

CHAPTER 4

THE FUTURE STATUS OF YOUTH WORK

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter provided a glimpse of the past and present status of Youth work in South Africa. As outlined at the end of Chapter 1, this chapter has a futurist outlook and is forward looking, because it looks closely at the policy options which might determine the future of Youth work. It is intended to analyse different policy scenarios or options regarding the future status of Youth work. They entail, maintaining the current status quo and leaving Youth work as an occupation; or having Youth work recognised as an area of specialisation for Social work and/or Child and youth care work; or having Youth work as an autonomous professional field of practice. On this basis, the researcher reviews the literature to understand how things ought to be handled going forward, if the identified challenges impacting on emergence of Youth work are to be overcome.

Taking the background that led to evolution of Youth work and youth development into cognisance, it is clear that the field of Youth work is evolving with more attention being paid to professional development of those working with the youth (Borden, Craig & Villaruel, 2004:77). It is in that context that the researcher had identified the other alternative policy options, so that they can be analysed together with professionalisation in order to guide policy direction. In undertaking this analysis, even prior to scientific findings, it will be crucial that the researcher analyses the pros and cons of following each course of action as a means to inform the decision that would be taken in the end.

4.2 YOUTH WORK AS AN OCCUPATION

In Chapter 1, the researcher concluded that an occupation refers to employment/ job/ work not registered by any statutory regulating body and for which a person is earning a living. This description fits the current status of Youth work in South Africa as described in Chapter 3. By discussing the history of Youth work, the researcher alluded to its origin, how it emerged and its present status as an occupation.

From that description, it is clear that when Youth work evolved it was out of concern to respond to challenges facing young people. However, as problems of young people become many and varied, the pursuit of the youth development agenda, particularly derived from the prominent role played by the youth in politics of the day, led to a further attempt by service providers to attend to young people's political, social, economic and cultural needs (National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2002:10; National Research and Technology Project, 1999:13). They achieved that by including young people in planning and developmental processes, thus making youth development a focus of their organisations and government by introducing interventions in the form of legislation, institutional structures, policies, strategies, programmes, and projects dedicated to empowering and developing youth (The Presidency, 2009a:71; Youth Development Network, 2008:9).

Youth work then became a job performed by many in youth-focused work places. This was a result of what Gilbert and Specht (1981:226) identified as an influence of emergence of the occupation as a private and voluntary enterprise in the philanthropic movements. It is therefore not surprising that this Youth work emerged from this background. This was essential as youth were considered a critical vulnerable grouping, yet, if developed could become an investment and resource to the nation (Jefferies & Smith, 1990:94; National Research and Technology Project, 1999:13; Verna & Saraswathi in Maunders, 2006:13).

Even though Youth work is an occupation presently, the study conducted by Makofane mentions that there are national efforts to facilitate that this field be recognised as a profession (Department of Social Development, 2007:57). This would result in Youth work becoming either an area of specialisation within other identified profession/s and/or an autonomous profession. However, if Youth work is classified as an occupation, it would mean that it will remain as is and there will currently be no efforts made to have it specialised and/or professionalised.

In the section that follows, the researcher discusses thus the second possible option regarding the future status of Youth work in South Africa, namely, Youth work as an area of specialisation.

4.3 YOUTH WORK AS AN AREA OF SPECIALISATION

Reference to the definition of specialisation in Chapter 1, section 1.12.11, highlights specialisation as recognition of line of work within an existing profession. In this context, it would mean having youth development recognised as speciality or a special branch of focus within an identified existing profession. The implication would be that those already qualified as professionals will have an opportunity to concentrate on youth development as a special branch of their work and be recognised as experts in this area (*Oxford English Minidictionary*, 1999:496; *Random House Webster College Dictionary*, 1992:1284). This would imply that the professionals for whom youth development is a speciality would be charged with the responsibility of acquiring relevant and specialised knowledge and skills to enable them to perform functions that target youth (Department of Social Development, 2007:28).

In the South African context, Youth work is being practiced by other professionals such as Social workers, Teachers, Nurses, Psychologists and ordinary youth who are passionate about this field (Department of Social Development, 2007:56). Although having Youth work as a specialisation may apply to all these various professions, this study only looks at the possibility of specialisation in the field of Social work and/or Child and youth care work.

In ascertaining the feasibility of Youth work as an area of specialisation for the purpose of this study, the researcher checked the curricula of Social work and Child and youth care work offered by various South African universities. It showed that Youth work is currently not an area of specialisation for any of these professions. The recent debate on areas of specialisation within Social work profession did not identify Youth work as an area of specialisation (Smith, 2010). Given all these, it is essential that this study explores specialisation as one of the policy options regarding the future status of Youth work.

In the following section, the researcher looks at the option of having Youth work as a profession including analysing the extent to which the criteria for professionalisation is being met.

4.4 YOUTH WORK AS A PROFESSION

In Chapter 1, the researcher defined a profession as an occupation or a field of practice that requires advanced learning, involves complex mental application of scientific knowledge, skills, techniques, competencies, values and principles of that specific field and is recognised by a regulatory body as such.

In general, it is worth noting that the debate on professionalising Youth work is heavily influenced by the traditional cultural setting that regard young people as minors who are depended on adults. This notion implies that, by virtue of serving young people, Youth workers might also be perceived and treated like minors who have to be monitored and supervised, thus being denied the professional status. In borrowing from Stewart (in Gibelman, 1995:11), this is similar to the notion of Social workers being associated with the “*unwanted population*” they are serving.

The process of professionalising Youth work is further influenced by an ever increasing number of young people as clients or consumers who want services and also by an understanding of the value of professionally developing the service providers involved (Borden, Craig & Villaruel, 2004:7). Even though the researcher is analysing the option of professionalising Youth work, readers should be aware that Sercombe (2010:7) argues that Youth work is a profession, regardless of whether it is recognised or not. However, the researcher is of the view that the opinions of other professionals and the public, in the quest for professionalisation, are important and ought to be known and understood.

In South Africa, professionalisation is being supported by the National Qualification Framework (NQF) Act No. 67 of 2008 and SAQA Act No. 58 of 1995 (National Qualification Framework Act No. 67 of 2008; Richards, 2011:15; South African Qualification Authority Act No. 58 of 1995). These legislations promote provision of professional services by the body of practitioners in order to hold them morally accountable for their performance and behaviour. At international level, professionalisation of Youth work is given prominence by the Commonwealth through its popular youth focused intervention – the CYP (Charles, 2006:44; Maunders, 2006:21, 25). The CYP programme mandates all member countries to establish Youth work education and training programmes and further encourages that Youth

work practice be recognised as a profession (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2001a:18; Maunders, 2006:23). Internationally, regionally, and nationally, there are notable strides made in this regard, because the CYP has developed a Diploma in Youth Development Work that is available in more than forty (40) Commonwealth countries, via its regional centres, namely: Africa; Asia; the Caribbean; and the South Pacific.

Table 3.1 in the previous chapter showed the Commonwealth countries and institutions in the African region offering Commonwealth Diploma in Youth work. Of relevance is that, South Africa is one of the first countries in the African region to offer Youth work qualification. In addition to this, there are Commonwealth member states in other regions such as Europe, USA and Australia which have recognised Youth work as a profession (Beker, 2001b:364; Maunders, 2003:9; Sercombe, 2004:70).

Like South Africa, even though some of these countries have initiated the professionalisation process, most of them are still struggling to get Youth work recognised as a profession. However, it is important to note that the struggle for professionalisation is not a new phenomenon, because other comparable professions such as Social work also faced similar struggles and threats in their journey towards a profession, but survived (Coulshed & Orme, 2006:1). A significant and relevant question to this study is whether professionalisation is the correct route being pursued. If it is found to be, there would be a need to fast track the complex process of professionalisation (Coulshed & Orme, 2006:1; Maunders, 2003:26).

Having the above in mind, this study notes that recognising Youth work as a profession implies that it can be an autonomous or independent professional field of practice. In the next sections, the researcher assesses the extent to which Youth work is ready to become a profession and the manner in which challenges that hinder achievement of this goal are being addressed.

4.4.1 Background of professionalising Youth work in South Africa

According to Community and Youth Workers Union (2008) and South African Youth Workers Association (2001), the process of lobbying for professionalisation of Youth work in South Africa started in the late 1980s. This work ultimately led to

establishment of an association for Youth workers in 1994, the Youth Practitioners Advocacy Group (YPAG). In its lobbying efforts, the YPAG consulted the youth sector widely as a key stakeholder in this process. This led to a Youth workers' conference which was held in 1996. The conference produced a document called the *Hunter Rest Declaration* (henceforth referred to as Declaration) which made provision for clear Youth work objectives, career paths, education framework, outcomes for Youth work, and a professional code of ethics. The Declaration was submitted to the national Department of Welfare, now known as the national Department of Social Development (Thabethe, 2008).

In 1998 the YPAG became known as South African Youth Workers Association (SAYWA) with its own constitution, code of ethics, and standards. This association became the collective voice for Youth workers and was involved in facilitating the professionalisation process (Community and Youth Workers Union, 2008; South African Youth Workers Association, 2001; Thabethe, 2008).

The following milestones regarding professional recognition of Youth work were reported (Pruis, 2006; South African Youth Workers Association, 2001; Smith, 2006):

- in 1996, YPAG developed the first draft Youth work policy which was presented to the Inter-Ministerial Committee on youth at risk.
- this was followed by a Youth work practitioners' conference held in 1996.
- the consultations between SACSSP and SAYWA regarding recognition of Youth work then started in August 2001 with a view to establish a professional board for Youth workers;
- in November 2001, an application for the establishment of a professional board was received on behalf of two organisations, SAYWA and the PRODYWOC. The spokesperson was Rev. Dan Thabethe, the then Director of SAYWA;
- the second draft Youth work policy was developed by SAYWA with the support from the Royal Netherlands Embassy and the Commonwealth Youth Programme.
- the application for professional recognition was then considered during a meeting of the SACSSP held on 27 and 28 March 2002, where collaboration

and the possibility of combining Youth workers with Child and youth care workers in one professional board was raised and debated;

- the matter was then referred back to SAYWA, PRODYWOC and the National Association of Child Care Workers (NACCW), suggesting that the two associations should either merge or collaborate;
- it was suggested that members of these associations should discuss the possibilities of merging or collaborating amongst themselves and that they should weigh the pros and cons thereof;
- in July 2003, communication was received from SAYWA and it was agreed at an Annual General Meeting of 2002, that there should be discussions between SAYWA and NACCW on possible combination of Youth workers with Child and youth care workers under one professional board;
- due to lack of progress on the proposed discussion, the NACCW as the applicant for the Child and youth care profession then approached the SACSSP to request processing of their application, thus resulting in establishment of a Professional Board for Child and youth care workers and its formal inauguration in April 2004;
- the Youth workers continued to attend to professionalisation of Youth work field by having workshops and consultative meetings. In that regard, SAYWA, PRODYWOC, national Department of Social Development, NYC, UYF as well as SAYC continued playing the advocacy role;
- in 2006, the National Department of Social Development commissioned a research on “demarcation of social services”. The findings revealed that Youth work should be considered as a profession;
- in 2007 and 2009, the national Department of Social Development hosted the Youth Work Policy Conference that confirmed the need to have Youth work professionalised and led to subsequent development of the third draft Youth work policy;
- in 2010, the national Department of Social Development transferred the function of facilitating the professionalisation process to the NYDA. That decision was taken in view of NYDA’s role as the primary custodian for youth development in the country;
- in 2010, the national Department of Social Development and SACSSP consulted the youth sector regarding developing a policy for employers of

- Youth workers as input into the draft social service professions policy; and
- in 2011, the NYDA held a National Youth Convention and one of the commissions was on Youth work. At that convention, the participants, most of whom were Youth workers, were in consensus about Youth work being recognised as a profession.

From the above, it can be deduced that the professionalisation process is driven from any direction (Sercombe, 2004:71). In South Africa, it is driven by Youth workers and Social workers. Even though this function has been moved to the NYDA, social service professionals continue to play an important role as key stakeholders because they still render youth development services and are currently involved in reviewing the Social Service Professions Act (Mmutle, 2011).

One of the reasons which appear to be the cause for delay in having this process concluded is the inability to meet the set criteria for professionalisation, as the researcher will discuss in the next section. Furthermore, in order to gain recognition as a profession the SACSSP has the following clear procedures which has to be followed (Pruis, 2006; Smith, 2006):

- a) a written application should be forwarded to the SACSSP by an applicant (individual, group or organisation applying);
- b) an application form is issued for completion and then submitted to the SACSSP with supporting documents;
- c) the SACSSP's committee on Education and Training to consider the application and make recommendation to the Council regarding establishment of a profession;
- d) on approval of establishment of the profession, the Council will draft Regulations in terms of section 28 (1) (g) (b) (c) and (d) of the Social Service Professions Act, Act No 110 of 1978, relating to the requirements to be complied by an applicant for the establishment of a professional board for the specific occupation which has been approved to be professionalised;
- e) the draft Regulations will then be consulted with all stakeholders before being submitted to the national Department of Social Development for approval by the Minister of Social Development and publication in the Government Gazette; and

- f) on publication of the said Regulations, a register will be opened and an occupation will be registered as a profession.

Of importance is the fact that the procedure of the SACSSP outlined above is consistent with what various authors considered as essential criteria or characteristics of a profession (De Vos, Schulze & Patel, 2011:25-26; Hahn & Raley, 1998:393; Sercombe, 2004:64; Social Services Professions Act, No. 110 of 1978). Therefore, in order to check progress towards professionalising Youth work in South Africa, it is important that an assessment is conducted on where South Africa is in relation to meeting the identified procedure and criteria or characteristics.

However, it is important to note that in assessing progress towards professionalising Youth work in South Africa, there is an assumption that professionalisation is an evolving process consisting of stages. The aim is then to look at the internal and external factors which facilitate or impede the professionalisation process (Greenwood as cited in Gilbert & Specht, 1981:257). On that basis, in the next section, the researcher assesses the extent to which Youth work is ready to become a profession. This is done by analysing progress that has been made to meet the set criteria and identifying tasks that still need to be performed.

4.4.2 Progress in meeting the criteria of a profession

Based on the views of different authors (De Vos, Schulze & Patel, 2005:25; Greenwood, 1957 in Sercombe, 2010:8; Hahn & Raley, 1998:393; Kelly, 1990:167; Social Services Professions Act, No. 110 of 1997), the following identified professionalisation criteria are discussed in detail with specific reference to progress made by Youth work in South Africa towards meeting each criterion:

- Name of the profession;
- Estimate number of practitioners in the field;
- Functions of the profession;
- Role specification in comparison with other related professions;
- Body of knowledge;
- Formal education and training (admission requirements, educational standards with clear curriculum);

- Public service and acceptance of authority;
 - Professional autonomy and self-regulation;
 - Professional identity;
 - A code of ethics;
 - Research activity,
 - Professional association;
 - Long term commitment to the field;
 - Employment organisations;
 - International recognition of the profession; and
 - The financial status as well as management systems.
- (i) **Name of the profession:** Those who work with youth are at times referred to as Youth development workers or Youth development practitioners/ Youth workers/ Child and youth care work practitioners/ Outreach worker/ Prevention specialist/ Youth leaders (Association for Child and Youth Care Practice & Child and Youth Care Certification Board, 2010:1; Garfat, 2003:3; Borden, Craig & Villaruel, 2004:80). This is also the case in South Africa, because there is still no consensus on uniform utilisation of the occupational title.
- (ii) **Estimate number of practitioners in the field:** In South Africa, there is no appropriate job market and a national register for Youth workers. Some of these workers, although qualified, use different titles depending on their employment settings. For example, the Youth workers employed in Child and youth care settings such as Places of Safety identify themselves as Child and youth care workers. Therefore, it is difficult to estimate the number of practitioners in the Youth work field due the fluidity of Youth workers.
- (iii) **Functions of the profession:** The following can be considered functions of Youth work (SAYWA, 2001:11; The Presidency, 2009b:31):
- ✓ conducting developmental assessments of young people;
 - ✓ engaging in developmental and therapeutic work with youth;
 - ✓ promoting youth development through organising and implementing individual and group activities;

- ✓ assisting young people to realise desired developmental objectives and outcomes;
- ✓ facilitating young people's access to developmental resources;
- ✓ developing and implementing policies, principles and philosophies;
- ✓ tackling systemic challenges that may hinder development of youth; and
- ✓ enhancing young people's contribution to nation building.

(iv) **Role specification in comparison with other related professions/practices:** For the purpose of this study, it is important to compare the roles of Youth workers with that of other related social service professions. In Table 4.1, the researcher adapted information on comparison among helping professions as described by Bloom (1990:94), and compared the roles of various social service providers with regard to youth service provision:

Table 4.1: Summary of role comparison among social service providers

PROFESSION OR FIELD OF PRACTICE	CLIENT SERVED	MAJOR EMPHASIS OR GOAL	WORKER'S ROLES
Social worker	All individuals (children, youth, adults, and elderly persons) groups and communities	Promoting social change, problem solving in human relationships, and enhancing social functioning	Problem solver, Counsellor, Therapist, Caseworker, Advisor, Enabler, Teacher, Mediator, Negotiator, Broker, Advocate, Researcher, Administrator and Planner
Child and youth care worker	Children and youth in difficulty or at risk	Providing assistance, care and treatment for children and young people	Counsellor, Care giver, Problem solver, Therapist, Advocate, Enabler, Homemaker, Administrator, Planner and Researcher
Community development worker	Communities, neighbourhoods, and groups including young people	Enhancing the capacities of communities to respond to their needs by improving their capacity for development	Facilitator, Catalyst, Enabler, Teacher, Guide, Broker, Advocate, and Researcher
Youth worker	Youth	Promoting the total or overall development of all young people, troubled or not, to enable them to handle current and future challenges in different spheres of their lives	Teacher, Enabler, Advocate, Guide, Planner, Problem solver, Mediator, Negotiator, and Coordinator

Source: adapted from Table 5.1 in Bloom (1990:94) on comparison among helping professions

It can be deduced from Table 4.1 that the functions performed by Youth workers overlap with those performed by other helping social service providers. This could be attributed to the fact that Youth workers do not have monopoly over young people as the target group since there are other identified social service providers who also service young people. However, despite the overlapping roles, each discipline has a clear emphasis in terms of service delivery, thus making different social service providers to play slightly different roles. For instance, although young people are the target clients of all social service professionals, they can only be regarded as the primary clients in respect of Youth workers (Sercombe, 2010:26, 88). Furthermore, Stewart (1984) as cited in Gibelman (1995:xxi), highlighted that the “*claim is not on monopoly of functions, but to uniqueness and distinctiveness about human problems and their solutions and in particular value and practice orientation*”. Of importance is that this “*uniqueness and distinctiveness about human problems*” underpins the nature of interventions in respect of service providers.

It is in this context that social service providers have to work as a team and coordinate their services in an effort to provide a comprehensive integrated service to youth (Department of Social Development, 2005:16). “*Designation of roles within the team needs attention if a team approach is an objective*” (Botha, 1995:212). Unpacking these roles and functions will pave way for determination of job descriptions, capacities as well as skills and training requirements for Youth workers and other social service practitioners. This include service planning and goal orientation by different service providers who uses interlinked and diverse professional skills to provide more effective and supportive services for users (Lumsden & Lumsden, 2000:9).

Extensive review of literature revealed the tremendous popularity enjoyed by teamwork. It creates an atmosphere in which service providers divides labour, cooperate, e.g., sharing and rationalising resources as well as putting together different abilities needed to accomplish tasks and deliver effective services, exchange ideas and experiences, and consistently recommend change (Botha, 1995:214; Skidmore & Thackeray, 1994:114). This leads to a more satisfying work environment that increases the morale and job satisfaction for

service providers, changes attitudes, reduces conflict, forges problem solving, increases performance, and consequently leads to quality services (Krueger, 1990:74; Lumsden & Lumsden, 2000:9, 13).

- (v) **Body of knowledge:** Various authors (Corney, 2004:7; Coulshed & Orme, 2006:1; De Vos & Delport, 2005:46; Hahn & Raley, 1998:393; Houle, 1980 as cited in Department of Social Development, 2007:8; Richards, 2011:16) acknowledge the ability to develop knowledge base and skills as well as mastery of several relevant bodies of theory as critical elements and foundation of all professions. According to these authors, this body of knowledge should be unique, specialised, organised and have theoretical underpinnings, minimum competencies as well as practical objectives, and eventually form a model of practice. Barker (2003:341) further confirms that availability of knowledge enhances the public credibility and should be used as a basis for provision of services to clients. It further underpins the use of skills, methods, and interventions (Coulshed & Orme, 2006:9).

In analysing the curricula of Youth work practice, it is therefore critical to note that some of the courses are based on specialised knowledge, whereas some have drawn ideas, strategies and practices from an array of relevant disciplines. Those disciplines include, but are not limited to: Child and youth care, Social work, Community work, Teaching, Psychology and Health (Benson & Pittman, 2001:10; Lyon & Canning, 1990:194; Spence, 2004:266). It is evident that integration of knowledge brings with it variety of perspectives and will consequently guide Youth workers on how to provide services. It is, therefore, critical that a unique body of knowledge is created in the Youth work field to guide intervention of practitioners and ensure that it is not lost in other paradigms and priorities (Baksh, 2004:31-32; Borden, Craig & Villaruel, 2004:79; Gilbert & Specht, 1981:293).

The challenge for the Youth work is that, there is currently a mismatch that exists between knowledge base and practice (Deschenes, MacDonald & McLaughlin as cited in Hamilton & Hamilton, 2004:27). This is to a larger extent as a result of lack of employment setting for these personnel as there is no

linkage between theory and field practice. This should be prioritised, because as aspiring professionals, Youth workers are expected to act from a particular knowledge and value stance (Ryan & Hawkins, 2000 as cited in Krauss & Saundi; 2008:4).

Another challenge is that, although research is being conducted on youth issues, it is limited, particularly in South Africa as compared to places such as the USA and Sweden where Youth work is well developed (Benson & Pittman, 2001:116; Mufune, 1999:366). The implication of this statement is that, even though the body of knowledge is somewhat developed, there is a need for more knowledge contribution. This orientation can best be acquired through formal education in academic setting (Gilbert & Specht, 1981:243).

The fact that some of South African institutions of higher learning as well as training centres are offering Youth work training as a means of creating capacity for those already in the field and for production of newly qualified Youth workers is a positive step in the creation of a theoretical body of knowledge (Mkandawire, 1999:3). Furthermore, the registration of an accredited Youth work qualification by SAQA further strengthens this point (South African Qualification Authority, 2009a; South African Qualification Authority, 2009b). This then implies that, there is availability of knowledge base to some extent and the fact that field practical forms part of Youth work training, will also close the gap between theory and practice. There is, however, a need to have the knowledge base increased and synergised. In comparing youth development and gender movement, Baksh (2004:32) asserts that the challenge for the youth development field is to go beyond leaflets, brochures and how-to guides, but to begin interrogating theories, analysing texts from a youth development perspective and then coming up with scientific research and evidence based practice.

- (vi) **Formal education and training:** The first step towards addressing the growth needs of clients is for Youth workers to address their own growth and education needs in order to perform highly skilled tasks (National Research and Technology Project, 1999:16; Richards, 2011:16; Wilkins, 1997:2).

According to Richards (2011:16) and The Presidency (2009b:31), entry into the profession is controlled through selecting admission requirements to education and training programmes, designing curricula, and setting graduation standards.

It is clear from the above that provision of skills, knowledge, values, attitudes and competencies are a key to Youth work being a profession (Krauss & Suandi, 2008:6; Maunders, 2003:18; Richards, 2011:16). This therefore implies that Youth workers ought to have been trained in mentoring, group facilitation, community development, youth development principles, understanding the systems of youth development broadly, financing, acquiring resources and marketing. They should be educated in relevant Youth work training and be driven by Youth work values (Broadbent & Corney, 2008:18).

In this sense, as a prerequisite for entering professional practice, there is a need to what constitute Youth work qualification or credentials and then obtaining relevant formal education and training with theoretical and practical components (Gibelman, 1995:xxiv; Maunders, 2003:18). At the end of that training and education, the practitioner must demonstrate that they have acquired high levels of knowledge, skills, and self-development, and that they are well prepared for their professional role by acting from a particular knowledge and value stance through the medium of their job, and being recognised as having expertise which legitimises their actions (Borden, Craig & Villaruel, 2004:77; Broadbent & Corney, 2008:18; Christian, 2007:91; Krauss & Suandi, 2008:4; Leathard, 1994:199; Lyon & Canning, 1990:193; Wilkins, 1997:7). Over and above the initial education and training, the practitioner may obtain additional education to enhance his knowledge and take discretionary decisions in an ever changing environment (Richards, 2011:16).

The outcome of implementing formal education and training is a body of skilled workers who should transmit that value to young people (Christian, 2007:91). It is, therefore, clear that education and training would benefit the practitioners and the client by ensuring competence, professional development and provision of quality professional service (Richards, 2011:16). The employment

organisations that employ skilled workforce prevent the weakening and probably the collapse of their organisations (Youth Development Network, 2008:25).

The education and training of Youth workers must be of high standard (Broadbent & Corney, 2008:19). In South Africa, the quality and standard of education and training is formally recognised by the SAQA Act No. 58 of 1995. It was on that basis that in 2009, the SAQA listed registration of National and Further Education and Training certificates as qualifications in Youth work, under the subfield: Adult Learning aimed at improving learners' access not only to Higher Education, but also to career progression (South African Qualification Authority, 2009a; South African Qualification Authority, 2009b). Additionally, as illustrated in Chapter 3: Table 3.2, South Africa's institutions of higher learning are also offering education and training of Youth workers at degree, masters and PhD levels (Fortuin, 2010, Monene, 2006; Mudau, 2011; Raselekoane, 2011).

Other forms of training include on-the-job training or workplace learning, continuous professional development or lifelong learning, professional supervision, workshops, and mentoring aimed at upgrading skills of practitioners already in the field and those whose schedules will not permit them to study full time by keeping them updated with the latest developments, thus alleviating their fears of thinking that they are under-qualified and may lose their jobs (Broadbent & Corney, 2008:18; Department of Social Development, 2007:8; South African Qualification Authority, 2009a; South African Qualification Authority, 2009b; Sercombe, 2004:64). These would benefit Youth workers who are unable to leave their work to attend training on a full time basis by teaching theory and/or practice, thus leading to increased numbers of skilled workers (Broadbent & Corney, 2008:19; Merton & Payne, 2000:22). It will further benefit the majority of workers who have long service in the youth development sector, but do not have the appropriate or related educational background and training (Ream & Witt in Hamilton & Hamilton, 2004:67).

The experience of practitioners already in the field can also be recognised through shortening the length of their training or ensuring that they gain credit for appropriate courses where recognition and validation of their experience and achievements is made (Broadbent & Corney, 2008: 19). This entails specifying standards and evaluation criteria, and creating an infrastructure of assessment, moderation and verification (Merton & Payne, 2000:22). This is termed, RPL and recognises the worker's prior experience and enables access to further learning (South African Qualification Authority, 2009a; South African Qualification Authority, 2009b).

The South African Institutions offering Youth work qualification are highlighted in Table 3.2. The analysis of these qualifications shows that there are differences between them in terms of core competencies and curricula content. For example, when the researcher compared the curriculum offered in different institutions, she noticed that there are differences depending on the location of that field as well as the credentials of instructors. Whereas the University of Venda and University of South Africa (UNISA) based their curricula on the Commonwealth Youth Diploma, Huguenot College and University of Port Elizabeth based their curricula on Social work. There is a need to agree on common core knowledge and skills to be uniformly applied across the Youth work training (Mudau, 2011; Monene, 2006; Raselekoane, 2011). This could be achieved through setting minimum norms and standards for education and training of Youth workers, thus ensuring uniformity in qualification, improving the quality of education, and enhancing the status of the occupation by providing recognition of Youth work as a profession.

- (vii) **Public service and acceptance of authority:** Extensive review of literature reveals that being a professional require experience to deliver complex services, formal acceptance, recognition, support of the authority, and integrity of the profession by those responsible for offering services to the public, community, and individual clientele being served (Barker, 2003:341; Maunders, 2006:25; Richards, 2011:15). Since *“youth development is a broad field with many constituencies in grassroots community organisations, in state and national youth-serving organisations, and at colleges and universities”*

(Borden, Craig & Villaruel, 2004:75), it is constituencies such as those who have to show acceptance of Youth work.

In addition to the general public, it is argued that even in instances where a qualification or credential exists; there could be problems, because Youth work is not yet accepted by others. Therefore, being accepted by clients and sanctioned by community is not sufficient; there should also be acceptance by the peers in other disciplines (Skidmore & Thackeray, 1994:8). In this regard, the role of Youth workers or youth development practitioners is to educate and inform fellow workers on their roles, skills, professional expertise and value by raising their status in the society (Ferguson in Anglin et al., 1990:280). The workers, students, and trainers should also act as advocates by marketing and promote Youth work field, so that society can begin to recognise its value.

Since Youth work services have been previously infused in traditional disciplines such as Social work and Psychology (Lyon & Canning, 1990:194; Osei-Hwedi & Ndulo, 1989:304), it is imperative that Youth workers are primarily involved in educating young people as well as the general public about their role as well as the benefits that the community will have if Youth work is granted exclusive professional monopoly (Gilbert & Specht, 1981:226).

Youth workers can make use of public platforms such as workshops, conferences, seminars, public meetings, media, and publications in books, journals, newspapers, newsletters, career exhibitions and guidance. Of particular importance is the fact that efforts to inform and educate the public about youth development should not be confined to times when major problems have arisen, but also to positive developments, thus making people to listen when there is emotional appeal (Baksh, 2004:30).

Lyon and Canning (1990:197) asserted that students must be given the opportunity to develop “meta awareness” of the field so that they can serve as ambassadors when they are in public. It is clear that learners in the field of Youth work could be utilised as human resource if they can prove themselves to be credible in the eyes of their local communities and may also serve as

mentors among their peers. Mkandawire (1999) asserts that, learners in the field of Youth work have skills and should as a result be involved in marketing their own field.

Another important dimension is the need for public regulation. This implies registration with a statutory body as an indication of a profession having received the sanction and mandate of the public and then recognised by the authority of peer judgements within the structure of that specific body (Gilbert & Specht, 1981:433). The current lack of recognition of Youth work as a profession deprives the Youth workers of the peer judgements and makes service recipients vulnerable since there is no statutory body to protect their interests. However, recognition of Youth work will put it on the same level and status as other social service professions, thus enhancing its public credibility and acceptance (Barker, 2003:341).

- (viii) Professional autonomy and self-regulation:** This characteristic of autonomy “include not only the financial aspect of independence, but also the comprehensive concept of functioning” that would allow the professionals to exercise discretion on how to produce the required outcomes or results for service recipients (De Vos & Schulze, 2002:9; Richards, 2011:16). Richards further stated that the professionals are granted autonomy by the society.

The sanctioning of the profession is awarded through registration, certification and licensing. It grants the degree of autonomy and authority in the form of privileged communication and set the right standards for what is considered professional (Gilbert & Specht, 1981:226). This is essential for the definition of professional boundaries, self-regulation, control as well as development of systems and procedures to determine the minimum academic requirements for entering such a profession, continuing education, membership to the profession and ethical guidelines (De Vos & Schulze, 2002:8; Hahn & Raley, 1998:393; Leathard, 1994:199).

Since “*the responsibility of many professional activities falls on statutory bodies and professional associations*” (Richards, 2011:16), in South Africa, different professional groups register with their respective statutory bodies in

order to control a particular profession. For example, Nurses register with the South African Nursing Council (SANC), Teachers register with the South African Council for Educators (SACE), and social service professionals register with the SACSSP. These statutory bodies are formally registered and use legal sanction, e.g., in disciplining unprofessional and incompetent behaviour (Richards, 2011:18).

Youth workers in South Africa are not yet recognised nor registered by any statutory body. The NYP advocates that, these cadres of workers have to be registered and recognised as professionals in order to have their interests and that of their clients protected (The Presidency, 2009b:31-32). Even though the SACSSP is taking the lead as the potential body to recognise this field as a profession, there is a need to have evidence that it is indeed the appropriate and relevant authority to do this. The researcher is intending to have that determined through this study.

- (ix) Professional identity:** Identity is defined as the state of remaining the same or unchanged under varying aspects, conditions or circumstances (*Random House Webster Dictionary*, 1992:668). Professional identity refers to the extent to which a member of a profession or the profession itself, remains the same or unchanged even under different or varied circumstances. It comes in the form of professional culture represented by values, norms, and symbols (Gilbert & Specht, 1981:226).

Even though professional identity is imparted during the training, “*the professional must live the life and mind of his profession throughout his career*” (Richards, 2011:16). As a result, important aspects of profession such as the language as well as the conceptual framework are shared by people in the same discipline and become part of their professional identity. In South Africa, the identity of Youth work seems to be weak as is reflected through lack of a universal title for the Youth workers, lack of professional recognition and poor direction for those involved in the field (SAYWA, 2001:15).

As illustrated in Table 3.2 in Chapter 3, there are still structural differences with regard to location of the academic programs for Youth work and differences regarding academic qualification. For example, at the University of Venda the programme is located within the school for Post Graduate Studies, and the qualification is known as Youth in Development; at the Stellenbosch University the programme is located within the School of Theology under the Faculty of Sociology and Anthropology, and the qualification is referred to as Youth work (Fortuin, 2011; Mudau, 2011). These differences also show signs of weak identities (Lyon & Canning, 1990:194). It is on that basis that Spence (2004:267) noted that it is critical for a profession to have its own language so that it can be able to withstand a climate of tight political control. The researcher has further observed that those qualified in this field are employed in different settings in both government and NGO sectors. This then implies that they will be remunerated differently depending on the employing organisation. This is yet another sign of a weak identity for those practicing in this field.

The structure of an organisation also proved to be contributing to interprofessional struggles (Temkin-Greener, 1983 as cited in Nandan, 1997:250). For example, Wilson and Setturland (1986) as cited in Nandan (1997:250) mentioned that, if different health care professionals were working under the same administrative umbrella, were tolerant of each other's difference, they would accomplish team goals. On the same note, this would be applicable for social service professionals if the same conditions could be applied to them uniformly.

By professionalising Youth work, there will hopefully be greater uniformity even in terms of language usage. Furthermore, the profession will also convince outsiders not to wear the title without it being conventionally conferred by a professional school (Gilbert & Specht, 1981:246). At present, those qualified and not qualified have access to usage of the title. The challenge is for Youth workers to demonstrate professional identity through debate and consensus on uniformity regarding aspects of professional identity. In South Africa, there is also a great need to define the difference between a

Youth worker and a Child and youth care worker as well as other professionals such as Social workers. This exercise will translate into identity and role clarification, key elements which have been specified as inhibitors for development of Youth work as profession if they are not attended to (Barwick, 2006 in Sercombe, 2010:55).

- (x) **A code of ethics:** According to Sercombe (2010:22, 23), code of ethics has always been linked to professionalisation and the agenda to have a code of ethics for Youth work started as far back as the 1970s. Professional ethics refer to a set of widely accepted moral principles, rules, behavioural expectations, conventions and customary practices that informs the professional's standard of conduct and are used to guide practitioners in making ethical choices (Davies, 2004:272; Garfat, 2003:119; Richards, 2011:17; Strydom, 2005a:69). A code of ethics is used to: regulate and protect the relationships of professionals with clients and colleague; bind members of the profession to a set of professional values above those of income, power and prestige; reflect the importance of the roles and tasks performed; protect society from general malpractice include restricting abuses that might arise from powers of monopoly, as well as faulty or negligent behaviour; serve as a basis for investigating misconduct (Coulshed & Orme, 2006:1; Greenwood, 1957 as cited in Department of Social Development, 2007:11; Richards, 2011:18; Sercombe, 2010:57). It embodies what is meant by serving the welfare of society or the public (Tyler, 1952, as cited in De Vos & Schulze, 2002:8). This is achieved through "dedication to the truth, equity, and service that cuts across political and cultural boundaries" (Richards, 2011:16).

In South Africa, there is presently no code of ethics which has been developed for and/or by the Youth workers for Youth work (Pruis, 2006; Sercombe, 2010: 54; Smith, 2006). However, even though there is a code of ethics for Youth work in some countries in the UK, there are also failed attempts by the youth sector in some countries in Australia to get same (Hoiles & Corney, 2007:2). However, other established professions such as Social work and Psychology have a code of ethics, and reference can be made to them to be used as a

benchmark when developing a code of ethics for Youth work practice (De Vos & Schulze, 2000:74; Hoiles & Corney, 2007:7).

The development of a code of ethics is important, since it recognises that service users (young people) deserve high quality practitioners who not only have skills informed by theory, but are also committed to core values (Coulshed & Orme, 2006:1; Sercombe, 2010:55). It further ensures safety and protection of young people and Youth workers, fosters agreement to commonly held philosophical principles among Youth workers, underpins education and training with agreed values for the sector, and provides reference for workers in creating awareness and discussing ethical issues (Hoiles & Corney, 2007:2).

It is clear that for Youth work practice to be given a professional status, like other professions, a code of ethics should be developed by Youth workers for Youth work to give some guarantee of standards of practice or at least some recourse if standards are breached (Hoiles & Corney, 2007:7; Sercombe, 2004:55; Skidmore & Thackeray, 1994:316).

- (xi) Research activity:** According to Greenwood (in Gilbert & Specht, 1981:255), “*the only permanent feature of social phenomena is their impermanence*”, hence the need for periodic reviews, testing, and/or investigations to determine if the phenomenon has changed since observed over time. It is with this consideration in mind, that research is seen as an essential component of all professions, because it is used to inform and evaluate current knowledge and practices; generate new ones; and continually renew and upgrade professional literature (Coulshed & Orme, 2006:10; De Vos & Delpont, 2005:54; South African Youth Workers Association, 2001:12). Research is therefore an “*evidence-based approach*”, described in criminal justice as “*what works approach*” (McGuirie as cited in Coulshed & Orme, 2006:10).

Maunder (2006:29) and Charles (2006:53) emphasised the need for research evidence within Youth work field in order to inform programmes and strategies, rather than relying on myths, impressions, stereotypes or passion. These

authors further suggested inclusion of research as part of Youth work training curriculum to increase the knowledge base and improve practice. This is important, given that an observation was made on the relative lack of people and places doing credible research on issues germane to youth development (Benson & Pittman, 2001:116; Charles, 2006:53). In particular, there is evidence to suggest that research and information systems on youth in Africa are not well developed as compared to other countries such as Australia, Germany, Sweden and Norway (Charles, 2006:53).

It can be concluded that the benefit of research is to legitimise the body of knowledge that will consequently have long lasting influence on the workers and to solve pressing social problems (Krueger, 1986:91; Mufune, 1999:327). The consequences of limited or poor research activity are weak theoretical framework, inadequate policy formulation, inadequate resources allocation, and poorly informed strategies and programmes (Charles, 2006:51). The author further supported promotion of research in this field, because it will portray youth reality based on empirical data.

Since research and practice are complementary, Pence as cited in Anglin et al., (1990:238) mentioned that it is essential for instruction to integrate this concept from the earliest coursework as part of the training curriculum. When reviewing the curricular of various institutions and South Africa's registered qualifications, the researcher observed that a research course has been factored within the coursework, especially from the third year level of study (Mudau, 2011; Raselekoane, 2011; South African Qualification Authority, 2009a; South African Qualification Authority, 2009b).

All of the above factors, therefore, highlight the importance of engaging in research activities thus building a strong business case for professionalisation of Youth work. Baksh (2004:31) sees participatory research where young people will also articulate their own concerns as being very instructive.

(xii) Professional association: Establishment of a professional association or organisation which unifies the field and safeguards the public is considered one of the attributes of a profession (Flexner, 1915 as cited in De Vos & Schulze, 2002:8; Maunders, 2006:23). The professional organisations or associations are used as platforms for engagement in activities such as conferences, workshops, publications, advocacy to update skills and knowledge (Broadbent & Corney, 2008:20; Kelly, 1990:180). All these activities support long term commitment to the occupation, contribute to the workers' personal and professional development, and maintains workers' fitness to practice (Wilkins, 1997:141).

These organisations or associations promote and sustain the professional culture by fostering strong group consciousness, creating professional contacts, especially among members who share similar concerns, engaging workers in industry-based discussions about the quality and benchmarks of good practice, convening regularly to learn and evaluate innovations in theory, and providing exposure to the professional world outside (Broadbent & Corney, 2008:20; Flexner, 1915 as cited in De Vos & Schulze, 2002:8; Krueger, 1986:95). Owing to the voluntary nature of their membership, they use collegiality to establish common goals and encourage members' commitment (Richards, 2011:18).

In South Africa, social service professions have professional organisations or associations. For example, the following first four organisations exist for Social workers, and the fifth and the sixth ones are for Child and youth care workers and the final one is for Youth workers (Mmutle, 2011):

- ✓ South African Black Social Workers Association (SABSWA);
- ✓ Social Workers Association of South Africa (SWASWA);
- ✓ South African Association for Social Workers in Private Practice (SAASWIPP);
- ✓ Association of South African Social Work Education Institution (ASASWEI);
- ✓ National Association for Child and Youth Care Workers (NACCW); and
- ✓ South African Youth Workers Association (SAYWA).

Of the above mentioned associations; SAASWIPP, ASASWEI and NACCW are the most active ones. The associations are playing an instrumental role in facilitating processes such as professionalisation. It is also due to all this, that SAYWA is the primary applicant for recognition of Youth work as a profession by the SACSSP (De Kock, 1999:4; Pruis, 2006). This illustrates the important role of an association in influencing the public's perception about the profession (Gibelman, 1995:11).

The challenge is for the Youth workers to strengthen their existing association or to form a new one if need be (Villaruel et al., 2003:382). The Youth workers' professional endorsement through membership will provide them with credibility as professionals, they will stay informed, maintain needed contact with colleagues, demonstrate to consumers that they have high quality controls in place and adhere to ethical code of practice and use the association as a platform for continuing professional development (Sercombe, 2010:159).

The establishment of a unified association for Social workers (Department of Social Development, 2005:1) through amalgamation of currently existing four professional associations for Social workers into one unified professional association could serve as a guide for Youth workers to consider the proposal of merging with the NACCW. The establishment of a strong association is essential, since Broadbent and Corney (2008:20) highlighted that "*professional Youth work can only be advocated through a strong collective voice of a professional association*".

- (xiii) Long term commitment to the field:** According to Richards (2011:15), professions "require a life span". This is corroborated by Gilbert and Specht (1981:267) as they singled out this criterion and the one on specialised knowledge as two areas which an aspiring occupation has to build a case around to persuade the public of its worthiness to be recognised as a profession. The conditions of service such as salaries, fringe benefits, career advancement opportunities, status of the profession, friendly working environment, and desirable working conditions are among indicators identified

to be enhancing the professional's long term commitment to the field (Kelly, 1990:173). These indicators illustrate the quality of Youth work service and determine the workers' commitment to the field.

In contrast, role ambiguity, role conflict, age of the organisation, leadership within the organisation, nature of services rendered, and educational levels influences the worker commitment to organisations (Glisson & Durick, 1988 as cited in Nandan, 1987:251). It is therefore clear that if Youth workers' commitment to the field is to be fostered, the conditions of service listed in paragraph one of this section should be given attention. The researcher had observed that for South Africa's Youth workers, the employment market has not yet been clearly determined. Those who have already graduated are employed within other fields of practice such as Social work and Child and youth care environments.

This implies lack of standardisation of their salaries, fringe benefits as well as the general working conditions, thus making them vulnerable to exploitation by potential employers. This state increases uncertainties among workers and negatively impacts on their long term commitment to the field, because they question the value of their work to society (Lyon & Canning, 1990:196). This also translates into high turnover and brain drain, particularly from non-government organisations with relatively poor working conditions as compared to government organisations (Youth Development Network, 2008:25).

(xiv) Employment organisations: In South Africa, those who already have a qualification in Youth work as well as those who are still studying towards obtaining it, are struggling to get employment in their practice areas. According to South African Qualification Authority (2009a); South African Qualification Authority (2009b), those who are qualified, are working as volunteers in government departments such as Social Development, Correctional Services, Health, Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs and Education. Others are employed in academic institutions, state-owned entities such as the NYDA and also in non-government, Faith Based, and Community Based Organisations.

There has been marked improvement in services for young people without significant upgrading of the professional status and recognising those working in the youth development field (Krueger, 1986:453; Lyon & Canning, 1990:197; Maunders, 2003:26). This commitment that Youth workers have to the young person as the primary client and the fact that the impact of their service is felt by all individual youth and the communities of which they are part, justifies that, through recognition of Youth work as a profession, its status would be raised and Youth workers' employment opportunities would be created (Baksh, 2004:32; Hahn & Raley, 1998:393; South African Qualification Authority, 2009a; South African Qualification Authority, 2009b; Sercombe, 2004:73).

It is important to note that there are still challenges pertaining to employment of these workers since there is no structured labour market opportunities for them. For example, the researcher noted that Directorate: Youth Development in the national Department of Social Development, advertised positions for Social workers who are registered with the SACSSP as a requirement for the advertised positions of youth development practitioners. This is done regardless of the fact that those with youth development qualifications are not yet registered or recognised as professionals. They therefore, remain excluded from competing for these jobs. This observation revealed that the high turnover of Youth workers from employment organisations is amongst others due to low salaries, lack of career pathway and opportunities for advancement as well as lack of recognition and rewards (Youth Development Network, 2008:9).

Furthermore, even though there are universities accredited by the SAQA to offer a qualification in Youth work; in practice, there is still lack of standardisation for those practicing Youth work as they range from: having no qualifications; having qualifications in other disciplines; having in-service training on Youth work; having qualifications in Youth work either at diploma/ degree/ post-graduate degree level (De Vos & Schulze, 2002:8; Hahn & Raley, 1998: 393; South African Qualification Authority, 2009a; South African

Qualification Authority, 2009b). As already stated, this lack of uniformity reflects lack of weak identity for the field.

In pursuing professionalisation, it would be imperative that employment opportunities for persons qualified in Youth work are created so that they could be absorbed in relevant job vacancies and are remunerated in accordance with the value of work that they do. The key role players identified in Table 3.3 in Chapter 3 are better positioned to advocate for employment of personnel with appropriate work experience and/or training background. The posts could be created in the labour market in recognition of the service that they render (Ryan, 2003:26). This would require lobbying various potential employment agencies for creation of work opportunities for Youth workers.

As a starting point, although not yet fully implemented, the South African Cabinet resolved in 2006 that youth directorates should be established across different departments in all spheres of government and be located in such a manner that the Directors General/ Heads of Departments/ Municipal managers takes full responsibility (The Presidency, 2009b:33). This Cabinet resolution is a starting point towards creation of employment opportunities for personnel rendering youth development services.

(xv) International recognition of the profession: The researcher has, in Chapter 3, presented extensive evidence from the literature of the overwhelming interest and existence of Youth work practice across the globe. The evidence also shows existence of education and training of Youth workers in countries such as USA and Canada (Sercombe, 2010:160). The following identified countries in the specified Commonwealth regions are offering a qualification in Youth work (South African Qualification Authority, 2009a; South African Qualification Authority, 2009b):

- ✓ African: Botswana, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Malta, Namibia, Nigeria, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Tanzania, The Gambia, Uganda, and Zambia;
- ✓ Asia: Bangladesh, Brunei Darussalam, India, Pakistan, Malaysia, Maldives, Sri Lanka, and Singapore;

- ✓ the Caribbean: Anguilla, Antigua & Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Montserrat, St. Kitts & Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent & the Grenadines, Trinidad & Tobago, and Turks & Caicos Islands; and
- ✓ the South Pacific: Australia, Cook Islands, Fiji Islands, Kiribati, Nauru, New Zealand, Niue, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tavalu, Vanatau.

From the above, it is clear that even though most of the listed countries offer education and training that leads to Youth work qualification, the fact that South Africa is offering accredited qualifications in youth development, benchmarked against existing international qualifications, illustrates that the national education and training is comparable with international qualifications of equal notional hours (South African Qualification Authority, 2009a; South African Qualification Authority, 2009b).

Furthermore, the assessment of the status of Youth work internationally, regionally, and nationally also showed that there are countries where Youth work practice has already been recognised as a profession whereas in some countries, the process is still underway (Borden, Craig & Villaruel, 2004:75). This is reassuring, since “*the development of profession may be sustained by international identity, collaboration, and support*” (Mauders, 2006:31). The fact that South Africa is facing challenges which are encountered by some countries that already won the battle of having the occupation recognised as a profession is an important lesson that proves existence of areas from which policy decisions on the possibility of professionalising Youth work could be benchmarked.

- (xvi) The financial status as well as management systems:** Meeting this criterion involves being in good financial standing and having proper management systems in place. The establishment of the NYDA in 2009 illustrates commitment by government to strengthen the youth sector’s management systems. The fact that the agency has, as part of its mandate, advocacy and lobbying, and had since championed professionalising Youth

work as one of its strategic objectives, further illustrates that financial resources for professionalisation may be allocated for this activity through the NYDA's budgeting processes.

In the next section, the researcher discusses the benefits and non-benefits of specialisation and professionalisation.

4.5 BENEFITS AND NON-BENEFITS OF AN OCCUPATION, AREA OF SPECIALISATION AND A PROFESSION

In this section, the questions to be answered are: what are the benefits and non-benefits of retaining Youth work as an occupation, recognising it as an area of specialisation or as an autonomous profession? Each of these identified policy options has advantages and disadvantages. The exercise on cost-benefit analysis should be undertaken in order to have a clear understanding of whatever course of action would be followed regarding the future status of Youth work.

Does Youth work meet the above identified characteristics or criteria of a profession? (Sercombe, 2004:64). Like in other countries where the debates on professionalisation were held, whereas progress regarding professionalisation of Youth work has been made, it is acknowledged that there are still outstanding tasks which should be attended to if Youth work field is to attain the professional status as an autonomous profession or an area of specialisation. Although, in its current form, the practice is still regarded as an occupation, the current debate on professionalisation means that it may, in the near future, be recognised either as a profession and/or an area of specialisation.

It is suggested that, if the professional standing of Youth work is not recognised by other professionals, they could be marginalised in professional teams, professional consultations, and case management panels (Sercombe, 2004:66). Furthermore, as a result of lack of body of knowledge and formal training, there will be no formal way of entering the field and those working with youth would not have credible basis for making decisions (Borden, Craig & Villaruel, 2004:79). Therefore, the need to identify and recognise Youth work as an autonomous profession or an area of specialty, becomes paramount for overall effective functioning including proper coordination

and integration of Youth work with comparable and similar service offerings. This would improve and promote quality of services to consumers, ensure standardisation of practice, increase competitiveness and worthiness of Youth work.

On the other hand, if recognised as a profession or an area of specialisation, Youth work will lead to emergence of higher education programmes in the field; introduction of formal educational structures; and education and training of Youth workers in areas such as program development, implementation, management and evaluation (Borden, Craig & Villaruel, 2004:75).

Further again, professionalisation represents the highest level of competence in a society; may open up the possibilities of financial and career incentives; affords Youth workers with an opportunity to have equal status and connection with other comparable professions; improves the position in the social hierarchy; ensures that the capacity of Youth workers is built through professional training; enables Youth work to have its own identity; elevates the status of the field in the eyes of the employer; brings with it an increased sense of accountability for program outcomes for young people; ensures that Youth work operates as an independent profession; implies proficiency; commits to high standards; and leads to meaningful integration of young people in development process (Chubb & Thomson, 2000 as cited in Department of Social Development, 2007:15; Richards, 2011:15; Ryan, 2003:54; Villaruel et al., 2003:370, 382, 389). The added benefit for the country is the fact that Youth work will augment the current shortage of human resource capacity in the social service sector (Department of Social Development, 2006a:13).

Finally, a review of literature revealed that there are positive and negative connotations of the term “professional” and whereas we are supposed to be inspired by its positive meaning, we should equally be cognisant of its negative implications. Therefore, in contrast to the benefits identified in the above paragraph; professionalisation can equally lead to elitism, failure to identify with clients from different social background or class and keeping the clients in subservient positions (Department of Social Development, 2007:15; Illich 1977 in Sercombe, 2010:7, 8).

4.6 CONCLUDING REMARKS

In reviewing the future status of Youth work in terms of whether Youth work should remain as an occupation or recognised as an area specialisation or an autonomous profession, the researcher is of the view that the Youth work field seems to be an occupation that prioritises young people. The specialisation route would offer other professionals in the youth development space an opportunity to concentrate on targeting and prioritising young people as part of their duty. The professionalisation route would offer service providers an opportunity to dedicate their duties to young people as their only priority group. The last two options would enable the personnel involved in Youth work to become more skilled in addressing the complex needs of young people. It therefore seems appropriate that this study has started the process of exploring these policy options.

The above discussion also illustrated that the youth sector appears to have made progress to some extent towards meeting the criteria of a profession compared to exploring the specialisation route. It implies that work has to be done to facilitate attainment of Youth work as an area of specialisation, if it is found that is a more feasible option. In relation to professionalisation, it is equally important to note that, *“while still evolving, an occupation can have sufficient points to warrant its classification as a profession”* (Gilbert & Specht, 1981:271). It implies that even though meeting the above stated criteria qualifies an occupation to become a profession, there should be concerted effort and commitment on the part of relevant key stakeholders of the aspiring profession, to accelerate the process by continuously making improvements (Roth et al., 1998:440), in order to ensure greater achievement in areas where progress has not been made.

For example, some of the tasks associated with meeting the criteria of a profession that have to be overcome for Youth work to be able to compete with other professions successfully for resources and support include: low wages; scarcity of jobs; and lack of comprehensive career path (Borden, Craig & Villaruel, 2004:75). In line with the assertion by various authors (Kelly, 1990:168; Commonwealth Secretariat, 2001a:17; Coulshed & Orme, 2006:1; Kelly, 1990:175; Lyon & Canning, 1990:187), this would be a challenge that cannot be ignored or postponed, particularly if the findings suggest the need for professionalisation.

Furthermore, it is important to note that professionalisation and specialisation always leads to greater interdependence on others to render desired services. There is as a result a need to examine an interdisciplinary team approach as it applies to the field of Youth work. This would be aimed at identifying the team players by analysing their contribution to Youth work and assessing how Youth workers can attain the same status, power and prestige in order to realise team outcomes successfully and to focus on a common goal of improving the quality of people's lives through appropriate collaborative intervention strategies (Department of Social Development, 2007:33; Kruger, 1987:448). It is, however, essential to note that, for an effective team work to take place, the team members are supposed to have the same professional status (Krueger, 1988:14; Lyon & Canning, 1990:187).

Therefore, this chapter had presented evidence strong enough to suggest that interdisciplinary team is not only desirable, but essential, since no profession can stand or work alone (*Encyclopaedia of Social Work*, 1995:360); it seems it is in the best interest of Youth workers to have teams and utilise an interdisciplinary team approach (Krueger, 1987:457). In line with the identified goal of this study of exploring and describing the perspectives of social service professionals in South Africa regarding emergence of Youth work practice and its future status, the next chapter thus continues this discussion by presenting a description of research methodology used in this study.