



(2018) *From informal solidarity to structure and distrust: a story of colonized multi-agency partnership in community education.* [MSc]

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**FROM INFORMAL SOLIDARITY TO STRUCTURE AND DISTRUST: A  
STORY OF COLONIZED MULTI-AGENCY PARTNERSHIP IN  
COMMUNITY EDUCATION**

Dissertation submitted in part fulfilment of the requirements for  
the degree of Master of Science Education, Public Policy and  
Equity



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\*A pseudonym for the project is used to protect participant identities

## SUMMARY

As the interrelated causes of deprivation, social exclusion and academic underachievement are increasingly recognised, multi-agency working has become the new norm in community development and education. Despite the increasing prevalence of partnership models in post-devolution Scottish public policy, sustainable and fundamental transformations in working practices appear elusive.

This research investigates the perspectives of front-line partners at one community education project in the West of Scotland in order to fill gaps in the extant literature and enhance 'practice-relevant scholarship' (Antonacopoulou, 2010). By telling the story of partnership at Killoch Homework and Cookery Club (KHCC), the benefits and frustrations of multi-agency working for small community projects are highlighted, and characteristics that could support success and sustainability are identified.

A mixed-method case study approach incorporating semi-structured interviews, participant and non-participant observation was employed. In addition, ten months of voluntary activity at KHCC built a semi-ethnographic understanding of project dynamics. Collectively, this data was woven together to produce a rich profile of multi-agency working.

Habermas's theory of *lifeworld colonization* (1987) provides an effective analytical framework for understanding transformations to the KHCC partnership, contributing to a growing application of Habermasian thought to organisational dynamics. Reforms and developments to the KHCC partnership are suggested, and lifeworld colonization is proposed as a useful tool for understanding broader multi-agency contexts. Furthermore, a novel hybridization of colonization theory is developed, incorporating the work of Michael Lipsky (1980) and Ulrich Beck (1992, 2014). Hybridization of this kind is shown to be a crucial element of building social theory that can be put to work for the benefit of society.

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

As the interrelated causes of deprivation, social exclusion and academic underachievement are increasingly recognised, multi-agency working has become the new norm in community development and education (Dhillon, 2005; Edwards and Downes, 2013; Forbes, 2011, 2018; Kerr and Dyson, 2016). Multiple agencies are encouraged to work together with individuals, families or communities in order to understand, and alleviate, a particular problem that is shared across their fields (Forbes, 2011; Walker, 2018). Despite the increasing prevalence of partnership working of this kind, indicators of inequality and deprivation have stagnated or worsened in Scotland and the UK (Cribb et al., 2013; Maantay, 2017), while flawed multi-agency approaches are repeatedly blamed for organizational dysfunction (Cooper, 2012; Harris and Allen, 2011; Riddell and Tett, 2001). Meanwhile, a national context of austerity has simultaneously spurred on calls for 'cost-effective' partnership working while producing extreme financial pressures for those same public and third sector agencies (Chapman et al., 2010; Forbes, 2018; Levitas, 2012).

This research examines multi-agency practices in one community education project in the West of Scotland. By telling a story of partnership working on the ground, I seek to highlight what benefits and frustrations multi-agency working can offer small community projects, and what conditions might help support success and sustainability. In particular, I focus on the transformations in multi-agency practices that occurred during the ten months spent conducting research. Key lessons are extracted for researchers and practitioners in the field, while recognising the dynamism and changeability of multi-agency contexts (Forbes and Watson, 2012). In addition, this research is intended to assist in the future reform and development of the KHCC partnership, and contribute to the evidence base for internal decision-making.

Furthermore, this study serves as a timely addition to the body of academic and policy knowledge about multi-agency working. An emphasis on multi-agency delivery has become increasingly pervasive in post-devolution Scottish public policy (Baron, 2001; Connelly, 2013; Forbes, 2018), and yet, high-quality, sustainable and fundamental transformations in working practices appear elusive in most cases (Cooper, 2012; Education Scotland, 2012; Forbes, 2018; Forbes and Watson, 2012). Further investigation of the front-line micro-politics of multi-agency working will be crucial for designing more effective policies that make genuine improvements to the lives of multi-agency service users (Forbes and Watson, 2012; Riddell and Tett, 2001). At the highest levels of policy design, there has often been insufficient recognition of the complexities of implementation mediated by human relationships and institutional structures (Eccles, 2012). Therefore, the decision to investigate the perspectives of front-line delivery staff is a conscious one, intended to fill gaps in the literature (Allan, 2012; Eccles, 2012; Forbes and Watson, 2012) and contribute to a body of 'practice-relevant scholarship' (Antonacopoulou, 2010; Orr and Bennett, 2010).

In order to capture the complexity of front-line service delivery (Boydell and Rugkåsa, 2007), I employ a mixed-method case study approach. Eight interviews were conducted with representatives from major partner agencies and a variety of observation data were collected and analysed. To augment and underpin this data, I spent ten months working regularly with partners and community members to build a semi-ethnographic understanding of project dynamics. Collectively, this data is woven together to produce a rich profile of one multi-agency project. Specifically, I examine a major period of transition for the partnership, seeking to understand how and why changes occurred and with what consequences for the future.

I begin by reviewing current literature on the topic of multi-agency working; developing a definition and rationale for multi-agency working before summarising extant research into the successes and limitations of partnership working at the operational 'street-level' (Lipsky, 1980). I then turn to a

systemic discussion of the state's role in promoting multi-agency working and the ways in which social theory has been used to understand this as a particular exercise of power. Discussion of my research methodology follows, including exposition of the philosophical assumptions that underpin my research and results. Findings from the research are presented as a descriptive narrative then discussed in the context of broader academic theory. I outline how this research contributes to debates surrounding the application of Habermas's (1976, 1984, 1987, 1996) conceptual tools and their relevance for organisational practice. Specifically his theory of *lifeworld colonization* is explored - a phenomenon whereby instrumental system imperatives come to overwhelm and disrupt the social and communicative realm of the 'lifeworld' (Habermas, 1987). My findings point to an occurrence of colonization in action, adding to the growing canon of applied Habermasian thought (Head, 2012; Jütten, 2011; Murphy, 2017; Scheuerman, 2011). I conclude by making suggestions for the future of the project and arguing for the value of lifeworld colonization as tool for understanding multiagency contexts. Furthermore, I offer possible refinements to colonization theory incorporating the work of Michael Lipsky (1980) and Ulrich Beck (1992, 2014), emphasizing for the value of theoretical hybridization when honing conceptual tools for application (Murphy, 2017). However before continuing, I present the case under study in greater detail.

### **1.1 Introducing The Case Study: Killoch Homework And Cookery Club**

Once a week at 3pm, Killoch Homework and Cookery Club (KHCC)<sup>1</sup> invites students, guardians and teachers from two local primary schools into the neighbouring Killoch Community Centre. Here, children spend time completing their homework with volunteers and teachers, while parents and guardians take part in an informal cooking class. The adults learn to cook a fresh and healthy two-course meal alongside a community chef, designed to build nutrition awareness and cooking skills. Parents not taking part in the

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<sup>1</sup> Pseudonyms for the project, partners and individuals are used throughout.



cooking session are encouraged to help students with their homework, working collaboratively with teachers. Once their homework is completed, the children go outside for a period of free play supervised by a local third sector playgroup. For the final hour, everyone returns to the main hall to eat the prepared meal together, and participants take home leftovers. Collectively, these interventions are intended to alleviate social isolation, promote healthy lifestyle behaviours and tackle academic underachievement among adults and children - all of which have been identified as significant, and interrelated, social issues in the local area. The programme not only delivers the activities described, but also provides a listening space, establishing further projects in response to community needs. Conversations during KHCC have spawned a summer camp, fitness sessions and an informal therapy project for local adults coping with grief, facilitated by the broad scope of resources at partners' disposal.

KHCC is orchestrated and delivered by an extensive partnership of local public and third sector agencies that collaborate in many configurations across Killoch, but have formed a distinct multi-agency partnership in order to manage and run KHCC. Current partners include: two local primary schools; the National Health Service (NHS); a local university research unit; a regional urban regeneration firm; a city-wide community development initiative; a third sector playgroup and Killoch Community Centre. Each of these partners provides funding, resources or staff, which has allowed KHCC to operate for the past 4 years. At different times, additional agencies such as the police and fire brigade have also been involved. It is important to note that KHCC does not hold charitable status nor does it exist as a distinct entity. Instead, it is a truly communal intervention delivered via the pooling of resources and institutional leverage by diverse partners.

In this way, KHCC combines forces between public and third sector agencies to address cross-cutting issues in a given area and deliver a multi-agency community intervention (Forbes, 2011; Walker, 2018). In order to explore the

origins of multi-agency working at KHCC and more broadly, I begin by reviewing the extant literature on the topic.

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Multi-agency working reached its greatest prevalence in British public policy during the late 2000s under a New Labour government (Cummings, Dyson and Todd, 2011). Supported by the Children Act 2004 and the Every Child Matters agenda (Ball, 2014), multi-agency working became a central tenet of Third Way politics which sought to temper the greatest inequalities produced by market forces using the tools of the welfare state (Baron, 2001; Clegg and McNulty, 2002; Milbourne, Macrae and Maguire, 2003). Particularly in post-devolution Scotland, partnership approaches continue to be an important way of working in public service delivery (Eccles, 2012; Forbes, 2011, 2018). Despite becoming an increasingly established practice over the last 25 years, there is still uneven evidence of the effectiveness of multi-agency working, and on-going questions about how successful practice can be ensured (Forbes, 2018; Harris and Allen, 2011; Riddell and Tett, 2001).

In order to frame the following discussion, a definition and rationale for multi-agency working must be developed. Glendinning, Powell and Rummery have described multi-agency working as "the indefinable in pursuit of the unachievable" (2002: 2), indicating anxieties over its conceptual framing and ability to produce social change (Connelly, 2013; Riddell and Tett, 2001). Partnership practices primarily emerged from a recognition of deprivation as multi-faceted, thus requiring responses that address health, education, welfare, et cetera simultaneously (Cummings, Dyson and Todd, 2011; Edwards and Downes, 2013; Kerr and Dyson, 2016). Put simply, multi-agency working involves "a range of different services which have some overlapping or shared interests and objectives, brought together to work collaboratively towards some common purposes" (Wigfall and Moss, 2001: 71). This can involve partnerships across the public and third sectors, public and private sectors, or indeed all three (Forbes, 2018). Importantly, multiple agencies work together with individuals, families or communities in order to understand, and alleviate, a particular problem that is shared across their fields (Forbes, 2011; Walker, 2018).

Multi-agency working is frequently required as part of statutory safeguarding efforts, particularly for children (Dhillon, 2005; Walker, 2018). Beyond this, Walker outlines six principal rationales behind the adoption of multi-agency practices:

1. To co-ordinate agencies' work with shared user groups, avoiding service duplication
2. To share resources
3. To secure joint funding
4. To share knowledge and skills across professions
5. To innovate and find creative solutions
6. To address service user needs holistically, producing better outcomes

(Walker, 2018: 10)

Ultimately, most projects cite a desire to improve social justice, correct inequalities and reduce social exclusion of various kinds (Boyd, Kamaka and Braun, 2012; Clegg and McNulty, 2002; Cummings, Dyson and Todd, 2011), concluding that the multi-agency whole will be greater than the sum of its parts (Greenhouse, 2013; Wigfall and Moss, 2001). For these reasons, it is not surprising that multi-agency working is highly prevalent in the field of community education, which seeks to build social capital among community members using both education and community development techniques (Dhillon, 2005; Riddell and Tett, 2001). Nonetheless, the pursuit of a 'value for money' agenda should not be underestimated (Atkinson, Doherty and Kinder, 2005; Forbes, 2018). Social justice and economic efficiency have become increasingly intertwined in the field of multi-agency working as efforts are made to identify and replicate 'what works', and eliminate interventions that do not (Boydell and Rugkåsa, 2007). This can pose ideological challenges to individuals and agencies who join partnerships with different motivations, or have different perceptions of success (Forbes, 2018).

Beyond rationale and motivation, it is important to examine the conditions that make for effective and sustainable multi-agency collaboration. While partnership working may be increasingly promoted in policy documents (Edwards and Downes, 2013; Forbes, 2018; Scottish Government, 2010), its success ultimately lies in the process of implementation. It is community educators, health workers, teachers and countless others on the front-line who must transform policy into practice. Acting as 'street-level bureaucrats' (Lipsky, 1980), these actors hold under-recognised power to shape the realities of partnership working; 'making' policy through their everyday professional actions in ways that can support and undermine policy priorities in equal measure. Without endorsement and enactment from street-level bureaucrats, the efforts of policy-makers will remain firmly in the realm of discourse (Lipsky, 1980). For this reason, I turn first of all to an overview of the conditions that have been found to both foster and frustrate multi-agency working at the 'street-level' in a variety of contexts.

## **2.1 Multi-Agency Working At The Street Level**

Differences in professional identity and ideology have often been cited as a hindrance to successful partnership working (Atkinson, Doherty and Kinder, 2005; Chapman et al., 2010). This can produce friction between partnered agencies, particularly if boundaries between the public, private and third sectors are crossed (Potito et al., 2009). Different partners may construct 'conflicting realities' born out of their distinct training, experience and professional identities (Greenhouse, 2013). At its worst, this can lead to 'professional imperialism' as each profession attempts to ensure its prevailing perception is dominant (Jones, 2000). A practical example of how this can hinder multi-agency working is seen in conflicting confidentiality procedures (SEED, 2002). If partners are unable to share information about service users due to pre-existing professional regulations, then the holistic approach to delivery is undermined (Connelly, 2013; Potito et al., 2009). As a solution, it has been suggested that wherever possible, professional expertise should be distributed across and between professions in order to enhance each agency's

awareness of its partners' working practices (Greenhouse, 2013). It should not be forgotten however that similar friction can occur *within* professions, as individuals mobilize other aspects of identity such as gender, ethnicity or their own educational past in relation to their professional practice (Clegg and McNulty, 2002; Floyd and Morrison, 2014).

As a result, relative parity of esteem between partners has been encouraged in partnership working (Chapman et al., 2010). Indications, or even perceptions of a power imbalance between agencies are likely to result in resentment and infighting (Murphy and Fleming, 2003; Potito et al., 2009). Ideally, each partner should hold some distinct form of power within the partnership in order to reduce their vulnerability and encourage mutual respect (Potito et al., 2009). For example, in some cases, third sector agencies can become subordinate to institutionally stronger public and private partners (Milbourne, Macrae and Maguire, 2003). However, third sector agencies may seek to rebalance this by offering their relative freedom from regulation and bureaucracy in exchange for stabilising public sector support (Chapman et al., 2010).

Differing organizational cultures have been cited as a source of discomfort and distrust between agencies (Atkinson, Doherty and Kinder, 2005; Cummings, Dyson and Todd, 2011). The great breadth of agencies that are brought together via partnership working ensures that a variety of organizational cultures are often represented (Riddell and Tett, 2001). This gives rise to the potential for attitudes towards formality (Clegg and McNulty, 2002), bureaucracy (Chapman et al., 2010) and even dress codes (SEED, 2002) to produce tension and generate accusations of unprofessionalism or rigidity (Connelly, 2013). For example, primary and secondary school teachers have struggled to collaborate on the basis of perceived differences in working cultures, despite the many attributes an outsider might expect them to share (McCulloch, Tett and Crowther, 2004).

In contrast, modes of communication that cross professional boundaries and cultures have been touted as important for effective partnership working (Atkinson, Doherty and Kinder, 2005; Carpenter et al., 2010a). The development of shared language to fit the context of the intervention has been encouraged (Connelly, 2013; Harris and Allen, 2011), such that partners become 'professionally multilingual' (Leadbetter et al., 2007). Arguably, if agencies are unable to communicate with each other, it leaves little hope that they will effectively communicate goals and strategies to service users (Greenhouse, 2013). These modes of communication can then be used to develop clearly defined roles, responsibilities and modes of accountability for all partners and agencies (Sloper, 2004). Without such clarity, boundaries between partners' and individuals' domains can become 'fuzzy', leading to a declining sense of professional security and the impediment of project success (Greenhouse, 2013). In particular, proper monitoring of project goals and appropriate corrections to interventions are more easily managed within a context of smooth communication (Greenhouse, 2013). It has been noted that the proliferation of 'horizontal' hierarchies within multi-agency partnerships can make for unsettling and politically-charged working conditions (Milbourne, Macrae and Maguire, 2003), necessitating clear divisions of labour and allocation of leadership responsibilities at the outset (Potito et al., 2009).

It has also been observed that poorly defined or competing aims can hinder the implementation and success of multi-agency projects (Connelly, 2013; Jones, 2000). If partners cannot agree on shared aims and methods of achieving them, it can be difficult to produce focus in the intervention (Cummings, Dyson and Todd, 2011). Characterised as 'disconnected partnerships', agencies are engaged in the same work but for different reasons, potentially resulting in none of the intended outcomes materializing (Jones, 2000). This has been observed at the intersection of community education and schooling, as schools remain focused on formal teaching and learning while neglecting the community engagement and democratic renewal that community educators seek to produce (Riddell and Tett, 2001). Therefore, multi-agency projects have been encouraged to operate with

shared and complimentary objectives (Atkinson, Doherty and Kinder, 2005; Tett et al., 2001). Ideally, project aims should be collaboratively produced and agreed, as well as clear and well-communicated in order to ensure that they are sustainably monitored and worked towards by all partners (Cummings et al., 2007). However in many cases shared objectives do not predate the partnership, and can be more meaningful when negotiated and refined collaboratively in the process of working together (Atkinson, Doherty and Kinder, 2005; Milbourne, Macrae and Maguire, 2003). Regardless of the process of development, “shared purpose and mutual challenge” (Keddie, 2015: 12) appear fundamental to effective programmes that produce desired outcomes.

It is not uncommon to find that in the process of developing strong communication channels and negotiating divisions of labour, multi-agency projects intended to empower service users become dominated by the views of professionals (Boyd, Kamaka and Braun, 2012). The sheer number and variety of professionals involved in often very small projects can result in partners’ voices overshadowing those of community members (Greenhouse, 2013). Vincent and Tomlinson (1997) warn of ‘the swarming of disciplinary mechanisms’ whereby a multiplicity of professionals act in ways that disempower those who are already socially marginalized. Indeed, the pursuit of inter-agency collaboration can become the primary task ahead of involving local people in decision-making (Baron, 2001). Multi-agency projects that actively listen to the needs of service users and involve the community in programme design have attempted to tackle this tendency (Boyd, Kamaka and Braun, 2012). Harris and Allan (2011) found that consultation with young people prior to and during implementation resulted in greater acceptance of project interventions and the realisation of desired outcomes. Similarly, multi-agency approaches in schools have been most successful when based on tenets of community engagement and voice (Carpenter et al., 2010b; Kerr and Dyson, 2016). One method for institutionalizing community involvement while also empowering individuals is to employ community members within the partnership team (Murphy and Fleming, 2003).



Ultimately, successful multi-agency projects tend to be based on positive, trusting relationships between professionals (Mills, 2015). These relationships form the 'social glue' that binds multi-agency teams together and ensures sustainability of partnerships (Dhillon, 2005). A sense of working well together, although not quantifiable, often forms the underlying source of project cohesion and longevity (Clegg and McNulty, 2002: 591). A combination of trust, respect and responsiveness allows partners to collaborate, innovate and prioritize project goals over managing professional tensions (Greenhouse, 2013). In particular, building trust at the highest level of partnerships can help transcend power differences and ensure the most productive forms of collaboration (Clegg and McNulty, 2002).

The dilemma comes when imagining how these successful features might be translated into policy frameworks and applied to diverse contexts to produce dependable outcomes. Indeed, how can we find "a transferable recipe which does not rely on a charismatic participant, personal relationships and the quality of the partners' inter-personal relationships"? (Jones, 2000: 4). It is at this juncture that the state becomes more intimately concerned with the policy and practice of multi-agency working. At the same time, professionals and community members come to experience the state in new ways as they are exposed to the impacts of changing policy priorities.

## **2.2 Multi-Agency Working And The State**

Across the UK, multi-agency working has been increasingly endorsed by the state, as 'good practice' for the delivery of public services (Forbes, 2018; Forbes and Watson, 2012; Munro, 2011; Public Service Commission, 2011). In Scotland, the introduction of Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) attempts to create a 'unified approach' to supporting the wellbeing of young people (Connelly, 2013; Scottish Executive, 2005), and the Public Service Commission recently declared that "public service providers must be required to work much more closely in partnership to integrate service provision and thus improve the outcomes they achieve" (2011: vi). This reveals a

fundamental assumption that partnership practices in their own right will result in improved outcomes, despite evidence that successful implementation is extremely challenging and complex (Forbes and Watson, 2012; Riddell and Tett, 2001). This contradiction has led to questions regarding the state's motivation as it pushes for increased partnership working (Allen, 2003; Forbes and Watson, 2012). As Eccles remarks:

*"That the recent headlong drive towards partnership working policy proceeded unreflectively without much reference to existing research suggests that a wider ideological agenda surrounding the notion of partnership was in play. Disentangling this ideological agenda from the many merits of, and need for, better collaborative practice is not a straightforward task."*  
(2012: 25)

Multi-agency working often emerges as a response to 'wicked' problems that traditional structures have thus far failed to solve (Cummings, Dyson and Todd, 2011; Watson and Forbes, 2011), placing high expectations on what can be achieved through a reconfiguration of working practices (Tett and Fyfe, 2010). Simultaneously, partnerships are established with the goal of cost reduction, requiring stretched services to 'do more with less' (Diamond and Vangen, 2017; Forbes, 2018). Out of this develops an increasingly post-modern welfare context, where no one agency is wholly responsible for the functioning of a given enterprise, and government becomes accountable via cross-sectoral governance processes supported by partnership (Ball, 2009; Boydell et al., 2008; Cooper, 2012; Hudson, 2007b). This has raised concerns that the state is attempting to dissipate challenges to structural inequality, and decentralise and depoliticise blame (Dhillon, 2005). As Eccles (2012: 26) suggests, "the weight of expectation around partnership working may be of benefit to government, allowing solutions to be seen as primarily organizational, and interagency responsibilities beyond further government involvement". Indeed, when partnerships falter in foreseeable ways (Eccles, 2012) conservative, inward-looking professionals can be identified as the problem, rather than

unjust state policy and political agendas (Cooper, 2012; Watson, 2012). Partners in turn are able to cite weaknesses in multi-agency dynamics as the cause of project failure, rather than provoking a fundamental questioning of systems-level structures (Floyd and Morrison, 2014; Tett and Fyfe, 2010). Berating incompetent professionals is far less troubling than examining the impact of austerity on staffing levels and morale (Eccles, 2012), or indeed the existence of poverty which necessitates many public services in the first place (Baron, 2001). Ultimately, responsibility for resolving structural problems related to the global economy and distribution of wealth are passed down to local actors with the least power to do so (Riddell and Tett, 2001; Watson, 2012).

Differing social theories have been used to understand multi-agency working as a conduit for state power (Allen, 2003; Baron, 2001). Allen (2003) develops a Foucauldian perspective, understanding the development of 'holistic' multi-agency working as producing equally holistic forms of power. These new omnipresent and omniscient collaborative forces are thus permitted to exercise judgement and control over every aspect of an individual's life in an expression of governmentality (Allen, 2003; Foucault, 1979). Regarded as neutrally benevolent and infallible, failures of this holistic power to produce the promised social transformations are then transferred to incurably pathological individuals, while the state is able to understand itself as kind and well-intentioned (Allen, 2003). Baron (2001) meanwhile has drawn implicitly on the work of Habermas (1987) to suggest that a 'what works' approach to partnership has allowed the state to increasingly colonise and control the civic realm. Over time, the pursuit of inter-agency collaboration takes precedence over the participation of local people in decision-making, increasing the centralised power of the state as it makes presumptions about citizen's needs. This centralised power then sets out to disrupt cultural mechanisms labelled as pathological (such as parenting techniques, modes of communication, social activities) in people's everyday lives while leaving no mechanism through which the civic can regulate or contest the actions of the state (Baron, 2001). Baron (2001) cites examples of this in Scottish public

policy, despite devolved parliament having been established with the intention of reducing central control and enabling professionals to reconnect with local communities (Connelly, 2013).

Nonetheless, the belief perseveres that a valuable and emancipatory form of multi-agency working remains possible if supported by compatible structures, concepts and policies at the systems-level (Atkinson, Doherty and Kinder, 2005; Boydell et al., 2008; Connelly, 2013; Tett and Fyfe, 2010). In order to genuinely challenge social injustice, a policy environment is required that not only allows collaboration to occur but encourages it to flourish and spread (Dhillon, 2005). Commitment must come from both strategic and operational levels; otherwise street-level partners will be limited in the change that they can effect (Atkinson, Doherty and Kinder, 2005). Conversely, when project aims are unachievable within the context, or are actively undermined by other areas of policy, then no amount of partnership collaboration will ensure goals are met (Riddell and Tett, 2001). Incompatible institutional structures (Keddie, 2015; SEED, 2002), insufficient funding (Ball, 2014; Harris and Allen, 2011) and political instability in government (Cummings, Dyson and Todd, 2011; Dyson and Kerr, 2014) have all been found to undermine partnerships in public service delivery. For example, multi-agency projects have been threatened by national funding and accountability structures associated with the rise of New Public Management that encourage competition over collaboration (Chapman et al., 2010; Cummings, Dyson and Todd, 2011; Milbourne, Macrae and Maguire, 2003; O'Flynn, 2007). Similarly, 'social entrepreneurship' practices have been widely encouraged by government, increasing the demand for multi-agency approaches while simultaneously producing a market-driven environment that is hostile to collaboration (O'Flynn, 2007; Riddell and Tett, 2001; Tett and Fyfe, 2010). Furthermore, the pursuit of economic policy centred on austerity in the UK has placed extraordinary pressure on public and voluntary services by increasing demand while drastically reducing funding (Ball, 2014; Diamond and Vangen, 2017; Forbes, 2018).

One element of a supportive environment appears to be the freedom to adapt implementation in ways that are relevant to the local context, often incorporating far more informal or ad hoc working arrangements (Eccles, 2012; Hudson, 2007a). Partnerships in Scotland that utilise less prescriptive approaches and develop local ownership have shown initial positive results (Eccles, 2012). Meanwhile 'change management' practices - centred on strategic plans and operational objectives - imported from the private to the public sector have been found to strangle collaborative practices at the outset (Eccles, 2012; Humes, 2012). In this regard, it has been suggested that Scotland provides more fertile ground for the pursuit of partnership practices than the rest of the UK thanks to less competitive organizational structures, less emphasis on mandating collaboration from the top-down, and more detailed policy scrutiny in post-devolution parliament (Eccles, 2012; Hudson, 2007a). Nonetheless, organisational and policy structures appear resistant to change and have yet to fully adapt in order to support partnership working (Education Scotland, 2012; Forbes, 2018), suggesting that further study of implementation on the ground is needed to shed light on how partnership working can be effectively supported at the systems-level.

### 3 METHODOLOGY

The case of Killoch Homework and Cookery Club was chosen as a result of the University of Glasgow's *Collaborative Dissertation* project. I was one of a number of students approached by community leaders and invited to visit projects in order to consider conducting research. I was immediately drawn to the originality and simplicity of KHCC in pursuing community education and development aims. It was only after five months of visiting the project on a near-weekly basis that I settled on the theme of multi-agency working. This was in part a reaction to structural changes to the central partnership, which produced tangible but ambiguous tensions, and in part due to the unusually long duration of the partnership thus far.

As I designed my study of multi-agency working at KHCC, I began with three initial research questions. These questions were used to select appropriate methods and guide methodological choices such as interview themes (see appendix i). The questions are not directly answered in the findings but underpin the direction of my inquiry.

1. What forms of multi-agency working are taking place at KHCC?
2. What differences and similarities exist between multi-agency working as described in the current literature and at KHCC?
3. What suggestions can the current literature offer for the successful continuation of multi-agency working at KHCC? How might examples of successful practice at KHCC challenge or augment current knowledge of multi-agency working?

#### 3.1 Choice Of Methods And Data Collection

While a broad knowledge of the literature on multi-agency working informed my investigation, I did not predicate my research on testing any particular theory of partnership working. As a result, I chose to use a mixed-method, case study approach, incorporating a number of different research methods in

order to collect a range of perspectives on multi-agency processes (Denscombe, 2003; Kerr, Dyson and Raffo, 2014; Silverman, 2013). I was keen not to limit the research from the outset, and as such, all of my research methods were flexible, semi-structured and broad in their scope.

### *I. Interviews:*

Interviews were chosen to capture rich and nuanced narratives about professionals' individual and collective experiences of multi-agency working (Denscombe, 2003; Mabry, 2009). Eight interviews of 40-70 minutes were conducted with project partners who represent key agencies involved in the formation and running of KHCC. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. I adopted a semi-structured interview approach - interview themes were developed from an in-depth review of the current literature (see appendix i) - to allow for comparison across certain answers while leaving space for participants to express themselves freely and introduce unforeseen points of interest.

### *II. Participant observation:*

Two separate, two-hour participant observations were conducted at KHCC to produce qualitative field notes on the activities, atmosphere and interactions between partners. While individual perspectives on multi-agency working gathered through interviews were an important source of data, I was also keen to gain 'on-the-ground' insight into everyday practice by working as part of the multi-agency team at KHCC. By regularly visiting the club for six months prior to beginning my fieldwork, I was able to build trusting relationships with staff and community members, minimising the potential disruption of observations (Curtis, Murphy and Shields, 2014). I recorded written information about which partners were present at the beginning of the observation, keeping notes on key words, interactions, timings and language for the duration of the two hours. These prompting notes were then used to write up extended field notes immediately after the observations ended, focusing on key questions (see appendix ii). This was recorded in a reflective fashion, incorporating notes on my own interpretation of events

(Curtis, Murphy and Shields, 2014). Where observation data was collected prior to interviews, any relevant findings were used to inform and prompt interview questioning.

*III. Quantitative non-participant observation:*

Four 50-minute non-participant observations were used to quantitatively measure the duration and frequency of interactions between different partners at the homework club and recorded in table form (see appendix iii). The content of interactions was not recorded. This data was intended to produce a rough picture of 'networks' within partnership working at KHCC, and highlight important relationships or surprising gaps in interaction. Again, where observation data was collected prior to interviews, any relevant observations were used to inform and prompt interview questioning.

*IV. Qualitative non-participant observation:*

After completing the majority of data collection, one non-participant observation of a partnership meeting was used to triangulate data previously collected and to corroborate initial findings (Curtis, Murphy and Shields, 2014; Silverman, 2013). I used a semi-structured, qualitative approach, taking field notes related to categories I had already developed from previously collected data while also leaving scope to record additional, unexpected themes or interactions.

### **3.2 Data Analysis**

Odena's (2013: 366) 'generative model of social knowledge development' has guided my approach to data analysis (see figure 1). As I began my research, I did not hold fixed ideas or hypotheses about what I would find, instead making use of broad questions and open methods. I began with a stage of immersion (Lincoln and Guba, 1985), producing detailed transcriptions of interviews and observations as they were conducted. I completed all transcriptions and coded the data manually. This was a deliberate choice to increase my interaction with the research data, ensuring that I could capture



nuances in tone (these were often noted within the interview transcripts) in order to minimise loss of data in the transcription process (Odena, 2017), and retain control over interpretive choices about the categorisation of data (Crowley, Harré and Tagg, 2002; Odena, 2013). While coding software can be an important tool for ensuring rigour and feasibility across large research teams using extensive data (Crowley, Harré and Tagg, 2002; Denscombe, 2003), a hands-on, connected approach was both manageable and appeared of greater value in a small postgraduate research project.

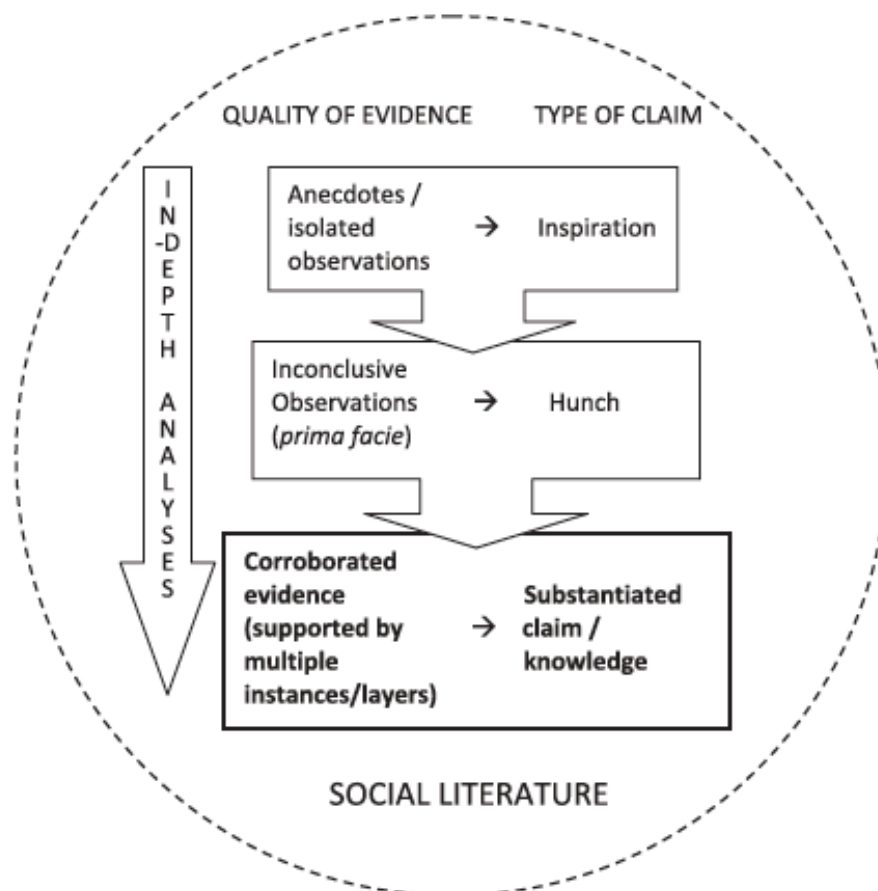


Figure 1. A generative model of social knowledge development.

(Odena 2013: 366)

Patterns in the data, or inconclusive observations, began to emerge after the first three interviews and two observations, expanding to 24 categories as further data was collected (see appendix iv). It is important to note that the immersion and categorisation stages were not totally distinct. As Coffey and

Atkinson (1996: 11) argue, analysis “is a pervasive activity throughout the life of a research project...not simply one of the later stages of research, to be followed by an equally separate phase of ‘writing up results’”. In this way, categorisation began before data collection was complete (partially due to time constraints) and I began to more explicitly test hypotheses in interviews. This gave me the opportunity to ask project representatives if I had characterised particular processes or dynamics in ways that they identified with, helping me to confirm or contest ‘hunches’ as I progressed (figure 1). For example, through interaction with the fieldwork data, the concept of ‘lifeworld colonization’ (Habermas, 1987) came to feel increasingly relevant to the case of KHCC and I began to explore issues related to governance and bureaucracy more directly in both analysis and remaining data collection. Furthermore, it was evident from time spent informally observing KHCC activities that the role of partners as ‘street-level bureaucrats’ (Lipsky, 1980) - enacting and/or resisting policy mandated from above - was particularly marked, and as such my data and its subsequent analysis focus strongly on individuals’ experiences and anxieties over making partnership ‘work’ in implementation. As a result, my approach to analysis can neither be understood as pure grounded theory, nor a deductive process (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Silverman, 2013), arguably the reality of much research. Detailed disclosure of my analysis process is intended to acknowledge the somewhat subjective nature of qualitative research, while rejecting the idea that this signals its invalidity (Odena, 2013; Silverman, 2013).

Quantitative observation data were initially recorded in tables, and my intention had been to present data in graph form to map interactions between different partners during KHCC hours. However, as the scope of my research narrowed and began to focus much more explicitly on the relational elements of multi-agency working, this quantitative data began to feel decreasingly relevant. Those periods of observation were still used to corroborate ‘hunches’ developed from other forms of data collection, and interactions or behaviours of note were incorporated into interview questioning. However, it became increasingly clear that the *content* of interactions would be most pertinent to

the study as it progressed, and extensive analysis of this data would divert energy from the central task of the research. I was perhaps guilty of falling prey to the idea that my research would be insufficiently 'scientific' if I did not incorporate quantitative methods (Barone, 2007; Clarke and Stronach, 2012; Silverman, 2013). In fact, in the process of conducting this research, a (perhaps superficial) commitment to the value of qualitative research has been cemented and made more certain through tangible experience. I do not think that this investigation has lost any of its value through the reduced importance of quantitative data. Indeed, the decision to focus on the data that matters most, in opposition to my original plans, reassures me that I have attempted to conduct my research in a critical and reflective manner.

Once it became clear from my initial literature review and interactions with KHCC partners that relationality and the human dynamics of multi-agency working were of key importance, I was keen to ensure that my mode of analysis would accommodate such observations and conclusions. As a result, I began developing initial categories from the interview and observation data very early on, expanding and removing where relevant as data collection continued. Once all the data had been collected, transcribed and re-read, I was able to reduce my categories to key themes by triangulating all of the interviews and observations (see appendix iv). By opting for a non-linear, iterative analysis framework that privileged the gradual development of increasingly refined and corroborated narratives, I hoped to allow issues of relationality to come to the fore, and avoid an overly static or restrictive approach to data collection and analysis. As I narrowed my categories into themes I chose to focus on those aspects of multi-agency working at KHCC which were most distinct from previous case studies, and provided new insight not captured in the current literature. This formed the interpretation stage of my research as I sought to make sense of the data in the context of established theory.

### 3.3 Research Philosophy And Positionality

In order to frame an understanding of the findings, it is important to clarify the philosophy underlying the research. I take a constructivist approach to understanding the data, viewing themes developed by interviewees as narratives individually and collectively constructed as a way of describing and making sense of the world and social phenomena (Gubrium and Holstein, 2009; Silverman, 2013). Rather than seeking a singular 'truth' about partnership practices at KHCC, I intend to generate 'plausible accounts' (Silverman, 2013) of complex behaviours, relationships and outcomes that may resonate with or provide counter-examples to pre-existing notions of common multi-agency dynamics. Importantly, I view this constructed truth/reality/knowledge as consequential, relevant and therefore worthy of study and theorisation (Merriam et al., 2001). Viewing these shared narratives as developed in configuration with peers, past experience, institutional/professional frameworks and the wider social context, I do not propose a postmodern view of reality as entirely fragmented to the individual 'knower' (Merriam et al., 2001). Therefore, while the data collected cannot unveil indisputable 'truth' about KHCC, I argue that they do provide a snapshot of a shared social understanding of how the project operates, and why. As a result, findings are presented in a descriptive, temporal format (Barone, 2007; Polkinghorne, 1995). This work therefore aims to tell the 'story' of KHCC in a way that simultaneously privileges the voices of individual protagonists and draws out generalizable themes within the dynamics of one partnership, in order to craft an engaging, and thematic, portrait of partnership working at KHCC (Barone, 2007). My intention is to be explicit about the ideology behind research of all kinds, and render visible the process whereby "the researcher takes a narrative and fashions another in response to it" (Watson, 2011: 405). This qualitative story is intended to uncover the everyday experiences of multi-agency work and contribute to an academic understanding of routine and reality in partnership (Allan, 2012; Eccles, 2012).

This brings the importance of researcher positionality to the fore. After spending ten months in regular contact with KHCC partners and volunteering on a weekly basis, it became increasingly complex to delineate my position as an insider/outsider (Chavez, 2008). In many cases, I shared the professional, class and ethnic background of my research subjects, perhaps contributing to my quick assimilation into working practices and friendly relationships. Equally, my knowledge of the Scottish context and local community experiences was largely non-existent at the outset of my research, and represented a steep learning curve in terms of mutual cultural and linguistic understanding. While it is not necessarily desirable to draw hard conclusions about the insider/outside dichotomy (Merriam et al., 2001), it is crucial to reflect on the impact of researcher positionality in my work; in particular, my choice of KHCC as a subject of study.

Due to the *Collaborative Dissertation* initiative, the case of KHCC was chosen prior to the topic of investigation. Therefore, a significant motivator in my choice of project was an interest and belief in partners' intention to alleviate particular forms of structural injustice. While on the surface this may appear to be a source of positive bias towards the work of KHCC, I found that in balance with my residual outsider status it motivated me to seek constructive criticism of project dynamics. As I believe strongly in the current and future benefits of KHCC, I have been keen to assist partners in identifying strengths and weaknesses in their multi-agency working practices. Indeed, I have endeavoured to occupy the position of 'critical friend' to the project (O'Hare, Coaffee and Hawkesworth, 2010; Spicer and Smith, 2008). Often this has been facilitated by my strong personal relationships with interviewees, drawing on informal comments and interactions to probe more deeply into sensitive topics during interview. At other times, I have been aware of uneven and fluctuating power dynamics between myself and research participants: in turn a result of my perceived 'superior' postgraduate education and my relative youth and professional inexperience (Merriam et al., 2001: 409). By disclosing the dynamics I encountered while conducting research, I hope to offer the

critical reader the tools and information with which to better appraise the trustworthiness and validity of my findings (Chavez, 2008; Odena, 2013).

### 3.4 Ethics

My research has been approved by, and follows guidelines set by, the University of Glasgow School of Education Ethics Committee (2018).

In accordance with these guidelines, one important consideration has been the protection of participants against professional harm (ESRC, 2015; Ethics Committee, 2018). Therefore, anonymity of the project and research participants has been maintained through the use of pseudonyms. In recognition of the small pool of participants, I use non-gendered geographical pseudonyms and do not identify participants by their job title when quoting individuals in order to further reduce the chance of identification (Atkins and Wallace, 2016). Although it might appear preferable to place responses within a professional context, I feel this is a necessary element of both eliciting more honest responses in data collection and protecting participant identities upon publication. Interview themes were finalised in partnership with project leaders, although no attempt was made to censor questions that invited criticism. Instead additional questions were added to explore leaders' own interest in multi-agency working. As a result, it was important to consider the sensitivity of inviting partners to critique their home agencies, colleagues and the partnership as a whole, requiring me to operate with the utmost discretion throughout data collection (Denscombe, 2003).

The use of participant observation also presents ethical challenges (Li, 2008). Volunteering at KHCC on a weekly basis helped me build trusting relationships with partners and community members, and supported the depth and scope of my research. However, in order to maintain ethical clarity, KHCC gatekeepers were always careful to introduce me to partners and community members as a researcher. Attendees were then free to interact with me or not as they chose. Furthermore, I was careful to ensure that the project did not depend

on my role as a volunteer (I generally helped with practical tasks such as washing up, supporting homework completion and serving food) and I received no remuneration for my time or labour.

In order to remove the ethical implications of conducting research with vulnerable groups (ESRC, 2015), the content of the research focused solely on the professional practice and experiences of KHCC partners, and did not include any data that concerned community members. All interviewees gave their written consent and were free to withdraw at any time. Prior to scheduled observations, partners were also given the opportunity to withdraw or object to my presence, although this was never the case.

### **3.5 Limitations**

I have made efforts to use a comprehensive variety of research methods while recognising that no study can offer a complete and accurate portrait of a given project (Silverman, 2013). Indeed, “one should not adopt a naively ‘optimistic’ view that the aggregation of data from different sources will unproblematically add up to produce a more complete picture” (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983: 199). I recognise that the narratives and relationships related to be me via interview and observation data are just that: narratives, rather than a collection of knowable facts (Silverman, 2013). However, this does not diminish the value in exploring such narratives, as multi-agency working is a deeply relational and social phenomenon, which has significance beyond that which an ‘objective’ appraisal of organisational structures and project outcome data can convey (Chavez, 2008).

As part of this, it is important to question the extent to which I can trust the narratives relayed to me by participants, as partners may have felt compelled to present an overly positive façade to an external researcher (Rapley, 2004: Silverman, 2013). This is particularly true when discussing the project’s past, as participants’ responses can be affected by nostalgia (Silverman, 2013). My decision to volunteer at KHCC was one element in overcoming this. By the

time I began conducting interviews, I had already spent seven months getting to know partners, having informal discussions about the state of the partnership and observing their reactions to events on the ground. This allowed me to ask more challenging questions during interviews as I had already gained the trust of participants. In one case, I had the impression that a participant was repeating 'the party line' during our interview; a stance that stood in stark juxtaposition to conversations and observations developed outside of interview. I was able to push back a little and encourage the participant to speak more freely and with less reference to phrases seen in promotional materials and partnership documents. In addition, reflections of a less guarded attitude were collected through observation data. Of course, reticence or obfuscation by participants cannot be fully protected against, however, the development of strong, trusting relationships over a long period of time was the most effective defence against this potential limitation.

Furthermore, it is important to recognise my role as researcher in assembling narratives through interviews and participant observation (Rapley, 2004). My findings do not simply represent a window into an authentic and truthful account, but my presence at the project became a part and a product of multi-agency dynamics (Silverman, 2013). This allowed me greater access and understanding of professional life at KHCC, and thus supported more nuanced conclusions. It also means my presence was not without impact, and participants' choice of expression and emphasis will have been influenced by my investigation and its focus (Chavez, 2008; Gubrium and Holstein, 2009).

Unfortunately, I was not able to secure interview participation from representatives of either of the primary schools. This was a result of time constraints and increasing retreat by the schools from partnership activities. Ideally, their perspectives as founding partners would also have been included in interview data. However, the views of school representatives are not completely lacking from the research. I frequently interacted with teachers and headteachers during periods of observation and was able to pursue informal questioning based on my interview themes. I did not receive



responses that directly contradicted my research findings and school representatives often echoed the sentiments of other operational partners.

While it can be tempting to dismiss case studies as un-generalizable, this detailed, rich data provides depth when developing a theory for sense-making that makes useful contributions to the field (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Maxwell, 1992). My intention is not to make concrete, universal claims (Kerr, Dyson and Raffo, 2014), but neither is it productive to diminish the value of findings by over-emphasising specificity and subjectivity (Flyvbjerg, 2006). I aim to “illuminate the general by looking at the particular” (Denscombe, 2003: 30) and present narratives that might prove useful for contesting existing theory, or in analytical or case-to-case generalizations (Mabry, 2009; Yin, 2014).

## 4 FINDINGS - THE STORY OF KHCC

On the first day of my research at KHCC, a key partner resigned and was not replaced. This was both the symptom and the trigger of a fundamental shift in working practices in the partnership. In this section, I discuss the changes I observed as an outsider, and how that shift was characterised by those involved. I present my findings as a temporal sequence, although these three 'phases' should not be understood as strictly distinct or linear. In building a temporal narrative, I neither purport that all features of earlier phases have been eradicated, nor that processes of change are entirely resolved to cement new practices. As ever, this relational phenomenon is more characterised by flux and inconsistency than certainty and uniformity. Nonetheless, extracting generalities provides insight into what has been a universally acknowledged - although varyingly perceived - set of transformations.

### 4.1 Phase 1 - Informal Solidarity

When describing the origins and character of KHCC up until late 2017, participants emphasised that the approach to partnership was distinct in its informality. This took the form of unusually informal relationships between partners, described as being closer to friendships than purely professional interactions. Participants repeatedly characterised the atmosphere at KHCC as 'warm', 'open' and 'friendly', held together by bonds of trust and reciprocity. Furthermore, it was openly acknowledged that KHCC was operating outside of established partnership working practices exemplified by partnership agreements, formalised roles, theories of change and so on. Indeed, the project does not exist as a distinct entity, relying on the institutional capacity of its constituent partners to deal with practical concerns such as human resources, insurance and the administration of funding. Instead, many of the existing working patterns and practices were described as having evolved relatively organically with the continuation of the project. In the words of one partner: "we haven't done a whole lot of focused,

sitting down saying 'Right, ok, today we're gonna talk about...' Lots of it's come about through natural conversations" (Clyde).

Despite a lack of pre-defined working structures laid out in partnership agreements or similar documents, partners appeared to share a strong sense of solidarity, and felt confident of support within the partnership. It was understood that the on-going involvement of diverse agencies was ensured by the personal commitment of their individual representatives to the aims and ethos of KHCC. "It's about the big picture, and about the whole community. All those partnerships realise that. Even though they come in with their own set thing, they still all come together as one" (Shira). As such, partners were able to conceive of each other as extensions of each other's professionalism, bound together in a shared endeavour. Front-line workers presented this informal solidarity as a fundamental, and novel, source of success at KHCC, which allowed partners to "lean on one another" (Burnock) and respond flexibly to community needs as they became apparent. Indeed, some suggested that structured partnership practices had been intentionally rejected on the basis that pre-determined working arrangements would be counterproductive to broader aims of community engagement and empowerment.

*"We don't want to go in too strongly with logic models and action plans, intended outcomes and indicators because that just dries it up a bit straight away. It's already too prescriptive. People need to engage first, you need find out what people are all about and how they feel about things." (Aray)*

This was not only understood as vital to building solidarity between partners and the community at project-level, but also expressed as an attempt to 'do things differently' and disrupt the status quo of community engagement across the city. Key project figures saw KHCC and its place in a wider partnership initiative as an opportunity to inform and alter service provision patterns across the broad range of agencies. It was felt that past partnership

practices had failed to meaningfully engage with community members in order to produce genuinely transformative outcomes for local residents. Using insight gained from developing KHCC alongside community members, it was hoped that other existing institutions could be shaped to better reflect community needs and desires. In order to achieve this, it was felt that project structures could not be pre-determined, instead mobilising informal solidarity to produce a partnership that is able and willing “to respond to whatever need is discovered” (Kilfinan).

One way in which this informal solidarity appeared to be maintained was through a collectivisation of risk within the partnership. There was an understanding that by working together across agencies, sectors and professions, the project would be more able to successfully navigate short-term funding, changing demand and fluctuating resources. Collectively, the partnership was seen as more able to absorb shocks, and therefore take on greater risk, than any one agency could have alone. This was underpinned by trusting and committed relationships, as a willingness to collectivise risk required a mutual understanding and appreciation of the project’s aims and outcomes. “Everybody wants to keep it going...you’ve got wonderful people...who will just fill the gap as and when needed...if you didn’t have all those partners round the table it would have ended a long time ago” (Luss).

Furthermore, in lieu of formalised working agreements, the partnership partly relied on the existence of what one participant characterised as a “social lubricant” role (Aray), operating behind-the-scenes on a relational basis to ensure partners felt valued and were ready to work cooperatively. This involved managing the entire partnership as a constellation of individual, and personal, relationships. It was clear that the ‘social lubricant’ figure had built a tailored rapport with each of the partners, and was seen as being able to exert influence as a result. “He knew how to read each relationship within [the partnership], to make it move and tick over smoothly...he took the time to know each individual partnership and relationship, to then work on strategies and bringing that all together” (Shira). This was maintained via

regular, informal, one-to-one contact with partners to ensure that communication was not viewed as instrumental, but an everyday element of relationship building and leadership.

Unfortunately, the partner who had fulfilled this function was the same partner who resigned at the outset of my research. Having lost the 'social lubricant' figure, and without formal partnership guidelines to fall back on, elements of partnership working became more challenging. "I think when you take away that person who goes between different partners...a bit of a social lubricant role. When you take that out, small things become bigger things. If there is something that isn't going so well, it then becomes a bigger issue" (Aray).

#### **4.2 Phase 2 - Disruption And Change**

The resignation of a central partner was indicative of growing fractures within the partnership, as well as a driver of further change. In particular, the decision by the individual's home agency to not refill the post left a vacuum in management and leadership structures. A trusted source of advice, direction and support was now missing for many remaining partners, leaving concerns and questions about KHCC unresolved. This threatened to endanger project delivery as remaining partners "panicked" (Shira) in the face of uncertainty. More fundamentally, it was personally distressing to many front-line workers who had lost a line-manager or symbolic figurehead and no longer felt sure of their role or project progression. The decision to not refill the post was widely criticised and cited as a key point of fracture and stress in the partnership. "That's missing, I think that's a really important part, a really important person that you need to have to organise [the partners]" (Burnock).

Once this pivotal figure and its 'social lubricant' function was lost, rumbling disagreements between partners - present since the outset of the project - came to a head. In particular, there was conflict between the two schools

over funding commitments, complicated by the fact that they were drawing on Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) resources to support KHCC. Schools felt obliged to ensure that PEF funding was spent on their students alone, and not used to feed other children at KHCC. One school withheld funding for a significant period, leading to a sense of injustice and inequality within the partnership. Overall, the use of PEF money to fund KHCC introduced increasing anxiety over the educational outcomes of the project, proof of which are necessary, or perceived to be necessary, for reporting to Scottish Government. The use of PEF money also produced payment in arrears which larger partners were required to support and absorb. Although this was done willingly for a certain period on the basis of solidarity and shared objectives, it was clear that those larger partners were not prepared to operate in the same manner long-term. Without a figure to act as a go-between and negotiate via trusting relationships, external structural constraints began to exert greater pressure on the partnership producing an “icy” (Shira) atmosphere between partners.

While the departure of a key partner undoubtedly produced disruption, it was not just the trigger but also the symptom of more fundamental fractures within the partnership. There were pre-existing disagreements between street-level staff and their managers about the meaning of community engagement and community development. Participants expressed deep-seated anger and frustration that decision-makers in positions of power were ignoring feedback gathered at KHCC. Some felt that vested interests were being maintained, and supposedly antiquated, top-down models of service delivery were continuing unperturbed, rather than the “grassroots, community-led” (Ara) ways of working that staff had been led to expect when joining the initiative. “Nobody was taking any action on what we were learning. Our very purpose was to learn this and feed it into the system - but the system didn’t want to know” (Kilfinan). This problem was not unique to KHCC. Neighbouring partnerships working within the same multi-agency initiative also lost key figures, which was blamed on a shared frustration with community engagement practices at a systems-level.

In addition, while front-line staff had been relatively comfortable with low levels of structure associated with informal solidarity, partners that had stepped up to fill the managerial vacuum were unsettled by levels of risk they perceived as alarming. Surprise was expressed at the lack of formal action planning, and there were increasing concerns that safeguarding procedures were insufficient at KHCC.

*“The project lacked sufficient project management and guidance. So while it is a very successful project based on feedback from the participants, there is a lack of structure and governance that could have ended up with the project failing or some of the basic fundamentals round about health and safety not being addressed, risk et cetera.” (Carrick)*

As a result, the club was briefly suspended. In response to this, a steady increase in formality, structure and governance procedures occurred. Service Level Agreements (SLAs) were introduced to formalise each partner’s commitment and responsibility to the club in terms of finances and staffing. Steering group meetings occurred with greater frequency and were used to discuss new organisational arrangements. “We had to resolve these things and get to a place...where everybody’s a bit clearer on how things operate day-to-day and where responsibility lies for different things. It’s not been easy, but these are the types of things that you need to do when it comes to multi-agency working” (Aray). The informal solidarity that had characterised KHCC for more than three years was now being replaced by formalised partnership structures.

#### **4.3 Phase 3 - Structure And Distrust**

Over the course of several months, a new managerial structure was developed. Killoch Community Centre took on primary ownership of KHCC, shouldering responsibility for procedures associated with risk (insurance, health and safety etc.) and general governance of the club and its steering group. In

return, they also gained greater authority in decision-making about KHCC's future. The original partnership model of informal solidarity based on collectivised risk was replaced by divided and formalised responsibilities, extending beyond a change of leadership. SLAs now prescribe the number of staff that each agency provides, although not the specific individual. This suggests a greater focus on staffing understood in terms of ratios, rather than one of expertise or personal relationships. One health worker is now seen as largely interchangeable with another - a stark contrast with the constellation of individual relationships that characterised informal solidarity in phase one. In addition, it has been proposed that SLAs could dictate the number of community participants allowed to attend KHCC based on pre-determined safeguarding ratios. For example, if five partners are expected to attend but seven become available on the day, only 50 children will be permitted to enter KHCC despite there being sufficient capacity for 70 children to participate and still satisfy adult-child ratios. This has not been fully explored by the steering group but was discussed in individual interviews and seems likely to receive negative reactions from many operational partners. Furthermore, it has been suggested that staff roles at KHCC should become governed by an 'activity rota' to ensure efficient use of partners' expertise. There has been significant resistance to this idea from front-line partners who argued that, for example, while a teacher may appear best placed to help with homework, based on professional observations they may identify improved rapport with a particular parent (built through chopping vegetables or washing dishes) as key to raising a student's engagement. Consequently, partners' have argued for the right to exercise professional discretion in choosing to participate in different activities according to changing priorities.

Broadly however, the adoption of a community centre-led model has been positively received by partners, and even characterised as a progression in terms of community ownership and sustainability. The centre itself has community representatives on the board and has been a stable feature of the local area for more than a decade. It is hoped therefore that the shift within partnership structures will also allow KHCC to become more embedded and



directed by the community. “Now we can start looking at the parents taking that ownership on as well, and giving them more responsibility, knowing they’ve got the support of [Killoch Community Centre]” (Shira).

Nonetheless, the period of disruption and uncertainty appears to have impacted on trusting relationships and staff morale. Three of the eight interviewees have left their posts during the course of the research. Repeatedly in informal conversation, partners have expressed frustration and resentment at the way changes have transpired, as well as hesitancy over the continuation of the project. This appears to be producing a self-perpetuating cycle, whereby suggestions that partners are questioning the future of KHCC allow others to reconsider their own commitment. Many staff are quite simply worn out from navigating the institutional politics of partnership working during a period of significant upheaval and disrupted communication. “I think as well the morale is quite low now. They’re just a bit...pfff...I mean, done in with the whole thing” (Luss). Schools in particular appear to be retreating from the partnership - no longer sending representatives to KHCC and steering group meetings on a regular basis - as funding concerns and personal tensions remained unresolved. This has eroded trust among other partners that schools will remain committed to the club, requiring them to plan for alternative futures. “We don’t know how long the schools are gonnae remain involved in it...I think just now our major concern is looking at the sustainability of the programme - what happens if the schools pull out?” (Carrick).

Furthermore, practical difficulties have brought differences between sectors and professions to the fore, particularly in relation to perceptions of formality and procedure. Some partners remain focused on questions of ‘why’ the project exists and a primary task of community engagement. Others are now more interested in ‘how’ the project runs in service delivery terms. This why-how, engagement-delivery, ideal-practical dichotomy is ripe for conflict. While both elements are important for success, the question of which perspective takes priority is one that reflects individual and institutional ideologies. At moments of clash between these opposing ideals, partners have

mobilised aspects of their own or others' professional identities to explain or categorise reactions. In this way, community workers are understood as fundamentally different from teachers, and teachers different from managers, based on values and knowledge shared within professions but not across them. "You don't get into teaching to be a community worker. It's a whole completely different thing. A completely different set of values" (Burnock). In interviews however, partners from the same background sometimes expressed differing views while appealing to common professional identities. Sectoral labels appeared to be used as a way of understanding and simplifying conflict that was usually more complex and individualised.

Underlying this, wider uncertainty about the availability of funding in the third and public sectors leaves the future of KHCC ambiguous. The partnership initiative of which KHCC is a part is intended to last for 10 years. Despite this, most positions associated with the initiative are funded on a yearly basis or rely on short-term external grants, and KHCC itself does not exist as a distinct entity that can apply for or receive funding. Partners also expressed distrust of the broader political landscape, characterised by the persistence of austerity and precarious third sector funding. "Funding is always gonnae be - it's like we've just accepted that it's always gonnae be like that, but it doesn't have to be - but at the moment funding is something that's quite short term, and it's quite temporary" (Aray). The original belief that 'we'll just keep it going' appears to have been unsettled, and partners have begun to talk in markedly uncertain terms about the future of KHCC after the end of the financial year. Where in the past, a sense of mutual commitment to the cause held agencies together, solidarity no longer appears to be sufficiently powerful to maintain partners' trust and positivity.

*"That's something that we're gonnae have to discuss as a steering group, as the partners that are involved - Where's the funding gonnae come from? Is it something that's just gonnae fizzle out, just gonnae end when the funding comes to an end? We're ok for*

*the next 6 months I think but we're not sure about what happens after then." (Burnock)*

What began as an unusual exercise in informal solidarity has now been thoroughly transformed. External structures related to funding, city-wide community engagement initiatives, risk management and 'good governance' have intersected with this small community partnership to influence its configuration. In the process, common impediments to multi-agency working have been heightened: competing professional perceptions of formality have become increasingly relevant; clearer divisions of responsibility and power have produced both relief and territorialism; and the interruption of communication channels has jeopardised trusting relationships and morale.

That is not to say that all elements of transformation have been negative. Partners have celebrated the opportunity for sustainability and community ownership offered by a community centre-led model. Furthermore, KHCC and its partners have shown significant resilience in the face of disruption and change, and have produced new partnership configurations that appear able to operate within the constraints of institutionalised expectations. However, the case of KHCC raises interesting questions about the limits of localised partnership practices when broader norms and structures are in conflict with non-traditional ways of working. Despite a trend of support for multi-agency working in Scottish public policy design, it appears that systems-level organisational configurations, funding structures and philosophies have obstructed a novel attempt to produce successful multi-agency practice at KHCC.

## 5 DISCUSSION

The question now is, what light can extant theory shed on this story of transformation at KHCC, and what, if anything, does this case study add to our knowledge of multi-agency working? Particularly striking within the transition from informal solidarity to structure and distrust is the changing attitudes towards risk within the partnership, and the strategies used to manage and understand it. Initially, the integrity of the partnership was predicated on a *commitment* from partners - garnered and maintained informally - to collectivize risk in a way that would allow them to navigate the hostile funding environment and ensure sustainability of the project. However over time, partner status came to be seen as something that must be institutionalised, formalised, 'de-risked' through the introduction of SLAs, predicating relationships on contractual *compliance* (Diamond and Vangen, 2017; Tett and Fyfe, 2010). While this might appear the less risky option for managing partnerships on paper, the example of KHCC suggests that by focusing on a negative depiction of risk and responding with increasing structure, positive forms of risk manifested in trusting relationships were severely damaged. This in turn undermined solidarity - previously one of the greatest sources of sustainability within the partnership. For example, what under informal solidarity had been seen as flexibility in the workforce came to be understood as a liability to staff-child ratios and participant safety. Strikingly, one partner was most frightened by possible press coverage of negative incidents, suggesting that health and safety concerns were motivated by the protection of professional reputations in a litigious environment, as much as by a fundamental belief that current practices were unsafe (Diamond and Vangen, 2017; Murphy, 2018; Murphy and Skillen, 2018).

Here, risk has been used as a legitimating tool to justify changes to the nature of the partnership in the supposed interest of participants (Brown, 2014). However, risk is not a natural or intrinsic phenomenon, instead socio-culturally constructed to produce powerful forms of risk knowledge that can be wielded while claiming objective neutrality (Beck, 1992, 2014; Brown,

2013; Habermas, 1976). In particular, the framing of 'institutional' factors such as partners' commitment and loss of reputation as risks in need of management presumes a complete absence of trust, greatly increases the possible failures of the project and thus generates forms of governance that are no longer related to the original social mission (Rothstein, 2006). In this way, the values of particular actors (particularly those higher up the hierarchy who have more to lose from institutional harm) are subtly prioritised above others (Brown, 2014), until the suppression of practices labelled as risky becomes so crucial that any disruption of a culture of informal solidarity - and its possible benefits for service users - is justified collateral damage. Gradually, it becomes difficult to contest new risk narratives, as the boundaries of what is possible and appropriate are narrowed (Wilkinson, 2009) and a recognition that human services by definition will never be perfectible is lost (Eccles, 2012). Brown (2013) has suggested that this can be an alienating experience for professionals, as technical application of risk avoidance mechanisms becomes increasingly central to their role, rather than discretionary judgements mediated by social interaction. This appears to capture some of the disenchantment felt by operational partners at KHCC as relationships and responsibilities have become increasingly formalised and rigid in the name of risk avoidance. It is important to recognise that operational partners have not been without ambivalence towards authoritative risk information (Brown, 2013, 2016), however, their subordinate status to the strategic management figures who advocate risk avoidance agendas has predominantly directed resistance towards resignation and withdrawal (Diamond and Vangen, 2017).

It is here that the conceptual tools of Jürgen Habermas (1976, 1984, 1987, 1996) appear useful for understanding the case of KHCC. Habermas conceives of two distinct spheres within public life: the lifeworld - the everyday site of complex, personal, communicative relationships that shape socialisation, cultural reproduction and child-rearing (Edgar, 2006; Murphy, 2017); and the system world - structures and behaviours configured to simplify, organise and increase the efficiency of functions at a societal level, principally those

concerned with political and economic imperatives (Edgar, 2006; Murphy, 2009). The existence of the system world is viewed as a necessary element of managing hugely complex societal functions and is manifested in processes such as bureaucracy (Habermas, 1987). In the system world, instrumental rationality is used to identify goals before pursuing the most effective means of realizing them, primarily using the apparatus of the state or markets (Edgar, 2006). The lifeworld meanwhile is mediated by communicative rationality, a process of problem solving characterised by complexity that uses open discussion to produce a shared, meaningful understanding of the world (Edgar, 2006; Habermas, 1987). Departing from Weber's (2001) 'iron cage' of bureaucracy and Adorno and Horkheimer's (1973) warnings of a 'totally administered' world, Habermas understands the system world as problematic *only* when it oversteps into the functions of the lifeworld, where it begins to disrupt the communicative fabric using steering media of power and money (Edwards, 2017; Murphy, 2009). He labels this dysfunctional bureaucratization 'colonization' of the lifeworld (Habermas, 1987), whereby communicative rationality is side-lined to produce 'one-sided rationality' (Habermas, 1987; Murphy, 2009). The replacement of communicative interaction - intended to achieve consensus - with instrumental rationality produces pathological consequences for identity and social relationships in the lifeworld (Edwards, 2017; Murphy, 2017). Edwards (2017) adds a useful layer of subtlety to Habermas's work by framing the system and lifeworlds not merely as distinct spheres of activity, but as competing perspectives or 'logics' for analysing society that may occur in any sphere of activity. Thus, examples of colonization point to sites or practices in which the boundaries between the state and everyday life are contested, and as such provide a useful conceptual tool for researchers interested in mediation between the state and citizens (Edwards, 2017; Tett and Fyfe, 2010).

I suggest that the process of change witnessed at KHCC is one of colonization in action. The initial phase of informal solidarity was one characterised by a cultivation of communicative rationality, in which an orientation to mutual understanding came to the fore. Partnership relationships were configured as

a constellation of personalised, individual, reciprocal relationships that required constant negotiation and upkeep by a 'social lubricant' figure. Furthermore, risk was managed on a collectivized basis, such that shocks were shared and absorbed by committed partners on the basis of solidarity rather than compliance. The flexibility inherent in these features was understood as facilitating creativity and adaptability when responding to community and partner needs. However, through a change in partnership configurations, a context originally built on complexity, social interaction and trust has been brought under the influence of rationalised, instrumental risk management processes that fail to fully accommodate the socialisation inherent in community engagement and the communicative requirements of working in partnership (Diamond and Vangen, 2017; Murphy, 2017; Tett and Fyfe, 2010). Discussions of multi-agency working at KHCC now increasingly revolve around budget management, risk avoidance, rational efficiency and ensuring that interactions with the community and between partners are predictable and controllable.

The consequences of this colonization have been an increase in stability from the systems perspective, but a fundamental undermining of the social relationships that made up the lifeworld of partners on the front-line. What results is a transition from informal solidarity to structure and distrust, and an uncertain future for a project that predicated its success on utilising communicative rationality to support dynamic partnership working. While bureaucratic mechanisms emanating from the state hold increasing sway in this localised context, opportunities for the lifeworld interests of community members and operational partners to influence multi-agency practices have been diminished (Baron, 2001; Legacy and March, 2017). This should not be understood as a complete eradication of communicative action as certain professionals continue to persevere against the grain of structural changes via personal and informal conversations observed at KHCC (Woelders and Abma, 2017). Nonetheless, there has been a shift from fostering a *culture* of collaboration to managing the *processes* of partnership (Connelly, 2013; Eccles, 2012), neglecting the contribution of communicative rationality and

leaving space for the retrenchment of professional identities, declining morale and partner retreat at KHCC.

That is not to say that there is no place for the systems perspective in multi-agency contexts such as KHCC - For example, safeguarding procedures are an important element of state agencies' accountability to service users (Gruenewald, 2005; Murphy, 2009) and were a source of communal concern at KHCC. Community education represents an important mediating site at the borders of the state and the lifeworld where both 'logics' have an important role to play (Edwards, 2017). Indeed, the maintenance of a careful balance between system and lifeworld imperatives can be key to ensuring that organised action for the benefit of citizens is possible and effective (Habermas, 1996; Legacy and March, 2017). However in this case, communicative reason has been de-legitimized through particular discourses of risk to produce one-sided rationality (Brown, 2014; Murphy, 2009), implanting a simplified rational planning approach to multi-agency working. Thus, the primary task of KHCC has shifted from reactive community engagement to straightforward service delivery (Diamond and Vangen, 2017). The long term aims of reducing social isolation, empowering communities and building flourishing neighbourhoods have been directly equated with delivering a multi-agency community education project, an assumption that harks back to the flawed rationales for partnership working outlined previously in this paper (Allen, 2003; Forbes and Watson, 2012; Riddell and Tett, 2001). Without communicative mechanisms that allow partnerships to react, evolve and course-correct, projects such as KHCC are more likely to fall into the perennial belief that simply working together is enough. Evidence strongly suggests that it is not (Eccles, 2012; Forbes, 2018; Forbes and Watson, 2012; Riddell and Tett, 2001). Extant research tell us that multi-agency working frequently falters in implementation, provoking a proliferation of transferrable implementation models that claim to hold the rationalized key to unlocking partnership potential (Allen, 2003; Atkinson, Doherty and Kinder, 2005; Boydell and Rugkåsa, 2007; Tett and Fyfe, 2010). Perhaps instead, a recognition and fostering of the fundamentally relational, personal and



*communicative* nature of inter-professional working could help acknowledge the potential for colonization in multi-agency contexts, and prevent the expansion of partnered, but ultimately dysfunctional bureaucracies. Fundamentally however, this requires not just operational partners, but system-level actors to acknowledge, value and assimilate the role of communicative rationality in partnership working (Atkinson, Doherty and Kinder, 2005; Legacy and March, 2017). As the example of KHCC demonstrates, failure to do so can undermine and obstruct approaches to multi-agency working that offer new avenues for success.

A recognition of multi-agency partnerships as sites of colonization also suggests an adaptation of Habermas's theoretical base may be of value. The example of KHCC demonstrates that the liminal spaces and activities occupying the boundary between the system and lifeworlds are not unpopulated zones devoid of action and agency. Managerial figures at KHCC have acted as system brokers, promulgating the instrumental wisdom of public and private sector bureaucracies (Murphy, 2009). Equally, front-line partners have demonstrated resistance and 'absorption' of colonizing tendencies through resignation, withdrawal, resentment and superficial subscription to new ways of working (Broadbent and Laughlin, 1998). I suggest that Murphy's (2018) hybridization of the works of Lipsky and Habermas offers a fuller theoretical picture. Acting as street-level bureaucrats (Lipsky, 1980), the professionals involved in partnership working are active agents in negotiating the seam between the system and lifeworlds. These individuals subscribe to (sometimes competing) 'logics' shaped by their own personal positions and trajectories (Edwards, 2017), which are mobilised as they act to 'make' policy at the street level (Lipsky, 1980). Habermas's (1987) theory of colonization does not fully account for the role of professionals in negotiating the borderlands of the state, who play a crucial role in the transformation of policy discourse into policy practice. The addition of Lipsky's (1980) conception of street-level bureaucrats brings both greater nuance (Murphy, 2018) and gives (literal) body to instrumental and communicative reason as enacted by a constellation of street-level bureaucrats who individually and

collectively interpret and implement system-level directives to work collaboratively. This hybridization of theory offers sharper tools for understanding the realities of multi-agency working, which can be useful when considering how drives towards effective partnership can be better supported at system and street-levels.

Furthermore, the case of KHCC suggests that greater attention to assessments of risk could contribute to a refined application of colonization theory. Ulrich Beck (1992) has argued that risk - understood as the anticipation and calculated moderation of uncertainty - is being mobilised and institutionalised to create new social formations (Brown 2013). At KHCC, the transformation and instrumentalisation of risk discourses in support of system imperatives was fundamental to the development of colonizing tendencies. By constructing and anticipating specific forms of organisational catastrophe (disintegration of the partnership, loss of reputation, financial uncertainty), the compulsion to react in an instrumental fashion became justified (Beck, 2014). In contrast, the initial collectivization of risk that characterized informal solidarity depicted risk in a less disastrous light as something be creatively and flexibly responded to from a foundation of positive partnership relationships built on commitment and trust. Attention to the role of risk in this case cannot be separated from an analysis of lifeworld colonization; indeed the two are deeply intertwined. Stronger analysis of how risk discourses are socio-culturally produced, employed and acted upon in modern public service contexts (Beck, 1992, 2014; Brown, 2013, 2014) could be used to disrupt the neutral framing of system imperatives and reveal colonization dynamics hitherto underexplored.

## 6 CONCLUDING REMARKS

The case of KHCC has provided rich evidence for understanding the day-to-day realities of multi-agency working. Through the observation and documentation of organisational transformation, one case has epitomised multiple forms of partnership working, moving through contrasting phases to reveal the strengths and weaknesses of different models. The cultivation of communicative rationality through collectivized risk, a 'social lubricant' figure and informal solidarity produced strong and trusting collaboration for three years. Later changes in partnership configurations were both the symptom and the catalyst of increasing colonizing tendencies within the partnership. In the phase of structure and distrust, professionals within the partnership have acted to promulgate and resist the suppression of communicative reason by hegemonic risk narratives emanating from instrumental public sector bureaucracies. The divisions sown by colonization have positioned individual professionals as competing advocates of system and lifeworld logics. In coming to terms with this, individuals have mobilised professional identities to explain differing visions and advocate for their distinct perspectives, placing pressure on the foundations of multi-agency collaboration. Ultimately, trusting relationships and social interactions within the partnership have been damaged by the move to managing processes of partnership over fostering a culture of collaboration. This has troubling consequences not just for beleaguered partners, but also community members who face the disintegration of yet another intervention. This will only make future efforts at multi-agency community education more difficult, as greater and longer-term resources will be required to counteract community distrust fostered by past betrayals. Unfortunately, resources of this kind appear unlikely to materialise in community education given a continuing context of austerity and short-termism (Ball, 2014; Diamond and Vangen, 2017).

Where this research makes an original contribution is in recognising that partnership working possesses a lifeworld of its own. Multi-agency contexts

constantly negotiate the boundary between state and citizens, and thus provide ripe territory for the battle of logics that can result in colonization (Edwards, 2017). Where previously the literature has focused on how multi-agency partnerships become a conduit for state power as exercised over service users (e.g. Allen, 2003; Baron, 2001), the example of KHCC demonstrates that colonization can also be a significant, distressing and power-laced experience for the professionals that inhabit the borderlands of the state and must act in the capacity of street-level bureaucrats to both enact and resist colonization (Murphy, 2018). In this way, the work of Habermas has helped shed light on changes taking place at KHCC. At the same time, this research reinforces the need for a refinement of Habermas's work in order to better recognise the agency of professionals (Murphy, 2018) and the role of risk assessments (Beck, 1992, 2014) in multi-agency sites of colonization.

At the beginning of this paper, I suggested that my research was intended to apply social theory in order to better understand real-life contexts, and offer reciprocal insights for honing conceptual tools. Crucially however, it was always my intention that this research be useful to partners at KHCC itself. Research participants have been generous with their time, expertise and interpretations of the topic under study, and continue to work hard to make KHCC a success for the benefit of community members. It is far easier to sit outside of a project and extol theoretical lamentations of what has been lost, than it is to suggest ways forward that acknowledge complexity and compromise (Antonacopoulou, 2010). Therefore, I feel it is important to offer my own recommendations based on the data collected as to how multi-agency working might be best supported at KHCC in the future.

Firstly, a recalibration of communicative and instrumental rationalities is necessary such that the processes of multi-agency working are safely and efficiently managed, while ensuring that a culture of collaboration is not undermined. The shift to a community centre-led model appears to be universally supported by partners, making use of Killoch Community Centre

staff's expertise and providing a sustainable base for the continuation of the project. However, the establishment of a clearer managerial lead should not be overextended to the point where other partners lose their voice in the direction of the project, and all communication becomes mediated via a hierarchy with Killoch Community Centre at the top. This is suggested as much in the interests of the community centre as any other partner, who should seek to benefit from a collectivization of risk rather than overburdening themselves with the task of navigating funding, accountability and commissioning contexts which do not always work in the favour of small community organisations (Ball, 2014; Diamond and Vangen, 2017; Milbourne, Macrae and Maguire, 2003; Riddell and Tett, 2001).

As part of this, I strongly recommend reinstating the 'social lubricant' role left absent by a partner's departure in 2017, making clear in the post description that the candidate would be required to cultivate, manage and negotiate partner relationships for the benefit of KHCC, rather than any one agency. As SLAs have already been established and drafted, there seems little point in removing them, especially as they have provided clarity of responsibility where there has been confusion at times in the past. Nonetheless, SLAs should be used as guiding documents, not shackles on the potential of KHCC. For example, I would question the wisdom of limiting community attendance on the basis of pre-recorded staffing commitments, instead allowing partners to use their professional judgement as to whether adult-child ratios are appropriate based on the number of adults present at a given time. Creating uncertainty as to whether children will be allowed to attend KHCC is likely to have seriously damaging consequences for community relations and therefore the long terms aims of KHCC. Similarly, partners should be trusted to exercise discretion over what role they perform at KHCC week to week, recognising that 'efficient' distribution of staff across tasks neglects the communicative and changeable nature of the work at hand.

Finally, while a desire to control and plan for the future of the project in the next financial year is understandable, an excessively instrumental response is

producing a counterproductive effect. Disproportionate focus on the 'how' rather than the 'why' of the project is eroding partner commitment, which is a fundamental source of future stability. Partners, and particularly schools, will not continue to commit funds and resources if they do not believe in the practices and outcomes at KHCC. Instead, careful efforts are needed to ensure that partnered decision-making is able to be creative, flexible and centred on community needs as well as instrumental and efficient. Inherent in achieving this is accepting that there are elements of community work that are not controllable or predictable (Eccles, 2012), and that 'risk' need not only be understood as dangerous, but also as liberating and creative, capable of producing unexpected innovations and successes (Beck, 2014; Diamond and Vangen, 2017).

In this research, I have attempted to straddle both practical and theoretical realms in order to contribute to a body of 'practice-relevant scholarship' (Antonacopoulou, 2010). Research that focuses solely on the technocratic details of one context makes little contribution to the pursuit of generalizable and strategic knowledge. Equally, work which does not engage directly with its real-life subject matter risks losing all impact outside of academic debate. The detailed, rich data gathered from one case study can be useful for honing conceptual tools (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Maxwell, 1992), and this study of KHCC provides a valuable example of "illuminat[ing] the general by looking at the particular" (Denscombe, 2003: 30). Most importantly, this research advocates for the value, and indeed necessity, of communicative rationality in partnership working. It would appear that the application of Habermasian theory to multi-agency contexts warrants greater investigation, particularly in order to further explore the value of hybridization (Murphy, 2017) if we are to build social theory that can be put to work for the benefit of society.

## 7 APPENDICES

### 7.1 Appendix I - Interview Themes

#### *Your role and home agency*

1. How and why did you become involved with KHCC? Talk me through the formation of KHCC.
2. How would you describe your role at KHCC? What do you consider yourself responsible for at KHCC?
3. Which agency do you work for?
4. How did they become involved/why do they work with KHCC and the local community?
5. What are you/your agency hoping to achieve through KHCC?
6. Do you think this is successful? Why?

#### *Multi-agency working: in practice*

7. Do you work a lot with other agencies at KHCC? In what way/what kinds of activities?
8. What other members of staff do you have most contact with at KHCC? Why?
9. Do you ever meet other partners outside of KHCC running times? Which partners? Why?
10. Which other agencies/individuals do you most depend on to do your job?

#### *Experiences of multi-agency working at KHCC*

11. Is there anything you think has been achieved at KHCC that wouldn't have been possible without multi-agency working?
12. What challenges have you experienced working with other partners at KHCC?
13. How might these be overcome/reduced?
14. Is there any aspect of multi-agency working at KHCC that you feel is an example to other projects?

15. Which agencies do you think are especially key to making KHCC work?  
Are there any missing that should be involved?

*Multi-agency working more widely*

16. How do your experiences of multi-agency working at KHCC compare to your other (professional) experiences?
17. In your experience, what helps make multi-agency working sustainable?

**7.2 Appendix II - Participant Observation Field Note Prompts**

Extended field notes:

*Description in regular font and analysis/personal reactions italicised*

Focusing on key questions:

1. What activities and events are taking place?
2. How often and in what form do different partners interact with each other?
3. What is the substance of the interactions?
4. How do partners discuss/describe their experience of running the event?
5. Do partners reference wider organisational dynamics throughout the event? In what ways?
6. What insider language is used/shared/not shared?



### 7.3 Appendix III - Non-Participant Observation Template

#### Non-Participant Observation

Date:  
Time:  
Location:

Partners present (+ employing organisation):

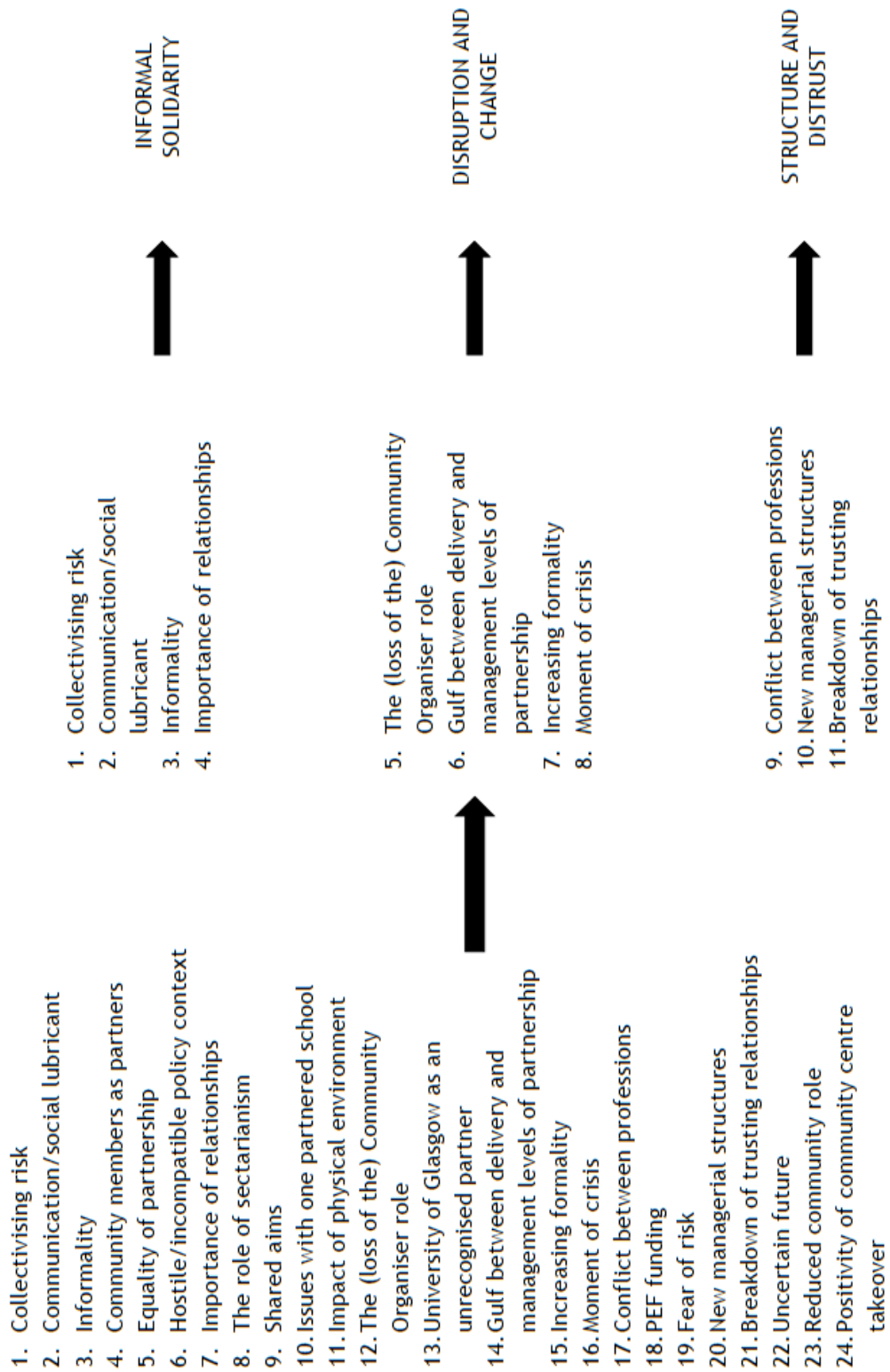
1. ....
2. ....
3. ....
4. ....
5. ....
6. ....
7. ....
8. ....

For each interaction between different partners, mark that box with the duration of the interaction e.g. if Partners 3 and 5 interact for 3 minutes mark '3' in the relevant box (see below). Separate interactions are to be distinguished as separate figures (see below).

	Partner 1						
Partner 2		Partner 2					
Partner 3			Partner 3				
Partner 4				Partner 4			
Partner 5			3, 2		Partner 5		
Partner 6						Partner 6	
Partner 7							Partner 7
Partner 8							

## 7.4 Appendix IV - Data Analysis: Categories And Themes

### Data Analysis: Categories And Themes



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