awakening, the current project is my first full attempt at executing a research endeavour that deviated from the teachings of my original training in Psychology and I was constantly apprehensive of the fact that my assumptions and actions were still grounded within the positivism school of thought.

The first point of note here is that such apprehensions may have disadvantaged me by narrowing my viewpoint to focus on the processes of my research (as a reassurance that I was not making any errors) and not the potentially enriching subjective data exposed to me. Whilst I do not believe it to be true, there is a very real possibility that key information may have been missed or subconsciously ignored due to the philosophical incongruence between my early training and my current project. The second point of note here is that Singapore, as highlighted in this commentary, tends to be a country that places emphasis on quantitative empirical data (Kim, Tan and Talaue, 2013; Suprpto, 2016), often derived from positivist methodologies. Accordingly, as a mechanism to inform policy, it is unclear how the present project may be viewed to achieve this goal.

Research Rigour

Rigour in research often relates to ‘fitting the research methods to the problem in order to produce valid scientific explanations’ (Baskerville and Wood-Harper, 1996, p. 241). In Psychology, rigour will inevitably pertain to reliability and validity, concepts imbued into every level 1 Psychology undergraduate. However, I have found that these concepts tend to become more nebulous when viewed within qualitative or practitioner-based designs, as suggested by some scholars (Morse, 1991; Winter, 2000; Merriam and Leahy, 2005; Creswell, 2013). The following extracts from a traditional level 1 Psychology text underscore the standard positivist slant presented to learners:

...the hallmark of scientific research is that there is evidence to support a claim. Scientific knowledge is empirical: It is grounded in objective, tangible evidence that can be observed time and time again, regardless of who is observing (Spielman, 2017, p. 45).

When viewed in this light, the present project may lack elements of traditional rigour often embedded within psychological experiments. However, the present project did not set out to be a clinical experiment. I thus had to learn to be self-reflective about the potential critique focusing on the below points (commonly used to evaluate studies in my community) that may be thrown at me.

- (a) *Sample size.* A key point to note here was that the AR Phases I-VI only took into account a limited number of individuals (32 ARYs and 75 Facilitators). Despite eventually assisting to inform the final phase of the project, this may have impacted the wholeness of data and should be an essential point of consideration when interpreting the project as an entity. Regardless, my project is highly contextualised and meant to be a step in the right direction to advance practice, not a clinical experiment proposing absolute findings.

- (b) *Sampling issues.* Random assignment is often a prescribed method in psychological experiments but was not feasible in the present project due to its scope and methodology. In the present project, there may have been a selection bias as only those participants readily available to the researcher could be engaged. It may thus be possible that those who had been engaged may have already been predisposed to responding in a manner that many others who had not been engaged might have been. Once again, this can be understood by the viewpoint that my project is highly contextualised and meant to be a mechanism to advance practice.
- (c) *Limited context & generalisability.* With the use of ARY from only 2 local schools for Phases I-VI, an argument can be made that the limited context may impact larger generalisability issues. However, triangulation with other Facilitators was employed to counter this issue.
- (d) *Researcher bias.* Whilst many authors have elaborated on the potential biases inherent in qualitative works that may impact the accuracy of findings (Oppenheim, 1992; Rich and Ginsburg, 1999), perhaps the key consideration for the present project could be confirmation bias. This is when the researcher deliberately or subconsciously seeks responses that gel with his / her preconceived notions, convictions and assumptions. When congruent responses are provided, they are immediately highlighted and documented but when contrary responses are provided, they are either rejected or ignored (Nickerson, 1998). This was particularly relevant for the present project as it is based on my life experiences as a practitioner. To counter for this, much of the significance of recorded data was designed to be self-explanatory (as far as possible). Triangulation was also employed.

Despite these potential limitations, research outside the positivist sphere can also be held up to standards of merit as delineated by Lincoln and Guba (1985). The authors propose an alternative taxonomy (i.e. credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability) to evaluate qualitative research as expanded upon in Chapter 4. Over the years, these criteria have come to represent a parallel track to evaluate research rigour for non-positivist designs and I have tried to incorporate such principles within my project.

I believe credibility was attained in my project through continuous engagement and determined observation to learn the context and lived experience of Facilitators and ARY, as well as to reduce distortions that may impact the data. For this, I spent almost 10 years prior to commencing my project, collating preliminary information by speaking with a plethora of Facilitators and ARY, sifting through policy papers, research articles, archived information, and observing & studying existing mechanisms within my community targeted at ARY. During the project, I invested time in building trust and rapport with participants while concurrently conducting triangulation and bracketing to ensure the veracity of data collected.

I believe transferability was attained by using purposive sampling and detailing robust descriptions from participants that appeared consistent with whatever little research there was on the matter for my context. In fact, more interviews were conducted with ARY and Facilitators that were not used within the project. As noted by Morse *et al.* (2002), interviewing additional participants can serve the purpose of increasing the suitability and scope of the data. At the analysis phase, great effort was placed to thoroughly document the various aspects of the analysis. Analysis here may refer to the breaking down and cataloguing of information in such a way that makes sense of the

data; thereby facilitating the writing of a final report that is accurate and veracious (Merriam, 1995). Even after analysis and interpreting data, effort was also made to look out for themes that aided in providing a more complete understanding of the issue(s) I was exploring.

I believe dependability, which may be closely aligned with reliability, was attained by constantly verifying my data and themes with local professionals who had expertise with ARY in Singapore (both within and outside my agency). This involved multiple vocations and any element that did not attain unanimous consent or agreement was omitted from the project. All of this was to make the data as reliable as possible.

I believe confirmability was attained by maintaining a reflexive journal to diligently record introspections and notes that may aid the project during the research. This also served to establish an audit trail that may aid in verification and cross-referencing processes. Manen (1990, p. 47) eloquently stated that ‘if we simply try to forget or ignore what we already know, we may find that the presuppositions persistently creep back into our reflections.’ As such, I was always cognisant of my own biases and assumptions through reflexivity and bracketing, but also aware that a total obliteration of such biases and assumptions may not be possible. During the data collection and analysis, I did my best to make my known biases and assumptions explicit but held them back and bracketed them (as touched upon in Chapter 4). I believe this aided in the confirmability of the project findings.

In all, I believe I did my best to attain rigour as proposed by researchers who suggest that in order for rigour to be established in AR, credibility, transferability and dependability of the research should be made evident (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Dick, 1993; Thorne, 1997).

Specific Issues With AR & MMR

AR can be a time consuming and labour-intensive process. This increases the probability of error on the part of the researcher, from simple reasons as fatigue to more complicated reasons as managing a complex project, and lends credence to the notion that particular issues may be missed (Bowen, 2009). Also, even though it was not an element of my research aims, it is often difficult to investigate causality with a process like AR, something consistent with qualitative research in general (Barbour, 2000). This may make follow up research somewhat contained within a narrow pathway. For example, as my original project did not investigate causality, a follow up research on what causes at-risk behaviours amongst youth in Singapore may be difficult to extrapolate from the current project.

Evaluations centred on the practitioner-researcher may also be seen as a drawback of AR. The veracity of data, the issue with potential coercion or biased selection, as well as preconceived assumptions, may all cast doubt over whether the practitioner-researcher's self-evaluations are presenting him / her with an accurate picture of the issue being studied (Coghlan and Brannick, 2005).

Furthermore, the cyclical steps in AR often make process control onerous to predict and attain (Baskerville, 1999). Whilst aims and objectives may be stipulated by the researcher, the detailed execution of such aims and objectives cannot really be enforced with certitude as responsiveness to the situation is vital and outcomes may not be predictable (Baskerville and Pries-Heje, 1999). This makes AR difficult to plan and channel. This also means that mechanisms have to be enacted to review results and validate subjectivity using techniques such as peer review and triangulation (Barbour, 2001); all of which makes the research more complex and deviates from the

quintessential principle of parsimony taught to all Psychology researchers. Also, some authors have argued that for a health-based exploration, the learning attained from AR is limited in application due to its deviance from standard scientific testing especially because specific events cannot be replicated (Susman, 1983; Baskerville and Wood-Harper, 1996).

However, with much of the critique of AR centred on the same issue of research rigour, it should be noted that AR does not set out to be objective or free of bias (Zuber-Skerritt, 1992). The emergence of a subjective viewpoint from the interpretation and analysis of human behaviour within a specific context may be the very reason AR is chosen as a design methodology; as was the case for me. Additionally, the following excerpt from Chapple and Rogers (1998, p. 557) suggests that replication as an aspect of rigour, may not necessarily be the most essential facet in health-based settings:

...the hallmark of good qualitative methodology is its flexibility rather than its standardization. The point of the methodology is not that it can be compared and applied across all other similarly controlled situations, but that it can be modified and be responsive to the peculiarities of situations as they arise in real-life social settings.

Similarly, many issues have been raised about MMR such as those espoused by Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003) who put forth that the primary limitation may be in attempting to fuse together differing worldviews with differing assumptions, epistemologies and ontologies in the pursuit of knowledge. This is perhaps the greatest drawback in using MMR as it opens the door to more epistemological debate that may undercut the practical findings of any MMR project. At a fundamental level, the lack of a common typology to explore rigour for MMR projects may also be an issue of concern. MMR is still developing and there appears to be no quality assurance

framework that governs the specific use of it. Instead, most researchers utilising MMR attempt to ensure quality by prescribing to the guidelines specific to the quantitative and qualitative realms (where it applies); a notion reinforced by O'Cathain, Murphy and Nicholl (2008).

7.2.3 *Dealing With Limitations*

With the project's adoption of the pragmatic worldview, the emphasis was on exploring a *what-works-best* approach which demonstrated itself to be a mixed-methods design with AR at its heart. I believe this was the best way to attain the intended aims of the project. Regarding the debate around a lack of MMR typology, my belief is that it is probably more vital for any form of research to be grounded in some form of rigour and possess quality assurance mechanisms regardless of the paradigm. Had I not adopted an MMR approach, I would have missed out on an opportunity to explore a rich vein of data from both ARY and Facilitators. I would have also not been able to cross-reference the data to explore if they actually complemented one another thereby assisting in the rigour of my project.

With respect to AR, the utilisation of it can support a pragmatic approach necessary for advancing real-world practice (Williams, 2006). As noted by Lau (1999), AR can contribute to new knowledge through reflection and learning from the various steps enacted. Also, as expressed by Dick and Swepson (1997, p. 6), AR 'has a capacity to respond to the demands of the informants and the situation in a way which most other paradigms cannot'. These are some of the reasons I chose AR to be at the heart of my methodology. Passive distribution of protocols and new information for changing the behaviour of physicians was found to be ineffective whereas the actual

implementation of sources via organisational routes was found to be better (Greco and Eisenberg, 1993; Bauchner, Simpson and Chessare, 2001). Along this vein, I believe AR being at the heart of my project was the best way to reflect to Facilitators that practitioner research is not only possible in my context, but also beneficial, which is why the training programme, at the local Government’s established institute, and TM, aimed at raising competencies, was the crux of the project. In the end, it was about altering the behaviour of Facilitators to help them achieve their own practitioner goals.

Additionally, it should be noted that the project was enacted and influenced by a number of practical considerations; all of which impacted the specific approaches employed and the timespan of the endeavour. The following Figure 7.1 presents a snapshot of these considerations. Regardless of these considerations, every effort was made to produce a piece of work without undermined quality and rigour.

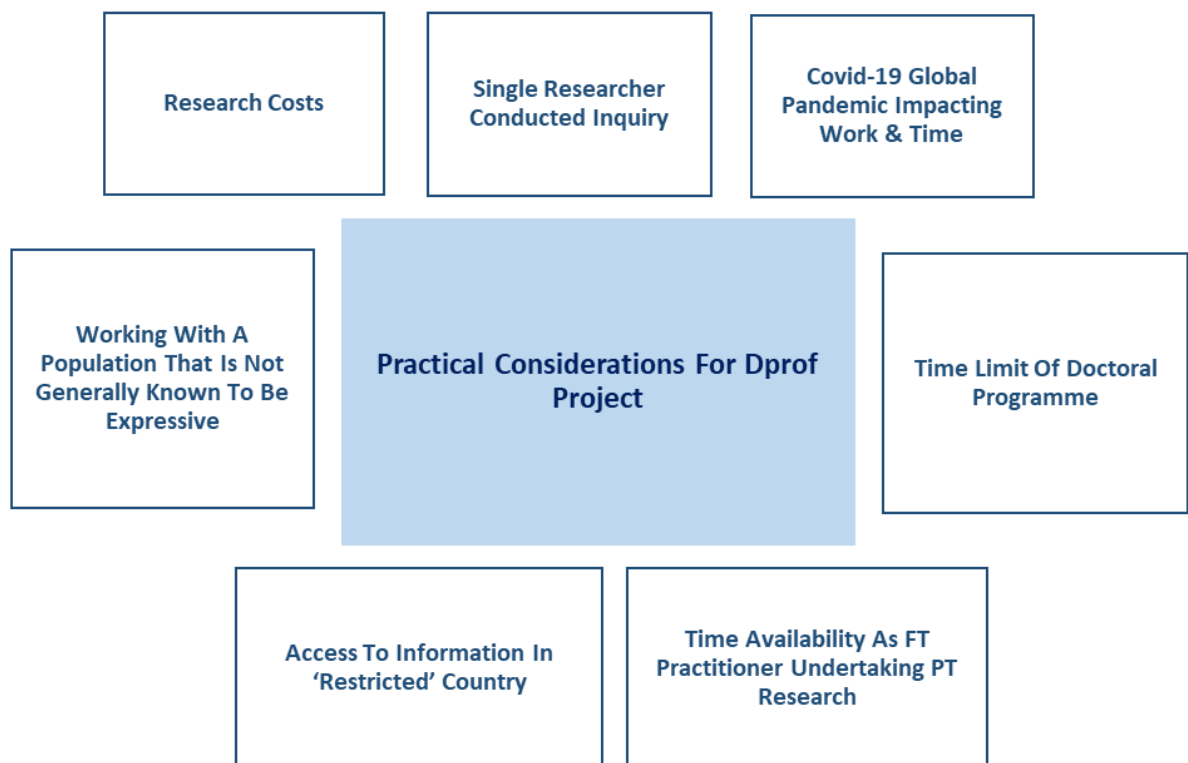


Figure 7.1 *Practical Considerations During Project*

7.3 *Critical Learning - Personal Development*

Chapter 4 briefly touched upon the AR concept of developmental transformation (McNiff and Whitehead, 2010). Reflection on my own journey within the doctoral programme has highlighted to me that I may have gone through my own developmental transformation. Whilst I was clear in wanting to pursue a professional doctorate because I wanted to continue my work as a practitioner with more career opportunities and the potential to explore research that could have social impact, a review of the journey illustrates to me that I was perhaps a little naïve and idealistic at the commencement stage. Although my project has altered slightly from that which I originally drew up at the commencement of my doctorate, the aims remain congruent with what I sought to achieve. The main reasons for alteration appear to be learnings that have transpired along the way; learnings guided by self-reflection as well as the guidance of the university supervising me. Such learnings, despite slightly altering the originally planned project, have contributed much to my own personal development thereby becoming more valuable to me than any project findings. A few pertinent examples of these learnings are highlighted below.

The Learning Of Philosophy & Praxis

Perhaps the greatest learning for me with regards to my project was that which allowed me to understand the philosophical dimensions to research and practice. This served as a treasured induction into a deeper understanding of ontology & epistemology and led me to understand that there was not necessarily anything straightforward about research and knowledge-production. I believe my learnings in this regard not only afforded me the opportunity to better understand research as a whole, but greater awareness of paradigms helped me to see who I was as a practitioner in a clearer light (i.e. what motivated me, what kind of inquiries intrigued me, what I believed was crucial for practice, etc.). I came to understand that pragmatism was

indeed something I was already practising before my doctorate and further discoveries about the philosophy helped crystalise my conceptual and practical understanding of myself as a practitioner. It was like a *light bulb moment* where suddenly, so much of what motivated me resonated with magnitude. From being able to understand the philosophical framework that guided my actions, I was able to attain a better understanding of what *praxis* truly meant to me.

Praxis to me is being reflective, integrating the best available information free from dogma or forced ideological positioning, and channelling it towards problem-solving within my practice. At its reduced level, it is about questioning and discovering. Reflection informs me that this was the very reason I pursued studies in Psychology. As stated by Barber (2006, p. 24), for practitioner research, 'the questions we form are more important than the results we defend'. As a guiding framework for my views on *praxis* and research discoveries, McMahon's (2012) elaboration on the continuous cycle of knowledge may be apposite. It is a cycle described as a movement from pre-understanding to post-understanding that has reflection, social engagement and *praxis* sandwiched within. The post-understanding then becomes the new pre-understanding. Being cognisant of this cycle was liberating in that it allowed me to focus less on achieving *perfect* or *absolute* findings. Unlike my early training in the positivist slant within Psychology, I felt more comfortable that I did not have to prove or disprove something but could, instead, be illuminated by a myriad of perspectives that could offer explanations or even insight into a phenomena. The doctoral project could thus be a starting point and not an end point of a specialist track within my practice thereby aiding in my professional development.

From a technical perspective, reflexive exercises during my project highlighted that although there were pros and cons to different therapeutic modalities (i.e. the Person-Centred Approach, Psychodynamic Approach, Cognitive Approach, etc.), I did not really ascribe to the notion of conforming to the rubrics of any single modality. I learnt that my inclination was towards

fluidity whereby Facilitators should be schooled in a number of therapeutic approaches and then match the most suitable one to the client and the situation. However, I noticed that this was not often done in my community where most Facilitators conformed to a single modality and practiced within its parameters. I found this odd as no two clients I ever encountered were the same even if they presented with similar issues. Accordingly, my take on being an effective Facilitator is that we should learn and absorb as much knowledge and skills as possible (from a range of therapeutic modalities) and then develop the judgement, with reflexivity, to know when to use such knowledge and skills for the betterment of our clients. In this sense, my viewpoint is very much consistent with the tenets of reflective practice ascribed by Schön (1983) in that I believe reflective practice can assist the clinical practitioner navigate complex issues in difficult situations, often when theoretical models only provide a limited viewpoint into an issue. In fact, reflective practice has been portrayed as a way to prevent clinical practitioners from becoming too technique driven (Thompson and Pascal, 2011). I believe my project is imbued with this philosophy of practice in the following ways:

- (a) the BPSw model I chose to construct cuts across and includes elements from a range of therapeutic modalities based on my own reflective practices on what appears to work;
- (b) reflective thinking is a vital component for the formulation of critical reasoning and helps to encourage self-confidence (Kuiper, Pesut and Kautz, 2009) which is why the intervention programme executed for ARY was centred on critical-thinking while the training for Facilitators was centred on reflective thinking allowing for raised competencies; and
- (c) reflective exercises during my project highlighted to me that my entire notion of *praxis* revolved around three themes which were *differentiation* (i.e. breaking from convention, ideology and not being afraid to try out things which were different from the existing practice in my context), *flexibility* (i.e. being open to adjustments and

change such as in the refinements executed during the AR cycles), and *control* (trying to execute an intervention or training with as many confounds controlled as possible so as to attain measurable, meaningful data laced with rigour).

Nevertheless, the underlying assumptions to this outlook are that Facilitators fully learn and understand a plethora of therapeutic modalities and are given the opportunity, as well as instruction (if applicable), on reflective practice. This is something I have tried to model during the training phase (Phase VII) of the project.

The Learning Of Methodology

Another area where I believe I have developed as a professional is with regards to the discoveries I made about methodology in research. From learning about qualitative research and AR, to utilising MMR, the learning that transpired for me went far beyond merely recognising tools for inquiry. For instance, as I sought to improve my own practice and contribute to the larger community of Facilitators in my community, I discovered AR to be supportive and consistent with this inductive inquiry. It was almost as if AR, in itself, was an agent for change and advocacy as described by David (2002). This was something new to me and congruent with the very reasons I undertook my project.

At a more macro level, the link between methodology and *praxis* took on new significance. I found qualitative research more aligned to practice with its emphasis on communication with clients. I also found that I was able to manoeuvre between subjectivity to objectivity and then back, developing an understanding and appreciation for these epistemologies. However, in this process, I had to develop strategies such as learning to be reflexive and bracketing to maintain the integrity of my project. Regardless, all of this contributed to my experience and knowledge of *praxis* as a practitioner; how reflection about practice can be used in research that subsequently feeds back into improving the very same practice. As such, I believe my project

emanated from practice and generated related lines of inquiry about practice; all of which became a learning loop that sought to advance my practice as a whole. To me, this was the quintessential encapsulation of work-based learning.

In totality, all the discoveries attained during my project have propelled me to not only develop personally with a better understanding of myself, but, more importantly, it also helped me develop into a better practitioner.

7.4 *The Path Forward*

This section focuses on some of the elements that may be derived from the project as implications to steer potential future work trajectories with regards to ARYs and Facilitators. Particular emphasis is placed on potential future research and policy enhancements.

7.4.1 *Future Research*

With the project completed, some recommendations for future research may be as follows:

- (a) Implementing the BPSw model in an attempt to deduce if there may be gender differences in the way the model impacts ARYs in Singapore. This would allow for even more targeted interventions by Facilitators. The present project did not really seek to investigate any distinction between male and female ARYs. Whilst both genders provided congruent data, it should be noted that the sample size and context could be improved upon to explore if any gender effects may be prevalent so as to give more credence to the larger inquiry on what works best with ARY in Singapore.

- (b) Using the findings of the project to explore if a scale may be developed to help identify an adolescent who may display the propensity to engage in at-risk behaviours (for the Singapore context). While it is acknowledged that such an endeavour would be a long drawn out and resource-intensive one, the question was raised by numerous Facilitators during the training phase. The general consensus was that such a tool could aid Facilitators to more accurately identify clients and plan resources. It could also be a valuable tool for schools to utilise as they try to plan intervention strategies for their charges. At present, no such scale exists and most schools have to identify participants for intervention programmes based on hunches or, more likely, the detection of an at-risk behaviour. The latter, however, tends to be a reactionary mechanism that may, by the very nature of being *after-the-fact*, limit the ability for Facilitators to adequately address at-risk behaviours in a preventive capacity. Whilst there are scales that attempt to identify risk factors, they tend to be normed on populations outside of the local context. They also tend to be difficult to administer to large cohorts due to administrative reasons. A simple yet reliable and valid contextual scale that attempts to identify the propensity for engaging in at-risk behaviours may go a long way to ensuring more effective therapeutic outcomes in Singapore.
- (c) Using the findings of the project to explore if more practitioner-based research may be encouraged and undertaken by Facilitators. This was a theme I personally tried to emphasise during the training phase (Phase VII) as it is an area that is deeply lacking in Singapore. One reason could be due to the tight controls placed by the Government on the availability of unbiased data or any research that has the potential to portray the local administration in a negative light.

7.4.2 Policy Enhancement

More importantly, as a derivation from the project, the recommendations geared towards policy enhancement in my community may be highlighted in the following points. In this vein, it should be noted that I have already commenced discussion with the relevant authorities to try and implement some of the points.

- (a) Exploring initiatives to reject the current top-down model of regulation and governance in favour of a more ground-up model derived from practitioner research and experience. The main issue in Singapore with regards to competency-enhancing mechanisms for Facilitators is the notion that prescriptive control (i.e. top-down rules and regulations to manage risks and attain outcomes) may be exacted over the vocation, by those without domain competence, when the vocation itself is more catered towards requiring discretionary control (i.e. where the individual practitioner is required to make effective and ethical decisions to manage risks and attain outcomes).

The most recent evidence of this may be the misclassification of the vocation as one that is *skills-based* as opposed to one that is predominantly *knowledge-based*. The recently enacted national Skills Framework (SkillsFuture Singapore, 2021) for instance classifies a Facilitator's job as being part of Social Service. It then prescribes the so-called necessary skills required for the job and places them at a level seemingly aligned to other vocations from industries such as *Retail, Logistics, Wholesale Trade, Electronics and Tourism* amongst others (SkillsFuture Singapore, 2021). To exacerbate matters, my own reflection on this initiative and multiple discussions with the authorities have reflected the following:

- (i) the framework seems to treat the vocation of Facilitator as comprised of skills to be learnt. The assumption here is that anyone who learnt such skills may be able to do the job. I believe experienced practitioners would more likely place the vocation as being a knowledge-based one whereby *praxis* can perhaps only be attained with the necessary balancing of theory and practical application, governed by reflection and an individual's capacity to enact discretionary control;
- (ii) the overall framework was most likely constructed by an accounting-based audit-team hired as a vendor for the Government with the volunteered input of some practitioners, and not some well-deliberated select committee comprised of seasoned practitioner-researchers being governed by data;
- (iii) individual administrators and managers working at national training centres themselves have admitted that they are unsure of how to retrofit or remap existing training programmes to match the newly constructed framework which was launched in a top-down manner;
- (iv) the framework appears to be ill constructed with poorly defined terms and inaccurate terminology;
- (v) mandatory re-mapping and retrofitting of all training programmes (even those with high evaluations) appear to reflect a need to conform to the top-down framework and does not align with any evidence-based data that highlights the efficacy of an existing training programme. This seems to reflect a hard turn towards positivism despite the vocation falling under Social Sciences where non-positivist approaches tend to be adopted; and

- (vi) most worryingly, all training programmes for Facilitators would now have to adhere to this framework (regardless of the framework's accuracy or utility) and redesign themselves to match the framework (via remapping of learning outcomes, content, delivery strategies, assessments, etc.). A failure to do so could result in an inability to attain funding or access to target participants.

In light of these points, it is essential for the authorities to realise that the present top-down model is not only ineffective but also inimical to the larger goal of addressing the issue of ARY in Singapore. I believe the current project and its findings will go a long way in supporting the argument to alter the trajectory of national policy to one that becomes more ground-up, with regards to training Facilitators.

- (b) Exploring the encouragement of more ground-up practitioner research. At present, the application for a research grant for Facilitators tends to be a cumbersome process fully controlled by the Government. Practitioner-researchers must also adhere to strict protocols that potentially limit their flexibility and agency with regards to topics to explore and how their research may be covered. For example, it is highly unlikely that funding support would be rendered if the research is in any way likely to bring about findings that could be critical of the Government or its work. This has served to create a climate where most practitioners simply focus on their practice and less on inquiries that could fundamentally impact their practice. By executing, completing and sharing the findings of the current project with other Facilitators during Phase VII, my goal was to display to Facilitators that conducting practitioner research is not only possible, but also essential if one is to develop as a professional.

Feedback via the data from this phase ([Section 5.5.2](#)) has reflected that this encouragement has been met well.

- (c) Exploring initiatives to be less ideological and more transdisciplinary with regards to Facilitator training. What I mean in this regard, is to move to a more evidence-based and contextualised model with regards to planning Facilitator training. At present, almost all training programmes are either rooted in a specific methodology (e.g. Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, Reality Therapy, etc.) or based on theoretical models that have been normed on Western populations. To me this represents a rigid, ideological way of looking at enhancing competencies for Facilitators in that the underlying assumption seems to be that what worked well in another population would work well in Singapore because it is the core curriculum taught in most counselling courses. The assumption also leaves no room for transdisciplinary approaches as there is often no attempt to integrate a wide array of theoretical models and a narrow focus on a single-disciplinary paradigm. Discussions with key personnel at a policy level further reflect that the only understanding of *contextualised* appears to be using the same *modus operandi* whilst including more examples from work within Singapore. There is often no deeper analysis of paradigms governing practice in Singapore or the ontological explorations specific to our context. I believe more emphasis should thus be placed on reflexivity, applicability of transdisciplinary approaches, and less on what has worked well in other contexts. This has been a driving force behind my project and something I hope to disseminate to policy-makers with an eye towards making Facilitator training more effective for working with ARY. Data collated from Phase VII of the project ([Section 5.5.2](#)) appears to reinforce this notion.

(d) Lastly, it is hoped that the BPSw Model and the TM may be exhibited not as a mandatory rigid template to follow, but as a mechanism that may guide Facilitators and encourage more transdisciplinary approaches to intervention planning. Perhaps it may serve as a national template that can be built upon; more of a blueprint for Facilitators to navigate the challenges in their vocation and implement meaningful intervention programmes. During the Facilitator training phase, I tried to emphasise this notion and data collected from the implementation of the BPSw Model went a long way in convincing Facilitators that transdisciplinary approaches towards intervention programmes were not only possible, but also capable of producing positive results in Singapore. This is generally in contrast to all existing intervention programmes that either do not have a theoretical framework, or have one that is rigidly tied to a singular theory (e.g. Person-Centred Therapy). Concordantly, Facilitators in the training phase (Phase VII), who had more than 3 years of experience with ARY, informally relayed that they wished they had the BPSw Model introduced to them when they first started out. Many expressed the notion that a *cut-and-paste* approach with regards to therapeutic modalities may not necessarily work in the Singapore context. Emboldened by the feedback in this regard, I hope to lobby the authorities to try and share the findings and TM to even more Facilitators in Singapore.

I believe policy enhancements along the axis specified above would contribute greatly to creating more competent Facilitators. This, in turn, would contribute to producing more effective intervention programmes for ARY and could ultimately, move more ARYs towards a life trajectory less likely to produce negative outcomes for themselves or the community at large; thereby having a significant social impact.

7.5 *Concluding Statements*

This project began as an observation in practice and concludes with a development of practice via the critical learning elaborated on in this chapter and development of elements that may serve as useful tools for other practitioners in my community (e.g. the TM). Moving forward, I believe the BPSw Model will continue to be open to further refinement through rigorous examination and debate. Moreover, I am of the hope that the BPSw Model and its utilisation, along with my training approach, eventually evolves into the construction and implementation of an academic module that may be offered at the early phase of the training for a Facilitator, rather than merely as a professional development option (e.g. during the training of Police Officers at the Police Academy, or during the training of Teachers before they commence at their jobs). I believe this would aid Facilitators to better navigate the complexities of their practice. The construction of the training programme in the final phase of the project perhaps already sets the groundwork for this evolution to take place.

As an insider-researcher I undertook the project to traverse the intricacies of my own practice and to coalesce the findings into a contribution to the world of knowledge that may be beneficial for other practitioners and my community. I believe this has been highlighted via the findings and project output presented. While it has been rewarding to see my project aid in the work of other practitioners, it has been even more gratifying to explore my own practice with the aim of developing myself as a better researcher, practitioner and professional; elements I believe the project has helped accomplish.

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APPENDICES

Appendix-A

List of Youth Work Courses @ The Social Service Institute

1. Applying Developmental Theories in Working with Children and Youth
2. Certified User for Child & Adolescent Needs & Strengths (CANS)
3. Certified User for Youth Level of Service / Case Management Inventory 2.0 (YLS/CMI 2.0)
4. Coaching and Mentoring Youths Effectively
5. Collaborative Skills for Effective Youth Programmes
6. Counteracting the Impact of Media Violence on Youths
7. Delivering Impactful Training to Youths
8. Engaging Reluctant Adolescents Effectively
9. Engaging Reluctant Adolescents Using Motivational Approaches
10. Engaging Youths-at-risk through Effective Strategies and Techniques
11. Game For Life for Youth-At-Risk
12. Helping Youths Cope with Anger
13. Introduction to Restorative Justice
14. Managing Substance Abuse in Youths
15. Schools-To-Job (STJ) Intervention Model
16. Tackling Cyber Addiction in Youths
17. The Art of Cyber Wellness for Youths in the Digital Age
18. The Competent Youth Worker I
19. The Competent Youth Worker II
20. The Competent Youth Worker: Advanced
21. Utilising Theories of Children and Young Persons Development in Social Service Practice

22. Working with Youths on Sexuality Issues
23. WSQ Mentoring and Coaching Youth Effectively
24. Youth Gangsterism & Violence

Taken From : https://e-services.ncss.gov.sg/Training/Course/TemplateSearch?Filter.Keyword=&Filter.CourseDatesString=&Filter.TypeOfCourse.Value=&Filter.TypeOfCourse.Label=&Filter.CourseSubCategory.Id=f6f837bd-290c-e611-810d-000c29e3b091&Filter.CourseSubCategory.LogicalName=nis_coursesubcategory&Filter.CourseSubCategory.Name=Children%2C+Youth+and+Family&Filter.CourseSubCategory.ToRemove= (1 June 2021)

Graphical Representation - BPSw Model

Theoretical Antecedents

Biological Perspective	Psychological Perspective	Social Work Perspective
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. James-Lange Theory of Emotions 2. Long-Term Potentiation (LTP) 3. Effects of Diet on Neurological Development 4. Theories Regarding Frontal Lobe Development 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Developmental Theories by Freud, Kolb & Erikson 2. Experimental Designs 3. Perceptual Control Theory 5. Cognitive-Behavioural Interventions 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Social Work Systems Theory 2. Responsible Thinking Process

The BPSw Model

Intervention programmes for ARY designed according to the BPSw Model

Identify and attempt to control potential Confounds

Target the development of Critical-Thinking

Emphasise the attaining of a Therapeutic Alliance between Facilitators and ARY

Improved attendance rates & decreased resistance towards intervention programmes

Increased receptivity of intervention programmes by stakeholders (e.g. Teachers)

Increased learning retention rates & decreased resistance towards learning by ARY

Structured, transdisciplinary & contextualised intervention programme

Enhance competencies of Facilitators

Appendix-C

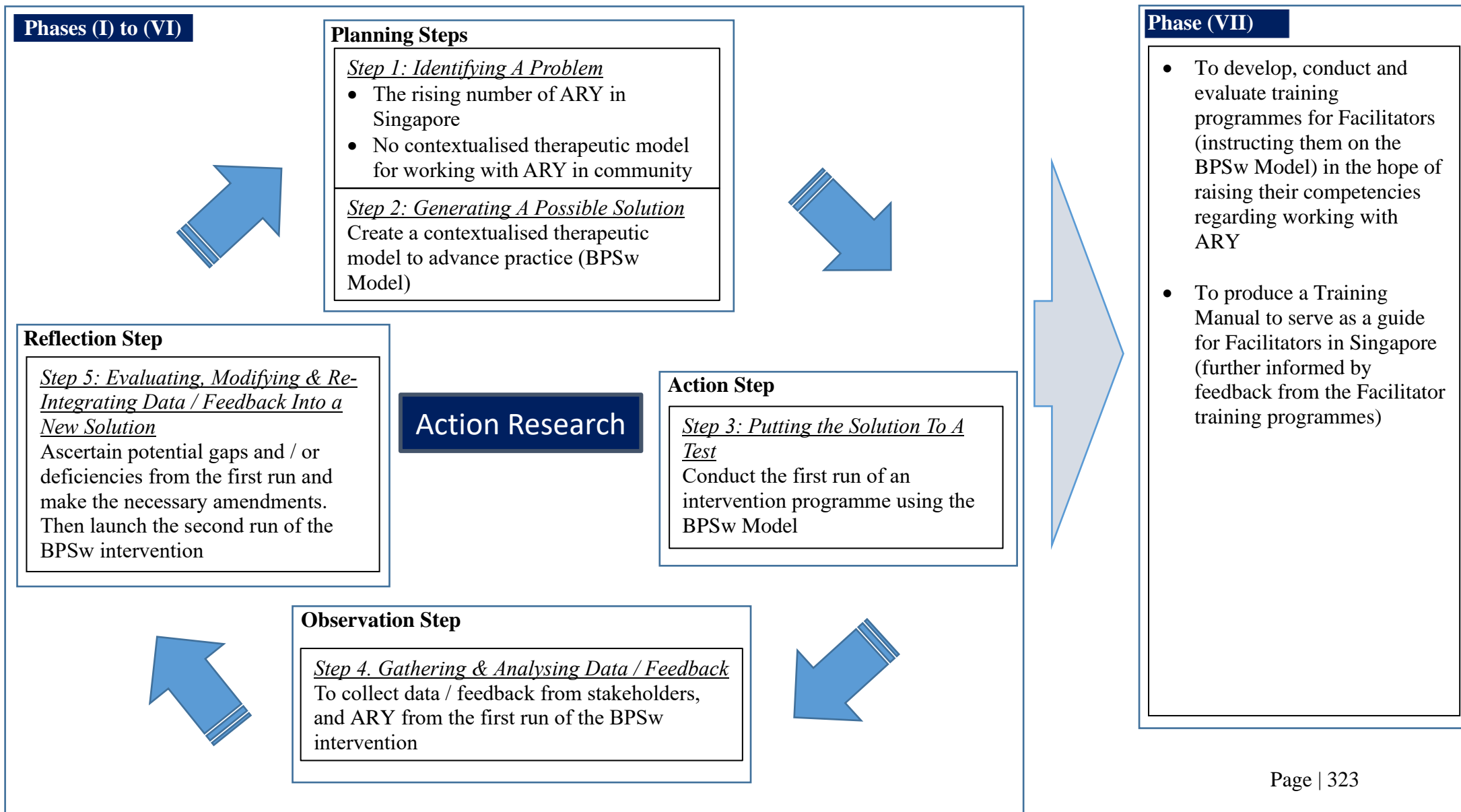
Examples Of Past Programmes Conducted

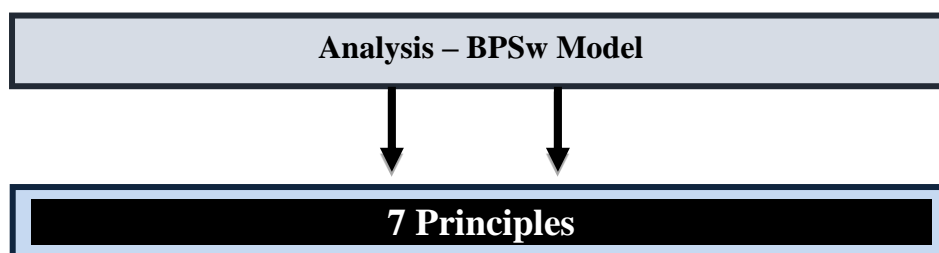
Attempted Focus of Programme (Facilitator Perspective)	Year	Name of Programme	Target Group	Remarks
Having a Singular Goal	2004	1. Periodic Training Order (1 run)	ARY Aged 14-16	Court-Mandated Programme for Youth Offenders
	2005-2008	1. Guidance Programme (28 runs)	ARY Aged 13-19	Court-Mandated Programme for Youth Offenders
	2006	1. Project YES (1 run)	ARY Aged 14-16	Programme for the Singapore Police Force
	2006	1. Kumpulan Sokongan IbuBapa (1 run)	Parents of ARY	Parents' Support Group
	2006	1. Remaja Bingkas (2 runs)	ARY Aged 13-19	Programme to Reduce Teen Pregnancies
Forming a Sound Therapeutic Alliance	2005-2009	1. Club ELITE (5 runs)	ARY Aged 13-19	Community Engagement and Character-Building Programme

	2006	1. SpyKidz (1 run)	At-Risk Children Aged 6-12	Community Engagement and Character-Building Programme
	2006-2009	1. Code RED (4 runs)	At-Risk Children Aged 6-12	Community Engagement and Character-Building Programme
	2006-2009	1. Project Eureka (4 runs)	At-Risk Children Aged 6-12	Community Engagement and Character-Building Programme
	2006-2009	1. Project 3C (4 runs)	At-Risk Children Aged 6-12	Community Engagement and Character-Building Programme
Controlling Confounds	2005	1. Project Metamorphosis (1 run)	School Students of Secondary One	School-Based Intervention for Adjustment Issues
	2005	1. Project SPRING (1 run)	School Students of Secondary Two	School-Based Intervention for Sexuality Issues
	2005-2008	1. Project I Believe (16 runs)	ARY Aged 14-16	School-Based Intervention

	2007-2014	1. Project BRITE (16 runs)	ARY Aged 14-16	School-Based Intervention
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AR Cycle In Project





Principle	Elaboration
<p><u>Principle One:</u> <i>Avoid Conventionality</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. My observations of existing intervention programmes for ARY reflected that conventional classroom-based approaches did not appear to be well received. However, this is still the predominant model being utilised by Facilitators. b. I believe that Facilitators presently use the classroom-based format, along with PowerPoint slides, due to convenience and historical factors. For instance, in the local school system, access to students for programmes is normally done from 2-5pm (Monday to Thursday). Schools will often hold back their student participants in classrooms and Facilitators will then arrive to conduct their programmes in the very same classrooms. c. My preliminary observational and my own experiences, as a former ARY and as a Facilitator, have relayed to me that programmes, run in this format, are not very engaging for participants due to the following factors: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Research indicates that physical attributes in indoor environments such as the confluence of acoustic, visual and thermal factors may affect the actions and behaviours exhibited by individuals within them (Salonen <i>et al.</i>, 2013). Accordingly, within the warm, humid climate of Singapore, I found that classrooms make it difficult for participants to concentrate on the subject matter being addressed. ii. The use of whiteboards and PowerPoint slides within classrooms appear to be a reminder of school to ARY. I have observed this to be a stumbling block to responsiveness and receptivity towards the learning points. iii. Furthermore, having just this medium of knowledge transfer may not be best for those with differing learning styles. This will be elaborated on in Principle Three. d. Consequently, the BPSw intervention illustrated the following which led to the derivation of this principle: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. The use of air-conditioned, enclosed rooms allowed for a cooler temperature and clearer acoustic environment where Facilitators

	<p>need not raise their voice. It also appeared to foster greater confidentiality which may have, in turn, improved receptivity and reduced resistance towards concepts covered.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ii. Activities that did not mimic academic exercises were found to be well-received by ARY. This could be due to the fact that such activities did not remind the ARY of school, and may have consequently decreased resistance towards learning. iii. The inclusion of outdoor, experiential learning activities in the evening / night, allowing ARY to formulate their own discipline rules and to be in their home clothes (i.e. not school uniforms) appeared to reduce the semblance of conformity and increased the perception of individuality. Research suggests the latter may be a factor in creating a successful TA (Church, 1994). iv. Additionally, research indicates that conventional techniques that may apply to adults may not work with adolescents (Creed and Kendall, 2005). As such, conducting outdoor experiential learning activities outside of school may have not only provided a platform for Facilitators to be fun and engaging in an attempt to form a better TA, but also reduced resistance to the intervention programme.
<p><u>Principle Two:</u> <i>Avoid Being Too Direct With Learning Points</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. For the present project, <i>direct instruction</i> refers to the use of drills and practice to master new facts, rules and sequences progressively in a teacher-centred learning environment within a formal classroom setting (Borich, 2017). An instructional classroom lesson on Algebra may be an example of this. As mentioned above, my observational analysis indicated that the vast majority of Facilitators in Singapore adhere to this model when conducting intervention programmes for ARY. b. On the other hand, research suggests that <i>indirect instruction</i> is a student-centred process that encourages participation, curiosity and answer-seeking from students to decode and / or decipher concepts in a manner relevant to them (King, 1995). For instance, students may be presented with an ill-defined puzzle and are encouraged to solve it with their own reasoning. Research also suggests that the use of <i>indirect instruction</i> can stimulate critical-thinking (Bonnette, McBride and Tolson, 2001). c. Additionally, research indicates that youth would want to be treated with autonomy, similar to an adult, during learning (Shaw, Conti and Shaw, 2013). <i>Direct instruction</i> may thus reinforce the notion that a youth is in a learning process and this may bring about a perceived lack of autonomy thereby leading to greater resistance towards learning. d. Accordingly, the BPSw intervention utilised socratic questioning and concealed the learning points encompassing life-skills within a selected theme such as <i>Investigating The Paranormal</i> (as indicated in Principle Six

	<p>below). This is consistent with <i>indirect instruction</i>, and appeared to decrease resistance towards learning. It was found that when learning points were less obvious and often disguised within stories or case studies, many ARY did not seem resistant to accepting the learning that was taking place. This was noted on multiple occasions and may have also played a part in the below which appeared across both runs of the BPSw intervention; thereby assisting in the formulation of this principle:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. reasonably good attendance rates and learning retention rates; ii. perceivably decreased resistance towards learning; and iii. a perceivably easier way to stimulate critical-thinking.
<p><u>Principle Three:</u> <i>Take Note Of Development</i></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. The BPSw intervention sought to take into account the following issues pertaining to development so as to enact activities that may be better received by ARY. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Neural Development. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An imaging study by the National Institute of Mental Health and the University of California Los Angeles indicated that during the human lifespan, the brain develops from the posterior to the anterior with regards to functional importance, with the Prefrontal Cortex being the final area to develop (National Institute of Mental Health, 2004). • An implication of this is that the Limbic System, the region of the brain associated with emotions (Catani, Dell’Acqua and Thiebaut de Schotten, 2013), of ARY may be more activated than their Frontal Lobes, the region of the brain associated with executive functions such as critical-thinking (Collins and Koechlin, 2012). I believe this explains the higher tendency for ARY to have more emotion-oriented processing and behaviours such as stimulation seeking. • The BPSw intervention utilised information regarding this development and attempted to engage ARY on an emotion-oriented level to improve their receptivity to the intervention. Proposed themes for outdoor experiential learning activities at night such as <i>Investigating The Paranormal</i>, was an example of attempts to engage ARY by utilising the potential excitement (i.e. emotional charge) presented by such a theme. This was found to be highly effective in stimulating participation and receptivity towards learning points. ii. Psychosocial Stages <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The scope of the present project classifies ARY to be in the adolescence stage. Developmental theorists such as Freud (1910), Piaget (1954), and Erikson (1968) lend support to the notion that this stage involves actions to establish one’s identity with one’s experiences.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identity formation in adolescence includes the distancing from family units and peer figures, allowing one to feel differentiated from them (Hamman and Hendricks, 2005). • In light of this, Sommers-Flanagan, Richardson and Sommers-Flanagan (2011) indicate that a therapist who does not impede, but instead supports, the autonomy of an adolescent client will allow for better TA formation and positive outcomes. • As such, the BPSw intervention attempted to utilise techniques that take into account such psychosocial development, such as the appropriate use of humour, especially dark humour which may be defined as humour that treats serious and macabre subject matter such as death or horror with amusement (Baldick, 2001; Willinger <i>et al.</i>, 2017), in an effort to promote the formation of a better TA. Humour, for instance, has been found to be effective in establishing the TA (Martens, 2004). Such techniques showed efficacy in that it made it very easy to bond with the ARY and subsequently build the rudiments of a TA. <p>iii. Development of Learning Styles</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Studies suggest that the varying preferences and styles of learning can impact the effectiveness of training (Towler and Dipboye, 2003). This implies that an intervention that only caters for one type of learning style may not be efficacious, particularly when run for a myriad of different participants already understood to possess reduced motivation towards learning. • Consistent with the points in Principle One above, my preliminary research into existing interventions revealed that Facilitators rarely used a combination of strategies that catered to the potential different learning styles of participants. Research indicates that students responded favorably to using varying representations of content (Sankey, Birch and Gardiner, 2011). As such, the present project utilised different representations of content to cater to different learning styles in an effort to increase learning retention and / or receptivity to the intervention. Some examples of these representations included videos, pictures, stories, case studies and hands-on activities. <p>b. In essence, observations of the clinical utility and efficacy of various mechanisms within the BPSw intervention that were enacted to take into account the different dimensions of development led to the formulation of this principle.</p>
<p><u>Principle Four:</u></p>	<p>a. From my preliminary research of existing interventions (in Phase I of the project), I identified the following list of common life-skills Facilitators attempt to impart to ARY in Singapore:</p>

<p><i>Coalesce Life-Skills Around Critical- Thinking</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resilience • Respect • Trust & Cooperation • Empathy • Resisting Peer Pressure • Anger Management • Effective Communication • Positive Creativity • Goal-Setting • Decision-Making <p>b. My own experiences, observations, and analysis of the issue, suggest to me that the above list of topics cut across a common construct of critical-thinking in that being able to think critically would enable one to achieve the essential learning point of each of the topics listed. Accordingly, the BPSw intervention sought to cover the majority of the life-skills listed above whilst linking them to critical-thinking. Attaining the latter was accordingly emplaced as the singular goal of the BPSw intervention as it was deemed the spine that cut across all the topics listed.</p> <p>c. My belief is that targeting critical-thinking skills will allow ARY participants to internalise many of the life-skills listed above on their own. This belief is supported by understanding the following points.</p> <p>i. Research illustrates that presenting questions that induce, and require thinking, promote the development of critical-thinking skills (Zimmermann, 2003; Golding, 2011; Barnett and Francis, 2012). In support of this notion, Şeker and Kömür (2008) found that students who asked questions born from curiosity scored higher in critical-thinking. Correspondingly, the BPSw intervention sought to present concepts and learning points in a manner that promoted active questioning on the part of the ARY. This was to try and induce the development of critical-thinking skills and was found to be easier to achieve than I had originally thought as many ARY were open to partaking in question-oriented debates.</p> <p>ii. Research regarding brain plasticity by Bruel-Jungerman, Davis and Laroche (2007) found that the physical structure of the brain will go through modification and remodelling upon learning new knowledge. This would support the notion that promoting the development of critical-thinking skills, through active questioning, may lead to eventual development of the Frontal Lobes, the part of the brain associated with impulse control mechanisms (Sebastian <i>et al.</i>, 2014). I believe impulse control is essential to counteract the potential impact of emotion-oriented thinking (highlighted in Principle Three).</p> <p>iii. In addition to impulse control, the Frontal Lobes have also been found to be responsible for executive functions such as working</p>
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	<p>memory, attention and planning (Johnson, Blum and Giedd, 2009). From my observational analysis and experiences from conducting past intervention programmes, I believe that the executive functions and higher order cognitive processes governed by the Frontal Lobes are the underlying mechanisms for developing and internalising the life-skills mentioned above.</p> <p>iv. As such, by promoting critical-thinking as a primary goal, I believe it would be possible to enhance the development of the Frontal Lobes and, in turn, assist in developing more mature and critical-thinking ARY who would be better able to internalise life-skills imparted to them.</p> <p>d. Thus, although the BPSw intervention covered many of the topics that other intervention programmes covered, the main difference was the alignment of those topics towards a centralised message of critical-thinking. This was done via the use of catchphrases, recall cues constant processing. It was found that this was not only achievable, but also aided in receptivity and learning retention rates; thereby allowing for the formulation of this principle.</p>
<p><u>Principle Five:</u> <i>Utilise Experiential Learning</i></p>	<p>a. Norton <i>et al.</i> (2014) suggested that adventure therapy (a form of experiential therapy) had been found to be effective for youth, reducing the frequency of substance abuse and Conduct Disorder behaviours. Experiential learning may represent gaining knowledge and understanding through experience (Yardley, Teunissen and Dorman, 2012). The BPSw intervention incorporated experiential learning via many activities such as 2 night outings with its own in-built activities. Novel methods such as experiential learning can decrease resistance towards interventions (Thompson <i>et al.</i>, 2011) and this was perceived to be the case in the BPSw intervention.</p> <p>b. Other factors that contributed to the outdoor experiential learning activities at night include the following:</p> <p>i. ARY having the preference to stay out at night (Tan, 2010; Teo, 2010). This is prevalent in Singapore to the extent that initiatives such as <i>Youth Hanging Out Late</i> (YHOL) have been implemented in response to this phenomenon. The YOHL initiative involves the Singapore Police Force issuing letters of notice to parents of youth who have been found staying out after 11 pm (Ministry of Social and Family Development, 2014d). The BPSw intervention thus attempted to utilise this preference of staying out at night to potentially increase receptivity towards it by ARY. Nevertheless, consent from the school and parents / guardians was sought and the outdoor sessions were timed to end by 11pm.</p> <p>ii. The night outings were used as a motivational device in that ARY would be required to attend the indoor sessions before they were allowed to participate in the outdoor sessions. This may have helped</p>

	<p style="text-align: center;">maintain attendance rates for the BPSw intervention as a whole.</p> <p>c. Accordingly, due to the perceived successes of using experiential learning, this was noted as a significant point for formulation of a principle.</p>
<p><u>Principle Six:</u> <i>Utilise A Theme</i></p>	<p>a. After both runs of the BPSw intervention, it was assessed that having all the sessions based around a common theme aided in receptivity by ARY and facilitated <i>indirect instruction</i>. This may have, in turn, resulted in less resistance towards learning. The theme used in both runs of the BPSw intervention was <i>Investigating The Paranormal</i> and this was found to have contributed greatly to maintaining attendance rates and receptivity to learning points thereby lending itself to be formulated as a principle.</p> <p>b. It was assessed from my reflection and analysis of both runs of the BPSw intervention that to effectively utilise a theme, the theme should be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Generate questions. In support of Principle Four, the ability for a theme to generate questions will aid in the development of critical-thinking (Tofade, Elsner, and Haines, 2013). ii. Be intriguing to most regardless of their socio-cultural background. Singapore is a multi-cultural and multi-racial community. The ARY from Singapore may thus come from a variety of socio-cultural backgrounds requiring a theme that could potentially cut across all of these variables. Appealing to ARY with interesting and intriguing themes will thus be an attempt to increase attendance rates and receptivity towards learning. While the theme is merely a framework, more critical is the embedding of life-skills within the context of the theme (such as the use of stories showing resilience to effectively demonstrate the concept). iii. Cut across multiple cultures. As mentioned, Singapore’s population comprises of many cultures and races. To account for the multi-cultural and multi-racial nature of Singapore, a theme that can be understood and appreciated by ARY from various cultures and races will potentially increase receptivity towards the intervention.
<p><u>Principle Seven:</u> <i>Control For Confounds</i></p>	<p>a. Perhaps the easiest principle to formulate was one which advocated for confound-control as this was easily noted to be a contributory factor to encouraging data from the BPSw intervention. Confounding variables (referred to as <i>confounds</i>) are any variables that may potentially affect outcomes planned for (Halperin, Pyne and Martin, 2015). Accordingly, the following points pertain to this function and I believe contributed to the meaningful data attained.</p> <p>b. Potential confounds in the BPSw intervention included factors affecting ARY outside of the intervention process. I believe such factors may include the home environment and past negative life events that may be beyond the</p>

reach of control for the BPSw intervention. This led me to the conclusion that in order to attain effective outcomes and accurately decipher if an intervention strategy paid dividends, Facilitators would need to control any and all confounds they possibly could (i.e. everything within their reasonable ability).

- c. There were a number of potential confounds that the BPSw intervention tried to control for. Some examples are elaborated on below.
- i. Intervention programmes in Singapore are normally required to provide refreshments. The refreshments provided during the BPSw interventions were carefully selected for ARY along the guiding principle that diet may directly contribute to behaviour and mental health for adolescents (Khanna, Chattu, and Aeri, 2019). Research indicates a link between dietary deficiencies and impairment in cognitive and motivated behaviour, and further suggests adequate nutrition to optimise cognitive and affective functioning (Bondi *et al.*, 2014). Accordingly, the BPSw intervention tried to incorporate these findings within its design by carefully selecting the choice of refreshments to potentially boost cognitive functioning to aid in enhancing receptivity towards the intervention. Some elements that assisted in this goal included replacing high-sugar treats with fresh fruits and supplementing the refreshments provided during the BPSw intervention with foods rich in Omega-3 Polyunsaturated Fatty Acids. Research has found that such foods can optimise cognitive and affective functions for youth (Bondi *et al.*, 2014).
 - ii. The venue for the BPSw intervention was also a factor. As mentioned in Principle One, conventional classroom settings have been observed to be less effective for ARY. As such, venues were selected only after accounting for various issues which included:
 - Temperature, the acoustic environment and visual distractibility. Research indicates that these factors may impact the behaviours of individuals (Salonen *et al.*, 2013), potentially affecting the outcome of the intervention. An air-conditioned room with privacy and reduced distractibility (such as the music room in schools) was negotiated for.
 - Potential risks present in the outdoor sessions were also countered via a Risk Assessment Matrix document which attempted to identify and devise a plan for potential risks.
 - iii. Screening of participants to ensure that participants with certain behaviours, such as special-needs cases and extreme violence (cases that may endanger the Facilitators and other ARY), were omitted from the final pool of participants.
 - iv. The use of multiple Facilitators to cater to the culturally heterogeneous nature of the participant group. As the Lead facilitator, I was assisted by a co-facilitator(s) of a different gender, race and age. ARY may feel more comfortable and identify easier

	<p>with Facilitators of the same gender or race, allowing for better TA to be formed. This notion is supported by Wintersteen, Mensinger and Diamond (2005).</p>
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Past Research To Shape BPSw Model

Perspective	Research Explored / Incorporated
Biological	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Allen, J.R. and Allen, B.A. (2000) ‘Violence: Early childhood, family and context’, <i>Transactional Analysis Journal</i>, 30(2), pp. 111-124. doi: 10.1177/0362153700030003000203. <li>2. Cordero, M.I., Ansermet, F., and Sandi, C. (2013) ‘Long-term programming of enhanced aggression by peripuberty stress in female rats’, <i>Psychoneuroendocrinology</i>, 38(11), pp. 2758-2769. doi:10.1016/j.psyneuen.2013.07.005. <li>3. Ganzel, B.L., Kim, P., Gilmore, H., Tottenham, N., and Temple, E. (2013) ‘Stress and the healthy adolescent brain: Evidence for the neural embedding of life events’, <i>Development and Psychopathology</i>, 25, pp. 879-889. doi:10.1017/S0954579413000242. <li>4. Giedd, J.N., Blumenthal, J., Jeffries, N.O., Castellanos, F.X., Liu, H., Zijdenbos, A., Paus, T., Evans, A.C. and Rapoport, J.L. (1999) ‘Brain development during childhood and adolescence: A longitudinal MRI study’, <i>Nature Neuroscience</i>, 2(10), pp. 861-863. doi:10.1038/13158. <li>5. Huebner, T., Vloet, T.D., Marx, I., Konrad, K., Fink, G.R., Herpertz, S.C., and Herpertz-Dahlmann, B. (2008) ‘Morphometric brain abnormalities in boys with conduct disorder’, <i>Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry</i>, 47(5), pp. 540-547. doi:10.1097/CHI.0b013e3181676545. <li>6. Hunter, R.G., and McEwen, B.S. (2013) ‘Stress and anxiety across the lifespan: Structural plasticity and epigenetic regulation’, <i>Epigenomics</i>, 5(2), pp. 177-194. <li>7. Koolhof, R., Loeber, R., Wei, E.H., Pardini, D. and D'Escury, A.C. (2007) ‘Inhibition deficits of serious delinquent boys of

	<p>low intelligence’, <i>Criminal Behaviour and Mental Health</i>, 17(5), pp. 274-292. doi:10.1002/cbm.661.</p> <p>8. Lewis, D.A. (1997) ‘Development of the prefrontal cortex during adolescence: Insights into vulnerable neural circuits in schizophrenia’, <i>Neuropsychopharmacology</i>, 16(6), pp. 385-398. doi:10.1016/S0893-133X(96)00277-1.</p> <p>9. McGivern, R.F., Andersen, J., Byrd, D., Mutter, K.L. and Reilly, J. (2002) ‘Cognitive efficiency on a match to sample task decreases at the onset of puberty in children’, <i>Brain and Cognition</i>, 50(1), pp. 73-89. doi:10.1016/S0278-2626(02)00012-X.</p> <p>10. Sowell, E.R., Thompson, P.M., Holmes, C.J., Jernigan, T.L. and Toga, A.W. (1999) ‘In vivo evidence for post-adolescent brain maturation in frontal and striatal regions’, <i>Nature Neuroscience</i>, 2(10), pp. 859-861. doi:10.1038/13154.</p> <p>11. Strauch, B. (2004) <i>The Primal Teen: What the new discoveries about the teenage brain tell us about our kids</i>. New York: Anchor Books.</p> <p>12. Swartz, J.R., Carrasco, M., Wiggins, J.L., Thomason, M.E. and Monk, C.S. (2013) ‘Age-related changes in the structure and function of prefrontal cortex–amygdala circuitry in children and adolescents: A multi-modal imaging approach’, <i>NeuroImage</i>, 86, pp. 212-220. doi:10.1016/j.neuroimage.2013.08.018.</p> <p>13. Whittle, S., Yücel, M., Fornito, A., Barrett, A., Wood, S.J., Lubman, D.I., Simmons, J., Pantelis, C. and Allen, N.B. (2008) Neuroanatomical correlates of temperament in early adolescents’, <i>Journal of the Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry</i>, 47(6), pp. 682-693. doi:10.1097/CHI.0b013e31816bffca.</p> <p>14. Drewnowski, A. and Darmon, N. (2005a) ‘Food choices and diet costs: An economic analysis’, <i>The Journal of Nutrition</i>, 135(4), pp. 900-904.</p>
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Psychological

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Social Work	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Forder, A. (1976) 'Social Work and System Theory', <i>The British Journal of Social Work</i>, 6 (1), pp. 23-42. 2. Ford, E.E. (1997) <i>Discipline for home and school book one</i>. 2nd edn. Scottsdale, AZ: Brandt.

Principles Of Care From Raven's Protocols

Principle	Description
<i>Principle 1: Responsibility</i>	<p>a. The practitioner must be aware that a heavy social responsibility is borne because the work done may directly / indirectly impact the lives of many individuals. The practitioner must act in accordance with such awareness and take responsibility for his / her actions.</p>
<i>Principle 6: Confidentiality</i>	<p>a. Information obtained in clinical or consulting relationships, or evaluative data concerning clients are only discussed for professional purposes. Written and oral reports should only present data germane to the purposes of such reports.</p> <p>b. The practitioner makes provisions for the maintenance of confidentiality in the preservation and ultimate disposal of confidential records.</p>
<i>Principle 7: Client Welfare</i>	<p>a. The practitioner must respect and protect the welfare of the person or group with whom work is undertaken.</p> <p>b. When potentially disturbing subject matter is presented to client(s), it is discussed objectively, and efforts are made to handle constructively any difficulties that arise.</p> <p>c. Care must be taken to ensure that an appropriate setting for clinical work is attained, to protect both the client(s) and the practitioner from actual or imputed harm, and the profession from censure.</p>

<p><i>Principle 8: Client Relationship</i></p>	<p>a. When the client(s) is not competent to evaluate a situation arising from the therapeutic relationship (as in the case of a child), the person responsible for the client(s) must be informed of all the pertinent issues revolving around this situation.</p>
<p><i>Principle 13: Test Security</i></p>	<p>a. Psychological tests and other assessment devices, the value of which depends in part on the naiveté of the participant, must not be reproduced or described in popular publications in ways that might invalidate the techniques. Access to such devices is limited to persons with professional interests who will safeguard their use.</p> <p>b. The practitioner must be responsible for the control of psychological tests and other devices and procedures used for instruction.</p>
<p><i>Principle 16: Research Precautions</i></p>	<p>a. Only when a problem is of scientific significance, and it is not practicable to investigate it in any other way, is the practitioner justified in exposing research participants, whether children or adults, to physical or emotional stress as part of an investigation.</p> <p>b. When a reasonable possibility of injurious after-effects exists, research must be conducted only when the participants or their responsible agents are fully informed of this possibility and agree to participate nevertheless.</p> <p>c. The practitioner must seriously consider the possibility of harmful after-effects in research and must take the necessary steps to avoid them, which may include removing them as soon as permitted by the design of the research.</p>



(Pre) Questionnaire

“Confidential”

(Please fill in and/or circle the relevant information, where necessary)

A) PERSONAL INFORMATION

Name: _____ Age: _____

1) Parents: Married / Divorced / Single Parent / Deceased
If parents are absent, the person you are residing with; _____.

2) Number of siblings (If any): _____ Number of people residing in your house (including you): _____
Please state the relationship of non-immediate family living with you (If any)

- a) _____ c) _____
- b) _____ d) _____

3) Family member that you are closest to: _____

4) House Type: HDB 1 / 2 / 3 / 4 / 5 room or Private Housing

5) Hobbies: _____

6) What is your ambition?

7) How do you spend your free time? (You are allowed to circle more than once)

- a) Watching TV / Movies e) Reading
- b) Playing Sports f) Staying at home
- c) Playing Computer Games g) Chatting online (Internet) / on the phone (SMS)
- d) Shopping h) Others: _____

8) How would you rate your performance at school? Excellent / Good / Average / Satisfactory / Poor

9) What kind of problems do you face at school? Please circle accordingly (You are allowed to circle more than once)

- a) Unable to understand what the teacher is saying g) Canteen & Bookshop too expensive
- b) Unable to accept discipline at school h) Unable to make friends easily
- c) Being bullied i) Being distracted from studies by friends
- d) Being led into bad habits (e.g. smoking) by friends j) Too much homework / assignments / projects etc.

- e) Missing school a lot (e.g. M.C. / Truancy)
- f) Unable to handle school hours
- k) Others: _____

10) Who do you go to when you face problems at school?

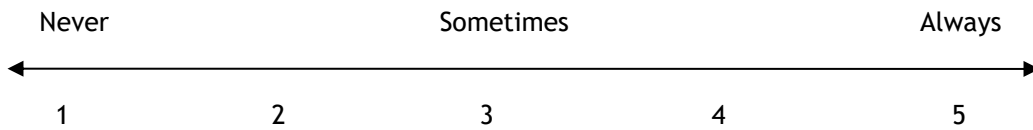
- a) Friends
- b) Teachers
- c) Family
- d) Others: _____

11) Are most of your friends your schoolmates? Y / N

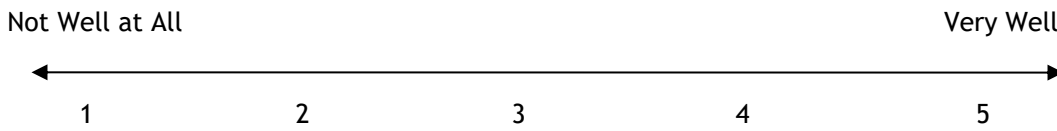
B) ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Please answer the following questions **truthfully** !

1) On a scale of 1 - 5, how well do people **understand you** when you communicate?



2) On a scale of 1 - 5, **how well** do you work with others?



3) Do you think it is **important** to work with others? Y / N

I. If yes, why? _____

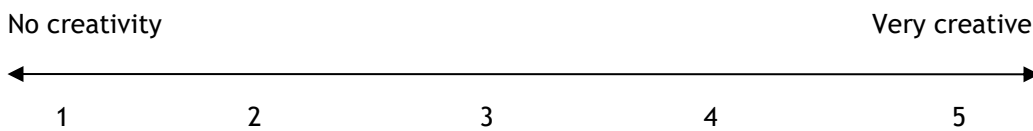
II. If no, why? _____

4) I. Do you think it is important to overcome your **fear**? Y / N

II. Please complete the sentence:

Conquer _____ Conquer All

5) Rate your level of **creativity**.



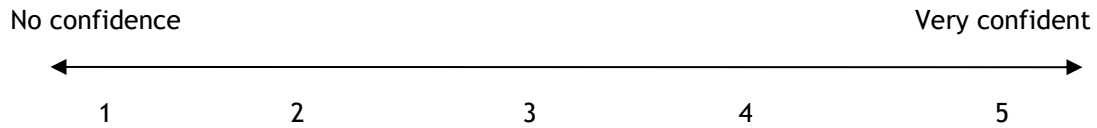
6) Do you think **creativity** is important? Y / N

I. If yes, why? _____

II. If no, why? _____

7) Do you understand the meaning of **Self-Confidence**? Y / N

8) Rate your level of **Self-Confidence**.

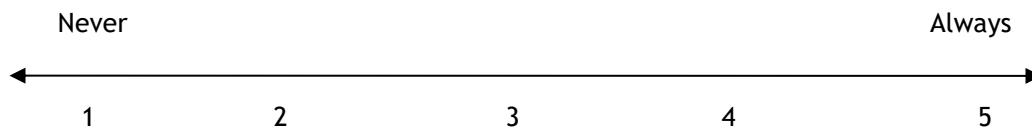


9) Is it important to **set goals**? Y / N

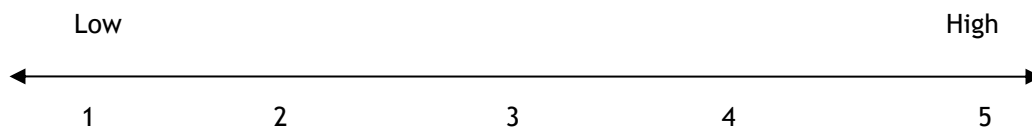
I. If yes, why? _____

II. If no, why? _____

10) Rate **how often** you **set goals** for yourself.



11) Rate your level of **General Knowledge**.



12) What are the **2 important** points to know about **Respect**?

I. _____

II. _____

13) Rate how important it is to **Respect** others.



14) I. Do you know the meaning of the word **Resilience**?

Y / N

II. What is the meaning of **Resilience**?

15) What is the meaning of **Empathy**?

16) What is *the* favourite 5-letter word? _ _ _ _ _

17) In **Decision-Making**, when do you need to think?

I. _____

II. _____

III. _____

18) What are the 2 strategies we may use to control our **Anger**?

I. _____

II. _____

-End-



(Post) Questionnaire – End Of Programme Only

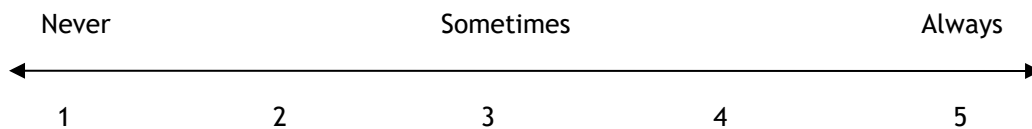
“Confidential”

(Please fill in and/or circle the relevant information, where necessary)

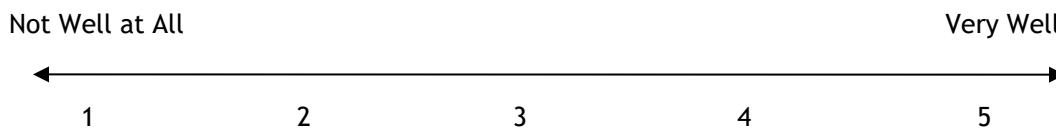
Name: _____ Age: _____

Please answer the following questions **truthfully** !

1) On a scale of 1 - 5, how well do people **understand you** when you communicate?



2) On a scale of 1 - 5, **how well** do you work with others?



3) Do you think it is **important** to work with others?

Y / N

I. If yes, why? _____

II. If no, why? _____

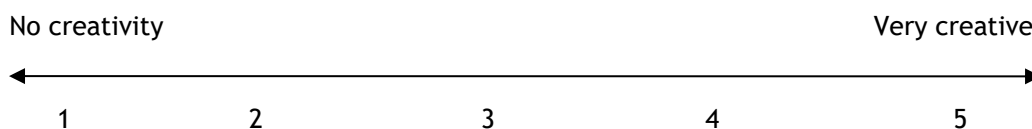
4) I. Do you think it is important to overcome your **fear**?

Y/ N

II. Please complete the sentence:

Conquer _____ Conquer All

5) Rate your level of **creativity**.



6) Do you think **creativity** is important? Y / N

I. If yes, why? _____

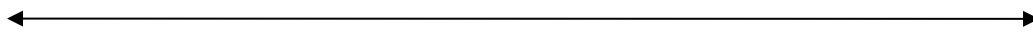
II. If no, why? _____

7) Do you understand the meaning of **Self-Confidence**? Y / N

8) Rate your level of **Self-Confidence**.

No confidence

Very confident



1

2

3

4

5

9) Is it important to **set goals**? Y / N

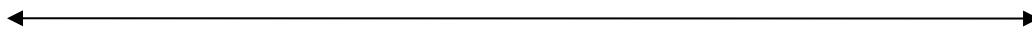
I. If yes, why? _____

II. If no, why? _____

10) Rate **how often** you **set goals** for yourself.

Never

Always



1

2

3

4

5

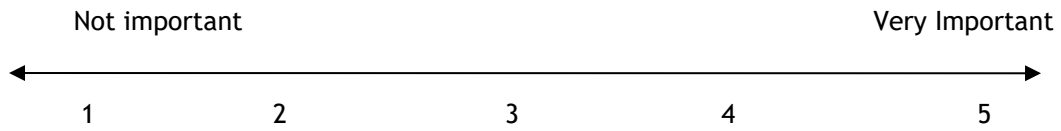
11) Do you think your **General Knowledge** has improved after the programme? Y / N

12) What are the **2 important** points to know about **Respect**?

I. _____

II. _____

13) Rate how important it is to **Respect** others.



14) I. Do you know the meaning of the word **Resilience**? Y / N

II. What is the meaning of **Resilience**?

15) What is the meaning of **Empathy**?

16) What is *the* favourite 5-letter word? _ _ _ _ _

17) In **Decision-Making**, when do you need to think?

I. _____

II. _____

III. _____

18) What are the 2 strategies we may use to control our **Anger**?

I. _____

II. _____



(Post) Questionnaire – End Of Programme Only

“Confidential”

(Please fill in and/or circle the relevant information, where necessary)

Please help us evaluate our services by taking a few minutes to give us your feedback. Thank you.

To answer the following questions, please circle only ONE number on each scale.

		Please circle your response				
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1.	I understand the programme.	1	2	3	4	5
2.	I find the programme useful.	1	2	3	4	5
3.	I want to use the skills and knowledge I have gained from this programme.	1	2	3	4	5
4.	Overall, this programme has helped me.	1	2	3	4	5

5. Is there anything else that we can improve on? If yes, please give your suggestions.

-End-

My Reflection Booklet 2016

Name :

Class :



WHAT I HAVE LEARNT TODAY

Session 1 Topic(s) : _____

Date : _____



Form E1.2

EVALUATION FORM



Course/Module(s) Title	Youth Work: Introduction to an Evidence-Based Approach		
Course/Module(s) Date	23 – 24 May 2019	Venue	SSI
Name (Optional)		Organisation	The Salvation Army
Email Address (Optional)		Designation	Y.W

Thank you very much for participating in this evaluation. Your feedback will help us improve the quality of our services. Please **shade** your answers accordingly.

Section A: Course Effectiveness	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. The learning outcomes of the course were met.	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. The topics and content covered are relevant to my current/future job scope.	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3. Content in the learning materials is presented in a logical manner.	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4. Language used in the course content is easily understood.	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5. The overall visual design of the learning materials (i.e. Images, graphics, colour and font) is appropriate for learning	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6. The duration is sufficient for the course coverage.	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7. I will be able to apply the skills and knowledge acquired to my work.	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Section B: Adult Educator (Trainer) Effectiveness	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Trainer: Mr Praveen Nair					
1. The trainer had good knowledge and practical understanding of the subject matter.	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. The trainer was well prepared for the class.	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3. The trainer was able to engage the participants using different interactive learning activities such as discussions, role-plays, group presentations, etc.	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4. The trainer provided useful feedback after the learning activities.	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5. The trainer was patient and helpful in addressing questions from participants.	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

** If you select strongly disagree/disagree, explain in brief in the overall comments section under "Areas that we can improve".*

Form E1.2

Section C: System application and support effectiveness	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree *	Strongly Disagree *
1. The registration platform on SSI website is easy to use.	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. The 'LearningSpace' LMS system is user friendly.	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3. The technical support was adequate.	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4. All navigation / buttons are working without broken links.	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Section D: Facilities, Administrative/Service Effectiveness	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree *	Strongly Disagree *
1. The learning environment is conducive.	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. There was sufficient variety of training tools available (e.g. flipcharts, markers, etc)	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3. The training support services (e.g. LCD signage/displays, rooms) were adequate.	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4. The administrative/service staff was responsive.	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

* If you select strongly disagree/disagree, explain in brief in the overall comments section under "Areas that we can improve".

Section D: Overall Comments

1. What did you like about the course?

CONSIDERED THAT THIS IS EVIDENCE BASED TRAINING IT STOOD OUT IN TERMS OF ITS APPLICABILITY TO MY WORK IN THE FUTURE.

2. Are there any areas we could improve?

THANK YOU

Media Consultation

1. Ang, Y. (2017, July 24). Featured Consultant in 'Dealing With The Echoes Of Terrorism'. *The Straits Times In*, pp 8-9.
2. Yang, C. (2017, September 10). Featured Consultant in 'Teen Influencers'. *The Sunday Times*, p A6.
3. Channel NewsAsia (2017, November 15). Featured Consultant in 'Inside The Storm 3; Olympus'. Singapore: Mediacorp.
4. Lee, V. (2017, November 26). Featured Consultant in 'Double Bonding'. *The Straits Times*, pp C6-C7.
5. Lee, V. (2018, May 6). Featured Consultant in 'Getting All Touchy-Feely'. *The Straits Times*, pp C2-C3.
6. Yang, C. (2018, May 10). Featured Consultant in 'Just 12 and She Had Nose Job'. *The Sunday Times*, p A7.
7. Nair, P. (2018, June 13). 'What Leaders' Body Language Reveals at Their First Meeting'. *The Straits Times*, p A9.
8. Yang, C. (2018, July 22). Featured Consultant in 'Kids Who Watch Parents Taking Drugs'. *The Sunday Times*, p A6.
9. Yang, C. (2018, August 6). Featured Consultant in 'Beware the danger lurking in online dating'. *The Straits Times*, p B1.
10. Yang, C. (2018, November 25). Featured Consultant in 'Barbecue, photoshoots and parties for the dead'. *The Sunday Times*, p C3.
11. Chan, S. L. (2019, February 24). Featured Consultant in 'Surge in fare, tempers flare: Why hailing a ride sometimes makes you #emo'. *The Sunday Times*, p C4.
12. Yang, C. (2019, April 16). Featured Consultant in 'Need to hide an ugly scar? Get a tattoo'. *The Straits Times*, p B3.
13. Yang, C. (2019, May 13). Featured Consultant in 'Suspected voyeur caught in NUS dorm'. *The Straits Times*, p B6.
14. Sin, Y. (2019, June 23). Featured Consultant in 'Singaporean's 'hikikomori' behaviour after retrenchment ends in divorce'. *The Straits Times*, p B4.
15. Mokhtar, F. (2019, July 11). Featured Consultant in 'Hikikomori in Singapore: Recluses hidden from view and at a loss for help'. *TODAY*, p 11.
16. Yang, C. (2019, October 6). Featured Consultant in 'More donating their bodies for research or organ transplant'. *The Sunday Times*, p A7.

17. Wong, C. (2020, April 27). Featured Consultant in 'Tears and fears over Covid-19: more in Singapore seek help for mental health'. *Yahoo News Singapore*.
18. Wong, C. (2020, April 29). Featured Consultant in 'COVID-19: Psychology, podiatry and other allied health services reclassified as essential'. *Yahoo News Singapore*.
19. Wong, P. T. (2020, May 2). Featured Consultant in 'Digitally estranged, seniors struggle with sense of displacement in pandemic-hit offline world'. *TODAY ONLINE*.
20. Oh, T. (2020, June 20). Featured Consultant in 'With many still working from home post-circuit breaker, some S'pore employees tell of telecommuting struggles'. *TODAY ONLINE*.
21. Meah, N. (2020, June 20). Featured Consultant in 'I worry about having to deal with people again: Phase 2 of circuit breaker exit leaves some anxious'. *TODAY ONLINE*.
22. Low, Y. (2020, September 19). Featured Consultant in 'The Big Read: Amid the crisis of a generation, losing one's job takes a heavy emotional and mental toll'. *TODAY ONLINE*.
23. Meah, N. (2021, May 8). Featured Consultant in 'The Big Read: To stop maid abuse, stop the power imbalance'. *TODAY ONLINE*.
24. Low, Y. (2021, May 22). Featured Consultant in 'Adulting 101: I've lost friends since I started working and learnt there is a season for everything'. *TODAY ONLINE*.
25. Wong, P. T. (2021, May 29). Featured Consultant in 'The Big Read: Floundering in digital wave, older hawkers could call it quits'. *TODAY ONLINE*.
26. Oh, T. (2021, June 12). Featured Consultant in 'Adulting 101: I took 2 years to pluck up the courage to see a mental health therapist. It's one of my best decisions.' *TODAY ONLINE*.